

# Chapter 11

## Typology of Critical Dialogue and Power Relations in Democratic Dialogic Education<sup>1</sup>

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In Chapter 10 of this volume, we criticized views that democracy and education can and should be power-free, based on the transparency of consciousness. In this chapter we discuss diverse types of relationship between the participants in critical dialogue where power and authority are understood to have significant, important, and necessary functions. Thus, rather than assuming transparency of consciousness and consensus as prerequisites, conditions, or desirable outcomes of education, we examine the ways in which educational relationships are realized when based on the notions of opaqueness of consciousnesses and where dissensus is not only unavoidable, necessary, and legitimate, but also a desirable aspect of learning and development.

We describe three types of relationships in critical dialogue, which is the basis of Democratic Dialogic Education rooted in the Bakhtinian framework:

1. agonistic dialogue among friendly enemies;
2. self-growth dialogue among friendly strangers; and
3. hanging-out dialogue among friends.

### **Agonistic Dialogue among Friendly Enemies**

Mouffe (2000) developed a position of dialogue among “friendly enemies” based on “agonistic dialogue,” in which the politically (and/or paradigmatically) disagreeable other is appreciated as a potential source for one’s own unknown self-limitation of truths and values. Traditionally (and monologically), any strong dissensus is viewed as a temporary state. Either an agreement has to be reached (cf. the Enlightenment project) or the dissensus will deteriorate into antagonism of “us versus them,” where a weaker dissenting party is eliminated or expelled

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(authoritarian or totalitarian projects).<sup>2</sup> Whereas the Enlightenment project seeks ways of eliminating violence, power imposition, authority, hegemony, antagonism, and politics from human life through deliberative rationality (cf. Habermas), Mouffe argues that the aim of democracy is to “limit and contest” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 22) violence and antagonism by accepting the unavoidability and desirability of power, authority, and politics. Violence, hegemony, repression, and antagonism should be curbed by dialogic reflection (i.e., critical dialogue): “[Political decisions] entail an element of force and violence that can never be eliminated and cannot be adequately apprehended through the sole language of ethics or morality. We need a [dialogic] reflection of the political proper” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 130).

Violence and antagonism are not always avoidable, while agreement is not always possible or even desirable:

... the aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* [i.e., involving hostile adversaries who try to annihilate each other] into *agonism* [i.e., involving friendly adversaries, whose right of the existence is recognized by each side, if not even appreciated] ... Modern democracy’s specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order. (Mouffe, 2000, p. 103)

Critical dialogic reflection is helpful not only for trying to prevent and mediate conflicts, but also for judging, limiting, and contesting them: “What to do with this violence, how to deal with this antagonism, those are the ethical questions to which a democratic politics will forever be confronted and for which there can never be a final solution” (ibid., p. 94).

The notion of “friendly enemy” implies an appreciation of dissensus as a permanent productive force. Mouffe argues that this appreciation is rooted in the fact that truth exists on the boundaries of consciousnesses that are opaque to each other—nobody can claim a monopoly on truth:

... for democracy to exist, no social agent should be able to claim any mastery of the foundation of society. This signifies that the relation between social agents becomes more democratic only as far as they accept the particularity and the limitation of their claims; that is, only in so far as they recognize their mutual relation as one from which power is ineradicable. The democratic society cannot be conceived any more as a society that would have realized the dream of a perfect harmony in social relations. Its democratic character can only be given by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself or himself the

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2 Cf. Lyrics “Who is not with us is our foe, he must fall” (from the Russian Communist 1905 poem, “The Worker’s Hymn,” by N.M. Minsky) that originate in the New Testament: “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23).

representation of the totality. The main question of democratic politics becomes then not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power which are compatible with democratic values. (Mouffe, 2000, pp. 21–2)

For example, oppositional scientific paradigms have very different epistemologies—what constitutes good scientific inquiry, what constitutes good evidence, what constitutes good scientific argumentation, what constitutes good logic, etc. (Kuhn, 1996). They also often fight for resources, adepts, domination in the scientific discourse, and recognition in the larger society (Latour, 1987). Dialogue with each other seems to be impossible and unnecessary: what is a good question for one paradigm to consider sounds like a frivolous and meaningless question for another paradigm; what is a hard fact/evidence for one is shaky and immaterial for the other; and so on. The truths of the oppositional paradigms often collide in angry antagonism—it feels as if life would have been better if only the other paradigm would fade away. However, Mouffe calls for agonistic dialogue involving the serious engagement with the friendly enemy. The goal of this agonistic dialogue is not to convince the other side of your own truth, but to use the friendly enemy to help yourself test the limits of your own truth in your own paradigm to create what Bakhtin called “internally persuasive discourse.” The counterarguments introduced by a friendly enemy from an oppositional paradigm may help the scientist deepen or transform his/her own perspective through responding to these counterarguments and challenges, reinterpreted within the scientist’s original paradigm. This reply to the hostile paradigmatic reinterpreted challenges does not need to be persuasive for the friendly enemy. Rather, the targeted audience for the scientist is the community of the scientist’s own paradigm, bystanders, important powerful outsiders, and newcomers who can be recruited by the new intellectual twist. The goal of agonistic dialogue is personal self-growth within the original paradigm that involves deepening one’s paradigm, finding its limits, and, thus, bringing power to it (i.e., winning over important others—mostly third parties and occasionally even opponents—and strengthening existing alliances). The benefits of agonistic dialogue are pragmatically and ethically mutual for both oppositional paradigms, which are rooted in their self-growth due to these mutual challenges and responses to them and in tolerance and even in appreciation of each other (i.e., the ethic of engagement with an agonistic irritating other). There is no expectation for consensus. When agreements eventually occur they remain “conflictual agreements” (cf. Mouffe’s “conflictual consensus”). Although an action of a friendly enemy can be destroyed, neither his/her idea nor the friendly enemy itself is destroyed in the agonistic relationship.

Envisaged from the point of view of “agonistic pluralism,” the aim of democratic politics is to construct the “them” in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an “adversary,” that is somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question. This is the real meaning of liberal-democratic tolerance, which does

not entail condoning ideas that we oppose or being indifferent to standpoints that we disagree with but treating those who defend them as legitimate opponents. This category of the “adversary” does not eliminate antagonism, though, and it should be distinguished from the liberal notion of the competitor with which it is sometimes identified. An adversary is an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality. (Mouffe, 2000, pp. 101–2)

The paradigmatic positions of friendly enemies engaged in an agonistic dialogue—“the internal territories” of the paradigms—cannot be understood as self-sufficient positions. Their paradigmatic and ideological meanings and truths emerge and can be understood only in dialogic relationship to each other’s charges and counter-charges. To understand a position of one is to reconstruct historically unfolding agonistic dialogue among them (Matusov, 2007). The oppositional paradigms help to reveal the boundaries of each other’s truths that are invisible from within.

In contrast to the self-contained rationality of the Enlightenment project, exemplified by Habermas’s “deliberate rationality,” we argue that Mouffe’s agonistic dialogue creates agonistic rationality. In our view, agonistic rationality is part of critical ontological dialogic rationality where diverse spheres of life, diverse opaque consciousnesses, and personal mediated or unmediated biases—rational or not—come together in a dramatic tension of critical deconstruction of values and power relations through dialogue. We believe that an unmediated personal bias—an initial personal emotional relationship of attraction, repulsion, disorientation, or indifference—is the basis of any rationality. However, we think that only public critical dialogue can justify rationality and point at its limits.

What has been tacitly naturalized in the self-contained rationality of one paradigm becomes problematized, replied to, and thus relativized (“ratio”—brought into the relationship with an alien other) in Mouffe’s agonistic rationality (Matusov, Smith, Candela, and Lili, 2007). For example, Albert Einstein’s vicious paradigmatic attacks on Niels Bohr’s and Werner Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics, through imaginary experiments challenging the “absurdity” of quantum mechanics, helped to reveal and challenge the hidden assumptions of the classical deterministic physics uncritically accepted (naturalized) by Einstein while pushing quantum physics further through Bohr’s and Heisenberg’s defensive replies (Kumar, 2008).<sup>3</sup> In this example, the critical ontological rationality emerges through the deconstruction of the hidden (naturalized) assumptions underlying the classical deterministic and quantum probabilistic physics paradigm. Critical ontological rationality is about the deconstruction of the natural and the self-contained, making the paradigmatic boundaries visible, which is impossible without another paradigm. In contrast,

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3 Some modern physicists still believe that this agonistic dispute is not over, and that a new strong deterministic “theory of everything” based on Einstein’s truth can finally emerge out of it.

self-contained rationality is about analysis within one paradigm. For example, it is very rational, from the self-contained rationality, to conclude that if you just bumped into a person on a street, this person cannot be at home at this time. This conclusion involves analysis of the spatio-temporal relationship of street and home within a paradigm that an object cannot be in two different places at the same time as well as many other naturalized assumptions (e.g., the person is the same and not, for example, a twin, the existence of whom is unknown in advance, or there was some other confusion about the person's identity). Thus, in order to see the self-contained nature of the self-contained rationality, the paradigm and the naturalized invisible assumptions have to be challenged, which would move self-contained rationality into the critical ontological rationality via challenging the paradigm from an alternative oppositional paradigm (e.g., the object can be in different places at the same time, twins may exist, etc.). Any unchecked self-contained rationality leads to irrationality as it tries to colonize spheres and consciousnesses to which it does not legitimately belong.<sup>4</sup> Conventional monologic schooling focuses exceptionally on the promotion of self-contained rationality and actively suppresses the critical ontological rationality on the ground that it deeply disrupts its authoritarian (if not totalitarian) pedagogical regime. Mouffe's agonistic rationality is a version of the critical ontological rationality, utilizing the friendly enemy for the deconstruction of its own and the friendly enemy's naturalized invisible assumptions.

Of course, the relationship among people is not only defined by the relationship among friendly enemies. In Western civilization there has been a long philosophical tradition of another type of human relationship that at times has been essentialized as the most desired relationship. In our reading of Mouffe's approach (and we can be wrong), although agonistic relationship is very important, especially for democracy, she does not seem to argue for the reduction of all "good" human relationships to agonistic ones as the only desirable form.

### **Dialogue among Friendly Strangers: Taking Care of Authorial Self-growth**

This position, promoting dialogue among friendly strangers, has been well developed by Russian educationalist Alexander Lobok (2012, 2014). Unlike political or paradigmatic friendly enemies, who fight for domination over resources and people, friendly strangers are not involved in a relationship of competition and dominance—the relationship with a friendly stranger is not

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4 The tension between self-contained and ontological rationalities can be illustrated by the following anecdote remembered by Marjanovic-Shane:

My dad often said to my mom: You shouldn't be emotional and biased. You have to be objective.

Mom replied: I am objective! I'm more objective than you, that's why I have to be emotional and biased!!!

agonistic or antagonistic in its nature (although competition and domination can be dynamically intertwined into the complexity of the friendly stranger relations, of course). In a dialogue with a friendly stranger, the other provides inspiration, nutrition, support, provocation, joy, and growth for one's own subjectivity, which is not necessarily expected in the agonistic relationship with a friendly enemy,

The encounter/meeting is the ultimate opportunity to hear yourself in the other. This other can be a physical interlocutor or it can be an encounter with a text or with some phenomenon of culture, which forces me to make that very effort. The encounter/meeting, which I am talking about, is that what presupposes my great effort to encounter the other who is not overlapping with me (i.e., opaque to me), but who is interesting for me. [This meeting generates] a point of puzzlement/surprise and at the same time it is a point of some kind of unusual joy of discovery of myself in the [other] unexpected for me. This is as if [the other] talks about something that is deeply intuitively clear to me. And at the same time, [the other] creates the space, in which these deep intuitions of mine begin to live and begin the fireworks of my own creative thinking ... [The other] capture[s]/hook[s] something in me, which is essential about me. To "capture/hook" something in me, means to provoke, spark, self-actualize, and initiate some kind of my own activity. And this situation of the encounter/meeting that I am describing here is, as a matter of fact, an educational situation. The genuine education unavoidably involves an element of provocation.

What is important for me, as a teacher, is that my encounter with the students is the space of my own personal self-growth, my own self-actualization. The encounter with my students is the process of my own self-making/self-creation/self-becoming and, thus, my own self-education. (Lobok, 2014; the fragments are from two video conferences, transcribed and translated by us)

In our interpretation, Lobok's dialogic position can be characterized as a critical dialogue of friendly strangers aiming at self-growth. People are viewed as authors of their own ontological growth. Others are regarded as provocations for the author's personal self-growth. An author can also provide a "review" (i.e., dialogic finalization) of another author as a provocation for his/her authorial personal self-growth.

According to Lobok's dialogic position, the subjectivity of another is never fully known and understood but only can be guessed by remembering and imagining yourself in a similar time, situation, or context,

We don't want to live in the world where other people's consciousnesses are transparent and decoded to us—that would be the end of the world. The essence of a human is in that the human is always more than what we understand about him/her and it's always true, regardless of the age of the person. When developmental psychology textbooks in all their totality describe one or two

year-old toddler, they actually do not describe anything important about the child. (Lobok, 2014)

The focus here is not so much on “getting it fully” and/or “getting it right”—i.e., getting the exact subjective position of the other, which is both impossible and undesirable—but on being dialogically provoked for self-actualization. Interaddressivity—interest in another—is about dialogic provocations for the authorial self-growth.

We are really attracted to Lobok’s emphasis on the opaqueness of the other’s consciousness, without which, in our view, a genuine dialogue is impossible: “... [a] person in his/her essence is untranslatable in principle. But there is a hope for translatability. And this is what is the hope for the encounter/meeting” (Lobok, 2014). In dialogue, people are interested in otherness of another, in being surprised by another, in another being different from them. This otherness is not going to be diminished as a result of dialogue (e.g., through reaching a consensus) but rather be transformed. The principle of the opaqueness of the other’s consciousness is the basis of human humbleness and respect. Lobok’s dialogue is not defined by agreement.

Lobok’s framework is deeply authorial and ontological. It focuses on authorial transcendence of the given—in a genuine encounter with the other, “the person transcends (getting bigger) him or herself” (Lobok, 2014). It is about life experience and life itself and not about the (re)production of knowledge. It is about authorial culture-making:

For me, the biggest issue is what dialogic pedagogy is for. If dialogic pedagogy is for production of new knowledge in students—I’m not interested in such dialogic pedagogy. If it is for something that I, as a teacher, don’t know yet, then I am interested in this dialogic pedagogy. I don’t want to get stuck in the horizon of the new knowledge that I have to acquire ... Life is not a means for something, let’s say, for getting new knowledge. Life, for me, has its own self-sufficient and intrinsic value. The highest truth of life is not rooted in some kind of results, at which I arrived or which I acquire, but in that I get goose bumps on my skin because I feel that I have been living a wonderfully authentic life. I am taken by a feeling of the authenticity of experience of my life in the moment, and this is the highest truth of life. And, it doesn’t matter whether I get new knowledge or not, whether I write a new book or not, as this result of living an authentic life. I know that, if in my life the situations of authenticity have occurred, the state of final feelings and final experiences (*perezhivanie*)—that means that life has been realized. If I live an authentic life, I am happy. (Lobok, 2014)

This position is attractive to us from a pedagogical point of view. It provides respect for the teacher’s and students’ authorial agency based on them treating each other as dialogic provocations for each other’s authorial self-growth—i.e., critical self-transcendence. Education is viewed as a self-forming unique universe.



Both the dialogue of friendly strangers and the dialogue of friendly enemies are self-centered and focus on what an author or a paradigm gains from the dialogue with the other. There is not much caring about the other. There is taking care of oneself, although with the contribution of the other, and this contribution is highly appreciated and valued. In our view, Lobok's focus on authorial self-growth—i.e., self-centeredness—has long roots in Western European philosophy. For example, on the Temple of Apollo at the site of the Delphi Oracle in ancient Greece, there was a carved inscription, "Know thyself," which was promoted by Socrates in Plato's writings. Another important precursor is Protagoras' motto, "Man is the measure of all things." In modern times, French philosopher Michel Foucault insisted on "taking care of yourself" (2006, p. 3). We think that Lobok has dialogized this position, putting it in the center of his dialogic ethics, which is a very important contribution to the dialogic framework in general and in dialogic pedagogy specifically.

However, we are also disturbed by Lobok's Western self-centered position on authorial self-growth—not as such, but by its apparent claim for the totality of any good dialogic relationship. As a particular good dialogic relationship, which may be useful especially in the sphere of academia, and maybe even in institutionalized education, or in some other limited contexts, his "dialogue of friendly strangers" position is legitimate and important, in our view. However, in some other contexts, the dialogue of friendly strangers that aims at authorial self-growth, while valuing others as merely dialogic provocations, sounds like egoistic, exploitative, self-preoccupation ("me, me, me!"), uncaring, asocial, and even instrumental. In this approach, interaddressivity—genuine interest in other people—is viewed not as self-contained but instrumentally, as a means for self-growth.

In our view, dialogue among friendly strangers for authorial self-growth as *the* model of any good dialogue stops being a particular legitimate dialogue among many other types of legitimate dialogue and becomes a certain type of Western ethnocentrism, promoting individualism, coldness, disinterest, and deep detachment from others—i.e., one's self-growth is more important than another person.

### **Hanging-out Dialogue among Friends: Interest in Meta-interaddressivity**

In contrast to Mouffe's agonistic dialogue among political and paradigmatic friendly enemies and Lobok's dialogue among friendly strangers for authorial self-growth, we view another possibility for a good dialogue—a hanging-out critical dialogue among friends. Friendship is a relationship that is not defined by any specific event or discourse, or topic, or goal; rather, it is enjoyment of being together across many diverse events, discourse, topics, genres, and goals—it opens up spaces for many overlapping possibilities (i.e., heterodiscoursia; see Matusov, 2011). Friends' interest in each other is self-contained and intrinsic—it is not reducible to anything or any particular reason, including their authorial self-growth



and agonistic dialogue. The basis of friendship is mutuality without reciprocity. Friendship is not so much based on exchange of favors to each other—doing something to please the other, expecting in return that they do something they otherwise may not want to do—but on intrinsic pleasure from being and engaging with each other. Agonistic and self-growth dialogues are task-oriented and self-oriented (i.e., one's own paradigm or self-growth) whereas hanging-out dialogue creates a joint living space and is relationship-oriented. In this sense, friends have meta-interaddressivity—overall interest in their own involvement with each other across vastly diverse life contexts.

Critical dialogue among friends is about being together through deep interest in, and enjoyment of, each other's subjectivity and taking care of each other. The subjectivity of the friend is accessible but never fully known in the tension between genuine question and serious answer. It is meta-interaddressivity driven by the relationship and interest in the other and not primarily by authorial self-growth. Thus, the opaqueness of consciousness is preserved in friendship relationships because it is defined by a deep, unconditional, and sustained interest of friends in each other across contexts and discourses and not likemindedness and mind-reading as Vygotsky (1986) and some other scholars assume (see Matusov, 2011, for more discussion).

Friends sacrifice for each other rather than for an idea or a cause. In contrast to Aristotle who claimed, "*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*" ("Plato is my friend, but truth is a better friend"), in friendship, we can say, "*Amica veritas, sed magis amicus Plato*" ("Truth is my friend, but Plato is a better friend"). Friend is the final cause of friendship.

Although they can benefit from each other, any instrumental relationship among friends may jeopardize friendship. That is why friendship and business should be kept separate from each other. In non-legalistic, non-capitalist economies, friendship can buttress business relations, while a business relationship creates new opportunities for friendship (Mauss, 1970). This creates a dualism similar to quantum mechanics. A person can simultaneously be a friend and a partner in a task-oriented enterprise, but the relationship-oriented friendship cannot be reduced to the entrepreneurial partnership, which may lead to instrumentalism and exploitation. Equally, the entrepreneurial partnership should not be reduced to the friendship, which may lead to corruption and inefficiencies. The careful boundary between friendship and enterprise has to be maintained. Since we define education as a leisurely enterprise of critical examination of the life and the world, this dualism is true for education as well—thus, in our view, friendship cannot be the sole basis of education, in contrast to Illich's argument to the contrary (Illich and Cayley, 1992). Thus, friendship sets limits for external, enterprise-oriented power relations.

Internally, the dialogue of friends involves strong and direct power relations. Friends can easily impose on each other and reject these impositions. While non-friendship relations outside of hierarchy (described above) require meta-negotiation on impositions, friendship does not need this. For example, a friend

of ours often apologized for “bothering us” when she initiated a request or just introduced a topic. We replied to her: “This is what friends are for—to constantly bother each other. If you stop bothering us, it means either that we stopped being friends or that we died.” After that, she stopped apologizing and “bothered” us unapologetically, as friends are supposed to do. Power and counter-power are welcomed in dialogue of friends.

### **Humanization of Power by Critical Dialogue in Democratic Dialogic Education**

Below we provide an intensive ethnographic field note of a college classroom event experienced by Marjanovic-Shane (adapted and reinterpreted from Marjanovic-Shane, in preparation), involving the emergence of antagonism among the participants and then its transformation into agonistic dialogue among friendly enemies and self-growth dialogue of friendly strangers. After the field note, we provide our analysis of the role of critical dialogue in this transformation of power.

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This particular class meeting, in a master’s graduate course on educational psychology for four current teachers and one future teacher, was about “classroom management.” The professor, Emma<sup>5</sup> (i.e., Marjanovic-Shane), introduced a short video by the famous American behaviorist Skinner on “Operant conditioning,”<sup>6</sup> In the class of five graduate students, three current teachers used behaviorist classroom management with their own students. Sarah,<sup>7</sup> a current pre-school teacher, was working with very young children with autism using a behaviorist pedagogical technique known as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).<sup>8</sup> Nora and Adele, both current elementary schoolteachers, used a behaviorist pedagogical strategy known as token economy in their classrooms. Mona, a committed Quaker,<sup>9</sup> was working in a Quaker Reggio Emilia play-, art-, and community-based pre-kindergarten. Cathy was preparing to become a teacher with emerging progressive liberal educational

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5 I use a pseudonym “Emma” to distance my current authorial voice from my then voice as a teacher—a practice I adopted from Matusov and Brobst (2013).

6 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_ctJqjlrHA&list=PLabg1zgHPvYPKbDHwq nQvMBd1umL5AlLx&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_ctJqjlrHA&list=PLabg1zgHPvYPKbDHwq nQvMBd1umL5AlLx&index=2).

7 All names are pseudonyms.

8 <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/treatment/applied-behavior-analysis-aba>.

9 Quakerism is a Christian denomination with strong commitment to human rights, peace, and equality. Quakers treat other people as “friends,” including children of all ages. Philadelphia (the City of Brotherly Love, a Quaker-influenced name), one of the strong centers of the Quaker religion in the USA, was where the event took place.

values (cf. Dewey type). Cathy had a three-year-old child who, by the time of the event, had been diagnosed as “at risk for autism” by the child’s pediatrician, which might have led Cathy to change her profession from a lawyer to a teacher. Cathy worried about the instrumental treatment of her son and was interested in learning about more humanist educational approaches through the class. The backgrounds of the five students and the professor set a stage for an educational ideological conflict: three (Sarah, Nora, Adele) against three (Mona, Cathy, Emma). Professor Emma was an emerging dialogic pedagogy teacher who was ideologically closer to Mona and Cathy:

After watching the video, in which Skinner described various aspects of operant conditioning, Emma asked the students what they thought about Skinner’s operant conditioning hungry pigeons to make them produce desired actions. The implication and tone of Emma’s question was challenging behaviorism in education: whether a behaviorist operant conditioning approach developed with caged pigeons can be applied pedagogically and morally to students (children).

At that moment, Sarah said emphatically:

The function of the behavior has to be attention [By this Sarah seemed to mean that as the pigeons were hungry for food, students/children are hungry for the teacher/adult’s attention]. The function of *most* behaviors is attention. The child will always want your attention. But if he is getting your attention in a way that is dangerous ...

Emma did not like Sarah’s equalizing of Skinner’s hungry caged pigeons with students in her class and wanted to challenge Sarah. Emma’s commitment to dialogic pedagogy (among other things) caused her to be disturbed by Sarah’s behaviorism.

Professor Emma: Ok, so are you saying that ... you can use it to manipulate them [children] with that—[the children’s] primary need! Just as you can say the pigeon has hunger, so you can use this primary need [for getting attention] to manipulate the child’s behavior like this.

Probably because of being strongly influenced by Quaker values, Mona also seemed to be upset by Sarah’s behaviorist approach and tried to introduce ethics into the discussion. From my previous encounter with Mona in the class I knew that she was a strong advocate of children’s human rights, believing that they should be respected and not manipulated for the teacher’s own comfort and control. Also, Mona was apparently concerned about Sarah’s possible position as “a bad educator/person” as a result of her challenge:

Mona (talking slowly and choosing words): Which then ... (coughs), comes down to ... to MORALS! If ... if you have a teacher, who is a good teacher, then

they'll recognize when something like this needs to be ... applied ... You know, if the students are in harm ... But if you have a teacher ... (Mona is breathing deeply. She seems to feel the tension with Sarah, and is careful with her choice of words) ... who just wants it [ABA] for the ... classroom management, to get through the day, and isn't really invested in their job ...

Professor Emma (trying to "soften" the potential blow to Sarah): Or maybe they are invested but just don't see how else ...

Sarah was apparently shocked. She seemed to recognize the moral issue of her ABA practice and tried to distance herself from Skinner's behaviorism while struggling with the clear connection between it and her ABA strategy.

Sarah (in apparent distress and confusion, her voice was trembling): I think it [ABA technique she was using with her students] is different than classroom management [i.e., from Skinner's operant conditioning of the hungry pigeon], that's my opinion ... They [ABA specialists] use it [behaviorist operant conditioning] to an extent, but they just don't use these phrases [Skinner's language], you know ... (Sarah talks slowly trying to suppress feelings that are welling up, being at the edge of crying).

Two other students, Nora and Adele, who were practicing the behaviorist token economy classroom management strategy in their classrooms, apparently wanted to give comfort and support to Sarah. They argued that at times punishment and manipulation are necessary, appropriate, and justified treatments of students/children by the teacher/adults. They claimed that token economy and occasional punishment are their only way of keeping the class in order, which is a prerequisite for successful studying.

Sarah did not participate in this discussion, but attentively listened to it. Neither Mona nor Cathy said much afterwards. I speculate that, for Cathy, this discussion was especially personal because of her three-year-old son. She was probably imagining her son under behaviorist treatments by teachers like Sarah—and she was probably very terrified about this possibility. At the same time, like Mona, Cathy seemed to be very concerned about Sarah's feelings being hurt.

The class instructor, Emma, saw the polarization of the perspectives—which can be called behaviorism versus humanism—between Sarah, Nora and Adele, on the one side, and Mona, Cathy, and herself, on the other. Sarah seemed to be caught between the two perspectives because she apparently recognized the negative ethical implications of her behaviorism (in contrast to Nora and Adele). At the very end of the class meeting, Sarah burst out in protest and defended her position. In a shaky voice, holding back tears, she explained in a distressed and angry tone, addressing primarily Professor Emma, that in her practice, based on ABA, she was "not cruel to my students!!! On the contrary!!! ... You don't know what you are talking about! You don't know much about ABA! How can you

judge it?! I love my students—I feel like a mother to them! You don't know my day-to-day problems! Enough of this!!!"

As the class meeting was over, Sarah left as fast as possible, avoiding looking at, or talking to, anyone. Mona and Cathy left the class together. Nora and Adele left separately—they had not been close to each other.

Professor Emma was puzzled, distressed, and dissatisfied with her lesson: she liked her students to test their ideas but not morally condemn each other or themselves. She wanted to create “a safe learning environment,” in which it was safe for the students to bring any ideas and positions into the class for class discussion and testing. Emma was also concerned with her lack of guidance for the students: that she was not able to deepen the discussion on behaviorism and humanism, that the students discussed only their personal and professional experiences and did not connect them with the professional discourses of Big Historical Dialogue (Bibler, 2009), analyzing the concerns, implications, values, and PROs and CONs behind these two approaches. She was *very* concerned that Sarah, Nora, and Adele would remain ignorant and continue harming their students by their behaviorist pedagogical techniques.

The next day, Sarah posted on the class web forum the following discussion (excerpts):

I was rather embarrassed when I left class on Wednesday and was surprised that I had engaged in such a, shall we call it, spirited discussion with the Professor ...

I believe that I reacted in such a single-minded fashion because it went straight to my heart rather than my head. With views so opposite to mine so readily expressed I felt that the care I feel and show for my students was seen by another as a disservice to the child. As a teacher, it makes my heart ache when it is thought that I am not trying to do all I can for students ... I know that these strategies, if implemented with caring and respect, can help many students discover more about their world and themselves and to embrace school life in a more positive way for themselves ...

I hope that I did not offend anyone with my spirited outburst, or impolite argument with the Professor at the close of class. I am sorry and hope that I will be able to control my own behaviors in the future so that I retain my respectful demeanor even when confronted with ideas or statements that are different than mine.

Hopefully this class will continue to allow me to learn to respectfully dissent, stand up for what I believe in with clear statements, and to keep an OPEN mind about new techniques and ideas.

Thanks for listening.

“Humanists” Mona and Cathy responded to Sarah with support, appreciation, and encouragement, stating “I love to hear debates ... What is education if not a free exchange of diverse viewpoints? Your exchange with Emma definitely contributed positively to the class” (Mona), and “THANK YOU for sharing your beliefs.

It is clear how dedicated a teacher you are to your students, your school and to yourself!” (Cathy). Surprisingly, “behaviorists” Nora and Adele did not reply in support of Sarah (or to Mona and Cathy).

Emma became even more alarmed and upset when she saw Sarah’s posting on the class web forum. She saw the Socratic stinging and numbing “Torpedo’s touch” effect (Matusov, 2009, p. 25; Plato, 1961) on Sarah and worried that Sarah would close up, that she had lost Sarah’s trust, and, with that, potentially the trust of the rest of the students. Emma consulted with her colleague (Matusov). He directed Emma’s attention to her unexamined pedagogical desire to “educate” the “behaviorist” group of her students so that they would stop being behaviorists and become “humanists” like Mona, Cathy, and Professor Emma. He shared that his definition of dialogic education of teachers was in testing the teachers’ own pedagogical desires, rather than in molding the students in the preset way dear Professor Emma. He suggested that Emma use “a Magic Wand” inquiry with her students.

On the class web forum, Professor Emma responded to Sarah:

Dear Sarah,

I started thinking about your words and asking myself what are my desires as a teacher for my students. Don’t I wish that my students discovered more about their world and themselves? Don’t I wish that my students embraced more about important things that I teach? I started thinking about difficult situations that I have been sometimes challenged with as a teacher: what do I want to achieve and in what way with my students? If there were a Magic Wand that I could use to make all my students behave and study exactly as I wanted them to do, would I use it? When would I use it? Isn’t ABA (behavioral management) something like a magic wand, to help me as a teacher achieve exactly what I want, with all my students?

...

Let’s examine different real and imaginary scenarios and test the limits of our own beliefs about behavioral management techniques. Please post different difficult and problematic educational situations for all of us to think through whether to use or not to use behavioral management. What are the pros and what the cons?

I apologize for hurting your feelings and making it unsafe for you to express your thoughts in the class. For some reason (and I am now interested in exploring it for my own sake), the behavioral management (ABA) approach in education is really my hot button. I get a knee-jerk reaction when it is touched. But I thank you for bringing this issue up and pushing me to start to think about it again.

What do you think?

Our next class meeting was completely overtaken by the critical dialogue about the “Magic Wand.” Sarah, Mona, Cathy, and Adele (all but Nora) enthusiastically,

critically, and safely explored and tested our own values, desires, and ideas about learning. Is it educational to make our students unconditionally conform to the teacher's desire, however good or bad this desire might be? When would it be better and more efficient to learn using a "magic wand" for making students behave well? Should students become involved in testing ideas about what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong? Is it educationally worthwhile to let our students make their own decisions about their own behavior—moral decisions about what is right and what is wrong—and then reflect on them (this question was very important for Mona)? What does it mean to be "educated?" Do we *want* to raise citizens who unconditionally follow authority, however good the authority may be?

During this critical dialogue about the "Magic Wand" inquiry, "behaviorists" Sarah, Nora, and Adele raised important issues about their institutional settings. They (but especially Adele) said that they were concerned with the institutional pressure to use behaviorist classroom management aimed at actively suppressing the students' "bad" behavior. Nora seemed to accept these institutional settings as a given that could not be changed, cynically seeing her professional responsibility as simply to follow institutional orders, although she did not mind most of these institutional orders. From Nora's professional position, the "Magic Wand" inquiry seemed to sound interesting but a bit frivolous and an inconsequential exercise. However, both Nora and Sarah preferred "positive reinforcements" (something that other students defined as "bribery by rewards") to "negative reinforcements" of punishments. Sarah apparently badly wanted to be a "good teacher," having a strong commitment to do only good to her students. For her, the "Magic Wand" inquiry, which tested her pedagogical desires, was apparently very professionally and personally important, exciting, and revealing. This put her on a collision course with her conventional institution. As to the "humanists," Mona and Cathy, they were on their own territory, being interested in finding the limits of their own humanism: when behaviorism can be legitimate (e.g., in quitting smoking).

The event seemed to have a lasting effect on the participants. Afterwards, during the class and many months and years after the class was over, "behaviorist" Adele contacted Professor Emma on several occasions. She said that she often felt as if Little Professor Emma was sitting on her shoulder, asking whether Adele liked her own pedagogical desires behind her pedagogical decisions and actions or not. Mona, Cathy, and Adele often recommend new students to take Professor Emma's class. Cathy asked Professor Emma to be her academic advisor, and Emma accepted this role. So far, I have not heard much from Sarah and Nora. Emma has revised her pedagogical desire to transform students from oppositional paradigms.

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In our analysis, Emma's introduction of the "Magic Wand" inquiry about the desirability of a teacher's pedagogical desires (i.e., the discourse on meta-desire, "Are you really in charge of your emerging desires? Is your desire really good?



What does ‘good’ mean for you?”) humanized the power conflict between these two groups/paradigms: behaviorist and humanist. After the first class meeting, an antagonism had developed. Mona and Professor Emma tried to prevent it by softening their accusation that Sarah (and Nora and Adele) were poor teachers and bad people who were disrespecting and harming their students/young children. Sarah also tried to mediate this antagonism by her public apology. If this had continued to develop in the way it was going, a “civilized antagonism” (“cold antagonism”<sup>10</sup>) would have probably emerged, in which the groups would have continued not to appreciate each other. The politeness between the two paradigm-groups would have been publicly maintained, while in-group hostility and even disrespect toward each other’s paradigmatic group would have been practiced. This would have been especially exacerbated by the fact that the professor could not mediate this “civilized antagonism” because she was not above the conflict. The “cold civilized antagonism” might have easily deteriorated to a “hot uncivilized antagonism,” or even direct (verbal) violence.

In our view, the “Magic Wand” inquiry and the following critical dialogue was very successful for all participants (to a lesser degree for Nora) because it introduced a “boundary object” (Star and Griesemer, 1989)—a material or symbolic object (i.e., the inquiry in this case) that has important and urgent, although different, meanings for its participants. For different reasons, all but Nora were eagerly engaged in exploring their own pedagogical desires. Despite the difference in the reasons for the participants’ engagement in the “Magic Wand” inquiry, they became interested in each other’s personal and professional approaches, perspectives, and concerns because they helped deepen their own perspectives and reveal their limits. Their critical dialogue transformed an antagonistic dialogic fight between hostile enemies into an agonistic dialogue of friendly enemies (between the paradigm-groups) and into self-growth dialogue among friendly strangers (within the paradigm-groups). We do not have much evidence of whether any friendship developed beyond low-intensity relationships between Emma and Adele and Emma and Cathy.

The “Magic Wand” critical dialogue challenged the existing power relations among the participants, imposing their own paradigms on each other and their definitions of peace and class order. After consultation with her colleague, Professor Emma rejected her own pedagogical desire to indoctrinate her “behaviorist” students into her own “humanist” paradigm. This pedagogical desire was pregnant with intellectual and relational violence. Emma’s acceptance of diverse paradigms as important for education led to the humanization of the paradigmatic antagonism. She became committed to two conflicting dimensions of her own

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10 “Cold antagonism” differs from agonism. Agonism tolerates and appreciates the existence of the friendly enemy as necessary and beneficial, although annoying and competitive. In contrast, cold antagonism recognizes that immediate elimination of the enemy is impossible, so the fight to undermine the enemy, with its final destruction, has to be undertaken carefully, avoiding mutual destruction (cf. “cold war”).

position: visionary partisan and pluralist (Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane, 2014, submitted). As a visionary partisan, Emma remained “humanist.” As a pluralist, Emma actively supported and defended all paradigms for freedom of educational exploration with an uncertain outcome for the participants. The inquiry positioned Emma’s students as the final authority for their own learning and professional decision-making. The students apparently started to feel respected and valued by both the professor and the participants of the opposing paradigm. They might have felt the freedom and excitement of becoming “whole persons” again. The inquiry transformed the fighting antagonistic Greek polities into one agonistic self-growth liberal-democratic mini-society, in which everybody (including Nora) is appreciated and valued by all.

Of course, this power conflict was much deeper than the direct classroom relations among the participants were. It involved the school institutions where the teachers work and will work, the university where the event occurred, the student-teachers’ current and future students/children and their parents, the families of the participants (especially for Cathy), religious beliefs (especially for Mona), political ideologies, etc. We doubt that the class event has transformed the existing societal antagonisms into agonisms, or whether this transformation is always possible. As Mouffe points out, violent eruptions and repressions should be expected. However, we hope that the event positively contributed to the humanization of education, society, and life itself for its participants at some limited levels. The success of class events, as we have already described, cannot be guaranteed, but it can be aimed at.

Finally, the presented event is not without its own issues. For example, we have noticed that Emma tacitly socialized the members of the behaviorist paradigm into her own paradigm via the “Magic Wand” inquiry and follow-up critical dialogue. Is this legitimate from an educational and ethical point of view? The “Magic Wand” inquiry was a “Trojan horse” humanist paradigm that penetrates, undermines, and potentially destroys the behaviorist position in a very sneaky way. Does a behaviorist Trojan horse, similarly penetrating, undermining, and potentially destroying the humanist position, exist? What about the critical dialogue itself being value-driven, anti-authoritarian, and, thus, again tacitly undermining the behaviorist authoritarian paradigm? Is our concern legitimate?

## **Conclusion**

On the basis of the Bakhtinian dialogic framework of opaqueness and non-transparency of consciousnesses we have abstracted three possible dialogues: 1) agonistic critical dialogue among friendly enemies; 2) self-growth critical dialogue among friendly strangers’ and 3) hanging-out critical dialogue among friends. We suspect that these are not the only types of dialogue and dialogic relationship that are possible. Agonistic and self-growth dialogues are activity-

and task-based, while hanging-out dialogue is relationship-based. All three types of critical dialogue are based on both self-contained and ontological rationalities.

The desirable role of power in these critical dialogues involves revealing paradigmatic limitations, promotion of the collective focus of attention, imposition of exposure to alternative desires, ideas, values, world-views, perceptions, and demands, and forceful engagement in negotiating these desires, ideas, and demands. Critical dialogue is needed and necessary to legitimize power and authority in relationships and to set their limits. It can transform antagonistic relationships into agonistic relationships of friendly enemies, self-growth relationships of friendly strangers, and power-infused dialogue of friends. Bakhtin argued, and we agreed with him, that meaning-making processes are essentially dialogic (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2009; Sidorkin, 1999). Critical dialogue gives meaning and sets limits to (i.e., curbs) power and, thus, humanizes it. At the same time, power objectivizes and creates new realities for critical dialogue.

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