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Bakhtin, Socrates and the carnivalesque in education

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we critically review the application of Bakhtin's literary work to education with the aim of exploring the notion of carnival. We argue that Bakhtin's highly original interpretation of Socrates as a carnivalesque figure has been neglected in the literature. While Bakhtin's references to Socrates are scattered through different texts, he develops an interpretation that extends our modern view of the Socratic 'method' of teaching. From his Socratic reading, we argue that Bakhtin develops an epistemology that links authority, carnival and knowledge. As such, we will argue that carnival helps to bridge the gap between 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive' discourse in Bakhtin's wider thought and, specifically, application of his ideas to education. In this Bakhtinian interpretation, a Socratic dialogue involves: (1) the subversion of authoritative discourse; (2) the discovery of knowledge through social cross-examination of ideas and (3) educating by personal example. Drawing on empirical educational examples already available in the literature, we will look at the difficulties and benefits involved in applying these aspects of the Socratic dialogue to formal education. Overall, however, we will argue both authority and internally persuasive discourse and carnival gives us an insight into the development of conceptual understanding and enables us to reflect on their application for classroom practice.

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1. Introduction

In this article, we are particularly interested in looking at how learning intertwines with the speaking subject and their associated desires, values and personality. Partly our motivation is

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experiential and personal. I (the first author) find my teaching does not entirely resonate with Piagetian and Vygotskian models of education that emphasise cognitive capacity to the neglect of individual identity. For example, in my introductory first year psychology teaching, I find that for students to comprehend Freud, they often have to (sometimes painfully) suspend their own cherished ethical, moral, and taste values of family life in order to see the family as an arena of possible sexual tension. Similarly, when I teach undergraduate psychology courses on the social construction of personality and emotions, I find my students often struggle, not with the logic and the course material per se, but with the value-system that such a view entails. Suddenly, they need to re-orient their perception to see possible political and power-laden forces that underpin concepts upon which they have hitherto grounded their lives – e.g. love, care, childhood.

To help unpack this link between the students' values and education as the students' joining a historically unfolding discourse with diverse value-systems some which of can be alien to the students, we will examine the Socratic dialogues as interpreted by Bakhtin. The Socratic dialogues are particularly relevant because of the carnivalistic interplay of authority, its subversion, and learning. In the first part of the paper, we will look at some of the changing meanings of the Socratic dialogues and their impact on educational models before moving to Bakhtin's interpretation of Socrates. Our purpose here is twofold. It is to look at how authority, interpreted relationally and discursively, can both be positive and negative for learning. It is also to look at how the subversion of authority through carnival is both potentially destructive and constructive for learning.

As we will show later, here, we view learning within a sociocultural tradition as a desired transformation of participation in practice (Lave, 1996; Rogoff, 1990) – although we emphasise the personal dimension of this transformation – as Hodges (1998) and Linehan and McCarthy (2001) argue we should. We view the notion of authority within a Bakhtinian tradition as a legitimate imposition and acceptance of power and teacher demands, and as an unquestionable tradition (Matusov, 2007). In the second half of the paper, we will look at real-life educational examples of classroom learning, taken from the literature, to extend these notions further. In the discussion, we will examine some of the tensions between authority and carnival and the creative possibilities they offer for the psychology of education.

2. Platonic and Socratic dialogue

Recent thinking about the Socratic dialogues, led by Vlastos (1991), Penner (1992) and Brickhouse and Smith (1994), tend to divide the Socratic dialogues into the earlier, middle and later periods. These are acknowledged to be rough and approximate divisions with some exceptions – depending on the influence of Plato's authorial voice. The earlier and middle dialogues (Hippias Minor, Charmides, Laches, Protagoras, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Ion; Gorgias, Meno; Lysis, Euthydemus, Menexenus, Hippias Major, Republic Book 1) are seen to be closest to the historical Socrates and Plato's influence is minimal (as interpreted by Penner, 1992). Even here, however, there are some omissions of early texts (Cratylus, Symposium and Phaedo) and some texts which are seen as more 'transitional' between Platonic and Socratic (e.g. Gorgias and Meno).

The later dialogues (Sophist, Statesman, Philebus, Timaeus, Critias, Laws) are seen to be as more Platonic – insofar as the historical Socrates has been apparently reduced to a mere mouthpiece for Plato's own views. In these dialogues, knowledge seemed to be already known and the interlocutors are led to this knowledge. For ease of clarification, and following Penner (1992), we will use the Socratic dialogues here to refer to those earlier and middle dialogues where the character Socrates is seen to speak for the historical Socrates and the 'Platonic' dialogues to refer to the later dialogues where the character Socrates speaks for Plato.

While there are many differences between the Socratic and Platonic dialogues (Penner, 1992, pp. 125–130, looks at twelve; Vlastos, 1991 looks at ten, pp. 47–49), the key one for our purposes is that in Plato's earlier writings Socrates is presented as a figure who avows that he has no knowledge while in Plato's later writings he expounds ready-made knowledge didactically, i.e. of the soul, to interlocutors already in agreement (Brickhouse and Smith, 1994). While there is some controversy over Socrates' claim that he knows nothing, at times he seems genuinely perplexed and confused by the issues that are raised and works with his interlocutors to create new truths (e.g. the unity of virtues in

Protagoras; the definition of piety in the Euthyphro) or to be surprised by their conclusions (e.g. in Hippias Minor the contention that a man who lies voluntarily is better than a man who does so involuntarily). Other scholars have noticed manipulative aspects in early dialogues (Matusov, 2009) but here we want to focus on Socrates' genuine explorations of philosophical and ethical inquiries with his interlocutors.

More particularly, in the earlier dialogues Socrates mainly works through the issues with his interlocutors through an *elenchos* (loosely translated as 'refutation') or a style of argument that leads the interlocutor into contradiction regarding their beliefs (e.g. the nature of virtue) (Brickhouse & Smith, 1994). Bakhtin (1984a) makes the point that this contradiction can sometimes be an intense provocation of the other's words (which he refers to as anacrisis). Anacrisis demands that the interlocutor clarify exactly what it is they are arguing for, to recognise the taken for granted assumptions that structure their beliefs and to critically reflect on these.

Anacrisis sometimes has implications for how the interlocutor lives his whole life. In his own words, Socrates acts as a 'gadfly', stinging his interlocutors into action. Interestingly, by his own arguments Socrates also 'stings' himself into action. As such, the dialogue is not abstract but is of significance to the lives of the participants in it. For example, in the *Crito*, Crito and Socrates discuss whether or not it would be acceptable for Socrates to escape from prison. From conducting an *elenchos*, they conclude it would not be consistent with Socrates' other moral principles for him to escape (although, it is an interesting and open issue of how much this conclusion contradicted Socrates' own opinion whether he should or should not escape before this dialogue). Similarly, Zappen (2004) argues that the dialogues with Laches and Nicias involves a critical reflection around the role of courage in warfare and how unreflected ideals of courage (such as leaving a defensive position to pursue a retreating enemy) led to defeat in wars that Laches and Nicias have led as Generals (for more on this, see Zappen, 2004, pp. 78–79, 89).

A correlate of anacrisis is syncrisis. This is the ability, epitomised by Socrates, to take different opinions and to juxtapose them and compare and contrast them against each other. Both syncrisis and anacrisis, embodied in the *elenchos*, reveal the dialogic quality of truth – particularly in the moral-philosophical realm. That is, truth is not relative but nor is it absolute – it is open to continual revision in response to others questioning and one's reflective experiences. Later on in the paper we will investigate what pedagogical value, if any, syncrisis and anacrisis have in the context of a student learning fractions in class.

Socrates does not remain above many of the dialogues as a 'devil's advocate' but often uses his own life as personal example (e.g. in the *Apology* he argues that others should imitate his search for wisdom after he has gone) and he also exhorts others to do the right thing in life (e.g. he dissuades Euthyphro from prosecuting his father). Brickhouse and Smith (1994) refer to these exhortations as a hortative use of the *elenchos*. He is not just contradicting and irritating people by questioning their basic assumptions but he also demonstrates how the examined life is worth living by his own personal example. Later in the paper, we will investigate what pedagogical value, if any, this kind of charismatic teaching has – by examining an empirical example of a glass artist teaching students how to make glass (p. 29).

As the *elenchos* involves leading the participants into contradiction as well as exhorting them how to live their life, Brickhouse and Smith (1994) argue that it involves both a destructive and a constructive style of argument. It is destructive because it breaks down the interlocutor's self-confident beliefs and values. Often, the interlocutors get annoyed and frustrated with Socrates as a result – suspecting manipulation, conspiracy, and even intellectual and moral dishonesty in him (e.g. Anytus in the *Meno*). It is constructive insofar as it allows the birth of new truth with better proved statements, from being tested in discourse with others, and deeper grounded doubts to emerge out of and survive this examination – or indeed 'cross-examination' with the other. This is not to say that they will always agree at the end of the cross-examination (and sometimes they do not – e.g. Callicles rejects Socrates' value of injustice in the *Gorgias*) – a grounded disagreement itself can be an important outcome of this social cross-examination – but that there is a destructive and constructive impulse to both.

Interestingly, Bakhtin (1981, 1984a) argues that the key difference between the earlier and later dialogues lies in the degree of influence that the "folk-carnivalistic" base of the genre exerts. Although often tending toward the monological in content (e.g. Socrates drags a singular truth out of the

interaction), the earlier dialogues take place in a carnivalesque atmosphere of crownings and decrownings where the truth is contested and disputed and hence “the dialogic nature of truth is still recognised” (1984a, p. 110). For example, in the *Gorgias*, Callicles ridicules Socrates’ conception of justice but Socrates confidently argues (using the *elenchos*), that it is Callicles who is ridiculous as he does not understand his own view of justice. Later in the paper, we will look at what pedagogical value, if any, a carnivalesque atmosphere may have in the context of a creative writing workshop.

In contrast to this carnivalistically ambivalent, mixed dialogic–monologic, nature of these earlier dialogues, Bakhtin argues that the later Platonic dialogues are clearly monologic – as they “degenerated completely into a question-and-answer form for training neophytes” (1984a, p. 110). This is because there is no dispute and argument and instead the interlocutors are already in agreement with Socrates. The atmosphere of lively debate has been lost in these later dialogues. In these later dialogues, Bakhtin argues that Socrates was transformed from a ‘pander’ and ‘midwife’ to truth, to being a [conventional, monologic] ‘teacher’ of truth, who is only interested in transmission of *the* truth from his or her own head to the heads of the students. It is ironic that for Bakhtin, conventional mainstream teaching and education are frequently used to illustrate excessive monologism, “In essence ... [education based in monologism –the authors] knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows, can be only a pedagogical dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 81).

In the next section – “*Bakhtin and the carnivalesque Socrates*”, we will examine what exactly Bakhtin means by this carnivalesque Socratic dialogue in more detail. We will use this as a springboard to discuss the place of authority in teaching and learning as well.

3. Bakhtin and the carnivalesque Socrates

Bakhtin (1984a) argues that the most inquisitive and challenging Socratic dialogues are rooted in ancient, medieval traditions of carnival. In carnival, normal life is suspended, including hierarchical distances between people produced by family, groups, associations, institutions, traditions, and the society, and what Bakhtin (1984a, p. 130) calls a “frank” exchange occurs, or an exchange, governed by internally persuasive discourse (“internal” to the discourse, not to the person’s psyche) that is outside of any social propriety and convention. Authority is decrowned, we become aware of the laughing side of things, apart from fear, and there is a profound and collective engagement with alternative ‘truths’ to the officious, the convention, and the tradition – e.g. to see such monolithic concepts as death or religion as serious as well as humorous and open to parody. As such carnival should not be read only as moments of complete disorganisation but much more as an epistemology – one where we sensuously interact with truth from many angles, e.g. with the laughing side of things. In carnival, three-dimensional truth emerges.

The Socratic dialogues emerge out of this tradition for a number of reasons, Bakhtin (1984a) explains. In contrast to monologism, such as the monologism of official dogma, truth is not ready-made but is born in a discourse between people, often assisted by Socrates. In his own carnivalesque description, Socrates is a ‘midwife’ to truth. Nothing is taken for granted and instead concepts have the ambivalence of carnival – e.g. courage is both foolish and seriously admirable.

Socrates makes people collide in a quarrel which familiarises contact. This kind of contact strips away traditional hierarchical divisions and enables a genuine interaction. The profundity of carnival depends on precisely this kind of frank atmosphere. For example, in *The Symposium*, the participants make their arguments about love in an alcohol-fuelled atmosphere. In this kind of atmosphere, Socrates, more than any other participant, often uses a series of lowly comparisons and irony (reduced laughter) to make his points. This kind of debasing of the other is a very common feature of carnival. It is the ambivalent ‘praise–abuse’ dynamic of carnival. We bring people down-to-earth (the fertility of earth) by lowly comparisons or mock crownings and decrownings, which allow a frank exchange to occur.

Finally, “the idea is organically combined with the image of a person” (p. 111) so to test an idea someone holds (e.g. courage is the best virtue) is to test that person. As the dialogue enables them to reflect on cherished beliefs, it is their identity as much as the truth of what they think that is open to

continual change. In this way, people undergo mock sufferings/cross-examination of their life as a form of testing the beliefs they hold. As Zappen (2004) remarks, the Socratic interlocutor has now become a hero, crossing an embodied landscape of struggle and painful truth in their dialogues with Socrates. Zappen (2004, p. 47) draws from Kristeva's (1980) well-known comments here that at the time Socrates was teaching, humans had not developed systems of logic that separated the person from the idea or that anonymised the person. The person was the idea and vice versa, hence the linkage of the hero with ideology to form the inseparable bond of the 'hero-ideologist' (cf. Bakhtin, 1984a). This will be empirically explored later in the paper in the context of teaching by personal example.

Historically it is worth noting that Zappen (2004) explicates this Bakhtinian interpretation by examining, amongst others, the carnival overtones of the *Laches*, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* dialogues. In the *Laches*, for instance, Socrates uses the elentic tools of syncrisis and anacrisis to examine and decrown Laches' views on virtue in terms of how Laches lives his life but more broadly the social tension in Athenian society between the value of courage and wisdom/justice and temperance. This was a society, Zappen (2004) reminds us, that needed to maintain its burgeoning empire (demanding courage) and maintain civic order and just rule (demanding temperance, wisdom and knowledge of the good). Socrates exposes the contradiction within such a society by questioning Laches' notion of courage as mere endurance, apart from wisdom.

3.1. *Authoritative and internally persuasive discourse*

In our view, the role of the Socratic carnival is useful (but not necessary) in making the move to what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as an 'internally persuasive' discourse. Bakhtin does not link carnival with the move from authoritative to internally persuasive discourse himself but we find a clear linkage between his 1981 description of the 'internally persuasive' discourse and his 1981, 1984a, 1984b examination of carnival. It is worth considering this link in more detail as some commentators (e.g. Morson & Emerson, 1990) argue that the idea of carnival stands apart from much of Bakhtin's other work.

Bakhtin (1981) contrasts the 'authoritative word/discourse' (linked to an unquestioned figure of authority or an institution or a tradition) with the 'internally persuasive' word/discourse (or discourse, in which persuasiveness is internal to the discourse; that is open to questioning and to testing of truth). Interestingly, Bakhtin argues that the same discursive statement may be authoritative for one person and internally persuasive for another or we may move from accepting a position on the basis of its authority and then on its logic. Epistemologically, however, they are quite different.

Following Bakhtin and the philosophical work of Benne (1970) on authority in education, we define authoritative discourse as any discourse which can legitimately (from the participants' point of view) control and direct the discourse and the participants' action and ideas without the participants' questioning this control, direction, actions, and ideas. In our view, Morson (2004) offers an important contribution to understanding authority as he makes a distinction between "authoritarian" discourse and "authoritative" discourse. The former involves authority that exists apart from internally persuasive discourse or IPD. The latter, authoritative discourse is conditional to establishing and maintaining the IPD and it can "function not as a voice speaking the Truth, but as a voice speaking the one point of view that must be attended to. It may be contested, rejected or modified, the way in which church dogmas over time are modified by believers, but it cannot be ignored" (Morson, 2004, p. 320). The authority in an authoritative discourse can thus be challenged, even disagreed with, but may still hold legitimacy on the basis of its wide acceptability in society, its influence, and so on. Authoritarian discourse is what Morson describes as demanding full acceptance and "unconditional allegiance." We do not see that IPD is at all guaranteed by authoritative discourse, but it seems to us authoritative discourse makes IPD more possible (especially in contrast to authoritarian discourse that makes emergence of IPD less possible and even difficult). Authoritative discourse, in Morson's definition, facilitates IPD while authoritarian discourse hinders IPD (Matusov, 2007).

The authoritative word often (but not always!) depends on the social status of the speaker, his or her recognized experience, expertise and/or knowledge, or of an institution as an authority. However, it may also depend on a shared unquestionable tradition to be respected for its truth-claims more than on any intrinsic logic of the discourse. There can be a certain degree of dogmatism (or, if such a word existed, "unquestionablism") to authoritative language that can constrict consciousness.

For example, a parental judgement can be compelling and difficult to resist for a child. Other examples of authoritative words that become dogmatic and fused with the charisma of the speaker or the history of the institution includes religious words, moral words, and the words of the father and of the teacher. These authoritarian words demand from the participants' acknowledgement and full (rather than partial or temporary) acceptance. Under such a bombardment of never questionable words from early life, Bakhtin (1981) notes that the child's independent consciousness develops slowly and painfully. It can be painful because the authoritarian word demands "unconditional allegiance" (p. 343) so rejecting it may involve rejecting the allegiance it demands.

On the other hand, as Morson (2004) and Latour (1987) point out, unlimited "questionablism" cannot sustain any discourse mainly because it will lose its focus and, thus, is impractical. When everything is literally questioned and unlimited creative alternatives are envisioned, testing ideas becomes impossible. To start with, the participants won't even agree about what exactly they want to discuss and examine. Everything can be questionable in IPD but it does not mean everything has to be questionable in IPD at once. A certain suspension of questionability, thus, authority, is needed to launch and sustain IPD (Matusov, 2007).

When we move from Bakhtin's (1981) work to his earlier 1990, 1993 works, we can see that as well as launching and sustaining IPD, authority, in some cases, may also be experienced as bestowing a sense of identity. In this earlier work, Bakhtin links authority to authorship or as involving a form-giving function. The loving tones of the mother, for example, are both authoritative and hard to resist but give the child a sense of the cherished quality of their body – e.g. their 'precious handy' (Bakhtin, 1990). In this sense, authority is implicit in an authorship by the other of who we are. Moreover, such lovingly authoritative words are ethically responsive to the other. They provide a "direction for our directedness". More prosaically, however, everyday dialogue is full of valuations from the other – e.g. that we are important, unimportant, useful, etc. If it is an authoritative other for us (e.g. a parent or intimate) these valuations are particularly instrumental in giving a shape to our identity.

In contrast to the 'authoritative' discourse, the 'internally persuasive' word is characterised by a critical engagement with the content apart from the dominance of an authoritative (if not authoritarian!) other, mixing it with a range of alternative discourses and testing it against these. With such thinking, one learns to separate one's own word from the other's word. Instead of echoing one authoritative voice, it is possible to reply to a multiplicity of points of view. Carnival gives us the tools to 'laugh-back' at this authority and the potential to interact as an equal with the other – as Socrates does, without losing authorship without which dialogue and truth are impossible.

In terms of the early Socratic dialogues this latter view of authority and carnival is particularly interesting. We have seen that as a carnival figure, Socrates engages in 'praise-abuse' of his interlocutors. By 'praise-abuse', Bakhtin (1984b) means the affectionate but ambiguous way we use a term of abuse to praise the other (at times, ourselves as the authors of such utterances). For example in the context of the party of the Symposium, Socrates mockingly abuses Alcibades' view of wisdom while also praising his good looks – as one may jokingly tease a close friend. In this way, one gives one's friend an important value but without creating a vertical distance – e.g. by putting them on a pedestal. This 'praise-abuse' is vital for Socrates, according to Bakhtin, because it enables a spirit of free inquiry (without worrying about social hierarchies or causing offense) as it often provides supportive criticism. In other words, it is important to subvert attitudes of self-righteousness to allow challenges to dominant values.

Having said this, sometimes the interlocutors interpret Socrates' style of argument as involving more abuse than of praise (e.g. Anytus in the *Meno*). This touches on the ambiguity of carnival – it can contain the implicit threat of and possibility for violence and abuse. The presence of carnival, in this sense, depends on one's experience of the interaction. That is, while Zappen (2004), Bakhtin (1984a, 1984b) and Brickhouse and Smith (1994) argue that the early Socrates might enter into dialogue with the genuine intention of enriching himself and his interlocutors through an intense elentic search for truth, his interlocutors' experience may have been more ambiguous than this – or out of synchrony with Socrates putative intentions – by experiencing manipulation and abuse more than any enrichment. Although, this point is questioned by some other scholars of Socrates (Boghossian, 2002; Goldman, 1984; Hansen, 1988; Matusov (2009); Pekarsky, 1994; Rud, 1997), for the purpose of this paper we are more interested in following Bakhtin-Zappen's image of early Socratic dialogue

rather than to investigate how accurate their image is with regard to the early texts about Socrates by Plato.

Indeed Socrates regularly mocks and teases his interlocutors (often powerful men in Athenian society), e.g. his mockery of Protagoras's poetry, or his decrowning of Gorgias by his lowly comparison of rhetoric to cookery (Zappen, 2004) and even ambiguously refers to himself as being quite ignorant, which might not be always sincere statements about himself. From a Bakhtinian (1984a) point of view, however, this is intended to familiarise the zone of contact and allow a frank engagement with the content of what is being said, much as a carnival 'fool' strips people of their authority – although it may be experienced otherwise.

In terms of education, while authoritative ideas can potentially be considered valuable to students for their own lives and purposes such a carnivalesque attitude to those in positions of authority contains the ideal of allowing the student to relate to their teacher as an equal other – one whose dear ideas may be challenged, laughed at and interacted with rather than one who embodies the definitive answer all of the time. In IPD that promotes genuine education, authority discourses are both a necessity for creating a shared focus and acceptable tools for IPD cross-examination as well as an obstacle for open-minded questioning. In decrowning the other, a separation of the content of what is said from the authority of who is saying it becomes possible. Decrowning destroys the authority discourse that legitimizes the power of the authority (e.g. why the students should listen to the teacher and unquestionably accept his or her words) (Smith, in preparation). This loss of teacher absolute authority, in this Bakhtinian view, makes it easier for the students to challenge the truth value that the teacher's discourse is assigned and claims to espouse. This may be easier for moral or philosophical discussion more than for a subject like mathematics but even when the teacher has the definitive answer, an open atmosphere of debate, dispute and questioning encourages student empowerment and participation in dialogue that reveals the truth of the ideas themselves. Any dogmatism in education should be challenged, since any such ideas have been launched against alternative ideas and have failed some cross-examination; the "definitive answer" is thus always contestable and has its own limitations. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$ is seen as an "unconditional and non-discursive truth" by some conventional teachers, but an investigation into the truth of this would reveal the problematics of the idea and the values behind it, thus revealing the truth of the idea in dialogue. For example, the linear mathematical model behind $2 + 2 = 4$ won't work with objects involving in non-linear relations (e.g. 2 friends plus 2 friends might not necessarily produce 4 friends) (Matusov, 2009).

Here, we have presented an experiential rather than sociological reading of carnival and authority. The validity of the carnival depends on our experience of the joyful relativity of the atmosphere and our sensuous engagement with the truths on offer. Moreover, carnival (involving certainly dramatic, but never complete, loss of authority) is not seen as a utopian state – as authority can be important for bestowing value and a sense of identity on our interlocutor. Similarly, authority is not utopian as it can be experienced as inhibiting the development of an internally persuasive discourse. Equally, authority can be experienced in varying degrees by different participants in a dialogue.

Overall, in this section on Bakhtin and the carnivalesque Socrates, it is our argument that Bakhtin's reading of the early Socratic dialogues draws attention to: (1) the ambiguity of authority and carnival in learning – their positive and negative dimensions; (2) relatedly – the ambiguous role of the cross-examination in learning (as carnivalesque and/or vs. authoritative) (3) the ambiguity associated with educating by personal example and exhortation (again as authoritative and/or vs. carnivalesque). We will unpack these three ambiguities in more detail by looking at some empirical examples of classroom education – each of which foregrounds, and sometimes problematises the Socratic dialogue. Our ultimate aim, however, is to draw attention to the potential within these ambiguities to enrich educational practice.

4. The ambiguity of authority and carnival

Lensmire (1994) used Bakhtin's work on carnival to design a creative writing workshop for elementary school students in a public school. This case is instructive because it illustrates the difficulty in trying to import the carnival concept into the classroom; particularly the idea of subverting authority.

According to Lensmire's ethnographic description of his writing workshop for elementary school children, there were no passive students without ownership of his/her writing but instead they actively participated both as audience and judges for each other's stories and as authors of their own stories. The children were allowed freedom of thematic and physical movement in the classroom; the teacher also moved freely around the classroom discourse and was not constrained into the traditional hierarchical 'teacher-role'; the students were able to use their stories to parody and even abuse traditional authority structures, e.g. in one story the authority of a particularly strict teacher was parodied.

Lensmire's (1994) carnival-based approach had mixed educational success, however. The workshop became increasingly popular, the students enjoyed the activity of writing and engaged with the activity with a high degree of ownership; they developed more autonomy and learned to learn from each other rather than just the teacher. However, the free play of the workshop carnival (or, arguably, its limitations) did have problems. In particular, Lensmire (1994) found that existing alliances, oppositional solidarities, and friendships were reproduced in this context, e.g. students sought feedback from peers within existing gender, socio-economic class, and race boundaries. Perhaps even more dangerously, the free format meant that one 'trailer-park' student from a poor family who was outside the dominant social class of the school (middle-class) was victimised and bullied in this context to create an oppositional solidarity among popular children. Lensmire (1994) points to one story he found, in the wastepaper bin, reported in the extract below (names are pseudonyms):

When we got into the classroom on Monday morning we heard singing. It was Jil, Jessie and Paul. They were singing a dumb song that went like this: Let's get together, ya, ya, ya. Mrs Parker was out of the classroom. Then Lisa shot Jessie in the back. AAAAAH! Jessie said with a scream! (Lensmire, 1994, p. 12)

Jessie became the protagonist in somebody else's story here – screaming in response to being shot in the back. In the real-life story, she was bullied and alienated from most of the class. She did not enter into the same joyful relativity of the carnivalesque atmosphere, as the other students did. Indeed, she did not participate in reading her stories out loud to the class.

Lensmire (1994) makes the point that even historically, carnival was used to oppress the weak, or for the weak to oppress the even weaker. In one festival in London, in 1512, for instance, it became an excuse for the massacre and expulsion of foreigners. This supports the idea, raised by some commentators of Bakhtin's work (e.g. Averintzev, 1997; Гаспаров, 1997), that historical carnivals do not easily correspond with Bakhtin's concept of carnival, at least, not always.

So what is happening here, educationally? It seems that vertical teacher authority supported by the institution is subverted but is replaced by the horizontal threat of mob-rule. In a way, in Lensmire's classroom the vertical authority of the teacher has been replaced with horizontal authority of the mob-rule based in unquestionable gender, socio-economic class, and race communal prejudices and oppressions. Thus, in our view, the regime of carnival, described by Bakhtin, should not be equated with simple relaxation or full elimination of the teacher's authority. There does not seem to be the genuine exchange of ideas that is so central to the Socratic dialogue and to the development of 'internally persuasive' discourse. Instead, the authority of the school-structure is replaced by the authority and violence of the peer group and mob. The former kind of authority is traditional, institutional and impersonally bureaucratic whereas the latter, as in Lensmire's workshop, is spontaneous, temporary and personal. Hence, the problem of emerged violence in Lensmire's classroom can be attributed not to the carnival regime, as defined by Bakhtin, but to a lack of it. It was not that too much decrowning occurred in his classroom but that too little did. There was no laughter at sexism, classism, and racism during the writing workshop. The class bullies were not decrowned. The teacher surrendered his authority to challenge horizontal authority of prejudice and to establish a truly carnivalistic atmosphere in the classroom.

Many commentators (e.g. Gardiner, 1992) have criticised Bakhtin's (1981, 1984a, 1984b) apparently romantic and uncritical description of carnival precisely because he appears to neglect the violence and terror, "horizontal authority", prejudices, and exploitation of the weak that can be associated with carnival. On the other hand, however, one could say that the incidents above do not qualify as carnival

from a strictly Bakhtinian point of view. Bakhtin argues that if decrowning is not also ambiguously associated with crowning, in the same act, then it is not carnival:

If carnivalistic ambivalence should happen to be extinguished in these images of decrowning, they degenerated into a purely negative *expose* of a moral or socio-political sort, they become single-level, lost their artistic character, and were transformed into naked journalism (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 126.)

In our view Lensmire's workshop degenerated from the ambivalent praise–abuse of carnival where the students were able to sensuously engage with different ideas such as the use of profanation into a purely negative *expose* (of a moral and socio-political sort) of another classmate – Jesse. It used the “other's back to expose their face”. Jesse was not an authority figure to be decrowned in the first place and the only truth that was revealed/created was that her identity was different from the rest of the class – a moral and socio-political judgement of character.

To us, this is where a strength of a discursive approach of authority may help in the analysis. From this point of view, it is not so much important who EMBODIES the authority, as much as what discourses of authority are being crowned and decrowned. We see in the Lensmire example a decrowning of a likely teacher-initiated idea (and perhaps popular among some children as well?) of promoting feel-good “community” values (i.e., we should all just learn to get along better with each; let's all be friends, etc.). You can hear this in the mocking reply of “let's get together, ya, ya, ya!” In contrast with the attempts of many teachers to create such feel-good, conflict-free, supportive and friendly communities (see for example, Paley's, 1992, book *You Can't Say you Can't Play*), there are underlying relational tensions under the surface of Paley's and many other classrooms in which it may not be possible to have idyllic relations with everyone (Matusov, 2009).

The question for us is what is authoritative about these imposed community norms. What is the basis of the legitimacy of the authority? And in the case of Lensmire's writing workshop, we think we can see an example of the delegitimisation of these authoritative structures, and the open questioning of them.

Smith (in preparation) argues that the legitimacy of imposed community norms is in the teacher's appeal to discourses that presume that the students are not yet fully responsible beings – they are what Sidorkin (2002) would describe as “half-beings” in the making. To gain legitimacy of their frequently arbitrary demands, teachers can appeal to the idea that “in high school” or “in college” or “as an adult,” you need to treat people in a different way, and there is a certain degree of authority to such discourse. Mostly, in Smith's analysis, the teachers took advantage of the students' ignorance about what the future holds for them and the importance that the following the norms of the school and the teacher have for the students' access to desired social practices in future. Alternatively, the teacher can engage the students in an honest discourse about a communal authority – “what kind of community we want to be and why?” (Developmental Studies Center, 1996).

With this understanding of carnival, we think that Lensmire's efforts to organise a carnival-esque atmosphere did allow a joyful participation in class (at times) and a new set of relationships between the students and the teacher. They were able to exchange ideas around their work in a frank atmosphere that fostered creativity. For some participants, however (not all), this experience left the enriching zone of carnival and degenerated into a different relationship, that of terror.

As such, while authority may be deliberately subverted to allow the creative exchange of ideas, if the dynamic of the relationship changes to one of terror (for some students) the teacher's authority needs to be re-asserted to claim back the carnival – not necessarily by punitive sanction but perhaps by trying one's best to facilitate a dialogue between the victims and bullies (the work of “The truth and reconciliation committee” in South Africa addressing crimes caused by apartheid seems a good example of that (Foster, Haupt, & Beer, 2005)).

We have seen that achieving the kind of carnival freedom that Bakhtin valued may not be easy within the school setting, where established alliances tend to remain and the experiential world of the participants is quite different. That is, it can fluctuate and change from participating together in a joint carnival space to degenerating into horizontal violence supported by the horizontal authoritative

discourse of peer hierarchy. In our view, the problem is not with peer authority per se (similarly, it is not with vertical teacher authority per se) but in the fact that such discourse remains unquestionable and becomes violent in Lensmire's classroom.¹ Having said this, Lensmire's (limited) carnival-based approach had some success educationally. It does seem to necessitate an occasional reverse to a vertical, Platonic and authoritative style of teaching, however, in the context of the classroom – where participants are not free to walk away and occasionally need to depend on vertical (and, probably, on horizontal) authority to provide a safe learning environment. This vertical authority can also be very important for giving the students a sense of achievement and an identity of successful students, through praise.

In the sense of physical, emotional, and intellectual safety of the participants as opposed to physical violence, and praise as opposed to mockery, the bureaucratic authority of the institution is far preferable to the mob-rule of the children, at least in our view, even if it creates a compromised carnival – one under the watchful eye of institutional and communal authority.

The deliberate subversion of authority through carnival is only one dimension of the Socratic dialogue, however. In Section “[The ambiguity of the cross-examination](#)”, we will focus on the discovery of knowledge through dialogic inquiry – (Socrates’ “cross-examination”) before moving to look at a more hortative use of the *elenchos* or the use of exhortation (by personal example) in instruction. We will then judge the merits of introducing a Bakhtinian-inspired, Socratic education into the classroom.

5. The ambiguity of the cross-examination

This brings us on to a second leg of Bakhtin's Socratic dialogue – this is the logical investigation of a topic through intense questioning or a cross-examination of others. This involves the use of what Bakhtin calls *syncrisis* (juxtaposition of different points of view on a topic) and *anacrisis* (using words to provoke the other into revealing their ideas, e.g. through provocative questioning) referred to earlier. Bakhtin (1984a) writes:

Socrates was a great master of the anacrisis: he knew how to force people to *speak*, to clothe in discourse their dim but stubbornly preconceived opinions, to illuminate them by the word and in this way to expose their falseness or incompleteness: he knew how to drag the going truths into the light of day (p. 111).

Socrates used his *elenchos* to drag the stubborn quality of the conventional truths into the light of day. Under this light, these self-confident truths (often cherished assumptions of his interlocutors) could be critically examined – e.g. the supreme value of courage as a virtue. He did this, not only by pointing out logical contradictions but also by forcing the interlocutors to define and clarify their own naïve assumptions.

An intense cross-examination, however, in a school context, becomes very difficult to avoid a more Platonic and monological form of the teacher's questioning. Indeed, as Matusov (2007) points out, when one is the questioner or provoking the word of the other, one gains a lot more power over the interaction than the one who is questioned. In this sense, relations of authority and carnival can again be ambiguously realised in the context of the classroom.

In the example below, we draw from a study of classroom interaction, involving intense questioning, that becomes loaded with a relationship of authority, turning more Platonic than Socratic (but retaining elements of the carnivalesque), again to emphasise the difficulty of implementing a Socratic type dialogue in educational practice – particularly when one is interested in eliciting or discovering or provoking the words of the other.

The example below is taken from Linehan and McCarthy (2001) who describe an interaction where a teacher is trying to elicit the ‘right answer’ from a girl (Lisa – pseudonym) who is learning fractions. As

¹ We refer to “vertical authority” as authority based on structural inequality and asymmetry (e.g. a structure established by an institution of school between the teacher and the students). We refer to “horizontal authority” as the authority established through dynamics of power relations. In the latter case, authority is not given but is (violently) established and emergent (e.g. in student peer group dynamics).

we can see below, she does not want this girl to use the mediational means of a fraction chart but instead wants her to produce the answer “on her own” (all names are pseudonyms):

Teacher:	another one half? Lisa Murphy three quarters plus how much makes one unit? Ah, no, don't look at your chart
Other students:	that's easy.
Teacher:	For these girls, these are too easy, aren't they?
Amanda:	ya, she doesn't know where we are
Lisa:	I do Amanda (pause)
T:	Lisa Murphy, now that couldn't take you that long if you were following it all, three quarters plus how much more to make a whole unity; if you got three quarters of the apple how much more would you need to make a full apple or how much more of it was missing, how many quarters are there in anything, Lisa (pause), better hurry up Lisa or you'll be on a third class maths' book if you're not careful (pause). Would you look up at the chart please on the blackboard and tell me how many quarters are there in any one unit, how many quarters are there in one unit.
Lisa:	Four fourths
T:	pardon
Lisa:	four fourths
T:	how many quarters are there
Lisa:	four (very low voice)
T:	I can't hear you Lisa (Linehan & McCarthy, 2001, pp. 328–329)

This example is very interesting because the authoritative, commanding tone of the teacher (“don't look at your chart”) echoes with the judging tones of the other students (“that's easy”). Within the utterance “that's easy” by the students and “these are too easy” by the teacher, we can detect an authoritative tone of judgement and scorn addressed to Lisa. Amanda's utterance builds on this authoritative tone but has a more carnivalesque overtone (a mocking, decrowning, cynical overtone). It is only an overtone to an “expose”, however, insofar as it lacks any ambivalent crowning of Lisa; it is only a decrowning: “ya, she doesn't know where we are.” In contrast to Jesse in Lensmire's example, Lisa feels empowered to answer back to Amanda and assert herself (“I do Amanda”) at the horizontal, peer, level of the classroom authority. This is an interesting example of the possible closeness of the authoritative and carnivalesque dimensions within the utterance at least at the horizontal level (but not at the vertical level).

More significantly in terms of education, it reveals how the Socratic form of the question and answer (the teacher questions her to drag her assumptions into the light of day) has become corrupted into a monological form of a showcase trial in the public court of the classroom. Under these circumstances, Lisa is forced to work out the fractions involved in calculation, by coming up with the one rigidly correct answer (which involves, arguably, arbitrary prioritization of saying “quarters” – the word with the Latin root, apparently less familiar or even unfamiliar to the child – instead of “fourths” – the word with the familiar English root). The “rightness” of her answer depends on how closely it correlates with the teacher's authoritative words and external sources of authority such as the chart. If she does not get it right, she is subject to threats of pedagogical violence – “you'll be on a third class math book”. Lisa is led to “the right” answer by the teacher's vertical authority and not by an internally persuasive discourse, in a very corrupted form of anacrisis. It does not appear to lead to an ‘internally persuasive’ discourse.

It seems to us that the most salient problem inhibiting the development of internally persuasive discourse, most notably the fact that the problem and the preset endpoint of “the right answer” toward which the students are going are in full control of the teacher (Matusov, 2009). The example is extremely monologic, since the only answer is that which is expected by the teacher. Arguably, dialogue and internally persuasive discourse is impossible in such situations in which the consciousnesses of the students are defined in terms of being “wrong” or “right” from the teacher's perspective – what Bakhtin (1999) defined as extreme monologicity of “pedagogical discourse.”

The teacher uses her institutional authority to create an atmosphere where questioning or disputing what the teacher says is not encouraged. In later interviews with the same students, Linehan and McCarthy (2001) found that the students believed it was their role to passively “take in” or uncritically “appropriate” (the teacher’s words in the children’s mouths) of what was taught. What is considered to be school learning and what is defined as school truth is in the full control of the teacher. The students are ultimately in this classroom, to use Sidorkin’s (2002) term, “half-beings,” not fully responsible for their own and one another’s learning. The identity which they have been given by the teacher of “an academically successful student” who can guess what the teacher wants and please the teacher – in contrast to the identity of an interested learner – (DePalma, Matusov, & Smith, 2009) works against the broader educational principles of actively exploring information through public cross-examination as a part of authentic learning and truth.

In this atmosphere, the disputation of truth is impossible because of the imposition of relations of authority and the mocking atmosphere of the classroom. In the above case, the structurally vertical teacher-based and dynamically horizontal peer-based authorities both have a destructive influence toward the development of internally persuasive discourse and the collective seeking of the truth. In this sense, the methods of the *elenchos* are overwhelmed by the relations of authority which powerfully shape the students’ identity. This is not to say, however, that the methods of *anacrisis* and *syncrisis* per se are faulty – rather that the atmosphere of disputation, argumentation and debate needs to be open to all parties, apart from authority, for these methods to work well. Paradoxically, as we have seen, however, *anacrisis* and *syncrisis* lend themselves to relations of authority.

One critical response to this paradox is to adopt styles of teaching that use alternatives to the methods of *anacrisis* and *syncrisis*. A good alternative to the style of teaching evident in the example above is provided by Knoeller (2004). He describes the interaction between a teacher of English (Cone – her real name) and her students (Bryon, Eva, Bonita – pseudonyms) regarding the place of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King in American History. Knoeller (2004) makes the point that teacher seems to model reflective, critical thinking for the students – much as Socrates does – learning from the students as well as instructing them. She does not, however, engage in a direct *elenchos* or subject the students to an intense *anacrisis* and *syncrisis*. The extract begins with a discussion around whether Martin Luther King should have done more:

Teacher:	Well you know it’s interesting when you said <i>Well did he need to do more</i> and Byron said and a lot of you said, you know, <i>Martin Luther King didn’t accomplish anything</i> . I guess what really concerns me is that we don’t know what, you know, it doesn’t really come up in our history what he accomplished...I’m not saying he was <i>perfect</i> , but I think we don’t understand how much Martin Luther King really accomplished. But as difficult as I have, problematic as this book is for me, even now, on second reading 20 years afterwards, I think that Malcolm X had a tremendous effect on our society today...But I guess because Martin Luther King is my hero
Bonita:	And I was kind of angry because, no one really acknowledges Malcolm X like they acknowledge Martin Luther King

In many ways, as Knoeller points out, this kind of interaction is marked by a serious engagement with the student’s views – finding them interesting and troubling. The teacher also admits personal bias and demonstrates a reflexive awareness of her feelings around learning. This kind of personal intervention and confessional mode of discourse encourages the breakdown of hierarchical barriers where the ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ roles appear secondary to the discussion.

At the same time, however, the teacher does not overtly challenge the students as Socrates does nor does she decrown them as Socrates does. As such, Knoeller’s example illustrates that there are more routes to a profound and sensuous engagement with truth, outside of hierarchical barriers, than an *anacrisis* or *syncrisis* or decrowning alone. This is not to negate the potential benefit of these in certain contexts (as Socrates’ mixed success and Lensmire’s mixed success shows) but rather to illustrate the

variety of ways in which a teacher can lose institutional authority to engage on an equal plane with the students.

Somewhat latent in Knoeller's example of promoting internally persuasive discourse in the classroom is a third dimension to the Socratic dialogue – which is the role of the teacher in acting as the example for how inquiry should proceed. She seems to be open-minded and allows debate and dispute of important truths. In this atmosphere, the students are encouraged to question and re-think their own assumptions around race-relations. Moreover, Cone often takes a back seat and allows the students to lead the discussions.

There can be a confusion here between ideology (what is espoused belief of the teacher) and practice (what the nature of the discourse is that emerges in the classroom) (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Does dialogic discourse emerge in the classroom here? Or is it something that is desired or encouraged by the teacher, but elusive in practice? The students may be “encouraged to question and re-think their own assumptions about race relations,” but a dialogic sense of truth may not emerge. Students may be “allowed” to “lead the discussions,” but it seems to us that an alternative possibility exists here that there is an alternation of control of the discourse between the students asserting what is true for themselves and others, and the teacher doing the same. This would mean that many authoritative ideas may not be opened up in dialogue.

In Section “The ambiguity of educating by personal example”, we will use an example of how a teacher acts as an example, not only of how inquiry proceed, but also as an identificatory example of what it means to be an artist – in a workshop she gives on making glass. Here, however, we will draw attention to the ambiguity between imposition and inspiration that this style of thinking can lead to. We will then move on to discuss the difficulties of achieving a liberating and educational Socratic Dialogue (a la Bakhtin) in education.

6. The ambiguity of educating by personal example

In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates' personality imbues the dialogues. In the *Apology* we hear that he urges others to imitate his elentic style of thinking. Historically, we are told that he served in the Peloponnesian war, earning a reputation for courage and endurance of harsh conditions (Zappen, 2004). In Kierkegaard's (1841/1989) reading of Socrates, he lives out his ideas by taking an ironic, detached attitude toward the structures and procedures of his society (Kierkegaard, 1989). Moreover, Socrates was admired, liked and disliked for his irony. In the Symposium we are told that he is a great drinker (in another carnivalesque reference), a wise man and an object/actor of bisexual love and sex. It is clear in the Symposium that people enjoy being around him (however difficult his questioning) and he is a figure of admiration and respect among his friends. In the Meno, in contrast, we hear that Anytus walks away in disgust from Socrates, feeling his questions sully the reputations of others and are manipulative. Indeed, Socrates' eventual trial and death speak to this strength of reaction he provoked.

In the example below, we will illustrate how this kind of *personal style/charisma* lends an authoritative weight to the logic that is being taught. We will argue that this is potentially both good and bad for students from the point of view of authentic learning emerging in IPD. The example is taken from research on a glass artist that I (the first author) have also reported (with colleagues) elsewhere (anonymous 2006). We describe the case of a glass artist, Donna (real name) who has a very strong personal ethic of love that imbues her life and her work as an artist. She loves the process of making art, she gives the art to people who she loves, makes art using hair of those she loves and often celebrates the feeling in her prose. When she is teaching the techniques of glass making, her whole personality enters into her philosophy of glass and the techniques of glass making – and is also manifest in the love and care she gives her adult students (pseudonyms). In the extract below, where she is freely moving around asking students about their work, she explains to one student Zoe (pseudonym) the importance of love:

Jane:	can I use this ruler
Donna:	sure honey, how you doing
Zoe:	grand
Donna:	OKAY (said in funny/joking voice)
Zoe:	are we able to do amm, like, I have rods upstairs and amm, will I just bring them down and we'll leave them together and stuff and?
Donna:	sure they'll be gorgeous, yeah, wiRED up on [a panel
Zoe:	just wired]
Donna:	you know like some of those pictures you have, they'd be simple, bring down anything like that that you LOVE
Zoe:	o.k.
Donna:	because if you love it you know, it will all happen and come together then in the piece, you know
Zoe:	o.k., so you don't, so it doesn't have to be like, well I will do this (?) as well anyway
D:	yeah which keeps going
Zoe:	so like the little journey around America (Capitals denote emphasis in speech)

We can see here that Donna is showing the students how to work but is also providing a possible model or example of *being* a glass artist – one who is immersed in the activity and loves what they do and places a high value on love as an ingredient to success. She is also providing a model of how collaboration with others can work, through friendly relations, humour and constructive suggestions. Her suggestions could be rejected by the students. Donna just wanted the students to be happy with their work but I did not observe any broader philosophical debate about what it means to be a glass artist.

Elsewhere in the data, she encourages the students to “have a go” at various techniques of making glass and assures them that, when it comes to the pieces they make “if you're happy, I'm happy”. For example, when one student is afraid that she may waste material by getting a particular effect in the piece, Donna encourages this student to follow her desire for the sake of her art rather than worrying about the resources.

Donna's authority is what Bakhtin (1990) would call “form-giving”, discussed earlier in the article (p. 11), where she communicates to the students the importance of feeling and love to making art which helps them to see the beauty of what they do. If the student uses something they love in the work then it will “all happen and come together then in the piece”. In Zoe's case, this means to use material from her trip around America.

We can see that instruction is tied to the person who is teaching – implicating her way of life and her values. The logic of different glass making techniques is secondary in the example here to these values. Instead of cross-examining the student, for instance, as to why different elements are logically necessary to their work, Donna asks the students to have faith in the success if the emotions are right. This is why I choose this example. Although Donna's discourse is directed at techniques of glass making and as such is not concerned with testing and challenging ideas and alternatives in the participants, it highlights a strand of the Socratic dialogue that is under-emphasised in the literature – the linkage of the idea with the person and the importance of teaching by example.

This kind of approach to teaching illustrates a different side to authority than the terrifying authority of the teaching in Linehan and McCarthy's (2001) example. The values that Donna ascribes to making art are authoritative and internally persuasive for her and she is at pains to express this to the students. Yet, perhaps to develop as artists, these students will dialogically interact with and question these values (e.g. that an artist needs to cut off an ear to qualify as being an artist) but did they not do so here nor are they encouraged to do so. This is because the students are immersed in how to use different drilling techniques, etc. in the process of making art – rather than questioning what it is to be an artist. As mentioned earlier, such an authoritative attitude cannot be ignored but can be dialogued with.

Much as Socrates takes his right to cross-examine the other and put them on trial as an authoritative value for the activity of argument and debate and urges his followers to do the same, love and care are the values that underpin Donna's approach to making art. In this sense, both Donna and Socrates are treading a very fine and ambiguous line between serving as an inspiration for how others conduct art

and argument (respectively) and allowing their own background and foreground values to authoritatively give form to their students' apperceptive background and authoritatively shape their identity. Similarly, a parental communication of moral values in a spirit of love and care (e.g. to be a good person) are ambiguous in shaping identity of "whom we want to be," they need to be challenged and dialogued with to move beyond a simple echoing of these words.

While shaping identity can be experienced as inspirational and form-giving for the students involved, it may also have its dangers. It may be harder to reject the lifestyle and life-choices of those we respect and admire, particularly if what they have taught us is deeply imbued with their own personality. It may be difficult to appreciate Freud, or social constructionism, for instance, if we think that doing so involves rejecting our parents and what they have taught us about family life and the nature of society. One would hope that this would not happen but there is of course no guarantee of this.

7. Discussion

In this article, we have sought to draw attention to the interesting refraction of logic through values – encompassing relations of authority and carnival. To do this, we have used Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) highly original interpretations of the Socratic dialogues as a genre that mix these things together. This mix offers quite a different view of education to the more logo-centric philosophies of Vygotsky and Piaget (Matusov & Hayes, 2000) through emphasising the place of values and difficulties around participation in education.

In particular it highlights authority and carnival as both constructive and destructive forces. Authority, for instance, can shape and consummate identity but in doing so it can constrain the development of an internally persuasive discourse. Carnival or the loss of authority can allow the sensuous engagement of alternative truths in an atmosphere of fun and irreverence but can easily degenerate in violence and persecution.

This creates a tantalising dilemma for educators, in our view. Should educators design activities around Socratic and Bakhtinian concepts such as carnival, as Lensmire has done, or exhort teachers to inspire with their enthusiasm and values, as Donna foregrounds her enthusiasm and values or as Socrates exhorts Athenian society to imitate him? Is there a place for anacrisis and syncrisis or will institutional authority transform it into a showcase trial? These kinds of dilemmas emerge from the inherent ambiguity of the Socratic dialogues but also from the difficulties of working in a formal institutional context where institutional authority is so often foregrounded and engrained into hierarchical practices.

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas. As Gadamer (1975) argues, each situation depends on the actor's judgement. There is a skill in making these kinds of judgements that emerges from practice as well as the kind of theoretical insights that Socrates and Bakhtin provide.

What then, if anything, are these insights? My guess is that they will vary depending on the teacher's experience and values. To return to my (first author's) own teaching example, however, I find that the kind of insights we have explored here will be of immense benefit to my teaching of Freud and Social Constructionism. In particular, what I will draw out from these examples is the role of the lecture-room atmosphere in teaching and questioning the students. Socrates' teaching seems to work best for the participants when there is a positive and jovial atmosphere (e.g. in the symposium) and worse when there is a hostile atmosphere (e.g. in the *Meno*, Socrates creates a hostile atmosphere by the nature of his questions).

Some ways of encouraging this atmosphere are better than others. Obviously I (the first author) can't get my students drunk, as Socrates does, but I can encourage an open-minded atmosphere by taking student's questions seriously, encouraging them to question assumptions behind what I say, inviting participation "without footlights" or without fear of shame and by creating opportunities to play around with knowledge (e.g. by asking some students to play Freud and others Maslow and have a debate around the essence of humanity). I will also try to crack jokes (even bad ones), laugh and smile, and to encourage the ambiguity of seriousness (e.g. the real implications that these debates could have for their lives) and fun to pervade the atmosphere.

Perhaps this may be easier in third-level teaching with adult learners than with younger children where authority is more often explicitly necessary to prevent the 'degeneration' into expose. At the

same time though, Knoeller's example shows how it is possible for a teacher (Cone) to create a fun, open-minded atmosphere that encouraged critical thinking, with younger students – mainly by working in the background. Different philosophies and approaches to education would also place different values on what is termed successful or valuable student participation and learning.

Equally, in many ways one could argue that the syncrisis and anacrisis employed by the teacher in Linehan and McCarthy's (2001) example could be successful educationally if the teacher was not so authoritarian and obsessed with terminology and rules and if there was an atmosphere of fun in the class – where the students were allowed to participate without fear of shame.

There is much that a teacher can do to encourage this kind of fun and even carnival atmosphere. In doing so, the teacher also transmits certain values to the students of what education is about. The students may find this inspiring or as a model of good, open-minded thinking. However, it also paradoxically carries the danger of imposing one's assumptions of the activity of learning on the students. These kinds of background values are very difficult to avoid. Perhaps one can question how inquiry should proceed within the class (in contrast to Socrates who sets ground rules for inquiry – e.g. that participants say only what they think is reasonable) and invite student feedback on it.

Overall, in this article, we have looked at the Socratic dialogue with the aim of explicating and applying Bakhtin's version of Socrates as a carnivalesque figure to the classroom. Perhaps appropriately, we have only really encountered paradoxes and ambiguities. Amidst these however, we feel there are some interesting signposts for thinking and helping educators to make informed judgements about good educational practice.

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