



# Dialogic Pedagogy and Polyphonic Research Art

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Bakhtin by and  
for Educators

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# Introduction: Inspired by Bakhtin—The Aim, Focus, and History Behind This Research Project

Russian philosopher and literature theoretician Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975) has become hugely influential within diverse fields of the humanities and social sciences around the world. Although Bakhtin represents many different things for different scholars, we might characterize his philosophy as a new version of *dialogic ethical humanism* (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2018). Since the 1960s–1970s when Bakhtin’s texts started appearing in the Soviet Union and then were translated into many languages elsewhere, his ideas had strong influence on the field of education. Literature involving translating Bakhtin’s philosophical and literary ideas into educational concepts has been steadily growing (Bibler, 2009; Matusov, 2009; Sidorkin, 1999; Wegerif, 2007). The term “Bakhtinian pedagogy” has been introduced and defined as a pedagogical alternative to conventional education (White & Peters, 2011). By now, there have been many attempts to study Bakhtinian pedagogical ideas and implement them in innovative education practices (e.g., Fecho, Falter, & Hong, 2016; Lefstein & Snell, 2013). A wide range of diverse innovative teaching practices have been researched from Bakhtinian frameworks in diverse settings, including outside schools (e.g., Dysthe, Bernhardt, & Esbjørn, 2013).

Our book is different. Strictly speaking we are not focusing on Bakhtin, painstakingly reconstructing his philosophical views and applying them to education. Rather, we critically analyze the educational practice of self-identified Bakhtinian educators—what they mean by claiming to be Bakhtinian, what attracts them in Bakhtin not merely in an abstract way but in their own pedagogical teacher practice. By writing this book, we want to help to pass the ownership of Bakhtinian pedagogy from mainly Bakhtinian educational academicians—scholars of education coming from Bakhtinian perspectives—to educational practitioners, interested in Bakhtin as their theoretical and philosophical orientation to their educational practice.

Ours is a book of educational practitioners, by educational practitioners, and primarily for educational practitioners. The task we set out to accomplish was

both facilitated and complicated as all three authors of this book are both (self-identified Bakhtinian) educational practitioners and scholars of education. We worked hard to prevent our scholarly orientation from taking over our practitioner orientation, while still preserving our particular scholarly voices. The practice of scholars often revolves around the conceptualization of ideas. In contrast, a pedagogical practice lives primarily in teaching cases—dramas, mysteries, problems, excitements, puzzlements, surprises, laughs, fears, fatigues, tears, terrible mistakes, grounded reflections, revelations, relational breakdowns—in all those stories that are told and relived (Matusov, 2017). We argue that the scholarly conceptualizing and philosophizing of this practice comes as a gift from the scholarly orientation to the practitioner orientation (cf. Bakhtin, 1990). Thus, we focused on teaching cases by Bakhtinian educators, which were often revealing teaching events of their Bakhtinian pedagogical practice—whatever “Bakhtinian” meant for the practitioners. We invited and interviewed educators, who claimed Bakhtinian pedagogy as their own (i.e., “of educational practitioners”). We selected those interviewees who could articulate their inner *teacher* voice rather than inner *scholar* voice through providing us with their Bakhtinian teaching cases (i.e., “by educational practitioners”). Finally, through our presentation and discussion of the teaching cases revealing Bakhtinian pedagogy, we tried to address primarily educational practitioners and only secondarily scholars (i.e., “for educational practitioners”). It is up to the reader to judge how successful we are in accomplishing this task.

The research with its results presented in the book is based on a dialogical theoretical paradigm informed by Bakhtinian ideas. We, the authors of the book, understand ourselves as being in a dialogue with each other, with the interviewees, with ourselves internally, with our past and present colleagues and students, and with our imaginary readers. We present the results of our analyses as dialogic provocations and invitations for our readers. We hope that the diverse teaching cases, pedagogical ideas, their justifications, and our analysis might reveal values, tensions, and issues that might be invisible to the participants and to ourselves and thus generate fruitful new dialogues, which in the future might change educational practitioners’ lenses on their own pedagogical practices. Similarly, but as a secondary aim, we hope to address Bakhtinian scholars to engage them in a dialogue about our findings. Thus, our analysis should not be considered as the final word about our respondents’ practices and ideas. We all—the authors, the interviewees, and the readers—are situated in the dynamic field of multivocal dialogues with ourselves and others in diverse settings. Furthermore, we continue to evolve and change both as human beings and as professionals, transforming our teaching and scholarship practices thanks to the dialogues big and small, in which we participate.

The process of searching for self-identified Bakhtinian educators started in 2015. As academicians and editors of the *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*,<sup>1</sup> we sent an invitation to our readers, colleagues, and innovative

<sup>1</sup><http://dpj.pitt.edu>

educators interested in Bakhtin and asked them to pass this invitation to others who might be or know self-identified Bakhtinian educators-practitioners across the world. We tried to create a snowball effect. We intentionally did not define what “Bakhtinian” means but relied on the practitioners’ self-identification: “those who claim that Bakhtin influences or inspires their own teaching” (from our invitation letter, summer 2015).

We started our pool by including ourselves because we identify ourselves as seasoned Bakhtinian educational practitioners and scholars. Of course, by joining this pool we had to assume diverse voices in our book. One of our voices is the voice of a past Bakhtinian educator, whose pedagogical practice we described in our own interviews. The second voice is the voice of a present Bakhtinian educational practitioner, who might change his or her pedagogical Bakhtinian practice and ideas. The third voice is the voice of the interviewer in dialogue with another practitioner. The fourth voice of ours is the voice of the past scholar that we might cite in the book. The fifth voice is the voice of an organizer of the project. The sixth voice is the present evaluative and interpretative voice of our critical analysis. Finally, the seventh voice is the voice of a co-author of the book. Many of our participants also had several voices. We tried to clarify these different voices in the book.

In the process of reaching out to and selecting self-identified Bakhtinian educational practitioners, we faced two major related problems. The first problem was how to reach out far enough so that we would access diverse practitioners: diverse by country, diverse in terms of the levels of education (e.g., early childhood, K-12 school, undergraduate college, graduate education, adult education), diverse in terms of the types of students they work with (i.e., age, special education, ethnicity, SES, minority), diverse in terms of the subjects they teach, diverse in terms of the settings they work in (e.g., formal, informal, public, private, afterschool), and diverse in terms of the nature of education (i.e., indigenous, vocational, academic, critical). We succeeded in some aspects of this list of diversities but failed in others. We interviewed 22 practitioners from 9 countries (Norway, India, Italy, Finland, Russia, New Zealand, Ukraine, Brazil, and the USA) with the USA dominating. We had only two elementary, one middle, and two high school teachers at the K-12 level with the rest teaching at undergraduate and graduate college levels. Higher education dominated our sample. Also, all but one of our participants were involved in academia and had double roles as educational practitioners and academicians. So, the vast majority of the experiences described in our book are of *academic* Bakhtinian practitioners. Was it because so far Bakhtinian pedagogy has been spreading primarily through academia that there has been simply a lack of K-12 self-identified Bakhtinian practitioners? If this is the case, our book is especially needed now to pass the baton to practitioner teachers *outside of academia*. Or, was it because, being situated in academia ourselves, we failed to extend our invitation network to reach out to K-12 and early childhood education Bakhtinian practitioners outside of academia? If this is the case, our book missed voices of potentially very important Bakhtinian educational practitioners

and further efforts are needed. Or was it a bit of both? Or something else? We do not know.

<<**Katherine von Duyke, feedback reply<sup>2</sup> (2018-04-30):** *A quick Google search—no self-identified [Bakhtinian or dialogic pedagogy] practitioner teacher groups online—you might check. The closest is a limited understanding of dialogic that I've come across.>>*

The second related problem that we experienced during the interviews was due to the fact that some of our academic participants (10 out of the 29 who volunteered, which includes 9 out of the 22 we interviewed) were continuously misinterpreting the purpose of our project despite our emphasis and follow-up clarifications. These ten participants often offered their theoretical understandings and analyses of Bakhtinian pedagogy and even tried to send us their scholarly papers instead of interviewing. During the interviews, they focused on conceptualizing their practice rather than describing the concrete examples of teaching, events, or cases that might reveal how Bakhtin's ideas influence or inspire their pedagogical practice. In other words, they assumed exclusively their scholarly orientation without much practitioner orientation. Of course, during the interviews we tried hard to encourage all interviewees to articulate their teaching events, examples, cases, struggles, and achievements—that is, what constitutes for them their own authorial Bakhtinian pedagogy in their day-to-day teaching practice. In some cases, we conducted follow-up interviews to focus them only on their pedagogical practices. But those ten interviewees could not do that.

We were surprised to face this problem especially because of our many efforts to emphasize that our primary focus was on lived pedagogical practice. We hypothesize several plausible explanations of why this problem appeared. One is that these ten participants embodied their academic voice in a scholarly genre to such a degree that they could not switch to or were not even accustomed to a practitioner narrative and we could not manage to help them to do so. Alternatively, or, maybe additionally, some of them might not be Bakhtinian practitioners while being genuine self-proclaimed Bakhtinian educational scholars.

<<**Atsushi Tajima, feedback reply (2018-04-29):** *It is a very important question. I think that the last comment by your team is interesting. From the Bakhtinian perspective, I suppose that the reason for this problem is not only rooted in the mentalities of the interviewees who cannot connect theoretical ideologies with practices, but also in the interviewers, who cannot pull out the answers they needed [from the interviewees]. It would be nice if you commented on the developmental change of interviewers in relating to this theme in your book.>><sup>3</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Here and further in the text, the feedback was provided by international Bakhtinian educators and scholars described at the end of this Introduction chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Sergeiy Sandler, who assisted us with some translation and editing, commented, “for Bakhtin, the issue is not so much with people not embodying their theories in their practice (or, probably, better to say, their deeds, *postupki* in Russian), but with theories not recognizing the primacy of practice/*postupok* over them.”

During our open-ended semi-structured interviews, we asked the volunteering self-identified Bakhtinian educators: to define, describe, exemplify, and justify their Bakhtinian pedagogy in their teaching practice; to talk about their achievements and challenges, external and internal; to recount the history of their encounter with Bakhtin's texts and reasons for their personal and pedagogical attraction to Bakhtin; to reveal changes in their Bakhtinian pedagogy over time and reasons for these changes; to analyze their internal and external struggles faced in their Bakhtinian pedagogy; to articulate their vision of the future of Bakhtinian pedagogy for themselves and for the field of education in general. We offered the participants a choice to be interviewed orally (mostly via Skype) or in writing via email exchanges. Out of 22 interviews (which included interviews that we did with each other), one was face-to-face, one was via email exchanges, and the rest were recorded Skype videoconferences. All but two interviews were conducted in English—one interview was conducted in Russian and then translated into English. Looking back, we wish we were able to offer all our interviewees the option to use their native languages. In six cases, we conducted follow-up interviews because after the initial interview we could not fully understand the teaching case exemplifying Bakhtinian pedagogy. All oral interviews were transcribed and sent to the interviewees for corrections and elaborations as needed.

Finally, we abstracted 29 teaching cases from 13 interviews. Some interviews generated several cases, some only one, and some none. Thus, we had to dismiss nine self-identified Bakhtinian educators from this study because we could not abstract any teaching cases, exemplifying their Bakhtinian pedagogy, despite all our numerous efforts during the initial and follow-up interviews. Most of the abstracted teaching cases were event-based. However, we included four non-event-based teaching cases that did not have a description of any particular teaching event but a description of general teaching practice illustrating Bakhtinian pedagogy (Case#6 by Beatrice Ligorio, Case#9 by Dmitri Nikulin, Case#17 by Beatrice Ligorio, Case#16 by Iryna Starygina). We included descriptions of general pedagogical practices because they still revealed the ways that their Bakhtinian pedagogy governed or influenced their practices.

As our first step in analyzing the interviews, we created an online closed forum to discuss the abstracted 29 teaching cases of Bakhtinian pedagogy with educational scholars and educators who are interested in Bakhtinian pedagogy. Using our Dialogic Pedagogy Journal's and informal networks and the snowball method, we invited Bakhtinian scholars and educators and all interviewees to participate in the forum. We decided to publish the cases on the online discussion forum one-by-one (starting with three cases at once) once a week. We started the online forum by posting Case#1 on October 1, 2016 and the last posting was dated August 22, 2017. By default, we anonymized the authorship of teaching cases unless the authors (i.e., our interviewees) asked us to reveal their names. Our assumption was that the forum participants might be more relaxed in discussing and critiquing teaching cases when their authors were

anonymous. However, we also wanted to give a choice to the authors. Only one of our interviewees, Dmitri Nikulin, wanted to reveal his own identity from the very start, because, as he told us, he believed that the discussion would be more responsible by all parties.<sup>4</sup> All other forum participants also had the choice to participate anonymously, although it required one more click. As a result, only a few case authors remained anonymous on the forum. We tried to encourage the participants of the online forum to talk as much as they wanted by always replying to their postings, thus, making our posting the last on almost any thread of the forum.

Altogether 17 people participated in the online forum, including three of us and six other authors of the teaching cases. Two authors of the teaching cases participated only in discussion of their own cases and not in discussions of the other cases, while seven participated in discussions of the other, not only their own, cases. As to the number of discussion participants per discussion case, there were max=6 (Case#9), min=2 (Case#23), and median=3 discussion participants per teaching case. As to the number of postings per teaching case (or per discussion thread generated by a teaching case), there were max=33 (Case#9), min=2 (Case#25), and median=6 postings per teaching case discussed. The lengths of the online forum discussion threads were max=9 (Case#4), min=1 (Case#8), and median=3 postings in a thread. The online forum, at times, expanded and grounded the teaching cases, dialogized the cases, and informed our follow-up analysis (see Part II).

Our analysis of the teaching cases and their online discussions was inspired by the Grounded Theory qualitative research framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) transformed by us into dialogical research art (see Part III). We discussed each of the teaching cases among the three of us and developed initially eight “juicy themes”—the interesting tensions that attracted our attentions revealed in multiple teaching cases and forum discussions. These juicy themes became analytic foci of our reflective chapters in Part II. At the end, we finished up writing five reflective chapters, incorporating our juicy themes. Some of our juicy themes were preserved in the chapters but some were completely transformed through our grounded dialogic analysis. For most of our Bakhtinian educators, our analytical, interpretative, and critical authorial judgments were based on their teaching cases and overall interviews. However, it was not true for Alexander Lobok and for Eugene Matusov – we (mostly Eugene and Ana) had access to their pedagogical practices through numerous video and face-to-face observations,<sup>5</sup> participation, and reading published detailed ethnographies (Lobok, 2001, 2008a, 2008b, 2012a, 2012b). To a lesser degree, it was true for Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Marjanovic-Shane, 2016; Marjanovic-Shane,

<sup>4</sup> Charles Bisley and Tara Ratnam, and three of us, revealed to the forum audience the authorship of their cases during the online discussions. Moreover, all our participants asked us to use their names in the published book.

<sup>5</sup> There are many videos of Alexander Lobok’s teaching in Russian: e.g., [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzdQ7J\\_BEKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzdQ7J_BEKU), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ifiWQo-iPs>

Meacham, Choi, Lopez, & Matusov, 2019) and Charles Bisley (2016). Knowing the pedagogical practices of these four Bakhtinian educators outside of the interviews influenced our authorial interpretations and judgments of their cases.

We sent the first full draft of the entire text of the book without the Conclusion to the interviewees and other project participants,<sup>6</sup> asking them to provide their feedback within a month: corrections, disagreements, excitements, holes in our argumentation, lack of clarity, and concerns about our analysis and presentation. We got six feedback replies from the authors of the teaching cases, and from nine other participants. We were pleasantly surprised how many replies we received: some provided us with contextual comments, some holistic feedback, and some both. One of our interviewees asked us to withdraw his or her case (Case#7) because of an “anonymity issue,” but we also suspect that it was because of deep disagreements with our judgments and analysis.

We included their critiques, appraisals, concerns, questions, and comments in the final draft, either throughout our text, when the comments were contextual, or at the end of the book when their comments were holistic, making their word “the last.” Of course, it will be the readers who will have the “last” word, if such a thing exists at all.

After we developed a near final draft with the Conclusion, and incorporated all received feedback replies, revisions, and editing from our project participants, we again sent our manuscript to the project participants for their last feedback, editing, and comments that we incorporated into our final draft.

We tried to promote the dialogicity of our analyses through the following six-step process. First, this process started in the interviews themselves when we, the interviewers, tried to make sense of the interviewees’ teaching cases, reflections, justifications, and ideas together with our interviewees. Second, it involved our analyses of the interviews’ transcripts to extract the teaching cases of the interviewees’ Bakhtinian pedagogy. Third, we created an online forum discussing the Bakhtinian teaching cases where everyone, including the interviewees, was invited to participate. Fourth, the three authors analyzed the Bakhtinian pedagogy teaching cases and their online discussion content and developed our authorial judgments of the presented Bakhtinian pedagogy. Fifth, we sent our analyses back to the Bakhtinian practitioners and scholars, whose cases were chosen for step two, for their comments and corrections. Finally, sixth, in our last dialogic turn, we incorporated their comments in our final draft of the book to make our text an invitation for a dialogue with our readers.

Sometimes, our author voices collided with each other (see especially at the end of the book) and inside of our past and present. Our voices also collided

<sup>6</sup>We defined “project participants” as those educators and scholars who expressed an interest in our book project in any ways during our search for self-identified Bakhtinian educators and who may be interested in Bakhtinian pedagogy.



with the voices of our participants throughout the book. When we disagreed, we did not imply that we were right, but rather we see our argument and interpretation as being stronger or better than alternative arguments and interpretations currently known to us at that moment. As our readers may see from some of the participants' feedback replies presented in the book, they not only disagreed with our critical judgments and our interpretations of their pedagogies but even at times found them unpleasant, if not offensive, and thus, non-dialogic. Thus, a Bakhtinian scholar and translator from Israel, Sergey Sandler, remarked in his feedback to an earlier draft of the book, "the terms and tone in which your criticism of other educators' work is conducted often becomes truly caustic (your avowed commitment to educational pluralism notwithstanding). Referring to fellow Bakhtinian educators as being 'authoritarian,' as 'manipulating' and 'exploiting' their students, etc., comes through as downright offensive" (2018-05-30). We stand by our critical judgments although they might be unpleasant, but we respectfully disagree that they are mean in nature. We think that without frank, in-your-face, at times unpleasant, critical, and judgmental discussion, a genuine, honest critical dialogue is impossible. We want to use our disagreements as provocations for our readers to push our critical dialogue further. We are aware of the lack of symmetry between our authorial contributions and evaluative judgments and those of our participants. We see this asymmetry as an unavoidable, problematic, but also desirable aspect of *authorial* dialogic research. We argue that this evaluative asymmetry is the core of our critical authorship—the point that we discuss in our book in detail (see Part III).

Part I of our book consists of the 15 teaching cases selected for the book. Unfortunately, the book's space limits prevented us from providing all teaching cases and forum discussions. For two cases (#9 and #11), we included online discussions—we start with them. We combined two cases (#15 and #18) by Russian Bakhtinian educator Alexander Lobok into one for ease of presentation within the book. Our criteria for selecting teaching cases to present in the book were based on our desire to capture as many levels of education, subject areas, diversity of Bakhtinian pedagogy issues, potential interests by readers (educational practitioners interested in Bakhtinian pedagogy), clarity of the cases, and interesting online forum discussions as possible within the book's size limits.

Part II consists of five chapters involving our authorial analysis and reflection on diverse issues of Bakhtinian pedagogy in the interviews and cases.

The first chapter is our analysis of what constitutes "Bakhtinian pedagogy" for diverse self-identified Bakhtinian practitioners. We found six tensions among these diverse Bakhtinian pedagogies. The first tension is between dialogue as an instrument to achieve a particular educational goal vs. dialogue as a mode of inquiry and/or being (i.e., an ontological view). The second tension is about the Bakhtinian educators' view on the nature of students' targeted authorship: creative vs. critical. The third tension is about the pedagogical and ethical legitimacy of Socratic dialogic pedagogy using the "torpedo touch,"



disrupting students' deeply held ideas or revealing oppressive conditions of the students' lives invisible or uncritically accepted by the students. The fourth tension involves the question of whose authorship has a priority and dominance in education—the teacher's or the students'. The fifth tension is about monodiscursive vs. heterodiscursive dialogic pedagogies. And the sixth tension is about productive dialectics vs. dialogue as being with others.

The second chapter of Part II involves our discussion of the diverse approaches to the issues of the ontological engagement. Elsewhere, Matusov and colleagues (Matusov, von Duyke, & Han, 2012) define *ontological engagement* in education as when the students' life in general, inside and outside of the classroom, becomes a crucial part of their education. First, we focused on describing diverse types of ontological engagement in the teaching cases presented by the Bakhtinian educators. Then we turned to a discussion of the issues of ontological engagement in the teaching cases. Analyzing the 29 teaching cases by the Bakhtinian educators, we abstracted four major types of students' ontological engagement. We called the first type of ontological engagement “extrinsic” because it mobilizes students' existing ontological needs and interests, located outside of education itself. The second type is “intrinsic” because it generates self-contained interest in the learning activities themselves. The third observed type is “eventful” as it is based on emerging here-and-now dramatic events in the classrooms. Finally, the fourth type involves students' *self-selection* based on their prior interests. We found that some types of ontological engagement had several subtypes, some of which have been already described or mentioned in the literature while others have not. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of Bakhtinian educators' prioritization of ontological engagement as opposed to alienated learning common for many conventional schools.

The third chapter in Part II discusses an interesting phenomenon and issue emerging among many Bakhtinian educators, which we call the “educational vortex.” Some past and contemporary educators, especially progressive educators, have sought for a Holy Grail of education—that is, engaging *all* students, including reluctant ones, in *any* curriculum *at all the time* (Bruner, 1986). It is about how to fascinate all students with a targeted academic subject, so they become active and enthusiastic in studying it. Is not engagement a primary marker of the quality of education? In other words, to generate educational vortex is to make students like, if not even passionately love, any academic subject and any curricular theme that society (or the teacher) finds important for them to learn. Some Bakhtinian educators, whom we interviewed, considered at least four issues regarding the educational vortex. The first is what Bakhtinian pedagogy can specifically offer in promoting strong and ubiquitous student engagement in a given curricular topic in contrast to other approaches. The second issue is whether the educational vortex can be achievable for all students in any curricular topic at any time. The third issue is whether a lack of student engagement is necessarily a marker of poor education. Finally, the

fourth issue Bakhtinian educators discussed is whether the educational vortex is desirable at all.

The fourth chapter of Part II is about the teacher–students power relationships in Bakhtinian pedagogy. The tension comes from Bakhtin’s dialogic philosophical framework. On the one hand, genuine dialogue demands certain equality among the participants in dialogue, of what Bakhtin called “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6). In addition, genuine dialogue may require transcendence of the participants’ voices, subjectivity, and positions. But, on the other hand, it necessitates a hierarchical teacher–students relation, a special legitimate power—authority—given to the teacher (Matusov, 2007; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015; Morson, 2004). This struggle between equality and teacher authority in Bakhtinian pedagogy generates diverse approaches to teacher–students power relationships.

The fifth chapter of Part II is dedicated to the Bakhtinian educators’ struggles within often conventional educational institutions they are situated in, and their internal tensions resulting from that. The biggest struggle for Bakhtinian pedagogy in conventional institutions is how to survive and flourish within monologic institutions while not losing its own spirit of dialogical humanity regarding the self, students, colleagues, institutional administrators, and so on. Many non-Bakhtinian innovative educators are also faced with this struggle of survival in conventional institutions and they might also employ diverse strategies to address it: persuasion, compromises, sabotage, smuggling, flying under the institutional radar, finding oases of support, and so on. As a result of these strategies and institutional responses to them, the innovative practices might become corrupted, eliminated, limited, undergrounded, moved away from a conventional institution to start its own institution, tolerated, or spread out in the institution. The particularity of Bakhtinian pedagogy is that it tries to respond to all these challenges in Bakhtinian ways that we discuss in the chapter.

In contrast to other parts of our book, Part III addresses primarily educational and social science researchers rather than educational practitioners. It is dedicated to a discussion of our *dialogic research art* and a dialogic presentation of our research (cf. “dialogic research,” in Sullivan, 2011). Dialogic research making is very different from a positivist research methodology, which, in our judgment, remains in a strong hegemony in the social sciences, even when researchers try to overcome it. However, instead of just critiquing positivism in the social sciences research making, in Part III we propose a dualism, envisioned by Bakhtin (1986), to find a boundary between dialogism and positivism.

The dialogic genre of our research and its presentation has been inspired by a book written by and for college art teachers (Reardon & Mollin, 2009), by a book on science education (Hammer & Zee, 2006), and by books by Tobin and his colleagues (Tobin, Davidson, & Wu, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009) who invented dialogic triangulation while comparatively studying pre-schools in Japan, China, and the USA. Similarly, our book represents several

tiers of dialogues between the diverse international educational practitioners in different stages of their Bakhtin-inspired or -influenced pedagogical practices. In our dialogic approach to research, we tried to engage all participants of this project in a role of researchers of each other's Bakhtinian pedagogical practices by encouraging them to provide their inquiries, make reflective observations, involve the analyses of underlining values, and evaluate beliefs and practices. In the spirit of Bakhtinian dialogism, we see our role as orchestrating the polyphony of this multivocal research. This means that we are committed to Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and unfinalizing as the participants' never-ending dialogue, addressing, responding to, and taking seriously each other (Bakhtin, 1999).

However, we are also different from previous dialogic research in education, known to us. It seems to us that the above dialogic researchers viewed the main research goal to expose, make sense, and cross diverse perspectives of the studied people (and invite their readers to the dialogue about these diverse perspectives), while avoiding revealing their own evaluative judgments and their own views. In contrast, we believe that dialogism reveals itself in the following additional aspects. First, dialogism also reveals itself in authorial disagreements, concerns, tensions, puzzlements, and questions—mostly, our disagreements with self-inspired Bakhtinian educators we interviewed, including ourselves. Second, dialogism also reveals itself in our strong subjective and biased authorship of evaluative judgment (Bakhtin, 1990, 1999). In this book, we were not shying away from making strong and provocative evaluative authorial judgments, full of our particular biases, about our and our colleagues' pedagogical practices and approaches. We wanted to reveal and critically deconstruct our colleagues' and our own pedagogical and philosophical biases, desires, orientations, and values in order to help us and whoever reads the book commit to their own values on an informed, responsible, and critical basis. Third, we strongly believe that our word is not final and not objective. Our evaluative and judgmental finalizing of their practices is dialogic because we address and expect reply from the people whose Bakhtinian pedagogy practices we studied (some did and some did not). We also expect and encourage our colleagues and our future readers to disagree with us. Fourth, our dialogism is also based on a conviction that dialogic partners can legitimately imagine, make assumptions, guess, and speculate about other people's subjectivities and conditions, while expecting to be corrected by or in disagreement with those people (or others). The tension between an image of the Other's subjectivity and the live responding Other is very important for the Dialogic Encounter (see Part III). Fifth, in contrast to Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic novel, we, the authors of our dialogic research, do not try to "unite unmerged voices" of our "characters" (i.e., the Bakhtinian educators, whose pedagogical practices we studied here) or to be on a par with them. We, as the researchers, particular Bakhtinian educators and the authors of this book, had both similar and different responsibilities than our participants. One of these responsibilities involves evaluative authorship guided by our biases rooted in our current particular Bakhtinian

pedagogies. Our understanding of Bakhtin's notion of "consciousnesses with equal rights" (1999, p. 6) is not avoiding evaluative, subjective, biased, authorial judgments about our Bakhtinian colleagues' practices and subjectivities but rather provoking them and our readers to reply and to disagree with us. We expect a lot of objections to this book from our readers.

Finally, in our Conclusion chapter, we discuss the lessons we learned through this project, "regrets" about our dialogic/polyphonic research, and hopes about the future of Bakhtinian pedagogy and dialogic research. In discussing lessons we learned, we wanted to answer the questions we raised in the beginning: What did the self-identified Bakhtinian teachers mean by claiming to be Bakhtinian and what attracts them in Bakhtin? In discussing our regrets, we focused on an analysis of how much our research was or was not dialogic and/or polyphonic. In our discussion of our hopes for the future of Bakhtinian pedagogy, we proposed new possibilities for deepening and promoting Bakhtinian authorial pedagogical practices. Finally, we ended our book with providing holistic feedback comments by Bakhtinian educators and scholars who read the first draft of our book.

The history of this book project goes back at least 15 years. At the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in Chicago in 2003, a group of graduate students and their professor, Amy Sloane from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, presented a symposium, "Bringing Bakhtin to our lives: Authorship and dialogism" on their efforts to develop a book on Bakhtin's influences on education and beyond (Sloane et al., 2003, April). As far as we know this book was never written. Since then, I (the first author) was constantly thinking about such a book, but with a focus on educational practitioners and not scholars as its participants and its audience. Then, at the Fifteenth International Mikhail Bakhtin Conference in sunny Stockholm in July 2014 we (Eugene, Ana, and Mikhail) met Paul Spitale, then a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo. This is how Paul remembered our meeting and conversation at a Stockholm café in an email of December 2 2015:

On July 25, 2014, I gave a presentation at the 15th International Bakhtin Conference in Stockholm, Sweden on Bakhtin's role in my classrooms titled *Promoting a Socially Aware Classroom with Mikhail Bakhtin Using Music, Television, and Film: Blood diamonds, same-sex marriage, and more subjects to open minds and elevate the shock factor* (Spitale, 2014). During my Q & A session, facilitator Mikhail Gradovski asked some very intriguing, probing questions on the embodied methods I used to elicit student interpretation. We had a great conversation that seemed to feel like a couple of old friends having coffee. So that's what we did next.

In a quaint Stockholm café, I was pleasantly surprised to be joined by the like-minded Ana Marjanovic-Shane and Eugene Matusov. As the four of us sipped our coffee and tea, the conversation soared. Out of the laughter and excitement, we revealed a "multiple discovery" of sorts where we each planned on writing a book for the busy, interested, innovative educators that provided a comprehensive translation of Bakhtin's theories to the classroom. We felt that Bakhtin was too

important for teachers to ignore. Although this is where a lot of our ideas culminated, we discussed how Bakhtin always had a role in our lives. I personally hope that this project is only the beginning.

At the same late evening after the conference day, Eugene and Ana started developing a book proposal. On the next day, Mikhail joined them. After the conference, on August 12, 2014, we sent our draft of the book proposal to Paul for his feedback.

We had several ideas for the book. Our first idea was to publish our interviews with self-identified Bakhtinian educational practitioners more or less in their entirety, without much analysis, inspired by John Reardon and David Mollin, who interviewed famous European college art teachers (Reardon & Mollin, 2009). However, we wanted to make our book more dialogic and analytical. So, our second idea for the book, inspired by Joseph Tobin and his colleagues' research on preschool in three cultures (Tobin et al., 1989, 2009), was to interview seasoned self-identified Bakhtinian educators, share their interviews with novice self-identified Bakhtinian educators, asking them to make comments and questions, and then let the seasoned ones reply to the novice ones. This idea failed because after we conducted the interviews we could not enlist "novice" self-identified Bakhtinian educational practitioners in our project. Also, we were faced with a huge amount of interview transcription pages that would be impossible to publish in their entirety due to the book's length limits set by the publisher. Finally, we came up with the current idea for the book.

We would thus like to acknowledge Paul Spitale for his catalyst role, support, and participation in the project. We want to thank all Bakhtinian educators who considered, volunteered, were interviewed, commented on the online forum, and provided feedback on our book: Aaron Yost (USA), Alexander Lobok (Russia), Antti Rajala (Finland), Beatrice Ligorio (Italy), Charles Bisley (New Zealand), Dmitri Nikulin (USA), Esther Joosa (Singapore), George Kamberelis (USA), Hannele Dufva (Finland), Heidi Robles (Columbia), Iryna Staragina (Ukraine), Joél Madore (USA), Kari Søndena (Norway), Marion Waite (UK), Monica Lemos (Finland), Paul Spitale (USA), Peter Smagorinsky (USA), Richard Beach (USA), Rosa Brefeld (USA), Ruth Harman (USA), Sami Lehesvuori (Finland), Silviane Barbato (Brazil), Soria Colomer (USA), Tara Ratnam (India), Timothy Lensmire (USA), Tina Kullenberg (Sweden), Robi Kroflič (Slovenia), Katherine von Duyke (USA), Atsushi Tajima (Japan), Jacob Tharu (India), and David Garcia Romero (Spain).

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## Teaching Cases and Their Online Discussion

This part includes 16 teaching cases out of the total of 30. Due to the limitations of the book page count, we could not publish all teaching cases. For the same reason, only two teaching cases are presented with their complete online discussion (#9 and #11). We selected these two edited online forum discussions as representing the diversity of online discussions. We combined two teaching cases (#15 and #18) by the Russian Bakhtinian educator Alexander Lobok into one because we felt that they were deeply connected.

In the process of selecting teaching cases for publication, we were guided by the following criteria: to capture as many levels of education, subject areas, diversity of Bakhtinian pedagogy issues, potential interests by readers (educational practitioners interested in Bakhtinian pedagogy), clarity of the cases, and interesting online forum discussions. Below, we de-anonymized Bakhtinian educators, the authors of the presented teaching cases in the online forum discussions, as they wanted to be known. In some cases, we tried to preserve the orality of the interviews, but we also corrected English when it was difficult to make sense of the participants' errors (many of them were not native English speakers).





## Chapter 1.1: Two Teaching Cases with Online Forum Discussions

### CASE#11: BAKHTINIAN TEACHING AS UNFINALIZED DIALOGUES BETWEEN THE CONSCIOUSNESSES OF EQUAL MINDS, TARA RATNAM, INDIA, INTERVIEWED BY ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE ON 2015-12-10

**Bakhtinian Educator, Tara Ratnam:** [Bakhtinian pedagogy] is about teachers and learners engaging in a process of meaning making in and through dialogue. In this dialogue both teachers and students are active contributors and, as Bakhtin says, consciousnesses with equal rights “to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree” and also disagree (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 293). It is in this interaction among multiple voices that there is this potential to produce new meaning. This I think is the basic ... Bakhtinian aspect of education.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember any particular example from your teaching when you felt that you’re doing what you wanted to achieve?

**Tara Ratnam:** Oh, yes. I do. I’ll tell you about that. My intention was to establish a more horizontal relationship with students in contrast to the hierarchical kind of relationship seen in conventional education. A hierarchical relationship, where the teacher, “the knower,” gives knowledge to the student to adopt. It eliminates the possibility of creativity.

So, I’ll give you an example now. I’ll illustrate it with comparison of two classes. The first one was [taught by] my colleague in those days, and then the other one was inspired by Bakhtin’s pedagogy. We were both teaching the same poem (in classes of English as a Second Language in a pre-university college in India). I’m not sure if you’re familiar with this Edwin Brock’s “Five ways to kill a man.”<sup>1</sup> Have you ever come across this?

Brock is talking about five ways of killing, right from the beginning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and then through the Middle Ages, and then how it

<sup>1</sup><http://www.davidpbrown.co.uk/poetry/edwin-brock.html>

progresses during the two World Wars and finally in the twentieth century. So, it's like giving ... it's like a manual, it's reading like a manual [for different ways of killing]. He's just giving a lot of illustrations, just hints [of ways of killing], and you have to figure out what he's talking about.

So, I went into my colleague's class for observation because we were part of a classroom investigation group. We had an informal teaching club, where I mentored teachers. And so, I went into his class and he was getting students to answer the comprehension questions after explaining the poem point by point. This is the interaction that I recorded. Can I just read one stanza for you? So that you get an idea of what we are talking about?

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Tara Ratnam:** In an age of aeroplanes, you may fly miles above your victim and dispose of him by pressing one small switch. All you then require is an ocean to separate you, two systems of government, a nation's scientists, several factories, a psychopath and land that no-one needs for several years. (Brock, 1990)

Obviously, Brock was talking about the World War.

And then, in my colleague's class there was this question. He was doing this multiple-choice question, and this is how it goes in class:

The teacher: "Question number 19: In this poem, Psychopath refers to: a) The man who manufactured the bomb, b) the scientist who gave the formula, c) the man who ordered the dropping of the bomb, d) the man who actually pressed the switch? So, now tell me, which one is the right answer?"

One of the students says, "B," and then the teacher looks around. "Anyone else?" Some students in the corner say, "A," and then there's one student who said, "C." Then teacher points to that person who said "C" and says, "Yes?" And the student repeats, "C." "Yes. C is the correct answer." And that's the end of the episode.

All of the options provided in the question could be seen as a possibility. But then, he didn't ask them why they chose the option that they chose nor did he ask them how they could justify what they had chosen. So, what happened was this whole episode closed there. He finalized the whole poem, and the students' utterances. There was no more potential for meaning making, and it closed off.

But, this worked very differently in my class. What I did was the following: I began with a question which was within the students' threshold level of experience, a question that they could answer subjectively, something like, "What are some of the ways in which ... people use for killing? Which one of them do you think is very gruesome and why?"

So, with that I used the poem, actually, to bring in other perspectives, and then to interact with what they had said. And so, the students had to find out other ways of killing that were mentioned in the poem. Now, this was not a very straightforward task as the poem was full of allusions and this went beyond

the background knowledge of the students. So, they said they couldn't answer it immediately, that they needed a little time to find out and find out more resources. So, on their own, they formed groups and they said each group will focus on one stanza and they'll pull out the references ... find out and come back.

One of students told me later that day it was like solving a cryptic puzzle, [chuckle] because from the allusions in the poem they had to figure out what these allusions meant. So now with the meaning that they had pulled out from the past, the cultural past from the age of Christ up till now ... All that knowledge then became the basis with which they went back into the poem to look for a new meaning there, and what meaning they could figure out.

Yeah. So, the discussion went on.

And then when we came to this multiple-choice question—that's because we're comparing our classes on that questionnaire—one of the students, he said, "Scientist is not the answer. He is not a psychopath because, scientists work under duress. There will be a reason to do things, and so, you can't blame the scientists."

And then, another student said, "No, no, it is the scientist because ...," and his reason was, he said, "Einstein recommended to Roosevelt to give a go to this project of manufacturing the atom bomb." So then, another student, he asked him a question which became really ... about his personal ethics ... personal ethics also came into the question. He says, "Oh, if the situation was like that, for Einstein to sign that letter," he says, "There was a threat from Hitler! And what would you do, if you were forced with that kind of a situation?" he asked. So, they had no immediate answer.

And then, I was also not spared. My morality also came to question because one of the students asked me, "Miss, do you consider Einstein a pacifist?" he asked. I was stumped by this sticky kind of question because I had never thought about it before. So, I had to think on my feet and then answer. Then I pointed out, "Einstein regretted his action later" and also, I said, "Some people, when they are under fear, it makes them do that. And he was afraid that Hitler would destroy this whole world ...". Immediately, one of the students stood up, "But Miss, what happened afterwards? The Americans bombed Japan," he said. And so, he said, "Isn't that equally bad?" So, he was kind of trying to question, Is it okay for America to drop a bomb and not for Hitler to do it? And yes, so, "It's as bad as if Hitler had dropped the bomb," he said.

So, then someone pointed out, "But Japan provoked America." Yet another student, he said, "But that's no reason! What about all the people who died, if that's a justification?" And then the topic reverted to the ethics of scientists, like their ethical thinking. I asked them, "What would you do?" because these were all science graduates and many of them might even become scientists. I asked them, "What would you do if you were under pressure? Would you give in or would you protest?" So, a majority of the students, they were thinking kind of idealistic, said, "No, no, we won't give in to pressure."

And then one of the students, he asked another, he said, “Even if your life was threatened, even if your family is threatened, then also?” That made another student falter, he said, “No. I think it’s difficult.” And then one more student adds, “Yes. A difficult dilemma, this is a difficult dilemma.” And after this kind of conversation one of the girls who had asserted very clearly that she will never give in, she changed her mind. She said, “Actually, I’m not so sure.” She says, “There are so many things to see, it depends on the circumstances I think,” she said at that point.

So, when the class was over, we really hadn’t arrived at a right answer, the right answer that was expected. Yes, but still everything was meaningful. The dialogue was “unfinalized” and there was a lot of potential to bring out more meaning. ... It’s like each of us was carrying a dialogue inside us and we were still trying to figure out among these many perspectives, what is right. Like Einstein’s position, [it] became a very ambivalent kind of thing. Meaning was still emerging for all of us, but it was not really closed. And later on, a few months down the line, actually, a topic on the social responsibilities of the scientists emerged again, and this dialogue became a reference point ... It became a reference point to continue that exploration.

It’s not like the lessons are compartmentalized, you finish this, finishing this, etc. ... Everything kind of flows into each other ... And so, if I should analyze this class from a Bakhtinian point of view, then what it feels like, [as] Bakhtin points out, [is] that our thinking, our ideas are not something that stand alone, but are always in association with other ideas, “as a link in the chain of meaning” (1986, p. 146), or as Emerson and Holquist (1991, p. 426) put it, “as a part of a greater whole.”<sup>2</sup>

The dialogue in class achieved this kind of, what Bakhtin would say, “fullness in time” (1986, p. 34), because it linked the student’s past, the cultural past, to a present and it also had a future orientation. In making sense of the poem in the present, they had to delve into the past, and together this past and present giving a direction to their future actions, how actions follow from the way we see the world, this is what opened up the future. And then the points of view that students put forward did not stand alone. It was not as if each individual was talking in spite of others, in response to some textbook question. There was a connection: each student was responding to somebody else and was anticipating a response from somebody. Continuity was there and also there were all these diverse points of view that were expressed, and they interacted with each other. Now, that girl who earlier said that “I’m definitely not going to give in,” later on became more tentative after all this. And then she said, “I’m not sure now.” It is like the meaning depends on the circumstances.

<sup>2</sup>Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist created a glossary of Bakhtin’s terms at the end of the book: “Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, *as a part of a greater whole*—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 426, the italics are ours).

So, the dialogue brought in new dimensions to think, the dialogue brought in change to each person, influencing each person.

And then there was learning and also questioning for me. Because I had taken for granted this idea, the common cultural idea, that Einstein was a pacifist. But I question this now. So, this dialogue changed my position vis-à-vis Einstein with regard to the inconsistency between his talk and his action. There was a discrepancy. This dialogue made me think again about Einstein. So, this ethical dilemma that emerged in the class made us aware of the contextual nature of knowledge. This whole thing, knowledge, is very contextual, beyond the binaries of good, bad, or right or wrong. One of the girls said there are so many things to see, it depends on the circumstances. So, the uncertainty that the student experienced, that's what makes the dialogue open. I think all of us went through this complex process of meaning making, like we're comparing perspectives, thinking about context, and our own values being examined and evidenced, this whole dialogue put us through that kind of a complex process.

It also had personal relevance for everybody because it was tied to their goals, their commitment. And so, this was a source of meaningful learning for all of us. And my students participated as agents or subjects. They were not just sitting there passively. They were agents and subjects of "student-student, student-teacher" interaction that happened.

If I should sum up this class in Bakhtinian terms, the features that were there, the questions that were posed by me and also by the students, they were not merely display (rhetorical) questions. I mean they were really very genuine, open-ended questions seeking to stimulate thought and they triggered inquiry. Students were not just responding to teacher-generated questions. They were questions generated by the students, too.

These questions posed by students were part of an authentic encounter, what Bakhtin (1991, p. 343) would [describe as] "Awakening new and independent words and entering into an intense interaction, a struggle with one another ... With other internally persuasive words." It raised further genuine questions for both teachers and students.

And then the students' inquiry led them to the larger historical time. And also, in conjunction with the present, it raised questions that had implications for historical future for them and the possible actions that could follow from their interpretations. I think that it is very important that we link our present to the larger context, and see the interaction between the past and the present and then the future. This dialogue, a joint inquiry by the teacher and the students, transformed both the teacher and the learner, as they negotiated different diverse perceptions and then, among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values to gain a new perspective. This is what Bakhtin calls "ideological becoming." It is a uniquely personal, activist, and creative act and selectively assimilates others' words. So, this I think was one of the features.

**Interviewer:** If I can just interrupt for a moment. Is this kind of pedagogy strange to the students that you were teaching?

**Tara Ratnam:** Yes, it is. I should say, it was in the beginning. But no, I mean, when this class happened, they were already quite familiar with my approach to teaching. That's why they participated so actively. There was no struggle for me to really make them participate because they were kind of used to this ... This is an example that I picked up somewhere from the middle of my semester ... So, students were familiar with this kind of approach.

**Interviewer:** Do they encounter this approach with other teachers, too, or just when they meet you?

**Tara Ratnam:** No. All the other teaching in their school context is monologic. It's [a] teacher-prompted, knowledge-transmission kind of teaching that they are exposed to.

### **Response#1: by Richard Beach—February 8, 2017**

This was a very engaging case portraying quite different pedagogical stances. One difference in the pedagogies had to do with framing of time and space as predetermined versus tentative and open-ended—as “unfinalizable” (Nikulin, 2010) based on inviting tentative, “exploratory talk” (Mercer, 2000).

Rather than focusing on definitive, authoritative interpretations valued by the observed teachers, the interviewee's students were engaged in collaborative sense making involving sharing temporary hunches or guesses so that, as one student noted, they were “more tentative after all this. And then she said, ‘I'm not sure now.’” The fact that the interviewee's students perceived the poem as a “puzzle” meant that they adopted more of a sense-making stance given that initially they were open about the challenges of readily inferring alternative meanings as opposed to the observed teacher's presupposition about the need to generate the “right answer.”

The observed teacher followed a script that served to “close down” captured in the description “so, what happened was this whole episode closed there.” In contrast, the interviewee adopted a stance that served to “open up” interactions, stances reflecting an emotion of caring.

This difference between “closing down” versus “opening-up” dialogue may be associated with the emotion of caring related to listening to the students' concerns or thinking (Hodges, Steffensen, & Martin, 2012). The students were therefore given agency by the interviewee to construct time according to their own agendas as opposed to conforming to the teacher's framing of time, agency evident in the statement, “So they said they couldn't answer it immediately, that they *needed a little time* to find out and find out more resources.”

This case relates to Bakhtin given that the interviewee's students were also evoking a chronotope of time associated with the historical past of previous events/wars informing the present and future given that in “making sense of the poem in the present, they had to delve into the past, and together then in the discussion, there was kind of giving a direction to their future actions.”

While the observed teacher maintained a consistent focus on the poem itself—presupposing that the meaning was housed within the text, she (Tara) was open to exploring a range of alternative meanings evoked by the poem, including a discussion of the morality of dropping the bomb on Japan, a focus

that resulted in dialogic tensions based on competing attitudes about that event, attitudes that could inform present and future actions associated with the use of power and control. Her stance and approach towards fostering open-ended interactions seems to be motivated by the fact that she wants to learn from her students rather than assuming that her students are dependent on her for learning, a stance evident in learning from her students' critique of Einstein's ambivalence about the use of the bomb—that “this dialogue made me think again about Einstein.”

This left me with the question as to how gender experiences (as opposed to any essentialized identities) may influence these alternative stances, being aware of avoiding generalization about gender differences.

**Response#1.1: by Tara Ratnam—February 11, 2017**

Dear Richard,

Thanks much for that very sensitive analysis of my class. The association of tuning into the other as “caring” (we have a beautiful word in our language,<sup>3</sup> *Sabrdaya*, that captures this emotion connoting empathy/sensibility/thoughtfulness) is particularly appealing and so central to pedagogy.

Your question regarding gender experiences influencing the divergent viewpoints expressed in class makes me introspect retrospectively on this issue. I don't remember noticing any responses biased by gender. Both girls and boys were equally vociferous in their protestations. However, generally, I have found that both in urban and rural schools and colleges, girls seem to be more attentive in class. The educational performance shows girls' achievement levels better than boys in both school and college levels. However, this is not to say there's no gender bias socially. For instance, in rural homes and poor urban homes, girls are given [a] subordinate position compared to their male siblings. They have to do all the house chores and are not encouraged to study. In many cases girls are married off soon as they complete high school.

**Response#2: by Ana Marjanovic-Shane—February 6, 2017**

Dear Tara and all,

The first thing that attracted my attention are the vivid events, actual events in which one can hear the students' and the teacher's ontological voices full of authentic thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The Bakhtinian educator is not giving a general description of some general class meetings where things might happen in a certain way, that is, she is not answering with a “blueprint” of a Bakhtin-inspired class, but with descriptions of actual unique events.

The second thing that I find very useful is the contrast between her colleague's authoritarian monologic teaching and her dialogic teaching of the same poem. This contrast helps to tease out different aspects of Bakhtin-inspired teaching:

<sup>3</sup>I.e., Kannada, one of many indigenous languages in India, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kannada>



- a) engaging students by provoking their genuine surprise leading them to generate their own questions and seek answers (asking them what are some gruesome ways of killing, which in itself is a very surprising question, and from there starting the whole discussion about killing and its possible justifications);
- b) ontologically engaging students by focusing on testing their ideas and grappling with their dilemmas; for instance, whether they would switch from a pacifist position to the more hawkish position in a particular circumstance of danger (like Einstein did);
- c) the teacher becoming the actual student #1, by participating in the same testing of the ideas as the students, and thus being conscious of equal rights;
- d) not merely unfinished, but unfinalizable dialogue, that becomes carried out in time for all the participants (“It’s like each of us was carrying a dialogue inside us and we were still trying to figure out among these many perspectives, what is right”).

What surprised me is how eager the students were to participate in this kind of dialogue, despite the fact that the rest of their schooling is rather authoritarian (according to the Bakhtinian educator). Although, this was not the first time for these students to participate in the dialogic class, I would like to ask the Bakhtinian educator what happened in the beginning of this class course? Was it difficult to create a dialogic class culture in an otherwise authoritarian school? What does the Bakhtinian educator see as necessary for such dialogic teaching, and what does he/she see as possible obstacles?

**Response#2.1 by Tara Ratnam—February 11, 2017**

Dear Ana,

Thank you for summing up what is Bakhtinian in the class I described. I think it is important, as you point out, that the dialogue was not just “unfinished” but “unfinalizable,” thereby highlighting the continuing and inconclusive nature of such dialogues that we carry with us/inside us, feeding into our ongoing “becoming.”

You have posed a set of interesting questions that gives me an opportunity to embed this class within its context and thereby provide an idea of the material constraints to developing a Bakhtinian pedagogy as I experienced it.

The level of student active investment did not happen overnight. Initially, I had to contend with the big gap between students’ expectations of me based on their conventional views of teaching as transmission of knowledge and learning as practicing the given (an individual activity) for examination on the one hand and my larger purpose and effort of enabling them to develop an authorial voice on the other. So, my first challenge was to change their expectations of teaching/learning and the teacher–learner relationship. I have had to face a barrage of complaints that students carried to the principal and questions from parents (“She asks questions before teaching the lesson. If they [students] are supposed to know the answer on their own, what is she there for?”). Very



often students have protested, demanding to change the “English teacher.” This put the principal in a dilemma and in the early years of my Bakhtinian practice, he or she would request me to explain the given lessons and give notes just to avoid complaints by students and parents. Over the years, the principal and other colleagues seemed to understand why I did what I did in class. So, if the students went to the principal to change the teacher, he would ask them to give him a month’s time to find another English teacher for them. He was very confident that the students would never go back to him after one month and they never did, because that gave them time to get attuned to what I was doing (that was now internally persuasive for them) and start to enjoy it. (A student: “I thought ...you don’t know the way [to teach] ... slowly we started understanding ... It is not just learning answers by heart [by rote]. We have to think and answer. I found your class very difficult, first six months, very-very difficult. Then I improved. I used to read, try to understand and express in my own way. That is good. If you plot time and interest, first of all, the interest would decrease, then it will go high.”)

The parents were happy when students performed well on the tests, because that’s their ultimate concern. I had mixed responses from my teacher colleagues—a few appreciated what I did from the feedback they got from the students, others were distant and did not want to acknowledge, although outwardly polite.

Regarding the obstacles to dialogic teaching, we work within institutional bounds with their own tacit and explicit expectations, which are often contradictory. For example, official voices that publicly exhort teachers to see diversity as a resource, acknowledge and value the experience and knowledge children bring to school—in reality they promote the dominant culture and interests monologically that exclude culturally diverse students. A Bakhtinian practitioner has to work against the grain; educational institutions with deep structures that support monologic practices and work with the narrow goal of promoting students rather than learning, where preparing students for preset tests and examinations dominates classroom instruction. Teacher autonomy is curtailed by having to comply with the top-down regulations (the norms of the institution) every step of the way. The challenge for a Bakhtinian educator [me] is, as I mentioned, in my response to Eugene [see below, Response#3.1], to understand these constraints to act so that we can work around them to change ourselves to change the situation in which we are bound. What has helped me gain a certain amount of autonomy in the classroom to promote free communication is, in Bakhtinian terms, playing with borders that frame my context (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 343) to creatively substitute these borders. I ensure that curricular requirements are met even if it violates students’ intentions to an extent. For instance, students have to complete the workbook exercises and submit them on time, even if many of them find it “boring.” This is a “creative compliance” (a term Jack White used during a conversation, August 4, 2010) to earn our freedom, and by and by students have understood this. It is not as if this kind of practice exercise is something new to these students. They do it

in other classes, which are largely traditional. However, they take the liberty to grumble about it in my class. This is perhaps because they know that I am sympathetic to their plight!

**Response#2.2: by Eugene Matusov—February 11, 2017**

Dear Tara

Thanks a lot for elaborating on Ana's questions. Since you know that you are going to violate many expectations of some of your students, do you engage your students in discussion of your pedagogy at the beginning of the term or not? If not, why not? If so, how do you do it? Does it help to address the students' pedagogical culture shock or not? Why? What do you think?

**Response#3: by Eugene Matusov—February 3, 2017**

Dear Tara and everybody—

I liked a lot the [mini teaching] cases and their discussions [in this overall teaching case] and also, I have some reservations about the second case and its discussion.

Let me start with what I like.

I like Tara's discussion of the first case—a monologic teaching case [by her male colleague]. The teacher's goal seemed to be making the students arrive at the preset curricular endpoint, which was option C, "in this poem, Psychopath refers to: c) the man who ordered the dropping of the bomb." This is what Bakhtin defined as "the authoritative discourse" (in my view, Gary Morson more accurately renamed it as "the authoritarian discourse," Morson, 2004). The teacher does not even explain why option C is better than the other options and did not explore why the students who chose the other options were wrong. As Tara nicely noticed, the teacher did not even ask the students to justify their answers. In short, "the internally persuasive discourse" was not a part of the teacher's instruction.

I also like [in the second teaching event] the students' discussion of the scientists' responsibility for developing killing weapons, especially the case of Einstein, since he was a pacifist but wrote a letter to President Roosevelt urging him to develop an atomic bomb that later was used against civilians in Japan. I like that discussion because it represents for me an example of students' internally persuasive discourse.

Now, what I don't like.

I don't like that, similar to the first teacher (Tara's male colleague), Tara presented poetry as a "cryptic puzzle" to be solved by her students. Although the Bakhtinian educator's opening question was open-ended, "What are some of the ways in which ... people use for killing? Which one of them do you think is very gruesome and why?" in my judgment it was still a very schoolish—read "monologic"—question. In my view, poetry (and art in general) is not a cryptic puzzle to be deciphered but rather a special (imagery) experience to be involved in. It is not about a message that the author wanted to carry out to a reader, as both teachers seemed to imply through their opening questions. Who said that the poem is about killing in the first place?! Is it not for a reader to decide what

his or her encounter with the poem was about, if there was an encounter in the first place? Why not ask the audience if they like or dislike or feel indifferent to the poem and why? Why not engage the students in revealing their experiences of encounters with the poem—for those of them who had these intellectual, emotional, relational, political encounters? Why not ask the students if something—wording, ideas, images—was unclear for them in the poem?

I want to know why Tara chose this particular poem for these particular students at that particular moment? Is it because it was “on the program”? Was this choice of curriculum monologic or dialogic?

Finally, I’m puzzled as to why the teacher was absent from the students’ internally persuasive discourse? Tara wrote afterwards, “And then also there was learning and also questioning for me. Because I had taken for granted this idea, the common cultural idea that Einstein was a pacifist. But I question this now. So, this dialogue changed my position vis-à-vis Einstein with regard to the inconsistency between his talk and his action. There was a discrepancy. This dialogue made me think again about Einstein. So, this ethical dilemma that emerged in the class made us aware of the contextual nature of knowledge.” I’m glad that the teacher was learning from the students, but in my view, it is not enough. For a teacher to be Learner#1, in my view, she or he should learn *together* with the students but first admitting her ignorance and then guiding herself *and* the students how to address the puzzle at hand. For example, it would have been terrific if Tara had engaged herself and the students in exploring Einstein’s pacifist dilemma that he faced first when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Fortunately, the Internet is full of exciting and informative texts about that (e.g., <http://www.ppu.org.uk/people/einstein.html>). Hearing Einstein’s own voice of how he dealt with the dilemma, his critics and supporters at the time, historians, ethicists, and so on would have enriched the students’ internally persuasive discourse and engaged them in the Big Dialogue of Cultures (Berlyand, 2009; Bibler, 1991, 2009) across time.

What do you think?

### **Response#3.1: by Tara Ratnam—February 10, 2017**

Dear Eugene,

Thank you for your provocative response that has made me critically review my practice, particularly with reference to the class in this case. I find your views of Bakhtinian pedagogy very agreeable. However, your interpretation of my class was based on my summary account of it and not from a direct observation of my class. I feel I need to offer some explanations/clarifications in response so that your comments are seen against that fuller view of my class, my purposes, thinking, and action in further dialogue.

The poem was not “presented” to the students as a “cryptic puzzle to be solved” as it seemed to you. The poem alludes to five different ways of killing (as the title says, “Five ways to kill a man”). I used “ways of killing” as a point for opening a dialogue. (This in no way can be seen as closing the possibility of someone coming up with an idea/hunch/realization/feeling/interpretation

that it was not about killing.) The first way of killing, in my understanding, refers to crucifixion, suggested by details such as a “plank of wood,” “a crowd of people,” and so on. My students did not have adequate background knowledge to figure out what this scene was. Since students were independent enough to search for meaning and wanted to do so, I let them engage in the process, instead of “telling” them “what.” This knowledge from the historical/cultural past would facilitate/enrich their “encounter” with the poem. If this search for information gave some students the thrill of solving a cryptic puzzle, it is their experience and not my intention. The challenge I set was merely to provide an entry point into the poem. What they came up with and how they experienced the challenge reflects their subjective disposition and not something imposed on them by me. If my purpose were to present the poem as a puzzle to be solved then the lesson would close with students identifying/labeling each of the five ways of killing and maybe with the teacher or students giving the poet’s meaning (one fixed meaning!). However, at no stage in the class were the students asked to “decipher” the poet’s meaning. The focus was on what sense the poem made to the students. For this, they needed some basic background information to make out the imagery in the poem. It must be noted here that the need to clarify the details/images in the poem was voiced by students when they started reading the poem.

My question—“What are some of the ways in which ... people use for killing? Which one of them do you think is very gruesome and why?”—was the opening to a dialogue. Even if it carried my meaning indirectly in terms of making a link to the poem (suggesting that the poem was about killing), I, as one of the authorial voices, have the right to speak from my evaluative stance. However, my standpoint is not binding on my students as the universal “authoritative discourse” Bakhtin talks of. If in responding to the poem, one of the students had said (as you have suggested) that the poem is not about killing, I would welcome that divergent voice to expose his or her thinking and that view, in collision with other voices in response to it, would be a potential opening to the emergence of new meaning/understanding.

I wonder if there’s anything “neutral” even in an open-ended question such as whether they “liked/disliked” or felt “indifferent” to the poem. Different people might come up with different questions to stimulate students’ thinking. The important thing is whether the ensuing dialogue provides equal rights for everyone to voice what is “internally persuasive” for them.

Yes, the poem was a unit from the prescribed ESL<sup>4</sup> textbook. Working within the bounds of an institutional setup, students’ and teachers’ autonomy is circumscribed. However, the challenge is to find open spaces and exploit them, extending the borders.

Regarding my learning, I would think it happened together with the students. This is precisely why I felt the need to stress that there was learning for me too. However, this learning didn’t happen standing outside the circle of

<sup>4</sup>ESL is the acronym for English as Second Language.

students but as a full member of the group where students could question me/ask me to justify my stand, just as they were called forth to articulate/justify their views.

Eugene, I fully appreciate your point about learning from joint exploration with students. This is one of the common features of my pedagogy. I did mention in my interview that this dialogue became a reference point in future dialogue among us (e.g. while discussing the social responsibilities of scientists). Then there was this poem by Bertolt Brecht, “The burning of the books,” which prompted us to find out people who had the courage to protest against the atrocities during the Nazi regime. I remember that all of us went to the university library (we had no internet accessibility then) and pored over books, pulling out interesting information that fed into our discussion on people who had stood their ground and those who had buckled under pressure and what made them act in a particular way.

I look forward to hearing not only what you think but also responses from other members of this discussion thread.

Thank you!

### **Response#3.2: by Eugene Matusov—February 11, 2017**

Dear Tara and everybody—

Tara, thanks a lot for your helpful reply.

- A. You wrote, “Yes, the poem was a unit from the prescribed ESL textbook. Working within the bounds of an institutional setup, students’ and teachers’ autonomy is circumscribed.”

I wonder how you would organize your class differently if you have full institutional freedom. For example, how would you select poems for your class?

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19): *Students would have the freedom to bring any poem or text of their choice that they would want to discuss as much as I would have the freedom to share a poem that I found interesting. In the after-school program I was involved with (2010–2012) for school children (age group 14–16), the students were not comfortable with this choice [given to them] in the beginning and expected me to prescribe the units for their “study.” It’s only in the second year of my teaching these students (by which time these students started to develop/evinced some interest in reading) that they were forthcoming. Reading for pleasure was something these children had never experienced before, because all the reading they were exposed to in their regular school class was the notes (answers to textbook questions) that they copied from what the teachers wrote on the blackboard.>>*

- B. Your example of co-learning with the students about scientists resisting Nazis in response to Brecht’s poem is very interesting. I wonder who

and how came to this idea: you or your students and under what circumstances?

<< **Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-16):** *The question was posed by one group of students. None of us had any ready answer, but the question made us curious to find out. I told them that I'd join them, so they included me when they went to the library.>>*

Is your students' response to poems mostly ethical? If so, why? If not, what kind of other examples of different responses do you have?

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19):** *No, not in most cases. When we take up a poem, students sometimes mimic me, "Sit back and relax as you listen!" I focus on the aesthetic aspect via open-ended questions about whether the poem was appealing or not, what made it so, or what they felt about the poem (without suggesting anything).>>*

- C. Thanks a lot for your elaboration on your teaching. Unfortunately, your very helpful elaboration convinced me even more than you present poetry as a "cryptic puzzle to be solved" (using the metaphor of your own student)—at least initially.

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-15):** *If you saw my answer to your last question, you'd perhaps qualify your observation, from a general, "you present poetry as ..." by changing it to, "In this case/class you have presented it as a..."?>>*

You started your pedagogical dialogue with a question focusing on the semantics of the poem, "What are some of the ways in which ... people use for killing? Which one of them do you think is very gruesome and why?" Correct me, if I'm wrong, but your guidance has two sequential phases. In the first phase, you start the lesson with semantic issues of the poem: difficult notions (e.g., "the ways ... that people use for killing"), difficult words, difficult images, and so on. You wrote, "My students did not have adequate background knowledge to figure out what this scene was." The second phase is students' free exploration of the poem, after they understood it semantically. In your case, the second phase involved students raising ethical issues. Is my mirroring your pedagogy correct? If not, please correct it.

In my view, this two-phase pedagogy of poetry [first gaining knowledge and then dialogizing it] is a bit monologic.

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-25):** *It is hard to accept this criticism. Think of Paul Ricœur's notion of two dimensions of reading a text: sedimentation and innovation (Ricœur, 1991).>>*

You may be right that some of your students may not have "adequate background knowledge to figure out what this scene was" (you can never know that for sure for all students in advance) but your assumption that the adequate background knowledge is absolutely necessary for developing a dialogic response to a poem is wrong, in my view. Very young children's relationship and responses to poems is a very good example of my point. Semantic pathway is only one pathway out of many to a poem. Yes, for some students it may be



crucial but for some others it may not and may even distract from their own pathways which can be rhythmic, aesthetic, emotional, therapeutic, biographical, graphical (i.e., how words and letters are written and organized on the paper), and so on.

It seems to me that your pedagogical approach is somewhat similar to Paulo Freire's, who argued that an educator must first study the students, their life conditions, their ontology, their oppression, their strengths, struggles and limitations, and only then teach them in a dialogue (Freire, Freire, & Freire, 1994). I strongly disagree. I think an educator should study their students through dialogue and through teaching. For example, you expect that your students would struggle with semantics and need background information and that this is crucial for their relation and understanding of the poem. In my view, this is a very reasonable suspicion and expectation. However, in my view, this pedagogical expectation should be treated as a hypothesis to test in a dialogue and not as a fact guiding the teacher's prompt questions. In my view, your initial focus on semantics and two-phase pedagogy is monologic and deficit-model based.

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-20): *Eugene, while I fully concur with the features you mention of what genuine dialogic approach involves, I wonder if the thrust I provided to kick-start a dialogue makes it "deficit" (granting that, in this particular case, it bypassed the aesthetic function of the poem for the semantic). My initial provocation was not instrumental in the sense that it did not have an a priori "right" answer and I was not pushing for students to adopt any a priori moral stance. The ethical focus to the dialogue emerged in the course of students justifying their choices with regard to the multiple-choice questions (a curricular requirement) which became ontologically engaging for the students because of the dialogization of it. If you say this is deficit, it amounts to taking the "Bakhtinian" model that you describe (prescribe) as the right answer to any pedagogical question, quite as a mathematical model is, taken conventionally. I feel that "dialogism" needs to be interpreted according to the context of application, taking into account the limits to dialogism (in real-life communication), and this includes the teacher's (in this case, my) "unthought known" (Bollas, 1987) (personal background and predispositions) that can direct students, which probably passes unexamined by them. No one is superhuman, not least the teacher. The important thing is to help the students realize this by enabling them to receive anything given/facilitated/guided/directed by the teacher (or any other source) critically so that my shortfall serves to help both me and my students grow. This, however, is not easy either for students or for teachers within a conventional institutional framework of formal education, because the image of teacher as "the knower" is very difficult to shake off. This image is so deeply ingrained in both teachers and students (and all stakeholders) and the credibility of a teacher is measured by that yardstick socially. In my case, for example, my main learning through my years of practice has come from holding my practice to scrutiny with the help of my students. My students have been my teachers in shocking me into an aware-*

*ness of the invisible gaps between my intention and practice, and the pedagogic violence that has resulted from my insensitivity. Imagine my pain and disquiet when one of my students from the vernacular medium said, “It was very difficult to follow you ... I could not participate in your class ... But in the history class I used to answer questions” (Ratnam, 2016). This was in the early years of my teaching when I believed monologically and naively that I was helping students to pick up English by expecting them to talk to me in English in class. And still, putting this realization, which was brought about by my student’s remark, to action was not straightforward, another lesson that I learned the hard way, made more formidable by having to work against the grain of not only my cultural milieu but also my deeply ingrained assumptions that continued to work, tacitly hijacking my vision.>>.*

In my view, a genuine dialogic approach involves:

1. Educator’s (and students’) interest in whether a poem resonates somehow in the students and if so, how and if not, why not. What they liked and disliked in the poem. What is unclear [to the students]. This question opens up for students’ expression of their initial holistic diverse attitudes toward poems and their potential difficulties (including semantic ones). This can be done in small groups without the educator.
2. Educator’s sharing his or her own diverse attitudes toward the poem with the students with justifications, if possible.
3. Educator’s sharing his or her own diverse challenges about and difficulties with the poem with the students.
4. Educator’s sharing diverse attitudes of other people (e.g., critics, the poem author, famous people, lay people) toward the poem.
5. Educator (or a student) reading the poem slowly for the participants’ interruptions with questions and comments.
6. Others?

This approach allows for many diverse attitudes toward the poem to emerge. If some students need semantic guidance because they struggle with unfamiliar words, concepts, and images here-and-now, this dialogic approach will reveal it. In this case, semantic guidance will be sensitive to the students’ real needs and not their imaginary ones. Also, other types of guidance—emotional, aesthetic, musical, graphical, ethical, therapeutic, and so on—can emerge in response to the students’ questions and struggles exhibited by the students. In this approach, poetry won’t necessarily be perceived by the students as a “cryptic puzzle to be solved.”

What do you think?



**Response#4: by Jacob Tharu, colleague of Tara Ratnam—February 12, 2017**

The organizers of the forum posted a question for us, “What would you like to ask this Bakhtinian educator about this case?” Here are my replies:

- a) ... Tara says, “So he [i.e., Tara’s male teacher colleague] finalized ... Closed it off ... no more potential for meaning making.” I think the fact that there was no (more) explicit provision in the lesson to think further ... does not support the implicit suggestion that the students’ minds switched off with the sounding of the bell. Since different perspectives (different choices) were noted ... some students might have continued to wonder ... (Some students might have got the sense over years in school that the official best answer is not the *truth*.) So, these ideas might linger ... grow ... and surface at some later stage. *But [I have] no issue with the fact that the teacher operated at a minimal compliance level not as a pro-active practitioner of pedagogy.*
- b) Lessons based on the study-reading of creative works/literary texts obviously allow of multiple perceptions and responses. The informal process of sharing/interaction and learning from one another can occur to a modest level even with a benign and not very imaginative teacher. Two further “desirable” moves (among others) are to promote interaction that leads to the creation of new meaning ... In practice, new meanings.

In this promoting, the teacher has to be more than another voice ... some authority, at least leadership, has to be exercised. Further, in the real context of public education, the “text” comes from a particular syllabus and textbook and is associated with goals—not something mutually agreed. All new perspectives (meanings) emerging in a cohort/class will not be at the same level of general maturity and subject knowledge-based sophistication.

So, the teacher has to play the role of the more knowledgeable individual in sustained spells fairly regularly. Is this [really] a “failing” on the part of the teacher in a Bakhtinian perspective?

Look forward to your responses!

**Response#4.1: by Eugene Matusov—August 22, 2017**

Dear Jacob,

I agree with you that monologic teaching does not necessarily cause monologic learning. In whatever oppressive monologic educational (and non-educational) setting, dialogic meaning making is possible and does occur. Short of genocide, it is impossible to arrest dialogic meaning making in people, although it is possible to make it difficult and unsafe. As they say, “What doesn’t kill you may make you stronger.” Some people deeply learned even in Nazi concentration camps (while some people were broken). [However,] this does not mean that we should glorify concentration camps as terrific educational institutions.

Yes, Tara's male teacher-colleague, she described, exposed his students to a great poem (in my view) and to interesting (if close-ended) questions. For that, the teacher—actually the prescribed curriculum designers—has to be credited. Both the poem and the question can be terrific dialogic provocations, as indeed Tara's terrific teaching showed. However, the [male] teacher also made students' dialogic meaning making of the poem and the question difficult, illegitimate, and unsafe. Yes, some of the students might privately and informally overcome these difficulties, but in that they were unguided by the teacher and, thus, the teacher could not take credit for that. However, many more other students might develop aversion to this poem or to poetry in general, to education, and to their authorial dialogic meaning making. They also remained uninvolved and unguided. It is an interesting empirical question of which group is bigger: (a) those who engage in dialogic meaning making informally later on, despite the monologism of conventional schooling, or (b) those whose interest in their own authorial dialogic meaning making on the academic subject matters become extinguished thanks to the conventional school's oppressive monologism. Based on my (non-systematic) pedagogical observations on conventional teaching, my hypothesis is that the latter is a much bigger group.

As to the teacher's authority, I think that it should be sanctioned primarily by his or her students and not by the institution. The teacher's epistemological authority (i.e., the leadership in what is worthy of study for the students), organizational authority (i.e., the leadership in learning community organization), and pedagogical leadership (i.e., the leadership in how students should study) are based on their usefulness for the students. The students are giving the credit of authority to the teacher to use it and prove its usefulness. If the teacher proves to the students that his or her leadership is useful for them, the teacher's credit of authority grows. If not, the credit of authority given to the teacher by his or her students gets exhausted and the teacher's authority gets lost. However, as I argued elsewhere (Matusov, 2007; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015), in the core of dialogic teaching, the teacher's diverse authority gets temporally suspended. A dialogic teacher cannot tell his or her students, "This is true because I said so. I know more." In a dialogic pedagogical regime, students-in-dialogue are the highest authority for the truth. Some statement is true for an informed student because, so far, he or she cannot come to a better answer to a particular question in a critical dialogue with his or her peers, teacher, literature, and/or to all existing available culture. In this critical dialogue (i.e., "internally persuasive discourse"; Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010), the teacher does not know more, as Lev Vygotsky (1978) insisted, but rather the teacher knows it differently, like any other participant of the critical dialogue (Matusov, 2009). Knowledge is always communal. To know with the students means for the teacher to stop knowing it individually—to become ignorant and uncertain again. Thus, for a teacher of arithmetic,  $2+2=4$  should stop being automatically true and certain but should become a subject of open exploration. In the core of the critical dialogue, the teacher does not have epistemological authority over his or her students. Everything is

open for testing by the students and the teacher and forever is testable for them (cf. Morson, 2004, p. 319). However, to jumpstart this critical dialogue, the teacher may use his or her epistemological authority by saying to his or her students tacitly or explicitly, “Trust me, we should study this and that—you’ll find it interesting and important for you.” As I argued before, the teacher’s authority is like a phoenix: it is burned to start the critical dialogue only to be resurrected at the end of it.

Finally, about “the real context of public education.” What is “real” in conventional education (public or private) is its oppressive monologism. It does not provide an alibi for a good teacher to teach badly (i.e., monologically). Similarly, guards in Nazi concentration camps did not have an alibi by following oppressive orders. It is a professional and humanistic responsibility of a good teacher to build an oasis of dialogism, freedom, meaning making, excitement for his or her freedom, and try to expand it as much as possible. This oasis can be different in differently oppressive monologic conditions of conventional education. As Bakhtin ethically challenged all of us in our human life, “there is no alibi in being” (Bakhtin, 1993). What do you think?

<<Jacob Tharu, feedback reply (2018-04-17): *I find this a most generous and thought-provoking response. I see the point that the ubiquitous oppressive monologism of conventional public education—the harsh reality in which low-status teachers survive—does not provide an alibi for bad teaching. The parallel with the Nazi camp is striking. A sympathetic view of teachers (common among well-meaning outsiders engaging in reform efforts relating to public education) often leads to an unwillingness to push them to think about new possibilities in pedagogy. The alibi that restrictions on freedom to act differently in a structured and monitored space and miserable material resources prevent any change comes too easily. As a result, we have over decades failed to provoke teachers’ deep and hard thinking about the meaning of pedagogy and to stimulate their imagination. Sharing the belief in the possibility, likelihood rather, of dialogic meaning making on the part of (all) students calls for belief with conviction among teacher support personnel, not system overhaul.>>.*

CASE#9: BAKHTINIAN TEACHING AS A MESSY CHATting  
ON A SUBJECT MATTER, DMITRI NIKULIN, USA, INTERVIEWED  
BY EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2016-06-20

**Bakhtinian Educator, Dmitri Nikulin:** I think that my teaching is enhanced by Bakhtin. Of course, Bakhtin is famous for various ideas that he brought into philosophy and into literary criticism, but I think we are mostly talking about his dialogical approach. So, in my understanding, dialogue is a conversation and an exchange between two or more people. In my understanding, dialogue is “unfinalizable”—it cannot be finalized [or exhausted] in principle [i.e., reach the bottom of understanding in its each and every moment]. And so, in this respect, it is different from a mere exchange of information—when somebody simply communicates certain information to students using PowerPoint or something like that.

On the other hand, the “unfinalizable” feature of dialogue is also different from what Bakhtin called “unfinished,” because at every moment this dialogical exchange is meaningful—it has a meaning. We are engaged in talking to each other like we are now, for example—we try to understand each other, we agree, we disagree with each other but, in principle, we can carry this conversation on and on and on, without [ever finishing] it. And so this, I think, is a very important insight into the nature of dialogue and conversation in Bakhtin, which I tried to implement in my own teaching. Because if you really talk to each other, if you really listen to others, if you listen to yourself, then it is remarkable that this conversation can go on and on and on without any repetition of content, without being boring or tiresome, and people really get engaged in it. So this is, for me at least, what Bakhtinian pedagogy is all about.

**Interviewer:** So, can you give me specific examples so that our readers can visualize how it happens in practice? You can pick up any examples that you experienced.

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Well, the philosophy graduates and undergraduates that I teach differ somehow. Graduate students are usually more mature, more advanced. We have a very diverse body of graduate students with different backgrounds. But I think undergraduates are a better example—because these are usually young people who come to college right after high school and some of them remarkably lack in some basic kind of knowledge of history and literature. But, on the other hand, many of them, for the most part, are generally interested in learning something new. So, they want to learn. And so, I think in my own practice over the years with undergraduate students, to some extent, I basically stopped teaching—in the usual sense. What I do is just sit and talk to them for two hours. About different things but mostly about the topic that we are discussing—we just sit and talk and ask simple questions.

For instance, when we are talking about “what is good” in Plato, we talk about Plato’s *Symposium* or *The Republic*, and I’m asking, “What is good?” or “What is the idea of good?” or “How is it connected with the idea of happiness?” or “What does it mean to be happy?” or “What is your idea of happiness or love?” Things like that. And, in this case, they usually say, “I want to be this and that,” “I want to have this and that in relation for myself.” And I ask, “How about the other? What do you want *the other* to have from this relation?” And we start talking about such things but we also usually have some assigned texts, so we read them and converse and discuss them but in a quite informal way. When I am teaching them, I’m trying to avoid some very special vocabulary—so, *it is a kind of a conversation that you might have with somebody who is not very well-versed in a particular topic*. I think we have an *ongoing and unfinalizable conversation*—this is what dialogical approach to pedagogy is all about.

**Interviewer:** And how do you see your role as a teacher there? So again here, and correct me if I am wrong, your role is to bring up these kinds of questions, right? But is there anything else besides bringing up questions that provoke students’ opinions about, for example, “what happiness is” in connection to Plato’s text?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Well, this is my understanding of dialogue, and this is a bit of a development of Bakhtin, of the ideas he presents in his book on Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1999, his postscript to the edition of the book as translated by Caryl Emerson), that in a conversation and in a dialogue we don't exchange information. [Information exchange is:] if you want to know how to get from point A to point B, you just ask. And somebody tells you how to get there and this is a final conversation—it cannot be renewed without a repetition of its content. But, when we are trying to discuss something, to understand something, then it is potentially renewable without a repetition, so it means that our conversation is unfinalizable.

But in doing so, again, my task, the way I see it, is not to convey some kind of information but to try to say something and hear something from others, so that one can, in principle, keep expressing one's "personal other." I consider the "personal other" as the other of myself, which, in a sense is *my* self. So, it is not an imaginary myself or me in the other—but the never fully thematizable yet fully present myself that [exists] at each moment in dialogue. The personal other (or "*videma*") is neither an "I" nor an ego (Nikulin, 2006). It cannot be objectified but can transpire only in dialogue. The other of the world, then, is/are not people but the physical world, the world "as a whole," which is never given in its entirety. Finally, the other of another human being is the other that is present in dialogue with whom I communicate. Yet again, the other of the other person that can never be extinguished, which makes dialogue ongoing and engaging (and not boring!).

In my understanding, dialogue occurs only between persons, so not between us and the world. The other person, then, is the other with whom I am in dialogue. Yet, at the same time, I, myself, am the other to myself, my "personal other" who is always implied in any dialogical act. It is this personal other that gets fully involved yet only partially disclosed as never fully, but always meaningfully, thematizable at every step in dialogue. Any ordinary act of dialogue, then, always involves the personal other of myself and of another person.

It has to do with a problem of "the other," of whom I personally see that there are three different kinds:

1. *One is the other of the world.*
2. *The other kind is "the other" as a real human being, the person with whom I'm talking, in this case, the students.*
3. *And the third one is "the other" of ourselves, which is not just pure kind of ego or what we usually call "subjectivity," "subject," "the I," and so on, but this is really something in us, which we want to understand and express.*

And we can only do it with the other and this is why dialogue is important<sup>5</sup>—because this is the place, the *topos*, where we can both keep expressing our own "other," listening to what the "other" of the other person or people would want to tell us.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Paul Ricœur (1992)—Robi Kroflič's feedback reply (2018-05-29).

And so, in this respect, again this is a process that can never be finalized. Bakhtin makes a distinction, which he gets from Kant, between “*unfinished*” and “*unfinalizable*.” The difference between these two concepts is that the former is the “not yet finished but doable in principle” (an unfinished work), but the latter is something that cannot be finished in principle, yet meaningful at any given moment. So, here I want to deal with an unfinalizable conversation, which can be always engaging, cannot be repeated, and, in doing so, we really get engaged with others. For me, the ideal dialogical situation is teaching, even though it is not always easy to realize it in practice. But once I happen to get engaged with this kind of conversation with my students, it often goes very well. We forget about the setting and we really can keep going and discuss many more things.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I am trying to visualize. So, let’s take your example about “what is happiness?” What if the students say “happiness is pleasure,” like “getting a lot of pleasure—that’s what makes me happy and that is how I define happiness”? What would you do, if you do anything, with that? And another student’s happiness is helping other people, because “it makes me happy when I see other people happy.” So, what would you do? How would you deepen such a conversation, if at all?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** In that case, of course, once we are engaged in a philosophical conversation, not just any kind of a dialogue, then, of course, we need to keep in mind the dialogical origin of the dialectic, and I describe it in my book *Dialectic and Dialogue* (Nikulin, 2010). And this of course is a method of coming to understand a particular subject or thought.

Here my approach to dialogue is a bit I think unorthodox, in a sense. I am inclined to think that dialogue is *not productive*—it doesn’t produce anything. In contrast, dialectic is *always productive*. Dialectic is a conversation in which you want to understand, for example, what happiness is. In principle, it should be productive in terms of understanding what happiness is. After some time in a dialectical conversation, somebody comes up with the idea that happiness is friendship, and somebody else says, “it’s equal distribution of wealth,” or something like that. And then, in the end, we refute the original claim by asking simple questions that allow for a simple “yes” or “no” answer. This is how I practice it in my teaching—it originally comes from Socrates. And this is what philosophical education is all about because it is finding something about something.

But, the Bakhtinian dialogical approach is when one keeps on going and conversing about certain things. So, again, the dialectical way to understand something is that it should be final [i.e., finalizable]. Again, if somebody says that “happiness is equality” or another person says “happiness is helping others,” we might debate this and ask the students if they can come up with some kind of arguments and examples—then we are trying to find out if this population can uphold this or come up with counterexamples. And this is again a Socratic method, which Plato calls dialectical. I think there is nothing wrong with it once we are in the business of philosophy, but again, I think, this is not what Bakhtin is all about. So, the dialectical method is what philosophers usually practice. But I am trying to set the dialogical environment when we

keep on conversing as these independent dialogical beings, who always have to say something to express more and more but never in a finalizable way.

**Interviewer:** And by “dialectical”—I haven’t read your book yet—do you mean *not* Hegelian dialectic but more what Plato described as dialectic, as questioning?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Yes, exactly, more like the Platonic dialectic. But, I think the Hegelian dialectic is an outcrop of the Platonic dialectic. Dialectic starts with the question of “what something is.” We want to find out something: the essence of happiness or something, the way it was practiced in the [Platonic] Academy.<sup>6</sup> First of all, we need to establish the shared topic of our investigation—for example, love, good, justice, courage, and then somebody comes up with a thesis saying that, for example, courage is something. And then comes the dialectician. Of course, the example or a prototype of a dialectician is Socrates, who is not committed to any kind of a thesis or proposition. His only task is to ask questions: simple questions, straightforward questions, to which the other, the one who came up with the thesis, should always be able to answer “yes” or “no,” quite simply. And then, in several steps, Socrates makes the one who came up with the original thesis to recognize that this thesis is wrong, it doesn’t hold, there is a contradiction, and that courage is not X and then we need to start again and again and again. Usually several attempts fail and then we simply need to go home because the day is finished, we are tired, and we will continue tomorrow.

My thesis is that dialectic grows out of the spirit of dialogue. And so, dialogue is an informal, live exchange between the interlocutors, a useful tool in philosophy. But, of course, the use of it is limited. It is unlike dialectic, which embraces a number of different methods, which later becomes only one single method, *the* method. But *the* dialectic is meant to be more or less ordered. Unlike dialectic, dialogue—and this is particularly helpful in teaching—can be very messy. People can get lost. And this is fine, this is what I tell my students: “If you get lost for a while, that’s fine, that’s normal, that’s the way people live, things get messy sometimes.” But then there is certain freedom, a kind of a liberating moment to dialogue, which dialectic doesn’t have, because dialectic is a method of coming to a certain conclusion in an investigation. Dialectic begins with a premise, then moves through a number of steps to the conclusion, and you come to claim that now you understand what you think happiness is, for example.

In contrast, dialogue is not that kind of enterprise or purposeful activity because for me it is not productive, it is unfinalizable, since it expresses *the personal other* within ourselves in this non-finalizable way. Moreover, dialogue also uses certain conversational practices, which contemporary dialectic avoids. So, in general, that book is partly a critique of the concept of a contemporary subject or subjectivity, which is a lot more recent, modern construction than, let’s say, Descartes or Kant. Right now, I am writing a book which is tentatively

<sup>6</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic\\_Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic_Academy)



called *Critique of Bored Reason*, which is a critique of this monological dialectic mono-subjective conversation. From very early on, we are taught simple things, for example: speak in full sentences—subject, predicate, direct object. Don't speak in incomplete sentences. Do not interrupt the other—listen carefully to what the other will have to say and then you will have your chance to go.

But I argue dialogue can sometimes be a very messy enterprise, which, in principle, is based on the idea of interruption.<sup>7</sup> I get it from Yakubinsky<sup>8</sup> (Yakubinsky & Eskin, 1997), who got it from Shcherba<sup>9</sup> (1915), who was looking into some local languages and dialects [in Tsarist Russia] and how people used them in the beginning of the twentieth century. And so, rather than listening to one monological utterance, a rejoinder from somebody, and waiting for the opportune moment to say something, I encourage my students to interrupt—of course, in a polite way. We quickly come to understand each other but we don't necessarily listen to all these long rejoinders. Interruptions are important because an interruption testifies to the dialogue's ability to be an effective pedagogical tool—interruptions happen very quickly—they allow for very quick and brief rejoinders, sometimes simply “yes” or “no,” sometimes incomplete sentences—the way people really speak.

It is an inspirational interruption—it is my argument—so that people do not even need to listen to the end of the enunciation in order to make a rejoinder, because they can quickly interrupt—so, it is a very complex process. Because, when I talk, I look at the other person, who might not interrupt me verbally but with gestures, with facial expressions—he or she always makes sure that it is clear that he or she is listening. So, as I am going, and this is also what I do in my teaching, I anticipate a possible response from them to my rejoinder and then I prepare a response to their response, and people always wait for the moment to interrupt, and it happens quickly, so the whole setting becomes very rich—suddenly we see so many possibilities—we cannot even discuss them all and we end up focusing only on some of them.

**Interviewer:** So, one thing [about dialogic teaching] is that conversations are not finalizable, sentences are not complete, and interruptions are important. What else, like what other aspects of the [dialogic pedagogical] communication, do you introduce? By the way, how many students are usually in your undergraduate class?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** All our undergraduate classes are kept at 18 students. Eighteen or sometimes it can be a little less—so, it is a very good and very healthy environment, because we can really talk to everyone and everyone can get a chance to talk. In lectures, of course, we can have more, but in our graduate seminars we also have 15 students—so they are relatively small.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Paul Ricoeur (1992) and Gert Biesta (2013)—Robi Kroflič's feedback reply (2018-04-29).

<sup>8</sup>[http://westside-philosophers.com/publishing2/author\\_pages/yakubinsky.php](http://westside-philosophers.com/publishing2/author_pages/yakubinsky.php)

<sup>9</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev\\_Shcherba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Shcherba)

Now, I think that an important dialogic moment is the capacity not only to speak but also the capacity not to speak—the desire to listen to others. This is important in terms of dialogical work. Because, again, there is always something that we can say and learn about ourselves and others. It can be non-productive but still very interesting and engaging. In this case, we need to listen to others. So, once the students come to realize that they get into this non-confrontational but ongoing dialogue, based on polite interruptions; they realize how much they can extract both from themselves and from myself. And so, they come to understand that they can learn certain things that they would be unable to understand without others. So, others are really important for me, not as a projection of my self, but as a robust other and this is, I think, really a foundation of dialogue—this respect and commitment to the real other.

*Interviewer:* And how is it manifested, that respect? And how do you also promote that respect? Because the students come to your classes—I assume many of them come for the first time—they don't know what to expect or they actually know what to expect, which is very different from what they were trying to accomplish in their past classes. How are you doing that? What are the transitions and challenges in that?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** I think the most important moment is quite simply to keep being engaged—not to be distracted but to participate. Once students realize that they don't need necessarily to show off, to over-perform but just to really get engaged in a conversation—something that they would like to do continually—then, I think, I accomplished what I want to accomplish. And then, when I see students talking about the topic we have been discussing in class after class, in the corridor, this is for me the most rewarding pedagogical experience. You know, when the students really get so engaged in the topic and also in their discussion that they keep on going and conversing. And I still remain very much in dialogue with my students, especially my former PhD students. I just recently saw some of my former students at a conference in Hong Kong, and we still kept on going and discussing certain things and themes we'd been discussing before. So, if you manage to stay in that kind of dialogical relationship, you can go on for as long as you keep conversing with the other person.

Once you get into a dialogical conversation with others, I think it is important to know that people often come with their prejudices. But, when they start talking to each other, you see that they come to get over these prejudices rather quickly.

*Interviewer:* But what about the opposite thing? I don't know if you have such situations when some of your students might not choose to come to your class but be forced because of these credentials, credit hours, institutional requirements—or a particular topic [in class] may not be interesting for them for whatever reason—how do you respond to such a situation?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Well, of course, they always have a chance to drop the class. It would take a couple of weeks and, in general, it happens in the first sessions. Some people want to attract students—I usually try to shy them away.

I just suggest that, if you are not interested in this topic, there are many other things that we might discuss. So, the important moment in these conversations is stressing the equality. Of course, the teacher is not always exactly in an absolutely symmetrical position to the students. What I am trying to do in the classes under my authority as a teacher is to encourage the students to talk to each other, so that they realize that you can actually talk to your fellow student about a topic that in the beginning of the class seemed to be a difficult topic, that you can actually do that—and this motivates them to talk to each other. I think once they understand that you can not only get into a conversation with the teacher but also with each other, I think that really helps.

*Interviewer:* So, do you have group work? How do you organize their working together or is it the whole class discussion, when they address each other, or is it both? How do you do that?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** No, I usually work with the whole class.

*Interviewer:* Are they just addressing each other?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Yes, I usually also ask one student to prepare a brief presentation of the assigned text and then we start discussing the presentation, asking questions, responding to each other—I think that is a good way to keep people talking.

*Interviewer:* And these presentations are about what? Are they about readings?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** I usually assign some readings but I don't assign much, especially with philosophy texts, because you can read closely just a couple of pages at a time. They read short selected texts that we should be able to discuss—so, I usually prepare some questions for the students, and I also ask them to prepare their own questions. And then I simply move around and ask them to ask the questions that they have prepared and this usually works very well—because just one question can be enough—and I encourage them to ask simple questions, because simple questions are usually the most difficult questions, and then, once they hear a question from a fellow student, they start to express their opinions.

*Interviewer:* And these readings—do they do them in class or at home?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** They are assigned for every week.

*Interviewer:* So, they do them at home?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** Yes. Here is what I also like to teach, and this is something that contemporary students really do not know how to do at all. So, it is the old school version, which was practiced by the founders of the New School<sup>10</sup>—Aron Gurwitsch,<sup>11</sup> Hans Jonas,<sup>12</sup> and Hannah Arendt.<sup>13</sup> What they stressed in their teaching, among other things, was close reading of the original texts. So, sometimes we read very, very closely—maybe a sentence or a paragraph—trying to dig into it and read it very closely. We begin with grammar of the

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newschooledu/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://newschoolphilosophy.wordpress.com/2014/05/21/aron-gurwitsch/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Jonas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Jonas)

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah\\_Arendt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Arendt)

original text—sometimes students read translations but I always read texts in the original—then we see if the grammatical structure of the translation fits the original text, if it is not that far away from the original text, and then we try to have a more substantial philosophical conversation about the argument.

*Interviewer:* Well, let me ask a difficult question for people who read Bakhtin and teach. Because I don't know if you noticed, but Bakhtin usually, when he needs to bring an example of what he sometimes called "extreme monologism," used to bring an example from education,<sup>14</sup> which I think is very fair, but on the other hand, you mentioned that you need to reduce asymmetry between students—so how are you doing that and are you trying to completely erase asymmetry or is certain asymmetry fine? How do you deal with this tough question that, in a way, Bakhtin raises for all of us?

*Dmitri Nikulin:* Well, this is indeed a difficult question. First of all, I don't think that one can or even should erase asymmetry altogether, because at least in the beginning of the conversation you need to show your students how to read these texts and also how to get engaged in a conversation. Some of them don't know how to do it but they learn this very quickly and most of them are eager to learn. I think it is important to learn how and when to interrupt, since the interruptibility is an important feature of dialogue. Of course, most students understand what is proper, many of them already know when and how to interrupt—so this is really not difficult to learn and practice.

In general, it is not only me but in our department [it is the case that] we don't hesitate to step over the existing established practices because, for instance, some of us teach very different texts and juxtapose very different texts from literature, philosophy, sociology, or politics, and try to read them side by side—so we like to experiment and invite the students to do that. For instance, I ask them, especially in the beginning of a class, what they would like me to teach. And I ask them about the syllabus, if they want to change something there, if they want to drop or add some topics that they would be interested in discussing—and they appreciate it. But some institutions don't even have that. For example, this spring I taught at l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, which has a structure that is very similar to the one I am used to—it comes from the same tradition. And they have no syllabus at all. Or they do have a syllabus but it can be changed—the teacher can always ask the students "do you want to learn this or that?" so that they can change the topics for conversations.

*Interviewer:* But how do you deal with this situation? Do you have a particular institutional role? You are a professor, so, from students' point of view, you are the one who knows things and, for them, since they are students, obvi-

<sup>14</sup>E.g., "In an environment of ... monologism the genuine interaction of consciousness is impossible and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence ... [excessive monologism] 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 [interaction]" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 81).

ously they come with the position that they don't know things and so you have much more weight in what you are saying than they do. How do you deal with that one? For example, I know that some [educators] try to actually avoid sharing their own ideas because they are afraid that the students take their ideas, the professor's ideas, with a much greater weight than their own ideas. So how do you deal with that epistemological asymmetry in a way?

**Dmitri Nikulin:** I am not afraid of sharing my ideas. Plato plays an important role in our curriculum and also because we have an example from Socrates, who said, "I know that I don't know." That is why, usually, when we hear that somebody knows something, I give an example from Augustine,<sup>15</sup> who said that, "when you think about time, you already know what time is. But when I start questioning myself about what time is, I find out that I have no idea." And this is actually the case with any particular topic. For example, some people seem to know what justice is, but when you start asking them, you understand that people don't know much about it. And neither do I. But I am open to recognize that I don't know much about something. And this is an interesting moment that I want to stress in distinction to Socrates that I am not afraid of others going after my ideas and criticizing them, because this is the case of "I know that I don't know."

I think the Bakhtinian dialogical approach here would be to say that, "I know that I know something," maybe not much but something, but in order to find out what I know I need others, I need conversation in a dialogical setting. And then you and I can find out that, in fact, we know much more than we know—but we will find this out only once we get into conversation. Now, regarding the question that you asked, that some teachers or professors might be uneasy with the fact that the students might underestimate their own ideas, I should say that the New School is a bit unusual because our philosophical tradition is not Analytic,<sup>16</sup> unlike the majority of the [philosophy] departments in the United States. But, we have what they call the "Continental" [philosophy] tradition,<sup>17</sup> which is based on the European tradition. In the analytic tradition, a philosophical discussion often gets somewhat aggressive and I think this aggressiveness is then reproduced in the classroom, which I personally don't find very helpful. The idea here is that the criticism is the way of destroying, not the opponent personally, of course, but the thesis of the opponent. So, we already a priori know that our opponent is wrong and we only need to know where he is wrong in his argument. Now, my approach is different—it is not an attempt to find out what is wrong with the argument of the other, but rather to try to develop in a creative way what the other has said, beyond the original suggestion. So, when somebody gives a paper or makes a claim, the task is not to refute that claim or argument but rather to develop it in an interesting way, which was not originally evident or even meant. And so, I think, in this way the discussion is less confrontational.

<sup>15</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine\\_of\\_Hippo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo)

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analytic\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analytic_philosophy)

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_philosophy)

**Response#1: by Ana Marjanovic-Shane—January 25, 2017**

Dear Dmitri and all,

There are several things that attracted my attention in this “case.” I put it in quotation marks because this is not a particular [teaching] case, but it sounds like a general description of many different instances of your teaching. And that is the first thing that attracted my attention—or that I want to talk about. Something like this:

There are so many interesting and intriguing concepts and practices that you describe, but because there is no particular event, with a particular encounter between people in conversation/dialogue, the description is still for me quite distant, as if through a milky glass through which you can see only shadows, and you might guess a lot about what is going on, but not the important details of a particular event. And because you are the narrator, I sort of know what *you* think about what is going on, but I don’t know the students’ different opinions about the same events. For instance, here is my simple question, “You really value the unfinalizability of a dialogue, the fact that you can go on and on about something, with your students. But what do the students think about the unfinalizability of dialogues? Do they like it and think that this is important, or do they get annoyed with it? Or both? And when and why might they like it and/or get annoyed and hate it?”

\* \* \*

Interesting concepts and my questions:

1. **Dialogue is not productive**—it is a process, without beginning and without end, in which people discuss the same and or different issues amongst themselves, and never repeat themselves, but somehow move their meaning-making process further and further, or maybe go around and around in spirals, or maybe there are tangential topics.

It is interesting to think of what “productive” means for your classes. In the interview, this concept is discussed in the context of the dialogue–dialectics opposition (dialogue is non-productive and non-finalizable vs. dialectic is productive, i.e. achieves a certain goal, and it is in principle finalizable).

However, from the point of view of education, of having classes with the students, what does it mean for dialogue to be “non-productive”? Aren’t there some transformations in the ways students think of some topics, in what they have learned, even as a by-product of these dialogues? Are there transformations in the relationships between the participants, and so on? It would be very interesting to ask your students if they have the same opinion of your dialogues being non-productive? Or maybe productive? What do you think?

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19): This is a very pertinent question from an educator's point of view. I find, and my students also share this view, that the dialogues in the classroom that they are part of and contribute to have been very productive and "transformative" in several ways. One example: Several students have come back to me to say that their experience of the dialogic space in my class stood them in good stead when they were called forth to work in teams and hold group discussions to identify and solve problems in their engineering course and particularly during campus selection.

Aren't the new insights/ideas/understandings that emerge in and through dialogue (inconclusive as they stand, because they are always nascent, open to other possibilities and "unfinalizable") still productive for the participants by way of enriching their held perspectives and providing alternatives for their action?>>

2. **The Other**—This is a very intriguing concept you have about "the other" in dialogue. I am especially interested in your third meaning, "And the third one is 'the other' of ourselves, which is not just pure kind of ego or what we call 'subjectivity,' 'subject,' 'the I,' and so on, but this is really something in us, which we want to understand and express."

Although I am not sure that I understand exactly what you mean with that concept, this is how I would think of it. In dialogue with others, we develop a certain relationship to them. At the same time, we start to develop a relationship to ourselves and to actually "grow" ourselves, being able to *be/become* someone, a *me* to our I (ego). In my dissertation about the development of metaphor in children, I also attempted to redefine the meaning-making process, and, in a nutshell, I defined it as a "gesture" (today I would use a term *postupok*)<sup>18</sup> through which someone creates/recreates/transforms relations within the triad of *me-you-topic*. Also, this gesture actually defines its author (*me*) within these (always) newly minted relations.

Today, I would add to this definition of a long time ago, the *answer* of the *other* (whether this *other* is a *me* or a *you*). I would add it in order to capture the dialogicity of the meaning making, because without the answer, there is no dialogue. I think that you capture this "*answer*" that describes the meaning making as a dialogue, with your concept of *interruption*. I see the interruption you describe as the "answer/new offer."

Is this how you think of it? This is why the person and her "personal other" cannot exist outside of the dialogue with others—because there is no meaning making, which simultaneously creates both the visions of the topic and their author-as-*me*.

<sup>18</sup>This Slavic word can be loosely translated as "a personal deed" see for discussion: <https://www.facebook.com/DialogicPedagogyJournal/posts/833467373331230>. Also Bakhtin discussed *postupok* in his early book (Bakhtin, 1993).



In your words, “And we can only do it with the other and this is why dialogue is important—because this is the place, the topos, where we can both keep expressing our own ‘other’, listening to what the ‘other’ of the other person or people would want to tell us ... For me, the ideal dialogical situation is teaching, even though it is not always easy to realize it in practice, but once I happen to get engaged with this kind of conversation with my students, it often goes very well. We forget about the setting and we really can keep going and discuss many more things.”

What do you think?

3. **The opposition between the dialogue and dialectics**—You describe this opposition mostly in terms of the non-productivity, messiness, no particular goal vs. productivity, orderliness, striving to achieve a particular goal of arriving at some final truth (even temporary). [You wrote,] “And so, dialogue is an informal, live exchange between the interlocutors ... But, *the* dialectic is meant to be more or less ordered. So, unlike dialectic, dialogue—and this is particularly helpful in teaching—can be very messy. People can get lost ... But then there is certain freedom, a kind of a liberating moment to dialogue, which dialectic doesn’t have ...”

But you also make a very important (for me) contrast between dialogue and dialectic, in terms of the quality of the relationships: A dialectician is always an “opponent,” always a “devil’s advocate.” You say, “And then comes the dialectician [Socrates] ... And then, in several steps, Socrates makes the one who came up with the original thesis to recognize that this thesis is wrong, it doesn’t hold, there is a contradiction.”

In contrast, [you wrote,] in dialogue, one “expresses *the personal other* within ourselves in this non-finalizable way ... So, others are really important for me, not as a projection of my self, but as a robust other and this is, I think, really a foundation of dialogue—this respect and commitment to the real other.”

So it seems to me that the relations between the participants are of a quite different quality in dialogue and in a dialectical (maybe critical) dialogue, because there is a different priority. In dialectics, the priority is the “truth” (or the topic about which the dialectical dialogue is conducted), but in dialogue the priority may be the authoring of the self and the personal as well as the actual other. In other words, dialogue is more about becoming alive as a human being, though creating a relationship to oneself as one creates relationships with the others (and the truth, incidentally).

And if that it is true, then your teaching is similar to what Eugene and myself (with our colleagues) are trying to do—to develop an education for and from agency (i.e. personal other??) (Matusov, Smith, Soslau, Marjanovic-Shane, & von Duyke, 2016). At the end, you say, “Now, my approach is different—it is not an attempt to find out what is wrong with the argument of the other, [not about finding the truth] but rather to try

to fully develop in a creative way what the other has said, beyond the original suggestion [but about developing your student's authorial agency]. So, when somebody gives a paper or makes a claim, the task is not to refute that claim or argument but rather to develop it in an interesting way, which was not originally evident or even meant."

What do you think?

\* \* \*

So, these are those concepts that attracted my attention, and my questions about them. But what I am missing and what I am dying to find out more about, are some actual events and the actual thoughts of your students!! I would love to hear their *interruptions* of you!

What do you think?

**Response#1.1: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 1, 2017**

Dear Ana,

Thank you for your very thoughtful questions. For a more detailed discussion, I might refer you to two books of mine, *On Dialogue* (Nikulin, 2006) and *Dialectic and Dialogue* (Nikulin, 2010) (the latter we had a chance to discuss in January [2017] in Delaware). Briefly, unfinalizability for me is a characteristic of dialogue that distinguishes it from an exchange of rejoinders that is meant to convey some information or make a statement. In this respect, everyone involved in dialogue shares this unfinalizability with others. Now, as I also said, dialogue describes our being with others. If to be is to be in dialogue, then dialogue is non-productive, because being is not produced. This also means that accidentally dialogue may, but does not have to, produce a conclusion, a justified true belief, and the like. If, furthermore, education is meant to allow each and every participant to learn from and with others, it has to be an open-ended dialogical process, which, again, may come to a conclusion from time to time. In other words, dialectic can be legitimately present in dialogue, but dialogue is not reducible to dialectic.

**Response#2: by Richard Beach—January 29, 2017**

This is a highly engaging case regarding methods of instruction supporting open-ended, dialogic interaction in the classroom. It led me to read Nikulin's (2010) book, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, which further contrasts the practices associated with differences between dialectic and dialogue. It also led me to raise two questions regarding the value or purpose of engaging students in dialogue as well as how engaging in such dialogue over time may foster change, and how to conceptualize that change.

1. One of the questions to ask Nikulin is, What is the ultimate value or purpose for engaging students in open-ended dialogue? What are they gaining over time through the experience of participating in dialogue? Such discussions are often framed as students just sitting around and bs-ing

without achieving any of the teachers' preconceived pedagogical goals, particularly when such discussions are perceived to be "off task." Such framing is problematic because it assumes that learning should be defined and assessed based on the teacher's predetermined agenda.

This is where Aukerman's (2013) distinction is helpful. In her critique of "comprehension-as-procedures," Aukerman notes how students' literacy learning is framed based on their display of predetermined uses of cognitive strategies consistent with a teacher's agenda, for example, their ability to apply a KWL comprehension strategy.<sup>19</sup> Such instruction serves to foreclose a more open-ended "comprehension as sense making" that invites students to explore meanings without concern for adhering to predetermined teachers' expectations and scripts.

Adopting a "comprehension as sense making" approach rejects impersonal presuppositions about students' abilities and knowledge as individuals to support their interactions with peers to focus on students' collaborative sense making related to developing intersubjective ethical understanding of dialogic differences and commonality between themselves and others.

Teachers can engage students in peer-to-peer sense-making interactions through sponsoring exploratory languaging (Linell, 2016) involved in collaborative reasoning through formulating and challenging hypotheses. Unfortunately, analysis of 5th- and 7th-grade students sense-making "exploratory talk" based on science concepts found few instances of "exploratory talk" (Cervetti, DiPardo, & Staley, 2014).

One key value of open-ended, unfolding dialogue is that it can lead to generating new insights and ideas, particularly if participants are attending to emerging threads of thought that lead to extending a shared "participatory sense-making" (Di Paolo & De Jaegher, 2012) based on voicing tentative, hypothetical thoughts. Drawing on David Bohm's (2004) work on dialogue, Mara Popova (2016) describes this unfolding process:

In such a dialogue, when one person says something, the other person does not in general respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person. Rather, the meanings are only similar and not identical. Thus, when the second person replies, the first person sees a difference between what he meant to say and what the other person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his own views and to those of the other person. And so, it can go back and forth, with the continual emergence of a new content that is common to both participants. Thus, in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that the two people are making something in common, i.e., creating something new together. But of course such communication can lead to the creation

<sup>19</sup> Instructional reading strategy: "Know, Want to know, Learned," <http://www.nea.org/tools/k-w-l-know-want-to-know-learned.html>

of something new only if people are able freely to listen to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other.

As with improvised jazz performances, this entails teachers being open to exploration of alternative voices and perspectives in unpredictable, unfolding events in which the event as a whole only remains in the future, as we can only know it in its “eventness” when it comes to an end. There is no way for social actors to understand with certainty what they are doing as they are doing it as each utterance or action can be taken up in an infinite number of ways. A part of being a social actor is remaining open to the unknowingness and unpredictability of the event as each moment unfolds. As such, a classroom event or lesson as it is experienced is indeterminate, lying between what is and what is not yet (Bloome & Beauchemin, 2016, p. 159).

This collaborative sense making includes expressions of being openly perplexed by certain utterances or interrupting others as leading to further development of the dialogue. As Nikulin notes in his book,

In dialogue, every rejoinder is meaningful *per se*, even if and when the speaker is utterly perplexed—for example, when during his rejoinder the speaker is still trying to understand, formulate, and express a response to what the other has just been saying. Of course, the other may be just as perplexed, and even when he is not trying to say, understand, or express anything meaningful, his speaking is still a reaction to what was previously said, so that what might not have made sense before suddenly becomes meaningful.

Moreover, any rejoinder makes sense within the larger “whole” of dialogue, which is perceived as such by the interlocutors yet is never fully accessed by anyone at any particular moment because the dialogue is unfinalizable and can always be continued further. (Nikulin, 2010, p. 100)

Students are often reluctant to interrupt or to express being puzzled or uncertain given certain norms operating in classroom discussions. Expressions of being uncertain may be perceived as lack of an ability to comprehend or grasp certain ideas or textual meanings. As Nikulin notes, teachers can play a key role in creating a safe or “third space”<sup>20</sup> supporting interruptions or expressions of puzzlement as practices contributing to as opposed to detracting from rich, dialogic interactions.

2. Another question for Nikulin would be how does he perceive change across time in students developing agency through engaging in dialogue when, for some students, such experiences may be quite different from their experiences in other classes. How and when do students begin to perceive the value of engaging in this dialogue and in what ways does the quality of interactions change or improve across time? This would also lead to questions of assessment in the course—How would one assess change or learning to participate over time? According to what criteria?

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_Space\\_Theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Space_Theory)

The challenge here is that the units of analysis employed in assessing learning as typically framed or “personalized” around students as individual autonomous actors as opposed to examining changes in group interactions themselves (Cervetti et al., 2014).

Rather than think about agency in terms of individual autonomy—the ability of the individual to acquire self-confidence to achieve certain goals—an alternative perspective focuses on agency as constituted by multiple participants interacting with others. As Linell (2016, p. 42) notes,

The speaker’s own agency, her ability to decide on utterances by herself, is therefore partly overridden by social interdependencies; we are faced with “co-actions,” rather than independent actions by autonomous individuals. Personal agency is limited or circumscribed, and we must therefore adopt a theory of participatory agency, which is partially shared, not only with the addressee but also with peripheral others (“third parties”) to whom participants orient.

Growth in agency could therefore be defined as development of relationships in a group through engaging in supportive dialogue with each other within activity systems (Stetsenko, 2005). As Freyok (2012) notes, “This view situates agency within its social context, including past history, current situation, and future prospects; it recognizes agency in responses to the affordances and constraints of a particular context” (p. 97). All of this suggests teachers creating supportive contexts that foster collaborative efforts of the group itself that leads to growth and development over time in use of dialogue.

### **Response#2.1: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 3, 2017**

Dear Richard,

Thank you for these very informed and thoughtful observations and questions, from which I learned a great deal. I think that the students can gain much from dialogue, even if, in my view, dialogue is not necessarily productive of new truths and meanings. Dialogue is the very condition of the possibility of learning, maturing, and growing. Dialogue gives students, by engaging with each other, a chance to think about a subject and to learn it. Since dialogue is based on mutual interruptions, it can at times be hectic but it is not a messy chatting, as the title of my case suggests. In fact, it is not chatting at all, since dialogue constitutes our human ontological condition: it allows us to be by being with others, and thus get engaged in socially and politically meaningful and liberating practices, one of which is education.<sup>21</sup> As for your other question, I quite agree with Linell that dialogue does not provide for autonomy (I argue that dialogue precludes autonomy). Dialogical agency is not an interaction of atomic individuals but at the same time it does not reduce the participants to being a function of the whole of the discussion. Rather, (pedagogical) dialogue allows each participant to be in conversation with others as equal and independent yet unfinalizable voices.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hanna Arendt (1961) and Gert Biesta (2013)—Robi Kroflič’s feedback reply (2018-04-25).

**Response#2.2: by Eugene Matusov—February 8, 2017**

Dear Richard and Dmitri—.

Thanks for the terrific critical dialogue! It is very helpful for me.

Dmitri, you wrote, “but it [dialogue] is not a messy chatting, as the title of my case suggests. In fact, it is not chatting at all, since dialogue constitutes our human ontological condition: it allows us to be by being with others, and thus get engaged in socially and politically meaningful and liberating practices, one of which is education.”

Would you agree with the following definition of dialogue: “dialogue is a messy chatting, in which the participants are very interested in each other’s ideas and persons as such”?

If not, why not?

What makes your dialogue “socially and politically ... liberating”? I imagine very ontologically intense dialogues between Hitler and his buddy [Hermann] Göring, but why would these ontologically intense dialogues be liberating?! Meaningful—yes! But why liberating? Liberating for whom?

This is for me the crux of my struggle: can education be dialogic (in your sense of this term). Your dialogue is not necessarily a critical dialogue. Not all dialogues (in your sense) are critical, right?

What do you think?

**Response#2.3: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 8, 2017**

Dear Eugene,

Dialogue for me is primarily an ontological enterprise, since, the way I see it, to be is to be in dialogue. Yet, being means also being free, which means that the very being in dialogue liberates people from various kinds of oppression and misrecognition: from social hierarchies, inequality, vanity, and so on. In this sense, dialogue is liberating and pedagogical, because we learn about our human condition only by being in dialogue. As for the definition of dialogue, in my understanding, it is an unfinalizable exchange, meaningful at any particular moment, between equal partners—real others—who disclose each one’s personal other in a never extinguishable way.

**Response#2.4: by Eugene Matusov—February 11, 2017**

Dear Dmitri—.

Your second part is very helpful for me, “As for the definition of dialogue, in my understanding it is an unfinalizable exchange, meaningful at any particular moment, between equal partners—real others—who disclose each one’s personal other in a never extinguishable way.” Although I prefer Bakhtin’s notion of “consciousnesses with equal rights” to your “equal partners.” In my view, people are [unique and, thus,] never equal to each other but they may have equal rights to be taken seriously by each other (and their listeners).

But, I have a lot of problems with the first part. You do not seem to treat liberation as a relational notion. I’m afraid that you treat it atomistically (something that you argue against in your books): “Dialogue for me is primarily an ontological enterprise, since, the way I see it, to be is to be in dialogue. Yet

being means also being free, which means that the very being in dialogue liberates people from various kinds of oppression and misrecognition: from social hierarchies, inequality, vanity, and so on. In this sense, dialogue is liberating and pedagogical, because we learn about our human condition only by being in dialogue.”

It reminds me of US President Trump, who constantly “ontologically liberates” himself by humiliating others. This is liberation from inhibition by humanity and civility. Some people call this move “sincerity” or fighting political correctness—indeed this is how Trump sincerely and ontologically feels about the people whom he humiliates. In my view, this is liberation (or better to say, indulgence) for humiliation. In my view, genuine liberation and genuine sincerity are relational and not individualistically atomistic.

Also, I still respectfully disagree with you that your ontological dialogue is inherently critical (unless I misread your reply).

What do you think?

**Response#3: “Can education be dialogic?” by Eugene Matusov—January 22, 2017**

Dear Dmitri and everybody—

I’m very excited with Dmitri’s mundanization<sup>22</sup> of dialogue. I think he moves away from Bakhtin’s (1999) notion of dialogue as “dialogue at threshold around the [ultimate] damn questions” (“проклятые вопросы,” in Russian) to dialogue as “the human condition” (cf. Arendt, 1958) when people are interested in each other and their conversation is unfinalizable, polythematic, and unproductive (but it can be by-productive). Bakhtin’s “dialogue at threshold around the final damn questions” can be a part of this mundane dialogue for a moment but then the mundane dialogue moves to something else or becomes “dialectics”—purposeful and systematic search for truth while staying on one topic.

However, I wonder if education, as such, can be dialogic from this definition. I define education as a leisurely pursuit of a critical examination of life, self, society, and the world (including education itself). As a particular pursuit, it is not necessarily “the human condition.” This “deconstructive” or “demon-taging” pursuit may be different from a dialectic search for truth, but it is a particular pursuit nevertheless. Can any pursuit be dialogic, from your point of view, Dmitri?

What do you think?

**Response#3.1: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 4, 2017**

Dear Eugene,

Thank you for all your excellent questions. I agree that my understanding of dialogue, although influenced by Bakhtin, also differs from his in some points. In particular, the “ultimate” questions, of course, can be addressed in dialogue,

<sup>22</sup>A new word for action coined from the conventional noun “mundane” by Eugene. It means “making something mundane.”



but they can also be discussed in a non-dialogical or dialectical fashion. And the critical examination of life, the way I see it, is impossible without a shared effort of being what one wants to examine, which is only possible in dialogue, precisely because dialogue constitutes human condition. To be is to be in dialogue, and only then can one examine one's being. However, again, dialogue for me is non-productive, so an answer to an "ultimate question" can happen within a dialogue but not necessarily. Dialogue provides the very possibility of addressing such questions, together with others.

**Response#3.2: by Eugene Matusov—February 8, 2017**

Thanks, Dmitri.

But let's discuss education from your dialogic perspective, please (this is my interruption, sorry!☺). Do you think that education is inherently productive or not? One candidate for educational products of education can be deconstruction (de-montage, in your terms) of the naturally and culturally given. Would you agree or disagree? If you agree that education is productive (and focused), does it mean that it cannot be inherently fully dialogic? If so, dialogue (in your understanding of this concept) can be one of the conditions for education but not *the* condition, no?

My understanding of your notion of dialogue (and correct me if I'm wrong, please) is that it resists any systematic endeavor. Dialogue can be an occasional endeavor (e.g., search for truth) but not a systematic one. However, in my view, education (like dialectics) is a systematic endeavor—would you agree? If so, how can it be dialogic?

What do you think about education in the context of your understanding of dialogue?

**Response#4: by Mikhail Gradovski—February 8, 2017**

1. What attracts your attention in this case and why?<sup>23</sup>

I think that this case represents a nice example of the use of a dialogue in teaching philosophy to the undergraduates.

2. What do you like/dislike in this case and why?

I do like the argumentation of Nikulin behind his choice of why he is using dialogue that includes the clarification of the difference between "unfinished" and "unfinalized."

3. What (if anything) surprises you about this case and why?

I think that what is most original in the case Nikulin provides is the argument behind his understanding of the difference between "unfinished" and "unfinalized."

I also like Nikulin's decision to give students few pages to read. In my opinion, it shows that Nikulin is an accomplished teacher of philosophy.

4. What would you like to ask the [Bakhtinian] professor about this case?

<sup>23</sup> Mikhail Gradovski uses the generic questions that the organizers of the forum developed for the forum participants.

How would you relate your usage of the dialogue in your teaching to phenomenology and its epistemology and ontology? Are there any similarities and differences between your understanding of the use of dialogue and phenomenological understanding of the dialogue?

Bakhtin's ideas have been heavily influenced by Neo-Kantianism. Your argumentation behind your understanding of the difference between "unfinished" and "unfinalized" is based on Kant. Do you think that this understanding could be different if you look at Bakhtin's "unfinished" and "unfinalized" through the lenses of Neo-Kantianism and not just Kant?

5. Do you think the [Bakhtinian] professor could have done something different, and if so, what and why do you think so?

I think Nikulin's way of teaching is the ultimate way of teaching philosophy from the point of view of the contents, knowledge, and skills with which philosophy is expected to equip its followers. The success of the use of the dialogue when teaching philosophy had been proved right by Socrates (according to Plato) and this very success was repeated since the Athenian School of Philosophy by several other (probably thousands of) philosophers.

6. What do you see as Bakhtinian, non-Bakhtinian, and anti-Bakhtinian in this case and why?

I do respect Nikulin's self-definition of his method as being informed by Bakhtin, meaning Bakhtin's ideas influenced the choices Nikulin has made when choosing how to teach and what forms of dialogues he wants to practice during his teaching. This means that his practical pedagogy is not Bakhtinian but informed by Bakhtin. I myself practice a similar form of teaching when I teach research methods when the point of departure is an article or a piece of text we need to discuss. I do not consider this form of dialogue as Bakhtinian but the ordinary dialogue as a form of teaching based on classical philosophy. I find nothing anti-Bakhtinian in this case.

#### **Response#4.1: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 4, 2017**

Dear Mikhail,

Thank you for your comments and observations. I am glad that you find the distinction between "unfinished" and "unfinalizable" meaningful. I indeed trace it back to Kant's *First Critique*. At a certain point, like Bakhtin, I was influenced by Neo-Kantianism, as everybody else in the Continental tradition in the twentieth century, either accepting or responding to the Neo-Kantians. But, I now argue against Cassirer's stressing of the primacy of function or relation over substance (which for him is the Kantian thing-in-itself). I take it that everyone involved in dialogue is not merely a function of the current dialogical situation. This is the reason why I introduce the notion of "personal other," who or which is not a substance either but is displayed through dialogue in a non-finalizable way.

**Response#5: “Is interruptibility dialogic or cultural” by Eugene Matusov—January 22, 2017**

Dear Dmitri and everybody—

Your notion of interruptibility as an inherent feature of dialogue as the human condition is very-very interesting and promising. However, I wonder if it is really inherent to any dialogue (in your definition) or a cultural phenomenon. For example, in some cultures interruptions are more acceptable and even valuable (e.g., among Ashkenazi Jews) but in some cultures interruptions are less acceptable and not valuable (e.g., among Maya Indians). My question for you: Are interruptions universal and happen in all cultures but in some subtle ways, since dialogue-as-human-condition is universal? Alternatively, you may be wrong that interruptions are inherently dialogic and universal.

What do you think?

PS By “interruptions are inherently dialogic,” I don’t mean to say that from your view, all interruptions are dialogic and good. I know that you disagree with that. Some interruptions are monologic, bad, and nothing to do with dialogue as the human condition.

**Response#5.1: by Dmitri Nikulin—January 29, 2017**

I think that interruption is essential to dialogue. Of course, there are culturally significant situations (e.g., collective mourning) when interruption is inappropriate, but dialogue cannot simply go on without interruption. It can be non-verbal, for instance, in silent dialogue, by gesticulation, facial expressions, body movements. This all occurs in communication and also in class on a daily basis. Modern culture is based on the cultivation of the self as autonomous and thus does not tolerate interruption, teaching us from early on that interruption is impolite. But then every uninterrupted utterance turns into a long, solemn monologue. In monological modernity, if I interrupt the other, I do not take her seriously. On the contrary, I want to argue that in dialogue if and when I interrupt the interlocutor, I take her seriously.

**Response#5.2: by Tina Kullenberg—January 30, 2017**

Dear Dmitri,

I am still so fascinated by your dialogic notion of interruption, first from your original book on dialogue and dialectic, then our Skype chat (SCA),<sup>24</sup> and now on this site.

Some scattered reflections:

Does it make sense to distinguish between rhetoric (as mere verbalism) and genuine dialogue? For example, if we think about authoritarian dialogues that aim for social order in the interest of society, they may be viewed as more rhetorical than dialogical in a sense. Or not?

<sup>24</sup>Tina refers to the SCA [Sociocultural] Reading Group at the School of Education, University of Delaware, where Dmitri’s 2010 book was discussed with him in January 2010. Tina was present at the SCA Reading Group meeting via Skype.

What I also like very much is something I don't think I have heard so emphasized before: the idea of boredom, and of talking too long when holding the floor monologically in dialogues; something that may block the flow of dialogicity because it does not let the radical other into a vital dialogue imbued in mutual curiosity, and so on.

**Response#5.3: by Dmitri Nikulin—February 1, 2017**

Dear Tina,

Thank you for these observations. Interruption, in my opinion, is indeed a unique feature of dialogue. For if we do not interrupt others, this means that we are not interested in them and in what they say and, thus, keep to our monological mode of existence. But if we do interrupt, this means that we are already in dialogue, are interested in others, and we *are* to the extent that we are in dialogue. Because of its unfinalizability, dialogue is always renewable and always new, and thus is never boring. If we are bored, this means that we are not in dialogue but on our own, missing the other, including the other of ourselves. The same can be said about education: if people are bored in class, if nobody interrupts (in a polite way), then there is no dialogue and one does not learn with and from others.

**Response#5.4: by Eugene Matusov—February 3, 2017**

Dear Dmitri—

You wrote, “For if we do not interrupt others, this means that we are not interested in them and in what they say and mostly keep to our monological mode of existence.”

I wonder if this is not necessarily true. Some ideas, feelings, images, and so on can be rather complex and require time to develop and express them. Is not desire to listen to these complex ideas, feelings, and images in their entirety not an expression of interest in the other?

I wonder if your notion of interruptibility is another extreme (and a trap) as the Western conventional (and traditional) notions of silent listening. I highly appreciate your challenging the latter but I wonder if the former can be faulty as well. The art of dialogue is to interrupt at times and to be a silent listener at other times. Can it be that neither interruptibility nor silent listening are markers of interests in the other per se?

I want to attract your attention that your notion of interruptibility came from specific sociolinguistic studies in specific linguistic communities (e.g., Shcherba, 1915). Similar empirical studies in other communities (both modern and traditional) might bring different results and conclusions.

What do you think?

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## Chapter 1.2: Standalone Teaching Cases

CASE#1: *MY PAPA'S WALTZ*, PAUL SPITALE, USA, INTERVIEWED  
BY EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2015-11-23

**Bakhtinian educator, Paul Spitale:** In my English writing class for diverse undergraduate students, “tableau” is, I like to call it, a living snapshot of, in our case, a piece of literature. So, what I do is I give my students a piece of literature that we have already read and discussed in class and I tell them, “Okay, you’re going to do a tableau. I need a living snapshot, your representation of a point in time of the piece, what the piece may mean to you and your group, what maybe anything that has to do with the piece. You don’t have to narrate the piece. You can do anything.”

I just had a class do a tableau exercise this semester of *My Papa’s Waltz*,<sup>1</sup> by Theodore Roethke. I have several different classes using the same text, but they all obviously did something different with this text in their tableau. In my ... one class, there were five students in the group that were going to do the *My Papa’s Waltz* tableau, and they separated three different scenes in one snapshot, and they represented the papa (father) character, in three different still scenes. One scene was a dance, like a playful dance, just the waltz itself. The second scene was the father ... One student had a water bottle, so it was representing the father drinking alcohol, the students said, as they explained later. And the third was the father and son, the father looming over the son who was cowering on the floor. So, we had a playful father, an alcoholic father, and an abusive father. Three scenes, three different interpretations, all in one snapshot.

**Interviewer:** So, where do you see your Bakhtinian teaching here?

**Paul Spitale:** This is a lot of what my dissertation is on right now: the embodied techniques, the process drama techniques, and I’m using my actual classes to study this. I initially find that students, when presented with a piece and asked, “Can you explain the piece to me?” give a real surface interpretation

<sup>1</sup><https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43330>



initially: “Well, okay, *My Papa’s Waltz* is about a son dancing with his father.” Or, “Okay, well, what about the whiskey on his breath, what does that mean? Why would the author mention that?” We get into a discussion where they start thinking and interpreting beyond the actual words so that they get a little more depth, then I break them off into groups and they research. Each group has a different task, so one group might research the history, what was going on during the time that the poem was written, during the time that the poem was published, another group researches the author and relates the author’s life to the poem; if there’s any relation that they can see or find.

And so, that’s some of the initial things that we go through. That’s one of the first things that we do, the first week of class, to dive right in so they know what they’re getting into right away. And it’s unconventional for many of them. I also have them write journals, reflective journals on how they felt about what they did in class, and a lot of them have expressed that they haven’t experienced anything like that before. And most of them are freshmen coming right from 12th-grade high school. It’s very interesting, their interpretations.

**Interviewer:** And what specifically would your students like about that? Do they say something about what’s interesting for them?

**Paul Spitale:** Just that they ... I don’t wanna say often, but more than once or twice a student has said that they weren’t required to do the thinking like that, they weren’t required to think beyond the words on a paper, which is odd to me. Maybe it attests to our public-school system, our graduation rates, but I’ve found that on more than one occasion as a reflection. I guess another theme would be that they’ve definitely never done the tableau, and I also have them do improvisation exercises in the class with the same guidelines as the tableau that I just explained, but they are to do a 60-second to 3-minute live scene or scenes on the piece as well.

I saw something recently this past semester that kind of interested me. Continuing with the *My Papa’s Waltz* example, I had a student who initially, when he was introduced with the poem in class, said that he wasn’t sure if the poem was about child abuse or about alcoholism, or if the father was just playful. He said, in his journal, “I think it’s a combination of both.” But then when his group was given the task to do a tableau about *My Papa’s Waltz* and this student was picked to be the father, they [peers in the group] wanted him to be the abusive father who just beat the child. He was hesitant, and not hesitant of doing it, but he expressed it as, “Are we sure that that’s what the poem is about?” When he embodied the father character, or was about to embody the father character, he then questioned, “What is really going on here? I’m not sure that the guy is a child abuser.” So, he went back, he was unsure in the beginning, as he said, but then when he was given the chance to embody the character, he went with no child abuse: “I think the father is just a little tipsy and he’s playing a little rough with his kid.”

So, I thought that was really interesting. I saw it twice, actually. Once, a student did that, as I just said, during the tableau. And then another time, another student did it when we used *My Papa’s Waltz* as an improvisation piece.

But the position of, “I don’t think the father was abusive” came from a female student who wasn’t even tasked with the father’s role. So, I thought that was really, really interesting. Once they’re given this opportunity to embody the characters that they’re really thinking, it almost gives them a chance to see the characters as human, rather than a fictional piece. Just a piece of paper. So, very, very interesting.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And why do you specifically like that? Is it because something unexpected happened or is it because it is a very deep way of understanding, or something you never thought yourself before, or what?

**Paul Spitale:** I think it’s a little of all of that. I think that I wasn’t expecting that shift to happen, I just thought that once a student makes up their mind, that that’s it, okay, and then here we go with the next case. But the fact that they said, “Wait a minute! This antagonist guy; I don’t think he’s all that bad.” It was pretty amazing to see that. And as I couldn’t be everywhere at once, I had recorded these for my dissertation transcripts. So, looking back on that and seeing that happen when I wasn’t even around the group? It was just a really, really interesting thing for me to see and think about. And I didn’t really think about it too deeply when I first saw it, but after going over it again, thinking “Wait a minute, maybe this process drama exercise actually affected the way that the student interpreted the piece; interpreted the character.” So yeah, it was very interesting to see that the students’ interpretations change.

**CASE#3: PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICH PEDAGOGICAL VIOLENCE,  
EUGENE MATUSOV, USA, INTERVIEWED BY ANA MARJANOVIC-  
SHANE AND MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI ON 2015-08-18**

**Bakhtinian Educator, Eugene Matusov:** When I started teaching undergraduate classes in 1996, I was a postdoc. At that time, I had a very conscious idea that I would teach in a Bakhtinian way, although what I did was terrible teaching—it was terrible teaching.

Well, it was terrible because my teaching was kind of Socratic—more Socratic than Bakhtinian—or, maybe, Bakhtinian Socratic. I really liked to disrupt students’ ontological and epistemological life in a very violent way. Let me give one example of that. I was teaching education and psychology students in a fall quarter. It was a course on informal learning. Once, I asked them to bring bread, peanut butter, and knives to the class to teach each other how to make a peanut butter sandwich.

So, they obediently split in pairs and taught each other how to make a peanut butter sandwich. I gave them time to do that. Then I asked them to tell how they did this and then, how they organized their guidance. Almost at the end of the class, one student asked me, “What was the point of this exercise?” I asked them what they thought it might be. Some students replied to learn about scaffolding—a type of guidance we studied. And I told them,

Not exactly. The point of this exercise was to show to you that I can ask you to do whatever nonsense, like for example, “teaching” how to make a peanut butter sandwich people who already know perfectly well how to do that and you will do it without asking me about the purpose or challenging me. Your last question actually a little bit violates my point, but other than that, my illustration was pretty good. Indeed, the teacher can ask students to do whatever nonsense he or she wants and the students in their conditions will do it without questioning that unconditionally.

The students were visibly upset but quiet. The class was over.

Well, that class was a night class—I came home very late. I checked my email before going to sleep and I noticed an email from my student from this class. He wrote, “I am a senior student. This is my last semester and let me tell you that out of all classes that I had experienced, definitely you are the worst professor!” [laughter] Many of my students wrote in my course evaluation how terrible a teacher I was.

Now, can you imagine my surprise: when I was teaching a winter quarter class, on my first class meeting, I saw almost two-thirds of my fall class, my previous students? I asked them, “Are you masochists?! You hated my previous class, so why are you here?!” They told me [laughter] that during the break, they had been telling everybody about how terrible their fall class was with me. But then they had realized that they had been constantly talking about this crazy class—something, they never talked about their other classes. They told me that they had realized how important the class was for their lives, how it had forced them to rethink their lives and their education [laughter]. They had started realizing that it was really something important [that] happened. So, they just came to this new class to dig deeper. My students’ replies made me realize that I was doing something very important for them in my teaching, but that I don’t need to be that violent. I realized that I didn’t need to be that Socratic, in a way. I didn’t need to humiliate students for them to learn. That was part of my learning.

**Interviewer:** So, in a way, you learned how to create provocations that were ontologically important for the students but not violent?

**Eugene Matusov:** Yeah. Not violent, not humiliating, not putting down the students, yes. It was easy to some degree to do that before—to be Socratic and nasty because it was very dramatic and it was very disturbing for the students and, yet, they also had to think about that. It was very internally persuasive and very penetrating discourse, using Bakhtinian terms. They could not think about the issues. It was difficult for them to just put aside all of that. But, my Bakhtinian Socratic teaching was very violent and inhumane.

**Interviewer:** So, how would you say that your practice was changing, in terms of how you create provocations and in terms of how you create relationships with students, since it is now almost 20 years since that event?

**Eugene Matusov:** At first, I would say my Bakhtinian focus was on being ontological at any price. So, the price of violence was very, how to say, tempting,

because it's difficult for the students to ignore violent things. It's very difficult to ignore that, so that by nature the violence is very ontological, and plus again, if you read Socrates—he sounds like an ontologically and dialogically powerful teacher.

But after this experience, I definitely moved away from that. I started with Bakhtinian Socratic teaching in part because my model dialogic teacher, my high school physics teacher, was very, very Socratic and very humiliating and a lot of my classmates hated him for that.

So, I definitely wanted to move away from that. Yes, I tried to drop my Socratic side, although, maybe, not completely as my 2013 book shows (Matusov & Brobst, 2013). But now I think I'm fully over it.

### CASE#5: HOW TO MAKE SCHOOL SUCK LESS? AARON YOST, USA, INTERVIEWED BY EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2015-12-03

**Bakhtinian educator, Aaron Yost:** I had two very different groups of students the year I returned to teaching from sabbatical. I had a 10th-grade English credit recovery class of mostly boys that were in there because they failed an English class the year before, so lower-end, struggling students, students who didn't feel like school gave them much. And then, on the other end of the spectrum, I had these AP [Advanced Placement] rhetoric students—65 of them in three different classes. It wasn't super purposeful on my part, but I came into those classes wanting to talk to students about what they wanted from school.

The credit recovery class started with just nine students, eight boys and one girl. My first question to them on the first day of class, instead of going over a syllabus, was, "Why are you here?" [laughter] They weren't writers—they didn't want to write. That was for sure from the very first moment. Some of them were able to put pen to paper and write some stuff out. Others just waited until we talked, but I got the basic sense. There was, I don't know, all different kinds of answers to that.

**Interviewer:** Really? In my cases, it's almost unanimous, "It's required."

**Aaron Yost:** Yeah. [laughter] I got all kinds of answers from "it's required" to some pretty big existential questions. Yeah [laughter]. And I think I was surprised and pleased by that, with that particular group of students because they were sharp, they were critical, they could think. So, they were in that class because of some other problem, for some other reason. And so, from the very first week, we set about trying to figure out what wasn't working for them and trying to articulate it. And so, out of that grew a project and they named it, titled, "How to make school suck less."

It took us the whole semester to produce a product, and I was trying to do this thing where the students really would lead the process. And they did, for the most part, though I often had to put some sticks in their backs to keep them moving forward. Or, I had to find some carrot. For example, while we

were trying to figure out what wasn't working for them, we talked our way to the idea that we should probably find out if other students were struggling in the same ways and they came up with a bunch of interview questions. They went out and interviewed students. They compiled stuff. They went and did outside research to find if other students in other places were going through the same things. They also tried to see if somebody else, other students, had proposed any kinds of solutions to the problems they were finding. I did all kinds of things to motivate them to keep working. I don't think any of them had ever done anything academic for any sustained period of time [laughter]. So, one day, a research day—I brought \$5 cash. [laughter] And just said, I need somebody to find something that answers this question. I put a dollar bill down on the top of the computer. I've never seen kids work so fast in my life. It was the money that was motivating them, yeah, I think [chuckles].

It was interesting to hear the frustrations from them throughout the whole thing, especially because they weren't finding solutions. The only people who'd proposed solutions to the problems they were describing were adults who didn't have any credibility, in their minds, to answer those questions. And so, we had a project. It was to try to answer those questions—as students for other students—to try to create a product that would do some good for students. That felt like a dialogic project for me.

**Interviewer:** Can I ask you something, please? Did your students try to apply solutions that they were talking about in your class, just immediately trying out some of these ideas in your class, for example, or did it never happen?

**Aaron Yost:** Trying things out, the solutions? Yeah, like those that were immediately applicable. When I asked students about the project afterwards, a couple of them, even a full year afterwards, talked about just that. Of course, some aspects of it weren't successful, but they were able to apply some of the things to their own education.

For example, their pamphlet included four suggestions for struggling students, four areas they identified through their research that would help them and students like them. One of them was *Managing pace*, like how things go too fast or too slow in a classroom. So, we started talking about that a lot in our own work. It was like, *are we speeding through this too fast? or is this dragging on? how do we do this right—how do we keep from getting bored?*

They also included *Managing distractions*. So, of course, we talked about that a lot. It became a constant subject of our discourse that it was, I guess, partly my role to try and help them manage those things. [Suddenly a school intercom went on with an announcement from the school principal.] Another “Welcome to high school” moment and our interruptions. This is a good example of school distractions, right? [laughter] Isn't that funny?! [joint laughter]

And then one that I was really impressed they worked their way to. It's hard to remember too specifically in hindsight how you end up at some of these things, but they had *Building relationships* as a really important factor for them, in terms of staying engaged both with teachers and with other students. That

arose out of a lot of interviews with other students, the ones that were connected and engaged. It was because of the people more than the content. So, I don't know.

I mean, with that particular one, it was a frustrating class for me because by the end of this project, we had a 50 percent attrition rate. I had lost half of the students in that class. They dropped out or moved away or something. How could that not feel like a failure, especially when we had identified all these ways to improve things? But they still left.

Because, that was those at-risk students. And being there and showing up was one of the chief barriers to their success. So, there were some ironies floating around in there too and throughout this whole thing. So, we were able to test out some of those things, and I think we also tested out the language of the product on each other, and that's what ended up taking the project down, the language. After weeks and weeks of work, we had put together a brochure and wanted to distribute it to the other students in the school. We have 850 kids in our high school, but we needed to have administrator approval before we could pass anything out.

Our principal at that time wasn't very academic, if that makes sense?! [laughter] But, he took a look at the pamphlet and the title was "How to make school suck less," which the students and I had negotiated. We had talked about it a lot. I tried to encourage them to use more elevated language, but they had convinced me that if we wanted students to pick the pamphlet up and read it, it needed to be in their language. It needed that word in the title. Our principal took one look at the cover and said, "You can't say 'suck,'" and I said, "Well, can you read the thing first? See if it ..."—and I told him about the rhetorical situation, that this was a big part of our class, and that we had talked about audience and making these arguments to this audience and what we needed to do to do that.

He kept the pamphlet and eventually took it to the superintendent, and it was agreed upon among all the administrators that we couldn't use the word "suck" anywhere in the pamphlet. And so, I had to bring that back to the remaining students in that class and propose the language change. They were furious, I mean, just furious that they had a perfectly good rationale for the language choice, but somebody from outside made them change it.

**Interviewer:** So, how did they change that?

**Aaron Yost:** ... I remember this pretty clearly. They refused [chuckles]. They were like, "No we're not changing the language," and I said, "Well if you want to finish this, I mean if you want to have other students read this..." And they said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, you just change it." It had already been sabotaged, so it ended up being, "How to get more out of school."

**Interviewer:** You know what, my immediate idea is that's a very interesting political and pedagogical situation! Coming from the Soviet Union, my immediate idea would be that I would strike the word "suck" with a black marker and put a footnote, "this is what was censored by the school administration," and that would have kind of satisfied both audiences.

**Aaron Yost:** Wow! The students would know what the word was. I am so upset that I didn't think of that.

**Interviewer:** But this comes with my Soviet experience. [laughter]

**Aaron Yost:** I needed to seek some better sources on what to do there.

**CASE#6: ALLOWING THE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE  
IN DESIGNING THE FINAL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS, BEATRICE  
LIGORIO, ITALY, INTERVIEWED BY MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI  
ON 2015-11-17**

**Bakhtinian Educator, Beatrice Ligorio:** I have 300 students, so I just deliver lectures, I don't do any Bakhtinian thing in comparison to the other course [I was talking about]. In a course with over 300 students, I am tempted to just deliver lectures. I do just a little thing, I tried a little bit, but with so many students it's hard.

**Interviewer:** You said that you tried a little thing, what is this little thing you tried?

**Beatrice Ligorio:** I tried a little thing. I asked my education and psychology [undergraduate] students [at the university] where I teach to imagine to be in my place. "Imagine you are the professor and have to decide what questions you, the professor, would like me to ask you, the students. If you were me what would the questions be? I mean, what do you think are the interesting questions that could be asked?" With this, I make them ready for the final examination: They tell me the questions and I take note of the questions. And I actually use those questions and we discuss whether they are good questions or not.

**Interviewer:** So, you actually make your students be participants in the mechanism of control?

**Beatrice Ligorio:** Yes, and I also give them some power. I ask them to think of the questions that they think are good questions. Not silly questions like, "Who said that or what year did this happen?" I say to my students, "I don't buy it that you think that with these questions I would understand how much you studied. It is not the case. Come on, let's play another game! So what questions do you think really would make it possible for me to realize you really understood the topic we're discussing?" And, of course, Bakhtin is part of my teaching there too. But I use this strategy for the whole program. I use this idea on the very first day when I start teaching. For the final assessment, I organize these questions into a multiple-choice test. Usually, final examination is a big concern for students, because they don't like multiple choice, and I agree with them. So, I use the interview. So, when they propose a question, we discuss if this really is a good question.

**Interviewer:** Where are these discussions going on? You mentioned there is a course for 300 people. Is it discussion groups? Is it in the audience where you lecture?



**Beatrice Ligorio:** I introduced this idea on the very first day of teaching. So, every lesson, every teaching class, we use the last ten minutes for this type of discussion. I ask them, “Okay, start thinking of one or two questions. One question could be enough for each lecture.”

**Interviewer:** And then you make a choice and these questions become part of this oral interview that you have at the end?

**Beatrice Ligorio:** Exactly.

**CASE#8: TEACHING MARXISM-LENINISM IN A SOVIET COLLEGE,  
ALEXANDER LOBOK, USSR, INTERVIEWED BY EUGENE MATUSOV  
ON 2015-10-30**

**Bakhtinian educator, Alexander Lobok:** Thus, I discover myself in Bakhtin ... and ... just a bit later, my pedagogical career begins. And initially I work with university students, not school students.

Well, it was actually 1980. This year I graduate from the philosophy department and it marks the beginning of my university teaching period [in Sverdlovsk—now Yekaterinburg—a city in the eastern part of the Soviet Union]. And, to tell the truth, from the very beginning I realize that I do not want to teach by *lecturing* and I simply couldn’t do it. I could not come to the pulpit and tell kids something that I want or have to tell them for some reason. I was well aware that this is, figuratively speaking, “not my cup of tea.” This is simply not for me. And I must add that, as a graduate of a philosophy department of a Soviet university, I had to work in the field of the so-called “Marxist-Leninist philosophy,” which existed in many universities as a genre of ideological dogmatism. And it was a mandatory discipline, the sole purpose of which was to prove that Marxism-Leninism was the only decent philosophical teaching in the world.

My students were undergrads of the polytechnic university. They were about 17, 18, or 19 years old, and the first group of students with whom I began to work were the students of the engineering-economic department. Those students were going to become experts in the economics of engineering and technical progress. But, I am speaking now with our contemporary idioms, though it was much more down-to-earth then. So, I needed to somehow introduce them to the subject of philosophy. It must be mentioned that, when I was a student of philosophy, the most important figures for me were Heidegger, Sartre, the existentialists, Western philosophy, and, for example, early Marx was also important for me, when he was a philosopher, not a political economist. I also highly valued Hegel, Kant, and some others. But when I came to work at the polytechnic university, I had to teach something totally different. There was a course, which was called “Marxism-Leninism,” a pretty narrow course, and, as could be judged by the textbook, it was an absolutely dogmatic course. Let me explain what I mean by “dogmatic.” Let’s put it this way—it was a

course in which I had to deliver a set of ideologemes [ideological truths] and some interpretations according to a predetermined plan.

**Interviewer:** Can you give an example, please?

**Bakhtinian educator:** Okay, for example, I have to tell my kids that ...

**Interviewer:** May I help you? For example, you have to tell students that “The doctrine of Marx is all-powerful because it is true” [quote from Lenin about Marx].

**Alexander Lobok:** Yes, right. Or, for example, “the three principles and three main parts of Marxism” [Lenin’s essay on Marx]. In fact, it was so insignificant and uninteresting to me, absolutely insignificant and totally uninteresting, that I don’t even remember it now—just because I never, ever for a second, taught it.

But the truth is I have never taught ideology. I had a stupid textbook entitled *The principles of Marxist-Leninist philosophy*.

**Interviewer:** Authored by Spirkin, if I am not mistaken.

**Alexander Lobok:** No, maybe Fedoseyev. I do not remember that and that is absolutely unimportant, what name was printed there. I just knew that I absolutely could not speak about all that stuff to kids, in order for them to “internalize” that stuff. To teach that way would be *disgraceful* for me.

So, how did I teach? I would enter the classroom, sit on the edge of a desk, and say, “Here you can see this textbook. Please, open it, leaf through it, and tell me what questions you have about it? Do you have *any* questions?” This was literally how I would start my first class meeting. And it was totally novel for students. They were used to professors delivering some “knowledge” to them. Whereas here was a weird young man—me—who was asking them not to learn the text but to come up with questions for it. And he was asking for *any* questions—they could be childish, silly—*any* questions. Questions beginning with “Why?,” “What?,” “How?,” “Why the heck ...?,” “Is it true that ...?”

In fact, I was suggesting that students should use these ultimately simple questions in order to deconstruct that extremely ideologized text. Here, for example, let’s take this rigid [Marxist] ideological maxim: “Matter is primary and consciousness is secondary.” Well, it turns out we can ask lots of questions about this maxim: “How so? Is it true? What if it is not so? What is behind it? What is the meaning of this principle? Why is it so crucial for Marxism to insist on the primary status of matter?” In other words, from that point, which has quite ideological origins, a cloud of your own questions and meanings begins to grow. And each person has his or her own questions. And when it all started to happen, the students began looking at this course from a different angle—they began to understand that that textbook was not a set of dogmas for them to memorize, but a sort of a challenge to their own thinking. Moreover, such a challenge could be provided by any text, no matter how idiotic it might be. To tell the truth, though, that textbook of Marxism-Leninism was not altogether idiotic, because it actually was quite multilayered. It did contain many very rigid ideologemes but, at the same time, it also contained many built-in, paradoxical, and intellectually charged elements. Because, if there is at least one

genuine quote from a real text within this ideological text, then this genuine quote alone is more alive than the whole text written by Professor Spirkin or Professor Fedoseyev. Because a quote is always a *different voice*. And the textbook always contained, besides all those ideologemes, a few real quotes from Hegel, from Kant, or from “Western bourgeois philosophers,” since there always was a chapter entitled “The critique of modern bourgeois philosophy.”

But, you have to understand, in order to critique the bourgeois philosophy, you need to use at least one quote. Therefore, a possibility arises for multiple readings and interpretations of these quotes. And when we begin to work with this space in earnest, when we begin to ask our own questions, we suddenly come to realize that this quote from Hegel, or Marx, or Sartre, or Russel, is much more interesting and meaningful than the interpretation it was reduced to. Because, as a rule, those interpretations were primitive. The authors of the Soviet philosophy textbooks tried to persuade students that an original bourgeois philosopher “misunderstands” something, that Hegel “misrepresented” something, that “the correct way” of thinking is different—but as soon as we ask the question “Why?” we begin to see this text from another angle. Besides, I should point out that it was important for me that the questions were asked not by me but by my students. I would give them a general assignment: come up with as many questions for this text as possible! I would announce a contest of questions: Who can ask the most questions for this text? Quite unexpectedly, from these texts there would spring up a totally new understanding. Suddenly, the “plain space” of the textbook would become multidimensional, alive, and exciting. It was exciting both for me and for my students. Only much later, did it suddenly occur to me that I had been working “according to Bakhtin” back then. However, at that point, I had no idea that I did.

**Interviewer:** And how did it occur to you?

**Alexander Lobok:** Well, I just worked and worked for a long time and I never even thought about “Bakhtinian pedagogy.”

**Interviewer:** That concept, of course, did not exist at that time.

**Alexander Lobok:** Exactly. I want to reiterate: for me, Bakhtin existed as a space, a cosmos, of his texts, which generates the impulses of inner questions, a sum of my inner, essential questions. For me Bakhtin is first of all a space for raising new, interesting, and important questions, and not just his ideas. And other authors, whom I have mentioned above, coexisted with him and they also created their spaces. I did not try to use them in my teaching by concocting them into some teaching ideology ... Well, frankly speaking, it is not even possible to take them and make up some teaching ideology out of them—Bakhtin’s work, for instance, is very inherently resistant to being turned into an ideology, into “Bakhtinism.” However, I was simply imbued with all this—imbued with this process of thinking, filled with the idea of authorship in culture—and this idea was extremely important for me. The question of the author was very important—and the question of his interpretation. The question of the text and its interpretation too.

So, it must be mentioned, that I also tried to see authors in my students. I was genuinely interested in discerning students' authorship. It was not interesting for me to see how a student could memorize and reproduce any excerpt from the textbook—but it was interesting to see the birth of his or her own authorial interpretation. And it is at the moment when their own question emerges that their authorship is being born. In the beginning, this question can be very fragile, silly, naïve, intimate, and even weird—but it is their *own* question, that is, the one coming from within the person asking it! Consequently, this question is always sincere and honest. It was at that time already that I began to develop this very important theme about a person's right to be silly, to be "incorrect." I mean "incorrect" as the other side of being "genuine." I used to tell my students, "You have the right to ask *any silly question*." Yes, it is very important to not be afraid of *silly* questions, because these "silly" questions can actually contain the most genuine truth. And we keep trying to be smart and keep protecting ourselves with our "smartness." Whereas the most important goal should be to learn how to trust your "inner child." And that actually was pretty risky back in 1980 in the USSR.

Risky, you know. When there was still that ideological noise around in the USSR, it was risky to teach students to ask basic, silly questions about the "sacred" texts.

At the same time, I did not just ask for it. After all, I was not an idiot, who did not understand the political ideological circumstances in the [totalitarian oppressive] country. I want to emphasize: my work with students was not of the [political] dissident [social justice] nature! In other words, I did not engage in "refuting Marxism"—God forbid! No, I was interested in another question—"How can one extract that *human* content that was hidden behind all those ideological dogmas?" For example, how can we see *living* Marx hidden behind all that political ideological noise?

Of course, I did not pose the question at that time about how we could understand Professor Fedoseyev [the author of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy textbook], as it was a totally different question—a question of the ideological death of a certain living philosopher. Because I have no doubts that, fundamentally, even Professor Fedoseyev was a thinking individual—but at some point, a person may start to work for a certain ideology and he or she perishes as a philosopher and turns into a slave of the ideology.

However, the ideological clichés of Fedoseyev himself and his colleagues did not attract any of my attention. What really attracted me was the question of how we could reconstruct the real content of those titans of philosophy, who somehow made it into the textbook of Marxism-Leninism. Because the most important point was that the textbook, no matter how ideological it was, still contained genuine philosopher voices—and that was crucial! It contained the genuine subjectivity of Marx, subjectivity of Aristotle, subjectivity of Spinoza, subjectivity of Kant, subjectivity of Hegel, and subjectivity of Lenin.

How were they represented? First of all, in a certain number of quotes. Because textbooks without any quotes whatsoever did not exist. So, if there is

a quote, there is a *voice* in it. And, therefore, this philosopher voice could be heard and interpreted. Consequently, even the most vapid philosophy textbook will hold some living content and this content is always multilayered and multipolar. And those few quotes, which were present in the textbooks, were enough to base the teaching on for a whole semester. The scarcity of those quotes was actually quite beneficial. Because a student can be overwhelmed with too much of a real philosopher's writing, if it's poured on him in abundance. Whereas, in this case, they have a few little excerpts from various philosophers and some interpretations thereof. And, consequently, there was an extension of meaning, which allows students to work on their own interpretations and form their own voice. All you need to do is make a leap of faith and ask your own—silly, childish—question.

And if I were asked by a government committee, “What are you doing that for?” I would reply, “Well, that helps us understand Marx better.” “It helps us understand that Marxism is not just an ideology but something that grows within each of us from some common human ground!” I would say, “Well, this is such a methodology!” And I would prove it. Well, no one really knew exactly how far we would go in our subjective interpretations. However, I will repeat—there was no political dissidence in my classroom. For, what is political dissidence? I mean, classical political dissidence? It is when we begin critiquing Marxism and refuting it. What we did, though, was different than the classical political dissidence—we tried to create a space of interpretational polyphony, where the voice of the textbook was also one of the important voices. And at the final exam, students demonstrated nothing but the voice of the textbook—according to the game rules.

And, you know, it is only now that, thanks to your question, I have realized that I was working with that textbook of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in a “Bakhtinian way,” even though I did not know it at that time. For I actually addressed my students with, “Guys, please note that there are different voices in this book. Please find these different voices!” By different voices, I meant the quotes. But it is not enough to find a voice—you also need to hear it. You need to engage in an inner dialogue with it. For example, you need to find the famous quote from the “revisionist”<sup>2</sup> [Marxist] Eduard Bernstein<sup>3</sup> [a German social-democrat]: “The goal is nothing, motion is everything,” and try to understand it through the lens of your own life—what could it mean really? What associations do we have with the word “goal”? What associations do we have with “motion”? When and in what particular situations can we say that the process of movement is more valuable than the outcomes and goals we envision for ourselves? And so on, and so forth. We create a sort of a collective cloud of our questioning with regard to this voice. And the most important point here is not that we try to understand “what Bernstein really meant by

<sup>2</sup>The Soviet ideological cliché qualifier associated with Bernstein and some other Marxist philosophers criticized by the Soviet ideological officialdom.

<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard\\_Bernstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard_Bernstein)

that,” but that with Bernstein’s help we can hear ourselves. And that we can hear this phrase as the one that has existential personal meaning for every one of us.

Regrettably, none of those discussions could be recorded back then. And I do regret a little that we could not videotape them. And, of course, I don’t remember any particular details of those dialogues with my students. And, of course, we did not undertake any full deconstruction of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy textbook with any group of students—not at all! We would just “dive” into the textbook, extract a couple of quotes, and work with them. We did it in a rather random sequence and the way we did it varied from one group of students to another. But the point is that in each group of my students that standard textbook of Marxist-Leninist philosophy would turn into a vehicle of a quite nonstandard, existential trip into the depth of one’s inner self. We did not “study” the textbook—we “travelled” around it. And, at the same time, we travelled inside ourselves. From that standard textbook we were, figuratively speaking, picking out “the raisins of philosophy”—those texts, which actualized our own desire to philosophize, to enact our “inner philosophers,” and to reach the level of that ultimate questioning, ultimate understanding of ourselves and of the world. We did not do ideology. We were engaged in growing our own personal philosophies.

Yet, bear in mind that even in my first year of teaching I worked with as many as eight groups of students, with about 20–25 students in each. However, only about a quarter of all those students actively participated in that work. But, in each of those groups, and this is a fact, we created a unique way of “travelling” through the textbook. The trajectories of our travels were totally different—we did not have a common direction. Because students picked out different “raisins” and they asked different questions. And the trajectory of our motion was absolutely open-ended, it was probabilistic. But if I was told at that time that I was working in the spirit of Bakhtin’s pedagogy, I would have been greatly surprised, even though Bakhtin already meant a lot to me then. But, for me, he was not associated with pedagogy. However, my work with those students was, in fact, to a certain extent, a “Bakhtinian” approach. But I have only realized it now, while answering your question.

**Interviewer:** What can you see as the roots of your pedagogy? So, you are an instructor in your first ever university classroom and you have this textbook by Fedoseyev. And you know how to teach by that book. Why did you suddenly decide to reject the traditional teaching? Maybe you had experienced something different in your studies? I, for one, had never experienced anything else but that traditional teaching of that “dull” stuff. What did you see as the major problems in your teaching? Do you remember?

**Alexander Lobok:** Sure, I will try to explain it. The fact is, I could never do things which were boring to me. And “making something more interesting” always equated for me to the word “thinking.” As a matter of fact, I simply could not “learn something by heart” or “memorize” something if it was not interesting to me. Just to move in the circle of well-established knowledge was

not for me. To invent something new—that was different. And much more so if I myself became a teacher. I just had to be inventive and somehow make the teaching process engaging for myself. Which meant to make it unpredictable. Which further meant that the process had to be born not in my own head but elsewhere. The Russian word “prepodavat” [“преподавать,” i.e., “to teach” in Russian] literally means “to transfer” some knowledge, and I felt a natural aversion to just transferring information.

I must also add that the philosophy department where I had studied was quite a remarkable one. There was almost no ideological propaganda at that department. It was a department where active thinking was encouraged. And with all the ideological drawbacks, we had a profound respect for original sources there. Literally, from the very beginning of their studies there, students were to accept one indisputable truth—it is not only useless to study philosophy from textbooks, it is also shameful. You need to plunge into original texts and try to understand and interpret them. A student’s ability to interpret on his or her own was highly esteemed there.

**CASE#13: MORALLY CONFRONTING A STUDENT’S BEHAVIORISM,  
ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE, USA, INTERVIEWED BY MIKHAIL  
GRADOVSKI AND EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2015-08-19**

**Bakhtinian Educator, Ana Marjanovic-Shane:** The most interesting example [in my Bakhtinian teaching practice] for me was when I greatly disturbed one of my graduate students in a course I taught on child development. This happened when I attempted to “teach the ugly truth” about behaviorism to my graduate students, current and future early childhood education teachers. The situation was especially complex in this class of students. It turned out that what I set to teach about behaviorism, as an uncontestable and final truth, was not some esoteric, abstract theory, but an educational practice to which some of my students were deeply committed.

One of my students, Sarah, was deeply personally invested in her everyday work with very young autistic children. At the same time, Sarah regarded herself to be a kind and skillful teacher who loved her young pupils. But my pedagogical desire was to disrupt and effectively undermine Sarah’s commitment to the Applied Behaviorist Assessment (ABA) technique as her main approach in working with younger children with autism (for more description and analysis of the case see, Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). I deeply felt that the use of behaviorism in education was very harmful for children.

I showed my students a video on “operant conditioning”<sup>4</sup> about B. F. Skinner’s behaviorist approach. Then I made a parallel between Skinner training pigeons by starving them, and Sarah using this kind of behaviorism with her young autistic students. I moralized the parallel between treating pigeons and

<sup>4</sup>This video can be found on YouTube: [https://youtu.be/L\\_ctJqjlrHA](https://youtu.be/L_ctJqjlrHA)



autistic children: “If you are using the same kind of techniques based on the behavioristic learning theory on children, are you really keeping them [young autistic children], in some way, hungry? And what do you think about that?”<sup>5</sup> Some of my other students picked up on my moralizing tone and vocally joined in the critique of using behaviorism with young autistic children, while the other students openly or tacitly took Sarah’s side. Sarah became incredibly disturbed as this situation made her confront her own professional ethics.

Our discussion in class resulted in Sarah’s dramatic protest. She defended her position. In a shaky voice, holding back tears, she explained in a distressed and angry tone, that in her practice, based on ABA, she was not cruel to her students. On the contrary. She said that she loved her students, she felt like a mother to them. With these words, she left the class. Later that evening she made a posting on the class online discussion forum, in which she protested the injustice of my and other students’ accusations that she may be an unethical teacher. She was both embarrassed for her outburst, and also provided her strong beliefs about her good will and gentle ways of treating her students. She wrote about how she tried to do all she could for her students, [that] she was caring and full of respect, trying to “help many students discover more about their world and themselves and to embrace school life in a more positive way for themselves . . . One of the most important roles of schools is to reach out to children and help them grow with the partnership of the child and the parents to do so” (Sarah’s writing on the class forum).

This new development made me puzzled, distressed, and dissatisfied. This event threw *me* into self-examination. What was I doing? This was far from who I wanted to become—“a dialogic humanist teacher.” I was doing something wrong, I could clearly see, but I didn’t know what. As a teacher I wanted to create a “a safe learning environment,” where the students can discuss any ideas and positions and test their ideas—but not this dramatic situation in which a student was falling apart, and everyone else was becoming distressed. I became troubled about my own lack of dialogic guidance—guidance toward a dialogue in which my students could safely deconstruct behaviorism. Instead, I saw that I had unleashed a stinging and numbing “torpedo touch” effect (Matusov, 2009; Plato & Bluck, 1961) on Sarah. I was worried that Sarah would close up, that I had lost Sarah’s trust, and with that, potentially the trust of the rest of the students. I saw that I had to change my guidance. I had to do something to restore the ease everyone in the class had with each other, the trust, camaraderie, and safety.

Before the next class meeting, I consulted my colleague, Eugene Matusov, about what to do. Eugene pointed out to me that I did not develop a dialogue with my students. I shut it down when I set out to impose my “dear ideas” on my students [rather than to explore all dear ideas critically and honestly]. Eugene suggested that I reopen the discussion about behaviorism as an open

<sup>5</sup>All quotations of my and the students’ words are from the transcript of the class audio recording, or from the class’ online forum.

inquiry in which all of us, including me, could learn something new. He suggested using a metaphor of the “magic wand.” Like behaviorism, the “magic wand” makes the students achieve exactly what the teacher wants. If there were a magic wand that one could use to make all students behave and learn exactly what a teacher wants them to do, would I use it? And if yes, when? And is there any kind of learning that would not be good to be done with the use of the magic wand?

I followed Eugene’s advice, and in the following class meeting, I reopened the discussion about behaviorism using the “magic wand” metaphor. This inquiry engaged my students and me into a lively and all-encompassing critical dialogue about the “magic wand” offering multiple views and ideas on who would use it, or not, in what situations and for what kinds of learning. We discovered surprising things about each one of us. Some of the students who were pro-behaviorist, including Sarah, brought out their concerns with the institutional pressures to “make children behave well”—to actively suppress “bad” behavior: running, loudness, not focusing attention on what the teacher wants, and so on. Another student, cynical about any possibility of school change, said that her professional responsibility [is] simply to follow institutional orders. The whole “magic wand” inquiry, to this student, felt purposeless and a bit frivolous. On the other hand, she did worry that “having too much structure in the class could take away a child’s ability and right to be a kid.”

Sarah discussed the fact that she did not like “negative reinforcements,” that is, punishments, but preferred “positive reinforcements,” that is, rewards. Sarah’s credo as a “good teacher” was to do only good for her students. Two other students with a more humanist approach to education criticized this approach as “bribery by rewards.”

The class developed a list of learning situations for which we (or some of us) would use a “magic wand,” and for which we would not. For instance, many of us would use a magic wand to “fix medical conditions like cancer,” or to “help a child to make eye contact with a teacher or a member of the family.” Almost everyone agreed that they would use a “magic wand” for children’s acute and severe self-hurting behaviors. Another “humanist student” would never use a “magic wand” to change the behaviors of others, including her own children and students. She would always be afraid to “break” the others’ personal integrity and autonomy, and hurt their real, deep needs. But instead, she would use the “magic wand” on herself, to make herself gain insight and understanding of each child’s strengths and needs, so that she as a teacher could provide the best guidance to children. The children, in her opinion, should still need to learn by themselves, through a process. She thought that if a “magic wand” would make you have “a photographic memory, [and] incredible knowledge base, but not [deeply] understand it ... that means you didn’t really learn it.”

As the class progressed, Sarah became baffled: in her opinion, the behaviorist ABA training can help children gain self-control and focus their attention, and that is precisely what “children ‘on the autism spectrum’ [were] ‘lacking,’ ...

How could such a beneficial technique be un-ethical? At what point would it become un-ethical?” It seemed that, for Sarah, the “magic wand” discussion became important and revealing. She wondered if she would change professionally and start to doubt the ultimate power of the behaviorist ABA techniques: “You know ... its ... I’m not so sure anymore ... if I’d wave the “magic wand” for all the things ... all the time ... The kids need a process [of learning] ... I think that that’s *true communication*<sup>6</sup>... and that it’s so important for them ... You know—to grow ...”

In fact, I think that all of us were examining different limits and boundaries in this “magic wand” discussion. Not just the limits of behaviorism and humanism in education, but our own limits as people and as teachers. The class had a lasting effect on all of us. Afterwards, during the rest of the course and many months and years after the class was over, a student used to contact me and say that she often felt as if “Little Professor Ana” was sitting on her shoulder making her examine her pedagogical decisions.

COMBINED CASES #15 AND #18: FASCINATING 7-YEAR-OLD  
CHILDREN INTO LEARNING BY HELPING THEM DEVELOP THEIR  
OWN VOICES, ALEXANDER LOBOK, RUSSIA, INTERVIEWED  
BY EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2015-10-30

**Bakhtinian educator, Alexander Lobok:** It was then<sup>7</sup> that I attempted for the first time to make a series of lessons with schoolchildren that would be based thoroughly on improvisation instead of a carefully planned script. I would do some impromptu provocations, the children would somehow react to them, and I would “thread” those reactions into a single common “fabric.”

[I worked with 1st-grade children,] 7- and 8-year-olds ... As a new teacher, I could come to the classroom and, instead of introducing myself to the children and stating the topic of the lesson (as teachers would normally do), I would start with a question: “Well, what ideas do you have? What are we going to do today?” And then, the children would suggest: “play!,” “draw!,” “talk!,” “learn!,” and I would write down on the blackboard all the words that they said expressing my delight about each suggestion. The point was for me to react to each suggestion in such a way that the children would come up with more and more words. And soon, along with the politically correct “learn,” we would see on the board such “incorrect” [replies by the children] as: “be silly!,” “laugh!,” “chat!,” “run!,” “get crazy!,” “make mischief.”

The important thing was that I wrote down every word and carefully spelled each of them. Also, I wrote the words in random places on the board, using different handwriting, font and size, so they all looked different. Naturally, the board would soon be covered with dozens of words—a sort of a maze of words.

<sup>6</sup>Italics indicate Sarah’s intonational stress.

<sup>7</sup>When Alexander Lobok worked at the Institute of Professional Teachers’ Training in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in the early 1990s, around and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

And only after that I could begin the following [competitive] game: who can run to the board and find this or that word or a syllable of a word? Or, who can be first to count the total number of “A” letters on the board? Or, I would erase a word and ask if they remembered what word was there. So, it all ended up being an exciting training of their writing, reading, and spelling skills, whereas all the content of our learning was born right “there and then.” And it was extremely important for me that the children could feel that they are just as important coauthors of the lesson because all the words that I wrote down on the board were suggested by them. Besides, they knew that the more words they would come up with, the more interesting our lesson will be. And they knew that each of their voices was important for me. Whereas my task was to orchestrate the process and help their various voices to mingle into an impromptu symphony.

We did not just play—we were also acquiring important skills. It was only natural that those lessons became a good training ground for my own pedagogical creativity. And for the children’s creativity too, of course. That was probably the most important outcome: the development of children’s co-creativity and their understanding that the course of our motion was not set by me but was indeed created “then and there”—in the process of our real-life collaboration. And also, it meant that I consciously followed the path of creating unforeseen situations, which forced me to activate my pedagogical creativity.

That was how my conception of probabilistic education was born (Lobok, 2012). The trajectory of our learning is naturally probabilistic. That means that the course of this development cannot be clearly planned—it can only be conjectured to a certain degree of probability. I kept repeating that, “Education is a cultural phenomenon and not a technological gain.” Therefore, the value of education is not in that we are moving towards a predetermined goal but in that we existentially evolve and become more advanced in our educational motion. What is important is that the motion itself should become more challenging and motivating with each moment and that both the teacher and the children should be involved in an ever-growing development of their resources and abilities in various cultural spheres rather than reaching a certain predetermined goal.

And that was exactly what baffled the teachers [that I taught]—the fact that I unequivocally upheld this probabilistic principle. It’s not important where to go: the point is to go—eventually, we’ll reach something [important]. The point is that the interaction between the teacher and children and among the children should take place on various cultural planes, so that both the teacher and children could experience the drive of this inner cultural motion. This will give rise to educational passion. However, the trajectories along which this educational passion will be actualized can be utterly unpredictable.

And in order for this process to be carried out successfully, it is necessary to meet two interdependent psychological requirements: (1) every child should

realize his<sup>8</sup> right for his personal voice—that he has the right to express his “I”; (2) every child should be able to manifest his “I” in such a way that his “I” would be heard and valued by others. Each voice needs articulation. And each voice needs an audience.

\* \* \*

It was in 1992, when we finally decided to announce registration for a preschool class. We ended up enrolling a group of preschoolers, from 5 to 6.5 years of age.

Initially, the context of our existence was totally informal. A number of parents became interested in our ideas and decided to entrust the preparation of their children for school to Irina<sup>9</sup> and me. They were also ready to pay us privately for that. And also, we found an innovative school principal who let us use the available classrooms of his school during after-school hours, without asking for any rental payment from us. And another year later, we met an innovative head of a regional ministry of education who gave us his support and allowed to open our first official 1st-grade class on the basis of our preschool class. He also gave us his unspoken consent on our free and unrestrained educational movement along an unplanned trajectory.

After all, it was an absolutely magic time ... We were given total “carte blanche”: no [administrative] checks, no control from the “authority organizations.” We could do whatever we wanted and move to wherever we wanted. We could build the trajectory of the collective educational movement not well in advance but in progress. Besides, the children we enrolled were not what you call “easy students,” as they had various developmental and psychological problems. With all that, we had a purely instructional goal, which was formulated as follows: we need to make sure that all the children become “addicted” to learning, so that, in the course of our probabilistic movement, all the children fall in love with reading, writing, and math. Under the existing circumstances,<sup>10</sup> it was quite a bold ambition, I must admit.

<sup>8</sup>In Russian, nouns have three genders and pronouns have to correspond to the gender of the noun. In this case, the noun “child” (“rebyonok” in Russian) has the masculine grammatical gender.

<sup>9</sup>“Irina Khristosenko, a post-graduate [developmental psychology] student, in the final year of her studies, involved in research on the nature of creative activity. Eventually, she became my wife. Irina and I (we were *we* already!) made a very dramatic decision: to switch entirely from working with teachers to working with children. Moreover, while experimenting with various groups of children and making up different ways of using play in interactions with them in learning various sets of skills (mostly in math, reading, and writing), I could already feel my strength, so to speak. I felt that I had enough resources to try and conduct the longitudinal pedagogic experiment of the probabilistic kind: what would happen if the educational work with children was based entirely on a probabilistic, unplanned approach? That’s how LPE was born—Irina’s and my *Laboratory of Probabilistic Education*” (interview with Alexander Lobok).

<sup>10</sup>In the early 1990s, the Russian state was both weak and chaotic and supportive of innovations in diverse fields and levels.

**Interviewer:** So, you are saying that the children had problems? What kind of problems?

**Alexander Lobok:** Well, various kinds. Some were hyperactive; some were hyper-aggressive; others were communicatively closed, or had articulation and speech pathology problems, or had dyslexia or dysgraphia.

And so, I enrolled such a group and, besides, it included children of different ages. And I begin systematic work with the group. ... Our group included students whose parents realized that they would have serious problems when they went to [a conventional] school. So, our group was the last hope for those parents. ... We were given students with various issues and it was my and Irina's responsibility to get those children fascinated with reading, writing, and math, and also to loosen the bonds of their psychological problems. That was exactly how we saw our main [pedagogical] goal: to *fascinate* with math, reading, and writing, as opposed to *teach* how to read, and write, and count. That was the way we presented our project to the parents too. Although before that, they had met a totally different point of view. Their children had been *taught* how to read, write, and count but, as a rule, the result was that their children started to hate reading, writing, and doing math. Eventually, the children would develop a strong resistance to learning. They had not even entered school yet, and yet they were already hating it. Therefore, we used to say, we should not "teach them to read" but, instead, to create a sum of motivational drives to ensure that the child would learn how to read by himself. We should make sure that the child really wants to read, that he gets "addicted" to reading. And the same can be said about writing—not to teach how to write, but to create a "drive" to write. The same applied to math.

At first, the group would come to our experimental classes twice a week. The children would show up and their parents, who wanted to see the process, would show up too, and then, for two or three hours, I would experiment with time, space, my provocations of the children, and their reactions to my provocations. I perceived my main task as making the children feel the learning "drive," feel self-confident, learn to present themselves in non-aggressive, non-destructive ways, and, most importantly, learn to hear others. My most valuable assistant in all that work was a standard school blackboard and piece of chalk, which I always used to record something on the board. I would draw the children's positions in the classroom and their movements in its space. I would write down children's remarks while loudly and articulately pronouncing these remarks. Then, I would offer the students to solve some "riddles"—I would ask them to guess where a certain word was written on the board or where a certain child was drawn on it. The huge blackboard would turn into a maze of signs reflecting our common, shared life in the classroom. And very soon it turned out that it was incredibly exciting to "decipher" that maze and it was extremely interesting to journey around it. The blackboard, all covered with various symbols and signs, would turn into a mirror of my interactions with the children, while our journeys around the blackboard became the most exciting game.

After the lessons with the children, we would stay and discuss the process with the parents, who had been observing it. And that reflexive discussion became another important source of our mutual development. And although not all the parents were ready to participate in that work, for some of them our reflexive chats were extremely important.

A little time passed, and the parents began to ask for more meetings and more hours of our work with children. We began to meet three times a week. Then four times. By the end of the year, we had class meetings almost every day. At the same time, nobody knew in advance what we would be doing at our next lesson. But we all knew for sure that it would be some new live interaction, which will be impromptu created “here and now,” and then it would be converted into reading, math, and writing. And here is what was absolutely unexpected: the effectiveness of that unplanned educational movement, purely in terms of learning, turned out to be surprisingly high. So, by the end of the first, “preparatory,” year the parents began insisting that we should open an official 1st-grade class—and continue studying while moving along the same unplanned trajectory. And we were lucky. We found the head of a regional administration of education who was so surprised at the results of our year-long experiment that he gave us an unusual status of an experimental pedagogic laboratory within that regional administration.

\* \* \*

Only a small part of what was happening back then has been described in my book (Lobok, 2001). Think about it: I had a whole day at my disposal and the instructional activity could take place in any zone of that day. Any children’s activity, any play activity, could be converted into written speech or a math problem. We always had a 10 m long tape measure and a scale—and, always, large surfaces for writing, where we could make notes. The most important thing is [for children] to realize that *everything can be written and everything can be measured*. The most important thing is that it must be really interesting. And the notes themselves must then turn into a fascinating game. Well, here is an example. Early in the morning, children get together in the classroom and exchange some remarks. I just sit there drinking tea. But at the same time, I am listening to what the children say. And then a girl whose name is Anya enters the classroom and says, “Oh, my backpack is *so* heavy today!” other children react to this with remarks about their own backpacks. And I challenge them: “Okay, who can guess the weight of Anya’s backpack?” And the children, including Anya, begin to throw in their hypotheses: “5 kilograms!” “10 kilograms!” “100 kilograms!” “1 kilogram!” I write down all these variants and the names of their authors—who said what. Then, with the children’s help, I arrange the variants in ascending order. This is followed by a ceremonial procedure of weighing Anya’s backpack and each child tries to figure out by how much he or she missed the mark. At that, all the funniest and most unexpected comments, which follow our activity, are also written down on the board (also with the



names of their authors). And I do not simply write them down but the children, rather, give me a spelling dictation. In other words, they spell the most difficult words letter by letter, whereas I can accept or reject their version ... And then, we excitedly play with the stuff on the board—who can find words or pieces of phrases the fastest, who can guess the overall number of certain letters or numbers, and all these activities can continue with the same level of engagement for two or three hours. And it all started with that random phrase uttered by Anya, “Oh, my backpack is *so* heavy today!” And this happens every day. Children get used to the fact that any random, insignificant phrase can trigger our learning activities for a whole day.

Or, on a different occasion, one of the children said the following phrase: “Alexander Mikhailovich!<sup>11</sup> You look like a dandelion<sup>12</sup> today!” I immediately jumped at that idea and we came up with a very exciting game called “What does Alexander Mikhailovich look like?”—we ended up with a whole series of metaphors and all of them were written down. And that was an incredible journey into the world of language, which lasted a whole school day. And it turned out that it was not only Alexander Mikhailovich about whom one might say what he looked like. It turned out that we could say that about every person. And about any object. And we could find out that it was very interesting to fill up the world with metaphors. It was real magic when we used the power of our imagination and a crumpled piece of paper turned into a burning bon-fire and a sunlight spot into a fairy-tale flower ... To create metaphors is the same as to be a magician. It is magical that the number of such metaphors is unlimited and that it can all be written down, and we can travel around it all, and then we can turn it into the subject of mathematical description and analysis. “Who will be the first to count the total number of letters ‘A’ in the words I have written? How many ‘O’ letters? And how many more ‘A’ letters have I written than ‘O’ letters? And which letter is the rarest?” And so on and so forth. There was no division between a “math lesson” and a “language lesson.” One would constantly turn into the other. Whereas the basis of all the lessons was life itself unfolding right then and there, in the classroom.

**Interviewer:** May I ask this question—where do you see Bakhtin in all of that? Or, perhaps, nowhere?

**Alexander Lobok:** Well, look—where do you think it came from that I looked like “a dandelion”? As a matter of fact, from a child’s voice. The same goes about all the other metaphors coming from other children. It is paramount to me that the authorship of all these phrases was not at all mine. Children gave birth to their own images and, for me, the most important thing was this polyphony of children’s voices. The only limit I set up in my work with children was that I waited for every child to find his or her own unique voice.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Lobok’s first and patronymic names—the official way to address teachers by students in Russia.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Lobok has curly hair—almost in an afro style.

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-10): *But then using their words for counting letters and the like is not quite a reflection of their authorship. It is possible to interpret this as an “instrumental” approach to their authorship.*

*It might well have been the case that in his delivery, he was able to maintain his respect for their voices nevertheless (he sounds like this is the case, because the children’s own voices are for him, in turn, more important than the three Rs). Much depends on how the particular interaction is handled. As a method, though, there’s a clearly non-dialogical element here. In another teacher’s hands this can easily turn sour.*

*But then, even the best dialogical methods would ring hollow in the hands of a teacher who does not genuinely respect her students’ voices, while the dullest monological didactic methods can be used to foster genuine dialogue by a teacher and students who genuinely wish to engage in dialogue with one another.>>*

I wanted it to be a unique voice and not cliché—not a reproduction of something the child heard before. And I put a lot of work into the development of such diverse children’s voices. I was looking exactly for polyphony and not for a sum of these ultimately homogenous sounds. A voice only becomes a voice when it presents its personal content and when it represents the person’s individuality. At that, I am just a radar. My task is to catch the signals and impulses coming from children and to follow those ones which most fully manifest the individuality of voices.

Here is another simple game that vividly demonstrates the essence of the interaction I model. With a group of children, I come into a certain new space—it does not matter what it is. It can be a museum hall or a forest clearing, or an ordinary street in a city. And I ask a very simple question: *What can you see here?* It is clear that the trajectory of the journey initiated from such a “scenario” is unpredictable. So, children begin to shout out their variants ... First, they point at everything obvious and, later, some small and unexpected details that were not previously noticed. ... I am just a “conductor” of this polyphonic concert. ... And such a game with the space can continue for hours and the student interest and engagement will only grow. Children open a new space as if it were a box full of jewels ... Well, this is exactly the process of finding one’s own voice—a voice that can be useful not only for oneself, but also for others. It is obvious that the trajectory of such a journey cannot be predicted in advance. It is true magic.

My role as a teacher in all this is limited to creating this game mode, triggering the start of the game among children, and upholding some discipline boundaries (the way an orchestra conductor does it), in order to bring about a polyphony, a dialogue of voices that can hear each other, as opposed to a cacophony, in which voices go over each other and fail to hear both others and themselves. My other role as a teacher is that I react with a special emotional emphasis to those children’s remarks in which, to my mind, the individuality of the child’s voice is manifested most vividly. As for the content of their remarks—this domain belongs entirely to children. I do not want them to speak with my voice—I want them to speak with their voices. Moreover, it does not matter if I “like” or “do not like” a child’s voice—the point is for the child to *have* a voice. ... “Your own voice” is something that needs yet to be found and manifested.

Here is an example of how “one’s voice” emerges in the same game with space. At first, children just enumerate everything they see around. The trajectory of each child’s gaze is, of course, unique from the very beginning. However, at the first stage, as a rule, the most “common” objects are named—the objects that would be noticed by anybody. But the longer the game continues, the more unexpected things emerge. The child begins to notice such details that no one else has noticed before. And he or she describes these details in an absolutely unique way. For example, the child notices a cluster of cracks on the wall and they remind him of a waterfall. So, the child marks the space with his subjectivity [i.e., “a waterfall”] and avoids the purely “objective” description of the space [i.e., “the wall cracks”]. And from this moment on, the journey around the space becomes captivating and potentially endless. The children come to realize that it is so “cool” to personalize the space and tell others about their experience of such personalization. And then, the most commonplace space is filled with the magic of children’s discoveries and images created by them. And the language they use to share their experience of personalization [humanization] of the surrounding world also becomes more and more personal and original. And each time it is a movement according to the principle of “go I know not whither and fetch I know not what”.<sup>13</sup> neither the children nor I know beforehand what we are going to discover (in the world, in ourselves) in the process of one such journey. It is a journey without a pre-planned end. ... And the teacher is equal to the children in that he is absolutely unaware of what the journey’s results will be. The only thing that needs to be strived for is that the result should be captivating and unexpected for both the children and the teacher. And the key component of this being captivating is the maximal individualization of the children’s trajectories. And the teacher’s role is to support this individualization of trajectories, so that a child could make a discovery and the other participants (including the adult) would feel like “Wow! That’s really cool!”

It is obvious that a child does not always speak in his own [authorial] voice. He often speaks in accordance with the standard templates and patterns—in accordance with the expectations of the adult world ... And it is the special task for an adult to support the crystallization of this inner voice in a child—and to help him believe that his voice has the right to exist. And only when the voice has been crystallized can we talk about the possibility of a dialogue—the possibility of endless listening to the unique qualities of this voice. This is how I see Bakhtin in my pedagogy.

<sup>13</sup> “Go somewhere, I don’t know where, bring something, I don’t know what” [“Поди туда—не знаю куда, принеси то—не знаю что”] is the title of a well-known Russian fairy tale. Alexander Lobok’s reference to this fairy tale gives his pedagogical approach a hint and a flair of creating a truly magical world. A translation of this fairy tale to English can be found here: [http://samlib.ru/k/kaminjar\\_d\\_g/tale.shtml](http://samlib.ru/k/kaminjar_d_g/tale.shtml); and a full-length Russian animated movie made after this fairy tale can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0Ely0bslSqM>. In English the title of the fairytale is also known as “Go I know not whither and fetch I know not what”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go\\_I\\_Know\\_Not\\_Whither\\_and\\_Fetch\\_I\\_Know\\_Not\\_What](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_I_Know_Not_Whither_and_Fetch_I_Know_Not_What)

CASE#16: THREE WAYS OF INCORPORATING THE BAKHTINIAN  
APPROACH INTO LANGUAGE LESSONS, IRYNA STARYGINA,  
UKRAINE, WRITTEN INTERVIEW BY EUGENE MATUSOV,  
BETWEEN 2015-12-30 AND 2016-07-04

One of the most widespread examples of the difficulties children encounter while creating a written text is the situation when the child cannot finish the text [without further guidance] and seeks for formal criteria: “How many sentences do I need to write?” or “How many pages should I write?” Usually, this indicates the fact that the child lacks the criteria of the semantic completeness of the text (he does not value himself as a writer and the question of whether or not he has expressed what he wanted to say does not have any value for him).

My attempts at implementing Bakhtin’s ideas in teaching can be described in three main directions:

1. Making sure that both students and teachers are involved, during the learning and teaching process, in the dialogic relations directed at understanding the cultural knowledge, which is the content of education.

Here’s what Bakhtin wrote about dialogic relations: “These relations are absolutely unique and cannot be regarded as derivative of logical, linguistic, psychological, mechanistic, or any other kinds of natural relations. It is a special kind of semantic relations, which can include complete expressions only (or the ones that are regarded as complete expressions), behind which we can see real or potential speech subjects, the authors of these expressions” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 320).

That is why, when I speak about getting students involved in dialogic relations, during the learning process, I mean the following: when we introduce any new linguistic concept (e.g., the concept of the lexical and grammatical meanings of the word in the 3rd grade), it should be connected, first of all, with the discussion about what students already know about the word meaning, who told them about it (their older siblings, parents, friends, etc.), and what exactly they have heard about word meanings before. Later, when we continue studying this topic (which can take a few lessons), the students are asked to reflect on that previously started discussion and add something to it.

I need to mention that, if it turns out that the students have not yet encountered any statement of the discussed phenomenon, the teacher can use special texts from textbooks, in which the characters engage in a conversation about a similar topic, and the students are then invited to join this conversation. I borrowed this idea from Vladimir Repkin’s textbook on teaching Russian.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>I have coauthored, with Elena Perepelitsyna and Nadezhda Sosnitskaya, textbooks on teaching the Ukrainian language for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades, which are recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to be used in the country’s elementary schools.

2. I have developed an approach to teaching writing which allows students by the time they graduate elementary school to reach the benchmark of the addressed, semantically complete written utterances (which, according to Bakhtin, is called a “secondary utterance”).

Using Bakhtin’s understanding of an addressed and semantically complete utterance, I distinguish a few levels of children’s written speech: not-addressed speech, addressed and incomplete speech, and addressed and complete speech. The completeness can be formal and simply reflect the requirements of the genre (“I am supposed to say it this way”), or it can be semantic and reflect the writer’s own speech volition (“I want to say it this way”). A semantically complete utterance triggers the reader’s intellectual and emotional response of agreement/disagreement. Based on my experience, I can state that about 40 percent of students demonstrate the level of addressed and semantically complete written speech when they are taught with the help of the special approach, whereas without the implementation of that approach only 3 percent do so.

In order to assess the levels of written speech of children, I have developed a methodology, entitled “Teremok,” which in Russian means “Little house.”<sup>15</sup> According to this methodology, the child is asked by the teacher to create a text based on the turns of the following dialogue: “Who lives in this little house?—I, Noisy Fly, do.—and I, Mosquito, live here.—and I, Weird Thing, do.—and I, Duckweed, do too.—And who are you?—I am Field Dweller.—Come and live with us!” The child is asked to do the following: “Imagine that the turns of this dialogue are said by cartoon characters and you are watching this cartoon on TV. Try to imagine everything that can be happening in this cartoon and write down the whole episode.”

Here’s an example of a child’s secondary utterance, which represents semantically complete addressed written speech:

- Since ancient times there has been a house on a flower field. A Field Cricket flies by and asks,
- Who lives in this palace?
  - Suddenly there comes a familiar voice from inside the house (it was a fly):
  - I do, I am Noisy Fly.
  - The cricket is glad that he will not be alone in this house. But then he hears a few other voices:
  - I live here too, I am Mosquito—somebody says in a weak voice.
  - And I do too, I am Weird Thing—somebody says roughly.
  - The cricket wanted to ask who that was but he could not do it as other voices followed:
  - I live here, I am Duckweed on the water.

<sup>15</sup> See the article by Starygina, 2004.

- And who are you?—they asked finally.
- I am Field Dweller—he replied.
- Come and live with us!—yelled the fly.
- “She must be excited about my visit”—thought the cricket and jumped into the house. So, there was one more person in the house. But then many more “visitors” came by that house.

If we analyze this text, we can notice that the child used all the eight remarks given in the assigned dialogue—the child did not omit any of them and did not change them. This means that the child keeps the addressee in mind (in this case, it is an adult who asked the child to work with the dialogue) and constructs his speech addressed to the adult. At the same time, the child is not “an active part” of the given interaction as he or she acts from two positions: (1) in the position of an observer (“being outside”) he reconstructs in his imagination the given remarks into a chain of primary utterances (words + gesticulation + facial expressions, intonations) and thus, he establishes the semantic relations between the sentences; and (2) in the position of an addresser, he expresses with the help of language his own understanding of the situation and demonstrates both the “monolithic connection” between his text and the well-known description of this interaction (in the Russian fairy tales “Little House” and “Little Mitten”), and his position as an observer.

3. Getting students involved in drama-based creative work as a cultural form which allows to view themselves from the aesthetic angle (i.e. “holistically,” according to Mikhail Bakhtin).

The direction of my search was influenced by Lev Vygotsky’s reflections on the psychology of actors in his article “On the problem of the psychology of actors’ creative work” (Vygotsky, 1936) and Mikhail Bakhtin’s reflections on the actor’s aesthetic creative work in his unfinished work *Author and hero in aesthetic activity* (1986). Vygotsky is not interested in the actor who “lives” on stage, in other words, when he is identified on the stage with himself (“double acting,” according to Diderot (1883)). Rejection of oneself on stage and “full integration” with the character (“the truth of feeling,” according to Konstantin Stanislavsky, 2003) does not satisfy Vygotsky either. He values that way of acting, when the actor manages not only to play the role but *to play the role of the actor who plays the role*. In Bakhtin’s work we can find his reflection stating that, in order to create aesthetically, an actor does not only need *to feel from the inside* but also *to see oneself from the outside*: “[The] actor both imagines life and reflects it in his play. If he just imagined it, played it for the sake of this life felt from inside, without shaping it with the help of the energy coming from outside, just like what children do, he would not be an artist—he would be, at best, just a good albeit passive instrument in the hands of an artist (a director, author or an active viewer)” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 75).

My experience demonstrates that the transition from role-play to dramatic creative activity can be ensured through the child's involvement in a role-play game of "theater," where *the child becomes an actor playing "an actor."* At the same time, the game rules include a discussion of the actor's expressive behavior, that is, the situation is created in which the child can see oneself "from outside."

CASE#19: THE CHIVALRY OR SEXISM DILEMMA, EUGENE  
MATUSOV, USA, INTERVIEWED BY ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE  
AND MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI ON 2015-08-18

**Bakhtinian Educator, Eugene Matusov:** I taught a course on cultural diversity to the pre-service future teachers. In one of the classes, a student suggested a new topic for our curriculum—that we should discuss chivalry. The class voted on selecting this topic out of many other curricular topics from our Curricular Map—a list of possible curricular topics for the class that I developed and the students amended. This topic got me thinking on how I could create a provocation to start a dialogue about chivalry, what exactly this student meant by chivalry, why my students were interested in chivalry, how it was relevant for our class on cultural diversity in education, and what my students wanted to learn about it. I started exchanging emails with this student. In the course of this exchange, I realized that he had some great ideas about chivalry. For example, he pointed out how being a young male adult, how much he was confused about chivalry: should he open a door for a female, pay for a lunch in a restaurant, offer his help to carry heavy bags, offer his seat on public transportation. He raised a question of what we, elementary teachers, should teach our young students about chivalry, why, and how. Therefore, I invited him to teach this class. My invitation was accepted. This made me finally realize what the whole thing of chivalry was about for these young people. He was a young male surrounded by females in our class and he did not know how to behave with females when many cultural norms have [currently] become eroded with the disappearance of clear gender roles, gender division of labor, and gender hierarchy. These gender relationship changes bring about very many educational issues, including how and what we should teach boys specifically about chivalry.

It was also very interesting because he asked me how he should teach this topic: should he use PowerPoint, for example? I replied that he should teach in a way a student, his peer, like him would teach other students. Concerning the PowerPoint, I replied that if he found it useful, he should use it, if not, he should not do that. While he was teaching this lesson, I was positively surprised about how the students socialized in dialogic teaching because he taught dialogically—he prepared provocations and used them in such a way that they resulted in terrific discussions. They discussed the history of chivalry, its transformations, its controversies, and its pedagogy. Participants of this particular class meeting were not only my students, future teachers, but also we had visitors, high school kids with a minority background and their [male] teacher who came from a neighborhood school to see what the college was all about.



These kids [and their teacher] became excited and wanted to participate in the discussion that my student organized.

This experience resulted in me starting encouraging my students to teach classes, as a part of my classes. So now, if a student suggests a topic, I will encourage him or her to consider teaching this topic. Some will agree, some will not. What is interesting is that they actually create their own teaching. I never tell them how they should prepare the class. I tell them that they have full freedom, and they can ask me to be their assistant, tell me what and how I can help them if they need me (some ask for my help and some don't). The vast majority of them, with very few exceptions, really try to do a dialogic teaching based on our class dialogic practices such as developing ontological dialogic provocations, bringing alternatives, asking the students to vote on alternatives, asking them about reasons for their opinions, and so on. This gives me a window in how they see our class pedagogy.

One of my students did a project about homework and its effectiveness. She found that homework has zero educational effectiveness regardless of the type of homework. At the end of her presentations, she asked me what I was going to do with her presentation. This experience had me rethink homework in my courses after I explored literature and came to the same conclusion as my student. I realized that assigned homework is a colonization of the students' time. With some trepidation, I actually decided to move away from homework in both my graduate and undergraduate classes. For the first time, my classes did not have homework. Actually, sometimes some of my students do homework but it is not assigned by me and this is their own educational activism.

CASE#23: TEACHING WITHOUT PREJUDICES, SILVIANE  
BARBATO, BRAZIL, INTERVIEWED BY EUGENE MATUSOV  
ON 2015-11-23

**Bakhtinian Educator, Silviane Barbato:** How to respect, but also, how to show other ways of doing it, I don't know, without prejudice. This is my problem! [chuckle]

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by prejudices? Can you give an example?

**Silviane Barbato:** Well, that experience I wrote you. There was that guy [in my] class ... and the next day, all my apps were hacked, all, all my gadgets were hacked. [laughter] So I just [felt] I don't want, anymore, to go to that class. [chuckle] And *that's* the prejudice. And I even didn't know if he was the person doing that. But anyway, he had all my [addresses] I had put ... on the board. So, it was really difficult for me to get in these boundaries.

What does it mean to be the teacher here? What should I do? How should I do it? And how to reflect on my ways of doing it? And to do it in a better way? I was thinking "everybody has the right to education." If it was him, I don't know if I succeeded. But anyway, things stopped after a while.

But, it's like that [with] people who are living in *some kind of different cultural contexts that are not mine*, [not] my usual context of identification. And then, all these things happened in my mind, and I stopped expecting everybody to act the same, and do the same things and ... not to be different. It is a daily effort, although my discourse is: I like the differences. [chuckle]

But, how should I look to the person? How? If I don't like what he or she is saying, how can I be that teacher here? How can I be someone that's giving the right conditions for them to reflect on whatever they are thinking about—things, or how the world functions, and how things work? It's like it's a continuous reflection, continuous in term of dialogue. It's very Piagetian internal dialogue. [chuckle] But, it's like this.

**Interviewer:** So where do you see your role? And what are you trying to achieve when you see, like in your case that you're just talking about, something that you don't like in how students talk or think or what values they have? What are you trying to do?

**Silviane Barbato:** Well, the first thing I try to do is to give them something about moral development to read. [chuckle]

**Interviewer:** Say more. If possible, can you give a specific example of that?

**Silviane Barbato:** I don't need to give them Piaget to read about making good judgments, as expected in our cultures, and about how to do the right things [chuckle]... and about building a better world. Well, sometimes I give them some readings on ecology that are written by some Brazilian professors or that work with activism, feminism, or work with moral development that has nothing to do with what this person is going to teach. But, I create a context where the person can think about important issues that are important for our culture. One of them is ecology. And that can give him or her other subjects that are directly related to child development, child moral development, and teenager's and adult's moral development, but that are in a wider context of reflection. So, I take it to myself: "You are the problem. [chuckle] Shouldn't you think about it too?" Once I think like that, then I get all the diversity of thoughts that one can't even imagine.

So, this is what I try to do but also to explore other contexts in the same subject, so I get some of the news from newspapers that talk about people, teachers doing things that are not expected from them. The main question is how to think of solutions with the other, in a different dynamic of learning and acting alone and/or together.

I think I told you about this, one of the polemic [class online] forums I like a lot is about a teacher, mathematics teacher, in high school. In the first year of high school, in Brazil, they are 14 years old. And he made a test, and these were children living in the outskirts of one of the big cities here in Brazil. Santos, which is a city ... near Sao Paulo—very industrial city. And these were very poor people, children living in a context of drugs and prostitution. So, he invented a test that was about how many kilos of cocaine you can sell in the street at that price. And if you mix it with another chemical, you should get much more money for the product. And how, if you are a girl with an addic-

tion, a drug addiction, and you should work for a pimp, how many jobs she should do to get one gram of, I don't know, crack. See? And this was the test, and some of the children, just the teenagers, just had a good laugh.

But, one of them didn't understand what was happening! She was very young. She took the test to her mother, so she could help her answering the question [chuckles]. It was a scandal! A scandal! But they didn't interview the teacher. So, in the newspaper article, everybody was talking about the teacher, and what he did, and were showing the test, but there were no interviews with the teacher, or the director of the school.

So, I started using polemic examples, like the one on Moodle,<sup>16</sup> for a discussion forum in my class. Before that, usually, I didn't get much participation in traditional forums, when I just began with two or three questions and the students started answering me. So, for them, their role was to answer and mine was to judge, to assess. But, now, in the polemic forum, they take part with entries in which they tackle their personal views on the matter, and comment intervening in each other's entries. The rule is: I do not take part. In addition, as one of the questions asks them to assume other positions through other points of view, they collaborate to find new ways of dealing with a situation that happened, relating new solutions or orientations with the theories they know and are studying. And I think this is very nice. It works well for discussion, abstract thinking, and reflecting on applications to everyday professional practices, as well as getting to know each other. I don't need to write anything or comment on their entries, "Wow, nice! In my opinion ..." or, "I don't like the way you think. Maybe you should ..." Or things like that. [chuckle]

**CASE#24: CHOOSING A SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY FOR A SCHOOL  
PERFORMANCE, CHARLES BISLEY, NEW ZEALAND, INTERVIEWED  
BY ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE ON 2015-12-04**

**Bakhtinian Educator, Charles Bisley:** I teach in a state primary school in a prosperous suburb of a New Zealand city. In our community, there are quite a variety of views on the school's pedagogy, including on the high value it places on the arts, on the arts in literacy. The school is governed by an elected parent body, and our parents don't necessarily get that arts, drama projects can be literacy, for example. There's also a National Standards regime, which has resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum nationwide,<sup>17</sup> and put teachers and children under pressure.

We've got a tradition of performing scenes from Shakespeare. A lot of the children look forward to doing these plays when they reach grades 6 and 7. And when I came to the school, one of my roles was to lead the performing arts and integrate them into the curriculum, the way the kids learn. Since then, the

<sup>16</sup>An educational online platform: <https://moodle.org/>

<sup>17</sup>This year (2018), as a result of a change in government, the National Standards have been dropped.

performing arts have come to play a big part in our school's curriculum development,<sup>18</sup> especially drama. Both adapting existing plays and devising original plays. Back then, I found the Shakespearean plays unremarkable—you know, dramatized play readings. The kids have fun, well those with lead roles, and the audience go away satisfied. It's a community occasion but I doubt the kids are learning—not much. Only a few kids shine. So I said that's not what we're going to do anymore. Let's get the kids *more* involved. Let's adapt the scripts, use the drama process.

You can imagine, back then some of [my colleagues] didn't think this was a plan. They weren't drama teachers. "If it ain't broke don't fix it"—that's the way it is down here. So, we had ... arguments ... It was a long conversation, it went further than Shakespeare. If drama and the dynamic use of language, and that way of thinking, were going to be part of the curriculum, [then] they need to be a part of everyday literacy, not a script reading, not a whole school production. Now it's all changed. Each class in the school is trialing drama in literacy, and also putting on their own performances. You can see the change in how different each class play is. For the Shakespeare, I now suggest to the other teachers they could choose the play with the kids. Some aren't confident to do that. It's easier said than done, as I found out this year.

The kids, most of them, are really keen now. This year, the plays were in term 3, but from the beginning of the year, it's "Which play are we going to do, Mr. B?"<sup>19</sup> My class and I have just finished adapting and performing *King Lear*—*Queen Lear*, actually—this is the play I chose with the children.

**Interviewer:** When you say, "with the children," how are the choices formulated for the children when they are choosing the play? Do they have some kind of short synopsis of each play, what it's about, the main conflicts in the play, and so on? What do the children know in advance?

**Charles Bisley:** The process is intriguing and depends on the class and its culture, and their teacher. One of my colleagues, he chooses three or four plays and he gives [his students] the synopsis [of these plays], like a children's version of the story, and says, "Which story appeals to you?" But the idea with all the teachers is first to deconstruct the play's text. Having told the children the story, then they say, "Let's try and tell the story now, and in a new way, and we are gonna use some of Shakespeare's language." Two of my colleagues, who haven't done much Shakespeare before, choose one play they think suits [the children] and they start off by reading an existing children's version together.

**Interviewer:** So first they tell the story?

**Charles Bisley:** Yeah, [these teachers] start with the story—and then they ask the kids to retell it. But, in my class' case, what we did was different. I want to know what the children think first, which [Shakespearean] plays they know. They were a forthright lot—and they told me. One thing they'd do at home was go on YouTube to watch clips. The lively disagreement we had over

<sup>18</sup> At this time, New Zealand schools were implementing a new national curriculum.

<sup>19</sup> I.e., "Mr. Bisley"—children's reference to Charles Bisley, their teacher, in his class.

[Shakespeare's] plays and their merits, the pitching of the different plays, set the scene, the tone for the creative process of adapting the play we chose. So that even if an idea or option for the play got rejected, that didn't mean that [the] idea [was necessarily bad]. The clash [of ideas and their proponents] did drive the creative process forward.

Who was speaking, their presence, their *chi*<sup>20</sup> does—that sounds too hippy—came to count. For example, a choreographer came and introduced a bunch of dance ideas and moves, most of which weren't used, but which nonetheless pepped up the movement level and energy level of the play. He became another voice in the discussion too. The long debate over which play [to choose] made a similar, indirect contribution to making the class listen [to each other more], the learning [process more] dialogic, and the interchange of speakers more decisive, [regardless of] whichever play got chosen.

A part of this process [of choosing a Shakespearean play] is to ask the kids to go and talk to their parents, families, and come back and tell us what kind of [Shakespearean] plays your family likes and who would be influenced by that. It's like what Madeleine Grumet says in *Bitter milk* (Grumet, 1988)—you draw from families' cultures, from where their language is developing: if you don't, you are disempowering children, and yourself as a teacher. That's Bakhtin too isn't it? Language is heteroglot, meanings [are] never finalized, so don't try to substitute children's culture and language with an instrumental institutional discourse.

Once we have chosen a play, my approach is this: we don't look at the text [of a play] straightaway. I don't tell them the story in a detailed way. I don't because the narrative is so strong and doesn't give them enough room to think [for] themselves. So, I try a number of openings: "What if you had a king who was very ambitious, what would he do? What would happen, if a king gave away his kingdom?" Or create a contemporary context around sibling rivalry. And we explore. We do some improvisation, around family rivalry. Take something from the play, like the love contest, for example, as a pretext. And then I send the kids off to ask friends and family for their opinions, and we assemble them and make them into a performance. Only then do I say, "Well, read this!" And then, we might watch a film version—again not directly the text, an adaptation of the story. Some colleagues [and some] parents disagree with the projects, ask why Shakespeare at all? The texts are recondite. And the historical context is a lot for a 12-year-old to get their head around.

**Interviewer:** We were so lucky in Serbia where Shakespeare is translated very well. And not into an archaic language but into the modern language!

**Charles Bisley:** Archaic language, yeah, yeah! It's a big barrier, but you know it also exerts a fascination in its strangeness. But there are plays [online], someone is always doing a Shakespearean play in the town, so the children are

<sup>20</sup> "Vital energy that is held to animate the body internally and is of central importance in some Eastern systems of medical treatment (such as acupuncture) and of exercise or self-defense (such as tai chi)." *Merriam Webster* dictionary.

in some ways familiar with them. The children ask, “Which play do you want to do, Mr. Bisley?”

A lot of the children in my school come from families that have a lot of cultural capital. Some of them could say, “Well, mom and dad really like this play, I’d like to do that play,” or some of them might have seen Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet*,<sup>21</sup> so they want to do *Romeo and Juliet*. Right from the beginning, every few days we have a discussion. Now the important thing about these discussions is [that] I do *not* provide a learning intention, I don’t provide an explicit focus. I say, “Okay, we discuss the way we always discuss. Let’s just have a conversation.” I respect what they’ve got to say, their voices.

In the second term, the term before the play, we went on a class outing to a Globe production of *Hamlet*. It was touring every country in the world. In it, a well-known Maori actor—Rawiri Paratene—was playing Claudius. So, going to that play fueled the discussion over weeks and weeks ... For the whole term before [working on a play], every now and then we had a discussion about which Shakespeare play [to choose].

Except this year. [In] this [year’s] class, they got very argumentative—a group decided to gang up on me. The last thing they were gonna do was *King Lear*; part of the problem was—I favoured [*King Lear*]. The leaders of the class who are very ... out there ... five ring leaders, they were all talking about *Hamlet*. One reason—they were fascinated by Ophelia in a teenaged emo way.<sup>22</sup> I’d shown them a National Theatre (English) short film—five different ways of acting her demise. A couple of leading girls fancied themselves in the role. There were four super intelligent girls and one amazing boy, and they all ... were talking *Hamlet* and they were a force to be reckoned with.

I thought, “Well, *King Lear* doesn’t look like it’s gonna fly, that’s fine.” So, I say to the kids, “That’s fine.” They looked at me, “Are you sure, Mr. B?” I said, “Yeah, *Hamlet*, I love *Hamlet*. We could do that too. It’s hard but we could try, we could give it a go. I can see it working around the play within the play.” I really do like *Hamlet*, I prefer it to *Lear*, but I preferred *Lear* for this class. I knew a lot of the kids and I thought they’d make something of it. So, you see, when I took my objections away from them to doing it [*Hamlet*], they became more quiet, open-minded, because I wasn’t opposing them. I think some misbehavior is just because as a teacher, you are to be opposed ... That’s not necessarily a bad thing but in this case, some of the kids overdid it. I became enthusiastic about doing the play within the play in *Hamlet*. I saw these kids doing it well.

We don’t need to have an ideological debate because they’re children, they don’t know what their position is. They don’t know enough yet to adopt a critical position. They were opposing me because I was a teacher. Children

<sup>21</sup> An American film adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo\\_%2B\\_Juliet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_%2B_Juliet)

<sup>22</sup> For meaning of “teenaged emo way” see: <https://www.wikihow.com/Be-Emo>

misbehave because you're the teacher. If you're not being the teacher, they don't misbehave.

Anyway, when the plays were put to the vote, *King Lear* won. The class allegiances had shifted. It seemed the power amongst the kids had become more evenly distributed as a result of the choosing dialogue? Also, it wasn't just *Hamlet* versus *Lear*. Only the leading faction stuck to their choice. For others, *Romeo and Juliet* was a contender early on; towards the end, *Julius Caesar* was in the running.

So what happened with *King Lear* [in the end] was we were sitting having this discussion ... Only two days ago, we were having a class discussion. We hadn't been talking about the play for several weeks because the children had been doing persuasive writing. It's important for when they get to high school.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and these [kids] are like what, 11 years old, 12 years old?

**Charles Bisley:** 11 and 12, yeah, grades 6 and 7. So, they start the year at 11 and 12, end of the year 12 and 13 mostly. And most of them are going on to high school next year. And so, one of the children started a discussion—this was the first year they'd been in my class. "I couldn't believe it when you said we could choose which play we [would enact] ... That has never happened to me in school before, that the teacher would let you make such a big decision about something so important."

I was startled to hear this view—and the widespread agreement in response. So, the choice was real. I have to be honest—I must have influenced the choice even though I'd tried to be even-handed. They'd been to a performance of *Hamlet*, and they'd seen film adaptations of all six plays, including a Japanese version of *Lear*. I didn't hide my enthusiasms from them, and they weren't just about *Lear*. I was also quite strong on *Richard the Third* and *Julius Caesar*. I think watching film adaptations, listening to actors and directors—these were more persuasive than my opinions. I really did leave them to decide. If they had wanted to do something else that's what would have happened. I'd say they made this massive effort to do this play because they chose it. They knew it was going to be demanding in every way.

So, that final discussion. The children reflected as to whether they had really chosen, including how they'd been manipulated by me, by all these cunning moves. And the question shifted to power, and who has power, and at the end they didn't achieve a consensus, it was still up in the air as to how it came to be *King Lear*, when not many had wanted it at the start.

At the time of the vote, no one could believe the result—it led to an uproar! And here's the thing, Ana: in this recent, calm discussion, you could see how far the class had come, from the first "teacher versus kids" phase. It was like ... communication and relationship and meaning becomes so fluid and volatile—choosing *Lear*, they'd come around to making a collective decision, that was not based on agreement, or on my dominance as the expert, or on manipulation, and this first dialogue evolved further, became a complex, overlapping of voices, a multi-voiced discourse that was so involving—each kid, me, each other, their parents, texts, performances as well. That's how we reinvented the



play. And the other teachers noted the level of discourse between the children. I wasn't needed—that was it.

The way they [the students] were all listening to each other and nobody dominated, not the power players, the old *Hamlet* faction—that was so evident to others who visited the class. It was a process they had experienced so much; it didn't really matter what the product was because they had experienced this process of exchanging ideas and thoughts, in a freeway, but which was also constrained. The debate had been confined to six different Shakespeare plays. And if there was one idea that came to dominate these discussions afterwards, it was that the play itself had a voice and had a kind of power—and some of the kids agreed on something, it was that the play somehow had asserted some kind of power over them, had come to speak to them. And it was because of the play, it couldn't possibly have been because of me, because so many disagreed with me. You see? It was the voice of the play itself, a written text that they had engaged with, changed, brought to life, and become part of, as authors and actors. The text only got that power from their dialogue with it. Just kind of astonishing, isn't it? And that dialogue began before we opened the script, which would have been too heavy to start with.

This dialogue has stayed current, carrying over into the [students'] letters—reflective narratives—the children wrote post-play. Most of them chose to address the play—their play, not the original text but the realised performance. And the questions in their letters are relational ones—relational as in Bakhtin's architectonics, especially the Other for Me: “the Other” being the play, the characters in the play, Shakespeare, other texts, and me, the teacher as intermediary. Some other teachers who were watching the discussion were struck by the way the kids were all listening to each other and nobody dominated. The last play discussion was the end of a long dialogic process, the process by which they had made their *Lear*, their own play. It took a while.

Once we had chosen, there was still a disagreement over *Lear*, of course, and its merits, but the dynamic was different—it wasn't against me. Well, there still were moments, like when I had to cut a couple of scenes one day to go because the play kept on getting longer and longer. This girl who was the leader of the chorus, a mainstay, she lost her own lines, but she could put her interests aside as we had a work to accomplish. I got some flak but not much because the class agreed about the problem.

Speaking of the chorus, a chorus piece—the first way we made *Lear* our own—was a turning point, another phase of the choosing. The kids made some verbatim theatre based on collecting parents', family first, thoughts on the play, and theirs. I have the recording on my phone. It's quite moving. The kids cut and pasted all these lines together on a shared document and then chose ten in a random order. They chose a piece of music for an accompaniment and then sat in a circle, taking turns to say their lines. And what you notice—it's what Bakhtin (1991) says about *skaz*, speech as the orientation towards the other—is that there's this [in-]between space of meaning—as in Gadamer (1998).

Halfway through this oral performance, something happens. You no longer have a child at a time reading a line, but a coherence, a flow, that comes from the voices mingling in the space out there. It's so moving hearing the change—how distinct the voices sound in relation to each other. I saw how attentively the children listened to the playback. It was a new experience. I'd say the children realised something from performing and hearing this interchange of voices, of their own voices—it was new space, a new level for them, and it set the scene for where we were going with the play. I didn't put my spin on it. I let the experience develop through new performances and improvisations. At our school we talk about collective agency as well, agency as singular and plural. That's what we are looking for but it has to come from the children, from their sense that a play, for example, is something they can do only if they work together.

Later, this was a recurring idea and experience—the play as the other—[and it] asserted a kind of strange power. That was what the kids agreed on—it was that the play somehow had asserted some kind of power over them, had spoken to them. They experienced the play as an encounter. That encounter began in the choosing. One parent was skeptical of the choice, thought I'd lost the plot in promoting *Lear*. It was not relatable for kids. Afterwards, she'd changed her mind; she'd put it to me that I'd underestimated my role as interlocutor. Well I agreed, that's an interesting role because it's not a fixed position—you can only be the interlocutor because you don't represent yourself, or one voice. It was only when I represented the play that I became influential in the decision. And the kids picked up this role too as they became more active in developing the play.

I'm an intermediary ... I took the kids to a live *Hamlet*, they found that a bit ordinary. They'd viewed performances, explored online widely, at home some of them. I showed them [Japanese director] Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, a stirring epic film version of *Lear* ... they loved that—perhaps that tipped the balance in their choice. Was it the strangeness of the medieval Japanese setting? Later, after the choice, there was [Russian director] Grigori Kozintsev's film of *Lear*, and they were taken by its operatic and archaic qualities. The choice process of *Lear* started with the encounter—Alexander Lobok (2014) wrote about it as *obrazovanie*—the encounter with culture that takes you to new reality. The encounter with an authoritative text challenged the children's view of their own identity and was transformative. They'd wanted to do something else that was more accessible to them, but then they had to make this huge effort, as I said, but they had to want to. I couldn't decide that for them. This effort to do the play that was so demanding for them in every way. And this gave them agency.

I think the ongoing process of choosing and being chosen by the play supports an argument against self-directed learning in its purely personal version.

**Interviewer:** And what were the other choices? *Hamlet*? *Macbeth*? No?

**Charles Bisley:** No, so another class had already chosen *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* is a very good play to do with kids. It's simple. It's got a straightforward plot.

There were six choices: *Romeo and Juliet* of course, *Julius Caesar* (there'd been a film festival documentary *Caesar Must Die* about some Italian prisoners performing it), *Antony and Cleopatra* (that was one of the three [choices] for another class), *Richard the Third* (Ian McKellen plays Richard and is popular here as Gandalf), *Hamlet* (the early favourite), and *King Lear*. *King Lear* started at the back.

**Interviewer:** It's a very complex play ... Family relationships are so subtle and so on many planes.

**Charles Bisley:** Yes. And also [there is] the violence in the play. But, the other thing that helped, we showed them, there's a great Russian film adaptation of *King Lear*, set in medieval times.<sup>23</sup> It's baroque and extravagant and operatic. Oh, my gosh! We watched that after we decided to do the play.

We downplayed the violence and the madness in the play, made the family, the love context, its reverberations, the pivot. I guess the choice had a simple aspect. Family relationships—that's what the play involved. I mean their [the children's] ones. I wouldn't have heard all the subtle conversations and interchanges going on. I think they drove the dialogue, the kids' questions about who they were. Thinking about the process, there's something Caryl Emerson (1997) says about dialogue being energising and also generating the slow process of making form. That's so insightful—that's what happened.

Making the choice was part of our collaborative process. What was confusing and productive for the kids was that it wasn't their own single choice, but a choice that began in listening to others and going beyond yourself to make it. Which was also a choice to learn in new ways, and deeply, via opening yourself up to a fictional role. Such self-dissonance required an appeal to the teacher, who after all was in on it, helped you open up to the role in an implicit, somehow non-deliberate way. I'd like to find and send you a last thought of one of the children—the girl who was the fiercest dissenter to the choice of *Lear* but got so involved in the ensemble, came to play Regan with ruthless finesse. It's from her letter about the play:

*WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY DID YOU MAKE US DO KING LEAR? If this was a text you would now see a million cry face emojis. But any any number of cry ojis wont say what I'm trying to say so instead I'll just say thank you. Thank you for showing us so many new ideas and possibilities and making us do King Lear no matter how unfealable the feeling is from doing it. I could never know what it feels like to be completely woven into something so deeply without you (Anonymous student).*

If you could have seen what the children did in and with this play! I think a Shakespearean purist or two rejected what we'd done, how much the play was changed by the children and by me to reflect their take on the questions they found in it. By what they did with their bodies, the nonverbal elements, their

<sup>23</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_Lear\\_\(1971\\_USSR\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Lear_(1971_USSR_film))

extra script, the music, and the choruses. As the parent who doubted what there could be in *Lear* for children of this age wrote to me later, the play became

... a commentary again on the futility of lack in child–parent, parent–child dialogue. As the kids reached out in a line against the black backdrop, as the play came to a close, they had indeed made something of great moment, redolent with the weight of their own moment(s)—a something that they’ll carry with them beyond that ephemeral performance. “If they can do that, they can do anything” was the admiring comment of our neighbour and guest; indeed.

I’d interpret the children’s choosing of the play as the beginning of their play-making and of the dialogue that developed with it.

CASE#25: REPORT ABOUT A RELATIVE, MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI,  
NORWAY, INTERVIEWED BY ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE  
AND EUGENE MATUSOV ON 2015-08-22

**Bakhtinian Educator, Mikhail Gradovski:** In 2010 when I got a one-year position in a university, I was responsible for teaching three subjects, and in one I was allowed to be dialogic [by my institution]. Although I could not be wholly dialogical because the reading list and the themes for the course had been decided upon before I was hired, I was allowed to organize the teaching in a way that would allow students to become active. So, I said to students,

Okay, here is a half of the reading list that we have for this study. Please, choose whatever you want, and you will be responsible for: presenting it and the way you present it—whether to make it a lecture, or make it a seminar, it’s up to you! The only thing that I require is that you would ask questions. You’re not allowed to be just monologic. You can make it, if you want, part monologic. But, there should be a discussion because we’re on the master level. There should be questions, there should be provocations. Please, try to do it! Some of the students rose up to the challenge and made it dialogic, and some of them did not.

I remember there was a woman, she was actually older than me, I think she was in her 50s, and she didn’t like me very much as a teacher. She was open about her not liking me. However, she made one of the most dialogic presentations. She chose an article by a famous philosopher of education. I think she chose it not because she wanted to but because it was the only one left on the list so she had to take it. She was late when it came to choosing for some reason. But, once she did research on that article, she suddenly found out that, actually, this philosopher was her relative! He was not a close relative but he was within the big family. And that changed her approach. I mean, that being related to this philosopher was one of the things that she used in her presentation: the presentation was a thoughtful and deep analysis that was followed by good questions. It was obvious that her questions had a personal value.

Actually, when I look at that event now, from 2015, I would say that, of course, it was not completely dialogic. I mean, even the fact that I had a pre-defined frame in which we had articles that we could choose from, would make it semi-dialogic. But, that was an attempt of being dialogic with students. And I remember, there was this taste that was so good! This event cemented my desire to be more dialogic with my students whenever I could.

We can make changes, for example, when it comes to the reading list, but it's not always that we can be allowed to make changes when it comes to exams or delivery of different essays. For me, dialogic is when student agency is allowed to be used to its utmost. I think that when it comes to dialogic teaching, it requires time, especially if we want real dialogue. There always should be time for students and teachers to sort of understand each other. Not mere understanding when it comes to points of view, but time for becoming dialogue partners. We're talking about the psychological awareness, the psychological understanding that what I have with me, the one that I have dialogue with is not a teacher, but a partner, a dialogue partner who is different, who can have different points of view. My biggest challenge now is that it takes time for me to get the students to understand that I am not here to fill the preformed frame of the class. I want students to work, I want them to use their agency, experiences, knowledge, and own voice. I'm not here to control, I'm not the one who always leads. I'm here to help.

**CASE#26: MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY HYPOCRITES, EUGENE  
MATUSOV, USA, INTERVIEWED BY MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI  
AND ANA MARJANOVIC-SHANE ON 2015-08-18**

**Interviewer:** How to teach a multicultural diversity class?

**Bakhtinian Educator, Eugene Matusov:** Teaching a multiracial diversity class always provides some exciting suggestions to me if the students get excited. I always face a dilemma on how I should adjust [my teaching] to the students or I should not, or I should just ignore one of the groups in the class.

**Interviewer:** Are you engaging them in your first classes in thinking about their own motivation?

**Eugene Matusov:** Yes, I put them in a position so that they would start dealing with their own motivation, and all the conditions of their own life and learning instead of making them abide to my rules. Putting them in a position so that they would take charge of and then organize their own education, this is what I invite them to do. By using dialogic provocations, I include [them] in my teaching practice dialogues about issues that are important for the students. I don't want to use time on a dialogue about things that students do not deeply care about.

When I start teaching a new class, I'm meeting my students without knowing much about them. I want to, through the subject itself, learn about the

students, and this learning is not necessarily learning about who has a grandmother, and who does not have a grandmother [laughter], because that's not necessarily relevant for our life together. I want to learn about something that is relevant for our life together and for what we do as well.

In another class, I had a similar situation. It was a graduate class. My previous graduate class consisted of students who just hated the class from the beginning. So, my goal was to engage ... students in thinking about epistemology, among many other issues. It was a rather successful class. I remember that the first day of the class, the previous time, we did a discussion of people's research epistemology, on what counts as knowledge. This resulted in one student so brilliantly defining positivism for herself. She said that she did not have any epistemology because she was studying the truth. There was silence and one of the students replied that this was the epistemology. [The initial student disagreed but the second student] got back [to her point] that the rejection of epistemology was [the first student's] epistemology.

In one of my classes, we studied cultural diversity [for future teachers]. The students studied three theories of cultural diversity that were presented in the book about cultural diversity (Liston & Zeichner, 1996). One theory is a conservative theory that says that cultural diversity is [teaching only] about something that we all agree. If we all agree about something that means truth and that should be taught in schools. Any controversial subjects should be out of [the bounds of] teaching for many different reasons, including intellectual reasons or political reasons, like, for example, paying taxes. Basically, if you don't like something, it should be out [of teaching in public schools] because you're paying for that (i.e. a student is paying for the course and should not be forced to be exposed to controversial issues).

**Interviewer:** Who determines what is controversial?

**Eugene Matusov:** "The one who pays the piper calls the tune!" [laughter] Many politicians in the United States promote this conservative view of multiculturalism: we need to have a consensus in society and this is what we need to teach—that is, consensus. In the conservative multicultural approach, the educators focus on teaching cultural capital and societal cohesion. Anything controversial is out.

There is another theory, almost opposite to the conservative theory. This theory is called a radical multicultural approach. It says that we need to teach about controversies (e.g., inequality, racism), especially about the painful sides of these controversies. The more painful, the more you should teach about that.

Then, there is also a progressive theory that is based on the notion of student-centered instruction: get to know students, to follow them, and teach based on the students' concerns. In the progressive multicultural approach, the educators focus on students' own questions, inquiries, and concerns, preexisting, emerging, or promoted by the educators (Liston & Zeichner, 1996).

I asked my students to develop different formulas for the approaches they prefer: they can create a formula like 20 percent conservative theory, 50 percent of the radical theory, 30 percent of progressive theory, and so on. At the end of our multicultural class for future teachers, I asked my undergraduate students to develop four multicultural formulae:

1. Their multicultural approach preference [formula] as students;
2. Their multicultural approach preference [formula] as teachers;
3. Our class multicultural approach [formula] as they experienced it;
4. Our class's instructor (my) multicultural approach [formula] as they can guess and observe it.

In our class discussion, I asked my students if they had differences between #1 and #2 and why. There were big debates among students who wanted to be conservative and non-conservative teachers. Students who wanted to be conservative teachers wanted mostly to do transmission of knowledge and promote a consensus among their future students around statements that they viewed as true (true for them). The more their future students would become similar to them, the more the students viewed as educationally achieving. In contrast, non-conservative students (e.g., radical or progressive or mixed) said that they liked debates, hands-on learning activities, and controversies. There was a very heated debate between these two groups.

At some point, one of the students who was not conservative turned a table, so to speak, on the conservatives. He said, "You know, you're hypocrites!" The conservatives were very surprised and asked why. He said,

Well because it looks like you enjoy our class. You have freedom to express yourselves in our class. You like these freedoms. You like our class discussions. You feel very comfortable in our class to be conservatives. It's possible in our class and you enjoy that. You talk about your conservatism, you discuss, you bring your conservative views in opposition to your peers' progressive and radical views. But you don't allow this freedom and pleasures for your own future students. You want to rob your students from that educational enjoyment that you experienced. [laughter]

That was very interesting and the conservatives seem puzzled and did not know what to reply. But, they wanted to reply because it was very penetrating for them, "penetrating word" for them using Bakhtin (1999). The student's question, the student's inquiry, forced them to seek for a good reply because this inquiry became their own. They wanted to reply to themselves. But, they, my conservative students, couldn't find a good reply to this tension between their student desire and pleasure for a non-conservative (dialogic) class and their teacher pedagogical desire for a conservative (monologic) class.



CASE#30: DIALOGIC TEACHING OF RUSSIAN GRAMMAR,<sup>24</sup>  
 MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, USSR, 1944–1945

The conjunctionless complex sentence [parataxis]<sup>25</sup> (in all its multifarious forms) is extremely rare in the spontaneous written linguistic output<sup>26</sup> of pupils in the higher (8th, 9th, and 10th) grades of school.<sup>27</sup> Any teacher knows this from experience. I have especially reviewed all the homework and classwork compositions of pupils in two parallel 8th-grade classes for the first semester, around *three hundred* compositions in total. And in all those compositions taken together, only *three* examples of a conjunctionless complex sentence were found (naturally, excluding quotations)! For the same purpose, I have also reviewed around *eighty* compositions by 10th-grade students, written over the same period. They contained only *seven* uses of these forms.<sup>28</sup> Conversations with teachers in other schools have confirmed my observations. Early in the second semester, I organized special dictation quizzes for the 8th and 10th grades, testing for knowledge of the conjunctionless complex sentence. The results of these quizzes were quite satisfactory: it turned out there were very few errors in punctuating conjunctionless complex sentences.

<sup>24</sup>The Russian original essay “Questions of stylistics in secondary school Russian language lessons” (written, though probably never finalized, in 1945) was first published in 1994. The definitive edition was published in vol. 5 of Bakhtin, 1996, pp. 141–156. The present excerpt (pp. 145–154) contains the main body of the text, excluding introductory and concluding remarks. Translated from Russian by Sergei Sandler.

<sup>25</sup>A complex sentence with two or more clauses not connected by a subordinating conjunction—it is often called “parataxis.” Several examples are discussed below.

<sup>26</sup>*Pis'mennaja rech'*. The Russian word *rech'* has traditionally been rendered as “speech.” It is, however, considerably broader in its sense, as this case illustrates: “written speech,” which is literally the expression Bakhtin uses here, would be an oxymoron in English. In translating this term, I (Sergei Sandler) used, in addition to “speech,” also “linguistic output” (as here), as well as “communication” (in older translations of Bakhtin’s works, “communication” has been used to render the Russian word *obschenie*, which is, however, much better translated as “interaction” or “social interaction”).

<sup>27</sup>Soviet schools, at the time of Bakhtin’s writing in 1944–1945, required ten years to complete primary and secondary education. In the 1940s, the seven years of primary and middle school levels were mandatory and free for all. The comprehensive or professional high school level (grades 8–10) was elective and required a moderate payment. In 1943, all schools were separated by gender. Bakhtin was teaching in two schools at the time; this piece was linked specifically to his work in a school for boys, in Savjolovo, a village near a major train station, about 150 km north from Moscow. There are indications that this article was written to comply with some sort of official requirement to produce a written report or article on teaching methods. It was likely abandoned as an advanced draft after Bakhtin was able to move to the city of Saransk, to teach in the local teachers’ college (later turned university) in the summer of 1945.

<sup>28</sup>An earlier draft (cited in L. A. Gogotishvili’s commentary to the Russian publication, see note 22 on p. 526 of vol. 5 of Bakhtin, 1996) contained the following addition here: “More generally, an extremely rare use of the colon and the dash is characteristic of the students’ writing. They use these punctuation marks almost exclusively in simple sentences with homogenous constituents and a generalizing word [i.e., to precede enumerations—trans.] (the dash is also used when omitting a copula). The students don’t know how to use complex constructions, which require [?] these punctuation marks” (the question mark following the word “require” indicates the reading of the word from the manuscript is uncertain).

The dictation quizzes and subsequent conversations with pupils convinced me that, when confronting the conjunctionless complex sentence in somebody else's given text, the pupils understood it well enough, remembered rules pertaining to it, and made almost no mistakes in placing punctuation marks. And yet, at the same time, they did not at all know how to use this form in their own written communication, did not know how to work with this form in a creative manner. This resulted from the fact that in the 7th grade, the stylistic significance of this remarkable form was not properly elucidated. The pupils had not come to know its worth. It had to be revealed to them. Using a thorough stylistic analysis of this form's special features and merits, a taste for it had to be inculcated in the pupils, they had to be made to take a liking for the conjunctionless complex sentence as a most wonderful means of verbal expressiveness. But how is this to be done?

Here is how, according to my observations and experience, this work should be structured. As a foundation for it, let us use the detailed analysis of the following three sentences:

- 1) Joyless am I: with me there is no friend (Pushkin).
- 2) He laughs—they all begin to guffaw (Pushkin).
- 3) You awaken: five stations have raced far behind (Gogol).<sup>29</sup>

Coming to analyze the first sentence, we first read it aloud in the most expressive manner, even somewhat exaggerating its intonation structure, while, using facial expressions and gestures, we amplify the dramatic element inherent in this sentence. It is very important to make the pupils hear and appreciate the expressive (first and foremost—emotionally expressive) elements, which will disappear when the conjunctionless construction is converted into an ordinary sentence with a conjunction. Let them feel the leading role played by intonation in sentences of this type. Let them sense and see the inner necessity of the way in which intonation combines with facial expression and with gesture when Pushkin's line is read aloud. Once the sentence has been *heard* by the pupils, once it has been delivered to their immediate aesthetic perception, one can start analyzing the means by which its aesthetic effect, its expressiveness, is being accomplished. This analysis should be structured in the following order:

- 1) We convert the analyzed sentence into an ordinary complex sentence with the conjunction "because." At first, we attempt to introduce the conjunction mechanically, without modifying the sentence:

Joyless am I, because with me there is no friend.

<sup>29</sup>The first sentence is a line (stanza 2, line 1) from Pushkin's poem "19 October 1825" (in my translation). The second sentence is a line from his *Eugene Onegin*, chapter 5, stanza 18, line 3 (1977; translation modified). The third sentence is from Gogol's *Dead souls* (2004, p. 252).

Through a discussion with the pupils, we reach the conclusion that the sentence cannot be left in this form; when a conjunction is present, the word-order inversion, which Pushkin used, becomes inappropriate, and the ordinary, direct, and “logical” word order has to be restored:

I am joyless, because there is no friend with me.

Or:

I am joyless, since there is no friend with me.

Both sentences are absolutely correct, both grammatically and stylistically. Along the way, it became clear to the pupils that the omission or restoration of a conjunction is no plain mechanical procedure: it determines the order of words in the sentence, and as a result also the distribution of stress among the words.

- 2) We pose a question to the pupils: what distinguishes the sentence with a conjunction, which we have constructed, from Pushkin’s conjunctionless one? We easily elicit from them the answer that in our remake of Pushkin’s sentence, it has lost its emotional expressiveness, that in the revised form it has become colder, drier, more logical.

Next, together with the pupils, we convince ourselves that the dramatic element in the sentence has completely disappeared: the intonation, facial expressions, and gestures, which we used to act this inner dramatism out, as it were, when performing Pushkin’s text, become clearly inappropriate when reading our revised version. The sentence, in the pupils’ words, has become more bookish, mute, intended for silent reading: it no longer begs to be uttered by a living voice. In general, as is now evident to the pupils, we have lost a great deal in terms of expressiveness, when we replaced a conjunctionless construction with one that has a conjunction.

- 3) We commence a consistent exploration of the reasons for the loss of expressiveness in the modified sentence. We first analyze the conjunctions “because” [*tak kak*] and “since” [*potomu chto*].<sup>30</sup> We draw the pupils’ attention to the fact that these conjunctions are somewhat cumbersome and dissonant. We demonstrate, using examples, how one’s speech deteriorates when such cumbersome words become abundant in it, what bookish, dry, and dissonant character it acquires when these conjunctions are frequently used. That is why masters of verbal art had

<sup>30</sup> *tak kak* and *potomu chto* are the most commonly used causal conjunctions in modern Russian, but unlike the English “because” and “since,” they are both compound (*potomu chto* typically even requires a comma between the two words of the conjunction) and relatively lengthy.

always tried to reduce their use to a minimum. We tell the pupils how, throughout the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century (in the work of poets, who tend toward archaism, such as Vyacheslav Ivanov),<sup>31</sup> the archaic Church Slavonic conjunctions *ibo* and *zane*<sup>32</sup> kept on living (especially in poetry), and they kept on living precisely because they were shorter and better-sounding than the cumbersome *tak kak* and *potomu chto*. We illustrate this narrative with examples.

We then move on to the special *semantic* features of the subordinating conjunctions. We explain to the pupils that such functional words as subordinating conjunctions, which denote *purely logical* relations between clauses, are entirely devoid of a tangible, figurative element. After all, their signification cannot in any way be imagined in a tangibly figurative form; therefore, they can never acquire a metaphoric signification in our speech. They may not be used ironically, they give no foothold for emotional intonation (simply put, they cannot be uttered with feeling), they therefore totally lack that rich and diverse life, which words with a material, figurative signification live in our speech. These purely logical conjunctions are, of course, absolutely necessary in our speech, but these are cold, soulless words.<sup>33</sup>

- 4) Having analyzed the subordinating conjunctions, we move on to the question of their influence on the whole context surrounding them. We first explain to the pupils the stylistic significance of word order in a sentence (more precisely, we refresh this point in their memory, because they should already be familiar with it). We demonstrate (using examples) the special intonational significance of the first word in a clause (following a pause). A brief conjunction, located at the beginning of a clause, does not occupy a special intonational position, but the compound conjunctions *tak kak* and *potomu chto* fill up this initial location unproductively (themselves having no accent) and thus weaken the entire intonation structure of the sentence. Further, the semantic nature of these conjunctions, their peculiar coldness, exerts an influence on the entire word order of the clause: emotionally motivated word-order inversion becomes impossible. Comparing Pushkin's sentence with our

<sup>31</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1945), among the leaders of the Symbolist movement in Russia, was Bakhtin's favorite poet, as well as a philosopher and literary theorist, who has had a crucial and well-documented influence on Bakhtin and other members of his circle.

<sup>32</sup> *ibo* and *zane* are archaic causal conjunctions in Russian (roughly equivalent to “for” and “whereas”—both in their archaic causal sense—in English). *ibo* is still used today in some contexts, while *zane* fell more thoroughly out of use.

<sup>33</sup> As Gogotishvili rightly notes in the commentary (in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 527, n. 25), denying any expressive non-logical “soul” to conjunctions is a simplification of Bakhtin's actual position. When addressing a more “advanced” audience, Bakhtin himself brings examples of conjunctions being used in less “cold” and more dialogically sophisticated ways (e.g., the example from Dickens in “Discourse in the novel,” Bakhtin (1991, p. 305): “But Mr. Tite Barnacle was a buttoned-up man, and *consequently* a weighty one”).

revised version of it, we show pupils how the intonational weight of the word “joyless” in the first part of the complex sentence and of the word “with me” in the second part has been reduced because they were shifted to another location, and how sharply weakened is the emotional coloring of the word “no.”<sup>34</sup>

- 5) We lead the students toward independently formulating the conclusions of our analysis. Here are these conclusions. As a result of replacing Pushkin’s conjunctionless sentence with a sentence that has a conjunction, the following stylistic changes took place.

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19): *Bakhtin’s grammar lesson seems instrumentally ontological, doesn’t it? He seems to use the inductive approach while focusing on the stylistic analyses and exercises [notice his “we lead,” “we lead,” “we lead” above. Also, below,] “We lead the students to the final conclusion of our analysis ...”>>*

- a) the *logical* relation between the clauses, having been exposed and brought to the fore, has weakened the emotional and dramatic relation between the poet’s joylessness and the absence of a friend;
- b) the intonational intensity, both of each separate word and of the sentence as a whole, has sharply declined: the role of intonation has now been assumed by the soulless logical conjunction; the number of words in the sentence has increased, but the room for intonation has been greatly constricted;
- c) it has become impossible to dramatize the word with facial expression and gesture;
- d) the language has become less imagery-laden;
- e) it is as though the sentence has moved into the silent register, has become better suited for silent reading than for expressive reading aloud;
- f) the sentence lost its compactness and became less pleasant to the ear.

The second sentence from Pushkin can be analyzed, relying on all the points made above, much more briefly. The pupils’ attention need only be focused on what is new about the second sentence. We first remind the pupils that the logical relation between the clauses here is different: this is also reflected in the use of a different punctuation mark.<sup>35</sup> We then proceed to replace the given conjunctionless construction with one that has a conjunction. Here, we immedi-

<sup>34</sup> In Pushkin’s original, *net* (in the sense of absence, not just negation) ends the line, while the revised sentence puts it before *druga* (“friend” in the genitive case). This has no simple equivalent in the English translation.

<sup>35</sup> In an earlier draft Bakhtin also notes the following difference between the two sentences: “The emotional expressiveness resulting from lowering the voice pitch on I (joyless am I). In ‘He laughs,’ on the contrary, there is a raising of the pitch, increasing energy and dynamism” (Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 528, n. 27).

ately encounter difficulties. The sentence, “When<sup>36</sup> he laughs, they all begin to guffaw” leaves the pupils unsatisfied. Everyone feels that some very substantial shade of meaning gets lost. Some propose the wording “Every time he laughs, they all guffaw,” others suggest, “Only when he starts laughing, do they all also dare to guffaw,” others yet, “It is enough for him to start laughing for them all to begin guffawing to please him.” All agree that the last sentence is the most adequate in conveying the original’s meaning, even though it is too liberal in paraphrasing Pushkin’s text. Following a discussion with the pupils, we reach the conclusion that the words “every time,” “only when,” “it is enough ... for,” and even the words “dare” and “to please,” convey different shades of the meaning of Pushkin’s sentence, and in that respect they are required, but that even all of them taken together do not exhaust the fullness of that meaning, so inseparable as it is from the form of its verbal expression.

Before we move on to continue the analysis, it is worthwhile to familiarize the pupils with the semantic features of the connectors appearing in paraphrases of sentences of this type. Connectors, unlike conjunctions, are not devoid of a figurative element, but this element is very weak and therefore lacks metaphorical force; they also allow for some (very weak) degree of emotional coloring. The presence of connectors in a sentence (especially if they are cumbersome) makes its structure logical, though not to the same degree as the presence of compound subordinating conjunctions.

In the subsequent analysis, we bring the following elements to the fore:

- 1) Dramatism is characteristic of Pushkin’s second sentence, but unlike in the first sentence, this is *dynamic*, rather than emotional, dramatism. The action unfolds before our eyes, as on a stage; the second clause (“they all begin to guffaw”) literally responds to the call of the first (“He laughs”). What we have before us is not a narrative about an action, but the action itself, as it were. This dynamic dramatism is accomplished, first of all, through a strict parallelism in the construction of the two clauses: “He”—“they all,” “laughs”—“guffaw”;<sup>37</sup> the second clause is a mirror image, as it were, of the first, just as the guests’ guffawing are a real reflection of Onegin’s laughter. The structure of the spoken words thus dramatically reenacts the event of which they tell.<sup>38</sup> We draw the pupils’

<sup>36</sup> An English restatement using “whenever” instead of “when” would be much closer to the original, but no exact one-word equivalent to “whenever” exists in Russian.

<sup>37</sup> The Russian original contains precisely four words (and the linking dash), allowing for a stricter parallelism between the two clauses, even in terms of rhythm: *On zasmejotsia—vse khokhochut*. The one-syllable *on* (“he”) corresponds to the one-syllable *vse* (“everyone”); the four-syllable *zasmejotsia* (“[he] will begin laughing”) to the three-syllable *khokhochut* (“[they] guffaw”).

<sup>38</sup> An earlier draft has a different wording for the last sentence (showing a clearer link to Bakhtin’s earlier philosophical writings): “The speech event thus dramatically reenacts the real event which it recounts” (Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 528, n. 28).

attention to the tense of the verb in the first clause (“laughs”):<sup>39</sup> it enhances the action’s dramatism, while at the same time expressing its repeating nature (which in the version with a conjunction is expressed by the phrase “every time that”).

- 2) We draw the pupils’ attention to the exceptionally laconic form of Pushkin’s sentence: two simple, unextended clauses, only four words,<sup>40</sup> but how fully it reveals Onegin’s role in this gathering of monsters,<sup>41</sup> his overwhelming authoritativeness! We also note that by assigning to Onegin the word “laugh,” while the monsters get the word “guffaw,” Pushkin conspicuously shows how coarsely and hyperbolically they imitate the actions of their master.
- 3) We lead the students to the final conclusion of our analysis: Pushkin’s conjunctionless sentence does not recount an event, but rather dramatically reenacts it before us with the very form of its construction. Attempting to convey its meaning using conjunctive subordination, we switch from showing to telling, and therefore, no matter how many extra words we insert, we will never convey all the concrete fullness of what is shown. By making the relation between the clauses logical, through inserting connectors, we destroy the living and tangible dynamic dramatism of Pushkin’s sentence.<sup>42</sup>

Sorting out the third example, after all that has been said, is now quite easy. The already familiar dynamic dramatism is expressed even more starkly, even if in a somewhat different manner, in Gogol’s sentence. When reading out Gogol’s text, one has to convey the intonation of the awakened traveler’s pleasant astonishment with mild exaggeration. The pause between the clauses (marked by a dash)<sup>43</sup> is here filled with the tense expectation of some surprise—this should be expressed in performance using intonation, facial expressions, and gesture, and then, the second clause should be delivered, with joyous amazement, with special emphasis on the word “five.” The facial expressions and gestures for performing this sentence invite themselves—they cannot be halted! We see before us this traveler, rubbing the sleep off his eyes, and finding out, with pleasant astonishment, that he had already passed five stations while

<sup>39</sup>The Russian original (*zasmejotsia*) is in the future tense (the most precise gloss, again, would be “[he] will begin laughing”) and Bakhtin here explicitly refers to the tense as future (which I omitted from the translation). The English translation uses the simple present-tense “laughs” instead, but, as the following analysis makes clear, the translator made the correct choice of tense: the simple present is indeed the tense typically used in English for repeating actions.

<sup>40</sup>Again, this is the word count for the Russian original.

<sup>41</sup>See *Eugene Onegin*, ch. 5, stanza 16.

<sup>42</sup>An earlier draft of the text also added: “(as in the first example, we lose emotionality)” (Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 528, n. 30).

<sup>43</sup>Gogol’s text, at least in most print editions (and as reproduced in Bakhtin’s own manuscript, though not in one of its surviving earlier drafts), uses a colon, not a dash. The two punctuation marks are in principle interchangeable in this context, and most Russian speakers nowadays would probably prefer a dash to a colon in similar cases (see Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 530, n. 31).



sleeping. Attempting to convey this using conjunctive subordination, we wade off track into a verbose narrative, but still fail to convey the fullness of what has been shown, dramatically reenacted, before our eyes. Following a discussion with the pupils, we agree on the following restatement: “When I<sup>44</sup> have awakened, it turned out that five stations have already raced far behind.”

Once this sentence has been formulated and written on the blackboard, I turn the pupils’ attention to the bold metaphoric expression, almost a personification, used by Gogol: “five stations have raced far behind.” After all, the stations were not the ones racing behind, but rather the traveler was riding forward (although this is precisely the rider’s immediate impression). We pose before the pupils the question, does this expression sound right in our remake of Gogol’s sentence (in Gogol’s original, it sounded great all right), is it appropriate in the context of conjunctive subordination? The pupils agree with me that this expression disrupts the logical style of our sentence to some degree, and that it needs to be replaced by the more sober and rational, but less figurative and dynamic, expression, “I have already passed five stations.” These transformations result in a totally correct, but dry and pale sentence: nothing at all remains of Gogol’s dynamic dramatism, of Gogol’s vigorous and bold gesture.

Based on the example we studied, and introducing additional materials, we make it clear to the pupils that all stark metaphorical expressions, images, and similes wilt and wither in the cold atmosphere created by subordinating conjunctions and connectors, that in the context of the sober conjunctive subordination, Gogol’s beloved hyperbolic similes and metaphors, with even the occasional direct alogism thrown in, would have been entirely impossible. We then expand these claims somewhat, showing with examples how a strict lexical selection occurs under the conditions of a complex sentence with a conjunction (especially of the causal type): words with a strong emotional tinge, overly bold metaphors, and also insufficiently “literary” words (in the narrower understanding of the word),<sup>45</sup> vernacular words, words connected with crude everyday affairs, colloquialisms, are all removed. The complex sentence with conjunctions tends toward a bookish literary style and shuns the colloquial living and spontaneous nature of ordinary life speech.

At this point, one may tell the pupils, in an accessible form, about the significance of the syntactic forms of conjunctionless subordination in the history of Russian literary language. The teacher may show them how the complex hypotactic<sup>46</sup> period constructions of the eighteenth century, cold and rhetorical, delayed

<sup>44</sup> Gogol’s original Russian uses an indeterminate form in terms of the person of the subject (the word *prosnuksia*, “woke up,” is consistent with any singular masculine subject), but one would interpret it as first-person by default. The English translation correctly renders this using the generic “you” (“You awaken”), which, however, conflicts with the chosen paraphrase.

<sup>45</sup> I.e., insufficiently Standard Russian. Bakhtin here uses “literary” in the sense of “belonging to standard written language”—a usage common in Russian, but less so in English—as opposed to “literary” in the sense of “belonging to the sphere of literature.”

<sup>46</sup> Hypotaxis, the opposite of parataxis, is the use of explicit conjunctions to connect clauses in a sentence.

the rapprochement between bookish literary language and living colloquial language. The teacher may show that the struggle between the archaic bookish and living colloquial elemental forces in literary language was inseparably linked with the struggle between complex (period) constructions and simple—mostly conjunctionless—forms of colloquial oral syntax. These claims can be well illustrated with examples of oral colloquial syntax from Krylov's fables (his syntax is, by the way, exceptionally dynamic). It would be useful to compare Karamzin's style in the complex hypotactic period constructions of his "History of the Russian state" with the style of his sentimental novellas.

Similar historical excursuses can be made not only in the 8th grade, but also in the 7th, if it is a good class.

Having completed the analysis of the three sentences we selected from the classics, we should show the pupils how common are the forms of conjunctionless subordination in our everyday speech. One should analyze a sentence, such as, "I am very tired: I have too much work."<sup>47</sup> Comparing it to the sentence "I am very tired, because I have too much work," one should show how the latter sentence becomes less alive and expressive. Having revealed the huge significance of conjunctionless subordination forms in our speech, having demonstrated their advantages over corresponding conjunctive forms, one should, however, point out to the pupils the legitimacy and necessity of the latter forms' existence in language too. One should demonstrate not only the very important significance conjunctionless subordination has in practical and scholarly communication, but also its unavoidability in the belles-lettres. The pupils should understand that the forms of conjunctionless subordination can only be used so often.

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19): *This kind of Bakhtinian practice is not very uncommon in conventional education where teachers make the instrumentally curated curricular material intrinsically engaging for students.*>>

Following this, together with the pupils, we take stock of all the stylistic work we have done. At this stage, the teacher checks to what degree has the goal of this work been accomplished: Was he successful in inculcating a taste and a liking for conjunctionless subordination in the pupils? Were the pupils able to truly appreciate the expressive and living character of these forms? If that goal has been reached, it only remains for the teacher to guide the pupils' practice in introducing these forms into their spoken and written linguistic output.

I have conducted this practice in the following way. We first performed a series of special exercises, in which we composed multifarious variants of conjunctive and conjunctionless complex sentences on given topics, carefully

<sup>47</sup> In an earlier draft, Bakhtin listed this sentence (or rather a variant of it in a different tense: "I get very tired ...") as a fourth example together with the three from Pushkin and Gogol (see Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 526, n. 23). Note that the Russian original also features a reversal of the standard word order in the second clause (word order is generally much more flexible in Russian than it is in English). A more literal translation would be "too much work I have." This word order is restored to the standard in the paraphrase that uses a conjunction.

assessing the stylistic appropriateness and utility of this or that form. Then, in marking homework and classwork, I noticed all the cases, in which replacing conjunctive subordination with a conjunctionless form would be useful, and made the corresponding stylistic edits in the pupils' notebooks.<sup>48</sup> When the students' work was reviewed in the classroom, all these sentences were read aloud and discussed, and the "authors" sometimes disagreed with my edits, leading to lively and interesting debates. There were, of course, also cases when some pupils became overly enthusiastic about conjunctionless forms and used them not always appropriately.

The results of all this work were, on the whole, quite satisfactory. The syntactic structure of the pupils' linguistic output has significantly improved. Two hundred second-semester 8th-grade compositions already contained more than 70 uses of conjunctionless complex sentences.

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19):** *The lesson also looks highly teacher directed, although Bakhtin seems to have made it intrinsically engaging for the students by involving them in inductive reasoning, a conclusion that we have to make from his affirmation and not by seeing it for ourselves. ... I miss students' voice in this description. They are kind of taken for granted. The class description carries more didactically of what this teacher (Bakhtin) "did" or teachers generally "should do," and focusing on the substantive aspect of the lesson, rather than samples of how it engaged the students.>>*

In the 10th grade, the results were even better: almost every composition had two or three such sentences. The change in syntactic structure also led to a general improvement in the pupils' style: their style became more alive, with more imagery, more emotional, and above all, it began revealing the individual face of the one writing, the sound of his living individual intonation came through in it. The stylistics lessons did not go to waste.

Finally, one should note that stylistic analyses, even the finest and most intricate, are quite accessible to and liked by the pupils, if only they are conducted in a lively manner and the children themselves are engaged in the active work. As dull as narrowly grammatical analyses are, so are stylistic analyses and exercises captivating. Moreover, these analyses, if designed correctly, make grammar meaningful to the pupils: dry grammatical forms, put in the light of their stylistic significance, come to life in a new way for the pupils, become both better understood and more interesting to them.

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<sup>48</sup> In an earlier draft, Bakhtin added, "(even though this would not count as a stylistic error)" (see Gogotishvili, in Bakhtin, 1996, p. 533, n. 37).

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## Analyses of Teaching Cases: Issues in Bakhtinian Pedagogy

In Part II we present our critical dialogic analyses of five “juicy topics,” that is, topics that deal with the important issues of Bakhtinian pedagogy that attracted us as the most prominent for the SIBEs, including ourselves. In the next five chapters we describe and discuss: (1) What is Bakhtinian pedagogy for the interviewed Bakhtinian educators? (2) Ontological engagement of the participants in Bakhtinian education; (3) Issues of educational vortex in Bakhtinian pedagogy; (4) Teacher–students power relations in Bakhtinian pedagogy; and (5) Bakhtinian pedagogy in conventional educational institutions.



## Chapter 2.1: What Is Bakhtinian Pedagogy for the Interviewed Bakhtinian Educators?

Guided by contextual Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we abstracted diverse ways in which 14 self-identified Bakhtinian educators (SIBEs) define Bakhtinian pedagogy. We found six tensions among these diverse Bakhtinian pedagogies. The first tension is between dialogue as instrument to achieve a particular educational goal vs. dialogue as mode of inquiry and/or being (ontological view). The second tension is about the nature of authorship, whether it should be creative or critical. The third tension is about the pedagogical and ethical legitimacy of Socratic dialogic pedagogy using “torpedo touch.” The fourth tension involves the question of whose authorship should have priority and dominance in education—the teacher’s or the students’. The fifth tension is between monodiscursive vs. heterodiscursive dialogic pedagogies. And the sixth tension is about productive dialectic vs. dialogue as being with others.

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-20): *On one hand, I find your six tensions a useful way of analyzing practice in the abstract. I suggest though that in practice, the contrasts you set up might coexist, especially when an account of practice is not of a single lesson but of practice changing over time. For example, the epistemological may be subsumed by the ontological over time. In the meantime, there may be hybrid discourses and practices, dissonances and tensions too, and the tensions may be productive. Or, there may be a balance between the teacher’s versus the students’ authorship. I would also say for children, the creative can include the critical. Here I’m thinking of reader-response theory where there are two types of response to a text, aesthetic and efferent. As you have noted, I involve children in the aesthetic experience of a text, and the critical discussion or the analysis of the information develops later. For example, in the case I presented of the verbatim performance, there was nothing mystical about the creative performance. It was an aesthetic experience, from which critical discussion about the audience, about how to stage the play and so on, followed, as well as action from the children.*

*I appreciate the dialogical nature of this research is unfinished. I did not have time to detail or provide the longer narrative sequence. I ask you to consider whether at times you misinterpret the complex dynamics of my and other cases in terms of your dichotomies/dyads, or whether you have enough details to be definitive. I would never claim my practice is one thing or another, everything is hybridized, mixed up! If only we had more time to talk about it all. One thing: I have created many plays with children and I do not have a mystical view of art. In my practice, reflection and the development of an internally persuasive discourse are just as significant as the creation of the aesthetic, temporarily finalized products/plays.>>*

We found that each Bakhtinian educator provided his or her unique vision of Bakhtinian pedagogy. Some, like Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane, even two. Some of these visions are compatible and complementary, but some not. Some are related to dialogue and dialogicity and others are not.

*<<Paul Spitale, feedback reply (2018-04-28): One question I have is of each SIBE having their own interpretation of Bakhtinian theory. Does this have a bigger connotation for language, interpretation and miscommunication? That is, what does this say about human nature when I think and act on a theory in one way, yet the person (educator) next door interprets and implements the theory in a whole different way?—a cause for indifference? poor practice?—or even (with world leaders) war? Also, if we each have our own version of the Bakhtinian landscape, is it then a true Bakhtinian practice or is it too loosely based? I often say that my educational techniques and my personal style are based largely in Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories. However, I now question rather whether I remove the “largely” and simply say “based.”>>*

## INSTRUMENTAL VERSUS ONTOLOGICAL

Based on our previous scholarship of dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009, 2018; Sidorkin, 1999), we defined Bakhtinian pedagogy as instrumental when it is used to achieve preset curricular endpoints. Thus, in case of SIBE Beatrice Ligorio (Case#6), preset curricular endpoints means that her students had to guess what an expert community sees as important for the field, confirmed by the professor. For SIBE Ana Marjanovic-Shane’s old pedagogy (Case#13), preset curricular points means her dear ideas, that is, the ideas dear to her heart (e.g., behaviorism is bad for education). For SIBE Iryna Starygina (Case#16), preset curricular endpoints means that students can successfully stylize the ready-made high culture, based on some preset conceptual rubrics of addressivity developed by the educator/researcher. These three SIBEs understand Bakhtinian pedagogy as dialogism, which is helping their students to arrive at these preset curricular endpoints in some humane, active, meaningful, conceptually deep, and critical ways. Although, in our judgment, these SIBEs define their instrumentally, and they each construct Bakhtinian dialogism differently.

*<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-18): I’d likely add Bakhtin himself to this group. He does speak about the pupils’ individual expression slining*



*through their writing in the end (also a goal he decided is good for them ...), but the more immediate purpose, of mastering the particular grammatical construction, was entirely imposed by the teacher (Bakhtin, 2004).*

*Also, consider that almost all of the SIBEs had at least some curricular requirement they had to make their students meet, and would arguably be acting irresponsibly (e.g., in terms of limiting their pupils' ability to reap financial benefits from their formal education later in life) if they neglected this imposed goal entirely.>>*

For Beatrice Ligorio (Case#6), dialogism seems to mean students authoring their own accountability by developing exam questions, which an imaginary expert community might ask them for summative, gate-keeping assessment, and then replying to these questions with the help of the professor and the assigned texts, as a preparation for the summative exam that they collectively construct. In our view, this pedagogical approach is apparently based on Bakhtin's claim that meaning making is always in dialogic relation between a genuine interested information-seeking question and a serious answer (Bakhtin, 1986; Matusov, 2009).

However, if our understanding is correct, we respectfully disagree with Beatrice, regarding how much pleasing an imaginary expert community can be equalized with dialogic meaning making. In our view, genuine dialogic meaning making is based on the personal interests of the people who ask the questions. In contrast, developing and replying to the questions by an imaginary community of experts in the field is performative: students need to learn how to perform to pass as knowledgeable, as judged by the professor. The imaginary community of experts, presented by the professor, is not genuinely interested in the students, but in their performance. Thus, Beatrice's pedagogical instrumental dialogism is *performative dialogism*, and not the *ontological dialogism* proposed by Bakhtin, as we understand it. In ontological dialogism, an outcome of personally interested dialogue (i.e. curriculum) is emergent and, thus, never fully predictable. The judgment about importance, relevance, and truthfulness of statements is inherent to the dialogic community itself, and not to the authority of imaginary community of experts or real authority of the professor. Bakhtinian ontological dialogism is based on the principle of the consciousnesses with equal rights—the equal rights to make judgments about what is relevant, what is important, and what is true (Bakhtin, 1999).

In contrast to Beatrice Ligorio, Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Case#13) promoted students' own interests and questions (e.g., how an educator can best address her young students' emotional tantrums) about academic material while defining Bakhtinian dialogism as a critical testing of their own ideas of interest (Bakhtin, 1991, 1999). However, in opposition to Bakhtin, for SIBE Ana Marjanovic-Shane, critical testing of ideas by the students with the professor was subordinated to her pedagogical desire to make all of her students accept her own dear ideas—that is, that behaviorism is bad—at the end of her lesson. This is somewhat similar to Socratic pedagogy, described by Plato. Like Socrates, Ana Marjanovic-Shane employed “torpedo-touch” to crush the

students' dear ideas through critical examination (we discuss the ethics of this issue in more detail below). Matusov (2009) analyzed the Socratic dialogue "Meno" (Plato & Bluck, 1961) and he concluded that Socrates was constantly leading Meno, Meno's slave, and Meno's affluent friend Anytus, to his own preset curricular endpoints. Socrates did not learn anything new through these dialogues, despite claiming to the contrary. Matusov argued that Socratic dialogue is often based on Socrates' manipulation of his interlocutors' ignorance, his use of fake choices, and his dishonestly leading questions (Matusov, 2009). That is not necessarily the case in Marjanovic-Shane's old pedagogy. She genuinely tried to crush student's positions that she disliked. However, her sincerity was limited, as she was avoiding any inquiries that might undermine her own dear ideas, making alternatives to her positions—for example, desirability of behaviorism and problems of her humanism in some situations—invisible to herself and her students. In this sense, the teacher excludes herself from the dialogue with students, making that dialogue disingenuous. So, we conclude that Ana's pedagogical dialogism was *Socratic instrumental*.

In our judgment, SIBE Iryna Staragyna (Case#16) defines dialogism as students addressing an imaginary audience for their writing, which, in its turn, is supposed to shape their writing constructions semantically and emotionally. Thus, she judges students' semantically complete utterances as ones that might trigger the reader's intellectual and emotional response of agreement/disagreement. Similarly, Bakhtin argued that any author's utterance, that is, a long or short dialogic turn, is shaped by taking into account an audience to whom it is addressed and their expected replies, that is, by its "addressivity" and "responsivity" (Bakhtin, 1986). We agree with Iryna that in conventional schools, the addressivity of students' writing is often ignored, which makes students' writing formalistic, focusing students on following formal linguistic rules, which in their own turns are abstractions of live addressivity and responsiveness. That is why students' schoolish writing may feel so deadly for the authors and the audience.<sup>1</sup>

However, Iryna assigns students to write and to imagine their audience. They *perform their writing*, rather than actually write. Or, in Iryna's own words, they have "to play the role of the actor who plays the role" (Case#16).

<sup>1</sup>In criticizing Montessori schools for teaching children meaningless reading and writing only as a mechanical skill, Vygotsky emphasized the relevancy of the activity for a child, We do not deny the possibility of teaching reading and writing to preschool children; we even regard it as desirable that a younger child enters school if he is able to read and write. But the teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something. If they are used only to write official greetings to the staff or whatever the teacher thinks up (and clearly suggests to them), then the exercise will be purely mechanical and may soon bore the child; his activity will not be manifest in his writing and his budding personality will not grow. Reading and writing must be something the child needs. Here we have the most vivid example of the basic contradiction that appears in teaching of writing not only in Montessori schools but in most other schools as well, namely, that writing is taught as a motor skill and not as a complex cultural activity. Therefore, the issue of teaching writing in the preschool years necessarily entails a second requirement: "writing must be relevant to [the] life [of the children]" (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 117–118).

At best, her students play at writing, like children play “family.” At worst, they follow new formalistic rules of addressivity that Iryna developed. From what she described, there is very little interest of the teacher in the students’ alive word and voice. Rather, the educator’s focus is on finding preset conceptual markers of addressivity in the students’ assigned writing. In our judgment, Iryna’s pedagogical instrumental dialogism is about *performative addressivity*.

Instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogies nicely fit modern institutional demands to make education into a predictable arrival to certain curricular endpoints preset by society and/or experts. Instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogies make this arrival arguably more humane and make students active and more intellectually and ontologically engaged. They promote students to develop questions, although in a limited way, and also can promote critical discourse, although also in a limited way. Thus, we argue that instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogies represent a hybrid and compromise between the conventional pedagogical instrumentalism and Bakhtinian scholarship.

In her feedback on a previous draft of our book, SIBE Tara Ratnam disagrees with our too-tough critique of instrumentalism and pedagogical manipulation. Tara argues that pedagogical manipulation may provide some reluctant students with exposure to an academic subject or topic of their initial dislike. After experiencing the disliked curriculum, reluctant students may start liking it and may get engaged in it ontologically. Tara wrote,

I wonder if we can put these into watertight compartments of student engagement as “manipulation” or “ontological.” Working within the stranglehold of the system, I have experienced that the dialogic spaces we create within the overarching constraints of the systemic a priori demands and expectations are not always/necessarily reduced to “manipulation.”

I have had several apathetic students in the science stream of the Pre-University course I taught sitting there under pressure from parents to become future doctors/engineers. For example, in my ESL class, one such student used to sit in the last bench. One day I found her, along with her other benchmates ... sitting in the first bench and subsequently these students used to come early to my class to occupy the front bench and participate in the discussions ... The following year (after completing her Pre-University education), she met me to share with me the big challenge she had faced during her Pre-University education and which she had overcome in achieving her life goal. She seemed highly excited and said that it was all possible because of my support.

I was puzzled. I had no idea what she was talking about, because I had had no personal/private interaction with her to know about the crisis she faced in her life.

She said that she had joined the science stream in Pre-University in order to please her father who wanted her to become an engineer like him, while her passion was in pursuing law. This split between her passion and sense of duty to her father created a dilemma that was eating her. She said that participating in [my] classroom discussions about a question on, “What will you do if your parents’ dream for you differs from your own? Which one will you follow and why?” had sparked her interest in my class, because it spoke to her existential dilemma. The

ensuing arguments and counterarguments over this specific and other issues that emerged in class and days of ruminating over it had helped her work through her dilemma till she made up her mind that she would find a way to follow her passion. She had reasoned to herself that if she did the engineering course, she would be unhappy and ruin her life and this would not make her parents happy in the long run.

So, she prepared for law entrance secretly side by side with doing the science course and succeeded in it before she took her mother's help to make her father see her point and concede to her wishes. It is not just this one student. Several other students have spoken about the difference such dialogues have made to their thinking, influencing them in different ways beyond what Ana calls "produce a better student engagement."<sup>2</sup> (Tara Ratnam, April 15, 2018)

We agree with Tara that ontological engagement can arise from any monologism. However, in our view, this does not justify monologism. We hypothesize that exposure to new educational curricula or practices, which is very important, can be done in more dialogic and honest ways.

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-06-13):** *While I agree wholeheartedly with Ana[, Mikhail,] and Eugene's hypothesis, I would like to remind them and our readers that what reigns in reality is monologism and therefore subversion within the constraints posed by institutional and social monologism is "creative compliance," or in Bakhtin's terms an act of "substituting borders with other borders" rather than being "dishonest."* Where, in real life, do we find the ideal environment for pure dialogic practice?>>

## CREATIVE AUTHORSHIP VERSUS CRITICAL AUTHORSHIP

We define *ontological* Bakhtinian pedagogies as ones with emergent curriculum, not fully known in advance, guided by and addressed to students' personal interests, questions, and needs. There is a great diversity among the SIBEs in the ways how these pedagogies are ontological and Bakhtinian. We found five major tensions within ontological Bakhtinian pedagogy. One tension is between creative authorship and critical authorship.

We define *creative authorship* as the students' creative, out of the box, new offer—students' transcendence of the culturally given—recognized, appreciated, and supported by the teacher and/or classroom community and beyond (Matusov, 2011a). We define *critical authorship* as the students critically examining and testing their ideas against alternative ideas (cf. Socrates' motto, "the unexamined life is not worth living") (Matusov, 2015). Some ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies foreground creative authorship while keeping critical authorship in the background, and others do the reverse.

In our judgment, creative authorship was prioritized in three instances by Alexander Lobok (Cases#15/18, while working with younger children), Mikhail Gradovski (Case#25), and Charles Bisley (Case#24). Meanwhile, we

<sup>2</sup> A quote from Ana's response in the forum discussion of Case#6 by Beatrice Ligorio.

argue that critical authorship was prioritized in 11 other cases by: Tara Ratnam (Case#11), Dmitri Nikulin (Case#9), Alexander Lobok (Case#8, while working with older, undergraduate students), Mikhail Gradovski (Case#12), Paul Spitale (Case#1), Aaron Yost (Case#5), One-who-withdrew (Case#7), Eugene Matusov (Cases#3, 14, 19, 26, 27), Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Case#20, in her more recent case), Silvine Barbato (Cases#23, 28), and Mikhail Bakhtin (2004).

Creative authorship is often promoted by throwing students into a culturally rich and challenging environment. For example, for Alexander Lobok, it could be a game of asking little children to close their eyes and describe what they see in the room (interview with Alexander Lobok, 2015-10-30). For Charles Bisley (Case#24), a culturally rich and challenging environment might involve his middle-school students asking their parents which of Shakespeare's plays they should craft in the school. In the case of Mikhail Gradovski (Case#25), it was focusing his adult students to find interesting and exciting aspects in the selected (school-assigned) texts, find important questions about them, and create exciting ways of presenting their findings.

The next step of promoting creative authorship is to disrupt possibilities that the ready-made culture will talk through the students. In his Bakhtinian pedagogy, Alexander Lobok would reject "non-interesting" objects, for example, "table," "chair," and similar, and wait for the emergence of "interesting," "out-of-the-box," and "deeply personal" replies that would surprise Alexander himself and other participants and make them laugh, like, for example: "smile," "thinking," or "imaginary friend." In Charles Bisley's Bakhtinian pedagogy, he gives students a problematic situation to resolve through their acting for each Shakespearean play they heard from their parents. The children might use problematic situations that they observed in their family life or the context might be fictional. For example, he might ask, in the case of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, "What if you had a king who was very ambitious, what would he do? What would happen if the king gave away his kingdom?" While the students are developing diverse solutions for that problem (diverse plots for the same *fabula*), the teacher elevates the most creative, ontologically deep, and personal plot solutions by the students. He and the children also watch and discuss diverse classical movies of the Shakespearean plays. Thus, students become exposed to the existing cultural, literary, and artistically diverse plots and their interpretations, and improvise their own. This leads them to decision-making about which play to choose for the school enactments and prepares them for new thoughtful and creative interpretations and play-crafting of the chosen play. In the case of Mikhail Gradovski, he focuses on the most creative, personally related, interesting aspects of the students' writing and elevates them for the whole class.

These SIBEs define "Bakhtinian" as developing students' unique personal voices, among other unique personal voices, with creative authorship. Simultaneously, it is also developing taste for a unique personal voice, creativity, and authorship and developing interest in each other. However, in our

critique, this taste is heavily controlled by the teacher and not so much by the community (classroom and beyond).

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-08):** *I disagree with “heavily and controlled,” and the value judgment that goes with these words. The process became dialogic, the authorship is shared, especially once we had chosen the play and I have plenty of evidence to show that but there was no time for it here. I will send you a couple of excerpts. There was a lot of improv, creative work, and critical discussions, in which the children had agency and where their decisions prevailed. I will send a couple of passages from children’s reflections as evidence. The final conversation shows the meta-internally persuasive discourse that could not have evolved with me heavily controlling.>>*

We suspect that there is little critical discussion with the students, if at all, of why the teacher’s taste—the teacher’s amplifier, the teacher’s filter—is good, what alternative tastes to it are, and why they are not as good as the teacher’s. The teacher’s cultural taste and creative authorship often has a charismatic, if not manipulative, quality to create “an educational vortex” of sucking students into this educational activity (see Chap. 2.3 on Educational Vortex).

Below we will discuss diverse ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies based on critical authorship.

### THE ETHICAL ISSUE OF A “TORPEDO TOUCH” UNDERMINING THE STUDENTS’ ONTOLOGICAL BEING

In our judgment, several Bakhtinian educators apparently committed to the Socratic version of critical authorship. That type of pedagogy was described and exemplified by Plato in the dialogue “Meno” (Plato & Bluck, 1961). As Matusov (2009) showed, Socratic pedagogy has several versions, some of which are instrumental, some ontological, and some mixed. According to Socratic dialogic pedagogy, the teacher starts by promoting a student’s dear ideas and then invites the student to critically examine them. This critical examination leads to revealing hidden contradictions and tensions among the student’s dear ideas to the student him- or herself. This revelation leads the student to an existential crisis, because the student’s original ideas are deeply ontological, often involving the student’s stakes, self-image, and relations to other people. Socrates described this existential crisis as a “torpedo touch” (i.e., existential crisis) imposed on the student. For example, SIBE Eugene Matusov (Case#3) described his old Bakhtinian pedagogy as forcing his students to perform a meaningless “learning” activity of “teaching” each other how to make a peanut-butter sandwich, only to make his students face their own unconditional and unquestionable conformity to the pedagogical authority. The students were very disturbed by this violent pedagogical turn. As Eugene described, “Well, that class was a night class—I came home very late. I checked my email before going to sleep and I noticed an email from my student from this class. He wrote, ‘I am a senior student. This is my last semester and let me tell you that out of all classes that I had experienced, definitely you



are the worst professor!’ [laughter] Many of my students wrote in my course evaluation how terrible teacher I was” (interview with Eugene Matusov, 2015-08-18).

Some educators are attracted to a powerful lesson of promoting this dramatic and deep learning through throwing students into an existential crisis. This approach is grounded in a Bakhtinian dialogic framework of using penetrating words that spark fierce internal dialogue in the person. As Eugene Matusov would say to his students, “It does not matter what you reply to me, what is important is what you reply to yourself” (Matusov & Brobst, 2013). This crisis potentially promotes, but does not guarantee, a revelation for the student, through which he or she may begin a process of examination of the self, the others, and the world. Alternatively, it can promote paralysis, cynicism, rationalization, or even a suicide. For instance, Matusov and Brobst described a Socratic dialogue leading a student to suicidal thoughts in the following dialogue between a Socratic teacher, Edward, and his former student, Jane:

**Jane (Edward’s former student):** ...but like you’ll still be in my head on the drive home even [i.e., vicious internal dialogue] if i would wish you wouldn’t be ... i see [having this internal dialogue caused by Edward’s penetrating words] as very oppressive ...

**Edward (Socratic teacher):** Why is having me in your head oppressive? I have all of you [my colleagues with whom I was working] in my head all the time and it is not oppressive to me ... Why? Why? Why?

**Jane:** [because] maybe i don’t want to have this in my head. Maybe because i’d rather have thoughts about ice cream or something in my head instead ... and they can’t be [there] because this is ... i guess it [this dialogue] becomes obsessive such that it interferes with other aspects of life ... i dunno Edward, it’s so weird and hard to explain but it feels like a ball and chain like a drug or an addiction or something ... maybe it’s just me though? maybe i’m too sensitive? like with my other [personal] issues i have in my life ... [these internal dialogues prompted by Edward are] all related to all this stuff ... it’s all so very penetrating ... excuse the French, but it’s like a mindf--k. because maybe it does conflate with personal issues i have, but i’m sure other people have similar issues, so some of your other students could have or could be suffering like me ... i think you are very good at asking very important and penetrating questions ... and sometimes you can get people to question their existence or their ways of living or why they’re doing what they’re doing, etc. etc. ... you have that blessing that is a curse maybe ... because i wonder if you could question someone to despair or death?

**Edward:** No, it is not my goal. My goal is to ask myself and others out of despair and out of death.

**Jane:** that may be your intention, but intentions and effects don’t always match up ... am I now getting you to question ... and possibly be in anxiety [about yourself and your actions] ... i think you have the potential to be psychologically very damaging to students/people ... because you are very good at seeing people’s weaknesses and vulnerabilities ... and getting them to face



them ... even if they're not equipped to ... or ready to ... and that can make people go into big crisis ... and they may not know what to do once there ...

**Edward:** I think that is the monster in me.

**Jane:** i think i can sleep peacefully tonight.

**Edward:** Good! Thanks! You helped me a lot! (Skype conversation, 2010-02-17/18) (Matusov & Brobst, 2013, pp. 81–82)

Throwing students into existential crises is attractive to some educators because sometimes painful existential crises may represent life-changing epiphanies to some students. For example, Matusov and his colleagues (Matusov, Baker, Fan, Choi, & Hampel, 2017) interviewed their diverse participants about their most meaningful experiences in their life. One young adult remembered being temporarily paralyzed as a result of an accident riding a horse in a race. While being imprisoned in her bed, for the first time she started reflecting on her life priorities and realized that she was not living a life she wanted to live. When being asked by the researchers if she would have had the same learning without the painful experience of being temporarily paralyzed, to their surprise, she replied negatively. She was saying that for her, learning was not an outcome of some experiences, but living through the experience.

In our view, one of the serious problems with the Socratic pedagogy of inducing existential crises in the students through penetrating words is not in the existential crisis itself, not even in its pains, but in playing God by intentionally *throwing* students into that crisis without their consent. A popular motif in post-World War II literature has been to examine people playing God, in order to “enlighten other people.” For example, in the Hungarian novel, *The fifth seal* (Sánta, 1986), a character reports a few “good-for-nothing” citizens to the Hungarian Fascists secret police in fall 1944, in order for them to experience existential crises, and stop caring only for their earthly mundane self-centered concerns. In our view, throwing people into existential crises against their will disrespects their agency and is irresponsible endangerment of their lives (physical and/or psychological).

Eugene Matusov criticized this Socratic pedagogy in the following way:

Although I initiated this dark pedagogy (after Socrates with his “torpedo touch”?), in my past teaching experience, I think it is wrong. It teaches through creation of blame and shame and even a sense of humiliation in students and I think it is based on teacher’s abuse of power. It breaks important trust and tacit contract between the student and the teacher about the safety of the learning environment and respect of boundaries. It also creates an unhealthy power differential, in my view. Now I prefer to teach via nostalgia—creation of good pedagogical relations with a critical twist that students may develop nostalgia—rather than through the pain of “torpedo touch.” (Facebook, Matusov, January 19, 2015)

According to Matusov (2009), pedagogy for nostalgia involves students experiencing certain pedagogical values and practices, which maybe initially alien for them. And then the student may decide if they like or dislike these

novel values. Experiencing new pedagogical practices may create a feeling of pedagogical nostalgia for the new pedagogical values and practices that the students liked.

In our current view, it is OK for the students to experience painful existential crises that they might face in their life, but it may not be OK for teachers to design and/or throw the students into them. It is not OK to play God for the students because this contradicts the ethical ontological principle of dialogism of treating all consciousnesses as having equal rights (Bakhtin, 1999).

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-25):** *What about all dialogic interruptions, ontological provocations [organized and promoted by the teacher—are they legitimate in your view or not]?!?>>*

### TEACHER AUTHORSHIP VERSUS STUDENT AUTHORSHIP

Another tension among Bakhtinian educators is prioritization of the teacher's authorship over the student's authorship of his or her own education, with the teacher only supporting it when and if needed. When the teacher's pedagogical authorship is prioritized, the teacher creates the framework for the students' creative growth through their dialogic encounter with each other. The teacher's authorship is in the creative recognition of the students' authorship of something that is interesting, exciting *for the teacher* based on *the teacher's* personal, pedagogical, and cultural taste. Of course, it leaves out students' contributions that are not interesting and exciting for the teacher. For example, for Alexander Lobok, young students' imaginative descriptions of what is in the room, like "smile" or "imaginary friend," are "wow!"-moments for him. He would stop, amplify, emphasize, and marvel at such creative, authorial wonders by his students. Meanwhile, young students' answers like "table" or "chairs" are uninteresting for Alexander—he articulates it to the children, by quickly skipping them, through rushing to their next idea. Thus, students' authorship becomes filtered through the authorial patterns of the teacher's interest.

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-20):** *Perhaps they are uninteresting for the students too? The teacher's and the student's responses and interests don't necessarily diverge—on the contrary.>>*

We suspect that Charles Bisley also prioritizes his own pedagogical authorship that creates a framework for the students' authorship. Like Alexander Lobok, Charles creates a framework of Shakespearean playcrafting for his students. The choice of Shakespeare is very interesting in itself. Choosing Shakespeare is institutionally non-negotiable for the students—they must prepare and present a Shakespearean play. It probably reflects institutional pressure to socialize children into the classical canons of high culture, admiration by the middle- and upper-middle-class parents of his students, and, perhaps, Charles's own aesthetic taste.

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-08):** *I think this is too simple. Of course, I cannot escape from filtering but I involve the children in this. I start with my authorship and, as playmaking is a long process, I hand over my author-*

ship to the students. Often I sat on the outside of a discussion about the children's acts and works and let them decide, value. In the choosing process, one of nine in the playmaking, I was more interlocutor than author. I do create a framework but it is not closed. The point is that it is an open one and that it provides the resources and the space for children to develop their own. I would argue that all creativity is based on innovation and constraint. A key principle of creativity for me is one of constraint. I start with an open framework that gives choice-constraint, and [some] choice[s] are not incompatible.

Shakespeare is known to many of the children—he is implicit in their cultural life, in the English language, and this makes their encounter a creative one, a dialogue as in “obrazovanie” (Lobok, 2014). There are plenty of other encounters I set up for the children to have with language and culture, including the demotic and vernacular. Or encounters they set up. For example, an encounter with the Marvel comic Deadpool became a key encounter in our Lear adaptation. I am following the school tradition and the big advantage is that the parents accept it. I do like Shakespeare, but if I chose another playwright I like to adapt, say a modern playwright like Sam Beckett or the Capek brothers, the parents wouldn't accept it. I agree my own aesthetic taste comes into the choice.

I would define the teacher's authorship as a responsive recognition of students' works and thoughts that encourages the children to develop their ideas further. For example, in the play projects, the main authorship occurs in improvisations I indeed set up, but I don't often choose what is selected. The online forums are often where the choices are made and in those I have a minimal presence. What is often most interesting for the teacher are the contributions that the children value. Also, as Kiyo [Miyazaki] notes, a strong and even provocative perspective from the teacher can lead to the children developing both their own and new perspectives (see Kiyotaka Miyazaki's arguments in Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014; Miyazaki, 2009).>>

We suspect that Charles also is involved in his creative pedagogical filtering of the students' contributions. This creative pedagogical filtering may occur when he elevates certain reflective writing by his students and ignores others. An example of such elevation is the following,

New matrices, a new activity system was created by a group in which I had complex and shifting roles. What had initially felt to most of the class like an argument, too much of one, became the start of a transformative process. If the splendidly individualistic Olivia<sup>3</sup> came to recognize and value my part in changing the fiction, I acknowledge that the feeling was mutual: “*I could never know what it feels like to be completely woven into something so deeply without you*” (Case #24, Bisley, discussion, April 1, 2017, italics in the original).

In this fragment, Charles elevates the student's contribution marked by him in italics. We think that for him, the student's acknowledgement of his own role in her authorship is of a great importance as a pedagogical author. However,

<sup>3</sup>The student's name is a pseudonym.

we do not know for sure whether and how Charles communicates his filtering to his students or only for us, the Bakhtinian peer community. If the latter, we are wrong—he is not prioritizing his pedagogical authorship to shape his students’ authorship.

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-08): *I prioritized this for the Bakhtinian peer community. It is important to note that of all the children’s letters, Olivia’s was the only one addressed to me, and she wrote that she did this to be argumentative. Olivia is highlighting my role as an interlocutor as an admission because she often rejected what I suggested and asked for in the playmaking, and sometimes with good reason. Her comment shows the agency I gave her as an author and actor, actually. Her involvement in the heteroglossia and heterodiscoursia of making and performing the play could not have been so extensive if I had been the main author of it. At times the polyphony was anarchic before it achieved something aesthetic.>>*

When students are primary authors of their education, they are actively involved in evaluative judgments of their own contributions and contributions of other students. Thus, in contrast to the cases, discussed above, in which teachers are authoring their students’ authorships, Aaron Yost (Case#5: “How to make school suck less?”) promotes his students’ judgments of their own contributions,

For example, their pamphlet [on how to improve school] included four suggestions for struggling students, four areas they identified through their research that would help them and students like them. One of them was *Managing pace*, like how things go too fast or too slow in a classroom. So we started talking about that a lot in our own work. It was like, *are we speeding through this too fast? or is this dragging on? How do we do this right—how do we keep from getting bored?* (Aaron Yost, Case#5: “How to make school suck less?”)

His students’ authorial process of critical dialogic examination of their own lives and desires was full of surprises for his students themselves, their peers, and for the teacher, Aaron (e.g., still 50 percent of the students’ attrition rate in the class).

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-08): *I’d say the key here, and in my example, is that the students evaluate their own work, not me. And they do it for each other and themselves.>>*

## MONO-GOAL OF EDUCATION VERSUS DIVERSE AND UNLIMITED GOALS OF EDUCATION: BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND DRINKS

One of the major concerns of traditional and innovative teachers is “staying on task” (Kennedy, 2005). For many monologic conventional teachers whose goal is to make students arrive at preset curricular endpoints, the task is defined unilaterally by the teacher. For many innovative teachers, including dialogic ones, the task can be negotiation between teachers and students, or even

exclusively among the students. In our analysis, this pedagogical concept of staying on task represents the unfolding of one particular discourse. This discourse may be “how to make school suck less” (Aaron Yost, Case#5), or how to interpret the poem *My Papa’s Waltz* (Paul Spitale, Case#1), or what is an ethical message for us from the poem “Five ways to kill a man” (Tara Ratnam, Case #11), or a discussion about what philosophers mean by their quotes in a Marxist textbook (Alexander Lobok, Case #22), or when to put or not to put words to connect simple clauses in complex sentences (Bakhtin, 2004).

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-06-13):** *This description makes it sound as if my purpose/plan (in advance) in “teaching” this poem was to get students to find the ethical message (a priori) of the poem. However, the ethical issue was a byproduct of the dialogue, and it emerged spontaneously from the classroom discussion. It was unforeseen before it happened.*>>In contrast to monologic educators, dialogic Bakhtinian educators encourage their students to define direction of that monodiscourse and value students’ creative contributions that are often unexpected, surprising teachers themselves. Using Kennedy’s terminology, these dialogic Bakhtinian educators actively encourage their students to be “off-script”—off the teacher’s scripts, while insisting that the students stay on the collectively (or unilaterally) defined task.

However, there are other Bakhtinian educators who support, if not actively promote, the emergence of diverse discourses in their classrooms and lessons—what Bakhtin and Matusov had called “heterodiscoursia” (*разноречье*—in Russian) (Matusov, 2011b). Probably the quintessence of the Bakhtinian heterodiscursive pedagogical approach is SIBE Silvine Barbato, making it difficult to follow at times (Robi Kroflič’s feedback reply, 2018-04-29). For example, in Case #23, “Teaching without prejudices,” she both articulates and exemplifies her heterodiscursive pedagogical approach. In this case, Silvine Barbato weaves together many diverse discourses. We see unfolding the following discourses: child moral development; current Brazilian political, economic, and ecological events; ontological teaching by a Brazilian math teacher; political, personal, and professional risk involved in ontological teaching; and unprofessional and unethical journalism. Of course, Silvine’s students might engage in many different types of discourses that might emerge in their discussions. The heterodiscursive teacher sees her role in creating a rich environment for the emergence of heterodiscoursia.

It’s interesting that Silvine chooses a “hands-off” approach to heterodiscoursia—another “hot” topic among Bakhtinian educators (e.g., see Paul Spitale’s Case#1). In our judgment, she seems to equate guidance with filtering student’s contributions that we described above, which leads her to stay away from the students’ discussions (i.e., “I do not take part [in the students’ online forum]”). Although we share a concern about filtering students’ authorship by the teacher’s taste and dear ideas, we respectfully disagree with this hands-off pedagogical approach. In our view, non-filtering dialogic guidance may involve promoting connections among the emerging contributions and discourses, engaging students in testing diverse ideas, engaging students in evaluating

their own ideas, engaging students in mapping and conceptualizing diverse discourses, exposing students to new ideas and discourses.

<<**Silviane Barbato, feedback reply (2018-04-30):** *Could you explain a bit more on the topic? It would support better the analysis and what comes next in your argumentation. And it would help me a lot to reflect on my teaching.*>>

In traditional schools, heterodiscoursia in the classroom—when students are shifting discourses-topics frequently—is not as appreciated as them being on task. It is perceived as students being off the teacher’s task. Some SIBEs, like Silviane Barbato, Matusov (2011b), and Ana Marjanovic-Shane have come to appreciate both the pedagogical and ecological importance of heterodiscoursia. Heterodiscoursia can signal an exhaustion of a particular topic for the community for some or all participants and an emergence of a new topic of communal or personal interest. However, it is true: heterodiscoursia may also disrupt the teacher’s lesson plan developed in advance, it may also extinguish some learning-teaching opportunities, and it may create the perception of chaos in content, at times resisting any possibility for a meaningful summary (i.e., finalizing). At the same time, heterodiscoursia connects diverse spheres of human life, promotes creativity of unexpected connections and juxtapositions, and creates a carnivalistic atmosphere.

Heterodiscoursia guarantees freedom from coercion to stay on one topic at any cost. It gives opportunity to see life from different, sometimes unexpected, angles. For example, the poem “Five ways to kill a man” can be viewed as powerful ethic prose as Bakhtinian educator Tara Ratnam (Case #11) presented it in her classroom. But it also can be seen from aesthetical lenses involving rhythm of diverse stanzas, or sounding of diverse words that might create a melody, pattern of graphic representation, and so on. It might remind participants of some interesting story or a joke or might attract attention to the poet and his biography on the occasion of writing this particular poem. It might spark a discussion about people disliking poetry in general or this poem in particular. Finally, it might be ignored altogether, as a failed dialogic provocation. This diversity of discourses creates a cosmos, in which the encounter between the poem and the students can happen (but never can be guaranteed).

In contrast to the other tensions described above in this chapter, in this tension between monodiscoursia and heterodiscoursia, we do not argue that heterodiscoursia is always better than monodiscoursia for education (or, at least, our vision of it).

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-20):** *I would agree, and it’s the same with authorship. The creative process of learning involves the teacher’s and the student’s creative authorship and it is not one versus another. There are different asymmetries and these develop and change over time depending on the individuals concerned, their roles, and the complex personal relations in the group.*>>

Rather, we suggest that both of them should be promoted in the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy. There is nothing wrong with becoming consumed by one discourse for some time. But, at some point, this topic will be exhausted, and the diversity of discourses will emerge. For us, the problem may be in an



exclusive commitment to one versus another. Exclusive commitment to laser-beam monodiscoursia may lead to the purification of life and critical dialogue, often entailing pedagogical violence (Matusov & Sullivan, 2019, submitted) as a means of this purification. On the other hand, excessive heterodiscoursia may lead to shallow, underdeveloped critical dialogue, disrupted by the attention deficit in a particular discourse.

<< **Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-20):** *Spot on! I know the limitations of too much heterodiscoursia, and the absence of critical focus.*>>

Sidorkin (1999) developed an interesting ecological “three drink theory” of (classroom) discourse. According to Sidorkin, any good discourse goes through three ill-defined phases with abrupt shifts. He compares an ecologically good dialogue with a dinner party:

Consider a typical dinner party; it consists of three major phases. The first phase is when people make toasts, and conduct a polite, turn-taking conversation. The conversation might be worthless or meaningful, funny or stupid, but in any case it has the attention of an entire group, and proceeds upon a clearly defined topic. The second phase roughly coincides with the second drink, when people start to talk over each other, to stray from the original topic and tone, but still aim their utterances toward the whole group. They become more excited, often, but not always ironical and humorous toward the ideas expressed earlier. Finally, around the third drink or so, the conversation falls apart into a disarray of smaller conversations, loosely if at all connected to the original topics. People usually talk nonsense in pairs or smaller groups, or sometimes listen to some nonsense offered by one person. Not all parties go through all three phases in a neat sequence, but the best of them do. In a cocktail party, or at a buffet, people try to jumpstart the conversation through bypassing the first, and even the second phases, which always seems artificial. On other occasions, formal diners seldom go beyond the first phase, which creates boredom of enormous proportions. ...

The three phases of a good conversation have very little to do with our habits of alcohol consumption, so I will call them simply the “first, second, and third discourse.” They represent some common means of making sense. This is often the process of how we understand and how we learn. (Sidorkin, 1999, pp. 74–75)

Our interpretation of Sidorkin’s three-drink metaphor is probably different from his own.<sup>4</sup> In our view, the “first drink” represents monodiscoursia, when people clearly stay within one discourse involving a trajectory of diving deeper and deeper into one chosen inquiry defining the discourse. For example, for Tara’s teaching Case#11, the general inquiry defining her monodiscourse is diving into the ethical meaning making of the poem “Five ways to kill a man” by Edwin Brock (see above). Tara started the discussion “within the students’ threshold level of experience, a question that they could answer subjectively ... [about] ways in which ... people use for killing.” She started with posing a task for the students, “so, the students had to find out other ways of killing that were mentioned in the poem.”

<sup>4</sup>The discussion of our differences lies outside the scope of this chapter.



After the students found the explicit examples of killing in the poem, Tara involved them in problem solving by deciphering the poem's various allusions to biblical and historical events. "One of students told me later that day it was like solving the cryptic puzzle, [chuckle] because from the allusions in the poem they had to figure out what did these allusions mean. They had to go back and find out. So now with the meaning that they had pulled out from the past, the cultural past from the age of Christ up till now" (Case #11). The knowledge the students acquired in their research of cultural and historical facts "became the basis with which they [the students] went back into the poem to look for a new meaning there, and what meaning they could figure out." Finally, when Tara used what was meant to be a multiple-choice test for assessment of the students' understanding of this poem, "one of the students ... said, 'Scientists is not the answer. He is not a psychopath because, scientists work under duress. There will be a purpose to do things, and so, you can't blame the scientists.'" Then a student brought an example of the responsibility of the famous physicist Albert Einstein who was a pacifist but in 1942, he wrote an infamous letter to the US president Franklin Roosevelt, urging him to develop an atomic bomb. The students challenged Einstein's morality and asked Tara, their teacher, how come a pacifist could ask for developing an atomic bomb. "So I was stumped by this sticky kind of question because I never thought about it before. So I had to think on my feet and then answer. Then I pointed out, 'Einstein regretted his action later' and also, I said, 'Some people, when they are under, fear it makes them do that. And he was afraid that Hitler would destroy this whole world?'" The students were not satisfied with their teacher's answer. As they discussed further, this atomic bomb was used against Japanese civilians. "And then the topic reverted to the ethics of scientists, like their ethical thing. I asked them, 'What would you do?' because these were all science graduates and many of them would go, many of them might even become scientists. I asked them what would you do if you were under pressure? Would you give in or would you protest? So a majority of the students think that is so kind of idealistic, they said, 'No, no, we won't give in to pressure.'" Initially many students thought that they would never give in. However, when their own questions became more and more ontological, involving their own lives and family, the students became aware of the complexity and difficulty involved in reaching simple, clear-cut answers.

The students' discourse trajectory in their learning journey started with their immediate untested ideas, led them through learning more facts about killing by studying history to identify allusions and solve puzzles as they began to make meaning, to finally bring them to posing new, difficult ethical problems in a critical ontological discussion of past events, and of the moral responsibility of scientists, their teachers, and themselves as citizens and future scientists.

<< **Richard Beach, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *The discussion of issues regarding whether the poem was framed as a "puzzle" as a reification focusing on the text and opposed to focusing on the reader implies the need to move beyond the text-reader binary to locate meaning making in the "in-between" [text-reader]*

*meanings in events (Bertau, 2014). Focusing on response events as a primary unit of analysis entails examining how those events unfold in unpredictable ways as a reader moves through a text ...*

*Focusing on the event itself constituting literary responses therefore entails considering how students are perceiving the event as fostering their collaborative construction of shared meaning. This entails students adopting tentative, exploratory, “I’m not sure about my response” stances that serve to invite others to mutually explore each other’s sense-making hunches in an unfolding event. This requires teachers to let students drive the direction of a discussion as opposed to imposing certain predetermined outcomes so that students assume ownership of the event.>>*

*<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-06-13): Thanks, Richard, for this useful comment! A focus on the event and students’ co-construction of meaning as agentive subjects seems to capture the process of the development of their authorial voice which could be seen as the crux of dialogic pedagogy.>>*

The “second drink” for us involves critical ontological dialogues with heterodiscoursia, when people jump from one discourse to another. These diverse discourses might be defined by diverse inquiries, jumping to discourses about the organization, jumping to humorous and carnivalistic discourses, jumping to sharing biographical stories and experiences, and so on. An example of that is Silviane’s Case #23, where she and her students started with a discussion of the class topic about Piaget’s theory of moral development. However, Silviane intentionally involved students in looking at diverse ethical issues by jumping to many different contexts. From the discourse of children’s moral development, Silviane and students jumped to a discourse of “building a better world.” Then, they explored issues of current Brazilian politics regarding ecology and feminism. They then jump to exploring a controversial case of teaching mathematics where a teacher used math examples about dealing drugs and prostitution to children from poor, drug-ridden outskirts of a large city. This discourse jumped to a discussion of sleazy journalism, sensationalizing this innovative teaching. She promoted her students developing their own positions and judgments of the variety of discourses, “as [these classroom discussions push] them [i.e., students] to assume other positions through other points of view, they collaborate to find new ways of dealing with a situation that happened, relating new solutions or orientations with the theories they know and are studying” (Case #23).

The “third drink” for us involves dialogues in education when dialogic being together becomes more important than purposeful searching for truth—the “dialectic” discourses (Nikulin, 2010), which are oriented predominantly to productive mono- or heterodiscursive meaning making. In the “third drink” dialogues, people are interested in each other rather than in things. Often these dialogues sound chatty, without any thematic take-away points. What they might remember is the quality time spent together and nostalgia—a desire to be with their dialogic partners again (whether it is possible or not). In the “third drink” people are interesting not because they can solve a problem or collaborate, tell something new or help people grow, but because they

constitute the sense of life itself—without these people life does not make sense (Nikulin, 2006). This dialogue is not discourse-oriented, but Other-oriented, what Buber (2000) called “I–Thou” dialogue. Of course, it involves discursive aspects, but discourse is bubbling and is a potentiality, without a need to be fully developed. But at any point, this dialogue may burst into discourse, moving temporarily or permanently either to a “first drink” or a “second drink” dialogue.

In the next section we will consider another tension presented by SIBE Dmitri Nikulin (Case #9), a tension between purposeful and systematic critical examination of life, self, society, and the world (i.e., “first drink”), and dialogical being together (i.e. “third drink”).

### DIALECTICAL ACHIEVEMENT VERSUS DIALOGIC BEING: BIFURCATION BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE THIRD DRINKS

BISE Dmitri Nikulin seems to propose a combination, or probably better to say, a bifurcation between a purposeful pursuit of inquiry in a monodiscursive fashion—“the first drink,” or what he calls “dialectics”—and free, unproductive dialogue of being with others—“the third drink.” Dmitri Nikulin insists that education, or any dialogue, is not about information exchange. “[Information exchange is] if you want to know how to get from point A to point B, you just ask” and get this information. Teaching philosophy to undergraduate and graduate students, Dmitri insists that in dialectics, the primary goal is to resolve some kind of tension, question, or inquiry, in which all the participants are genuinely engaged and interested in and which is unknown to them. Also, the participants do not know how to get to this resolution, their inquiries may go in many directions and come from unexpected, often serendipitous insights and twists. At the end, the participants are hopefully coming to a satisfactory, for them, conclusion. This emerging endpoint of dialectic is its product. Thus, dialectics is essentially and purposefully productive. Of course, the achieved endpoint of dialectics can be challenged and problematized in the future by the same or different participants, and then the new participants will come to another conclusion. Dialectics can move from one product to another in some trajectory, which makes it Big Dialectic.

Dialectic is a conversation in which you want to understand, for example, what happiness is. In principle, it should be productive in terms of understanding of what happiness is. After some time of a dialectical conversation, somebody comes up with the idea that happiness is friendship, somebody else says, “it’s equal distribution of wealth,” or something like that. And then, in the end, we refute the original claim by asking simple questions that allow for a simple “yes” or “no” answer. This is how I practice in my teaching—it originally comes from Socrates. And this is what philosophical education is all about because it is finding something about something. ... [T]he dialectical way to understand something is that it should be final [i.e., finalizable] ...

Dialectic starts with the question of “What something is.” We want to find out something: the essence of happiness or something, and then it is done the way it was practiced in the Academy ... My thesis is that, in fact, dialectic grows out of the spirit of dialogue. And so, dialogue is an informal, live exchange between the interlocutors, a useful tool in philosophy. But, of course, the use of it is limited. And so, it is unlike dialectic, which, embraces a number of different methods, which later [in Hegel’s dialectic] becomes only one single method, *the* method. But *the* dialectic is meant to be more or less ordered. (Dmitri Nikulin, Case #9)

Thus, Dmitri argues that Socratic dialectic was heterodiscursive (“second drink”) (Matusov, 2009), while Hegel’s dialectic became monodiscursive. Dmitri does not object to dialectic. Rather, he argues that its pedagogical and even philosophical use is limited, although helpful.

And I think there is nothing wrong with it once we are in the business of philosophy, but again, I think, this is not what Bakhtin is all about. So, the dialectical method is what philosophers usually practice. But I am trying to set the dialogical environment when we keep on conversing as these independent dialogical beings, who always have to say something to express more and more but never in a finalizable way. (Dmitri Nikulin, Case #9)

Thus, dialogue as being with others is “unfinalizable,” according to Dmitri Nikulin. The unfinalizability refers to the fact that a topic of dialogue cannot be finalized or exhausted in principle, that is, reach some kind of satisfactory understanding, endpoint, or conclusion. An unfinalizable dialogue can be only abruptly ended, abandoned, or tabled but never finished.

Since dialogue of being with others is often not topic-oriented, it can be very messy. It does not necessarily have a point. Even when it has a point for one participant, this point may not be shared with other participants or feel like a satisfactory conclusion, but rather is recognized as an important anchor in conversation. The flow of conversation itself is anything but smooth. People are constantly interrupting each other (“in a polite way,” as Dmitri adds) without necessarily wanting to know the ending of a phrase or topic. They are legitimately free to change the topic of conversation at any time or return it back to the original one. The conversation moves freely, without a particular order or destination. If it is recorded, it is difficult to comprehend the recording or even make sense of it, without participating in it. According to Dmitri, this type of unfinalizable dialogue of being with others belongs to orality and cannot be adequately transcribed in any writing. After Socrates, Dmitri Nikulin argues that writing kills that kind of dialogue (Nikulin, 2010).

<<Antti Rajala, feedback reply (2018-04-30): *I remember being in [Swedish sociolinguist] Per Linell’s seminar. Per said that there is a body of research on the cultural change in communication due to the social media and similar technology. In this research the argument has been that written communication becomes again similar to oral. I am sorry I do not have references, but this is of course easy to note in our everyday experience.*

*It is surprising that there is very little about the new opportunities that new information and communication technology, such as Facebook, offers for pedagogy. In Bea's [Beatrice Ligorio] case there was some, but this was not taken up much in the analysis. This is not a critique, just a surprised observation.>>*

In our understanding, Dmitri's Bakhtinian pedagogy involves bifurcations between finding deep interest in others (i.e., interaddressivity, Matusov, 2011b) and searching for truth—that is, critical examination of life, Socrates' moto in Apology: “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Carefully listening to and reading Dmitri Nikulin, one can recognize that his sympathy is lying more with the former than with the latter.

In our view, Dmitri Nikulin captured the bi-directional nature of education: one is a purposeful activity of a particular meaning making (e.g., “I-with-You-about-It relationship,” using Buber's terminology, Buber, 2000; “critical dialogue,” Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015; “internally persuasive discourse,” Matusov & von Duyke, 2010; “dialectic,” Nikulin, 2010; “critical examination of life,” Socrates, see in Plato, & Riddell, 1973) and the other dimension is a particular way of being with others<sup>5</sup> (e.g., “I-Thou relationship,” Buber, 2000; “conviviality,” Illich, 1973; “community of learners,” Matusov, von Duyke, & Han, 2012; “social relations,” Sidorkin, 2004). Nikulin (2006) makes the most dialogic definition of this second dimension of education, that is, unpacking the notion of the pure dialogic I-Thou, dialogic being together relations. In our judgment, his contribution is original and deep.

However, one can question why in education the existential dimension should be more important than the purposeful dimension. Following Buber, Dmitri Nikulin might reply that “Thou” (the Other) is more important than “It” (the search for truth). This may be true in life, but why should it be true in the sphere of education?

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-25):** *Very important question—also for the concluding chapter!*>>

## CONCLUSION

All the Bakhtinian pedagogies described both address and challenge conventional monologic pedagogy. Based on the abstracted teaching cases of Bakhtinian pedagogy, we may conclude that the most important legacy of Bakhtin's philosophy for our Bakhtinian educators is his dialogic framework. This dialogic framework is mostly understood ethically rather than discursively, stylistically, or in terms of genre.

In the big picture, all of the abstracted tensions of the Bakhtinian pedagogies are about ways of being with others: instrumentally or ontologically; in a creative or critical authorship, whose authorship has precedence; author among heroes or author among authors, monodiscursively or heterodiscursively, purposefully or existentially.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Biesta (2017) and Robi Kroflič's reply (2018-04-25).

The six abstracted tensions in the 14 interviewed SIBEs are our particular and subjective angles. The readers may disagree with us about the particular coding and judgments of these tensions, across diverse SIBEs, and/or may find different tensions and ways of looking at these diverse Bakhtinian pedagogies.

We are looking forward to new discoveries in Bakhtinian pedagogy.

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## Chapter 2.2: Ontological Engagement

### WHAT IS ONTOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT AND WHY ARE BAKHTINIAN EDUCATORS CRAVING IT?

Matusov and his colleagues (Matusov, von Duyke, & Han, 2012) define students' "ontological engagement" in education as when the life of the students, outside of the classroom and in general, and the students' lives in the moment, occurring in the classroom, become a crucial part of their education itself. Following American educational philosopher John Dewey's pedagogical creed, in ontological engagement, "education ... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Dewey, 1929, p. 7). This means that education is the final cause rather than being imposed on the students by an authority or even by the students themselves, as a means of achieving some other, non-educational, goals,

Students' ontological engagement in their education ... means that when the students are asked why they do what they do in school, "Why are you doing that?" the students find the source of [their engagement] in themselves (e.g., "I like it," "I want to find out ...," "I want to learn that ...," "it is useful for me because ...") or in the activity (e.g., "it's fun," "it is interesting"). When students are engaged in the learning activities ontologically, their whole personality exists in their learning while this ontological learning penetrates the whole existence of the students' "here-and-now"—they are "in the flow," often forgetting time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In contrast, in non-ontological engagement, the students see the reason for their classroom and homework activity in the teacher or the school institution (e.g., "the teacher wants us to do ...," "the teacher assigns us ...," "to prepare for a test," "it's required," "it's good for my future"). When asked why the teacher has assigned a particular learning activity, the students usually reply that they do not know. It seems that in the non-ontological CoL ["Community of Learners"] model, students often do not actively invest in and have ownership for their own learning and when they do, it seems to be accidental to the non-ontological CoL project. (Matusov et al., 2012, p. 42)

Let us illustrate the concept of ontological engagement in education with the following example. In one of his undergraduate classes for preservice teachers, Eugene Matusov wanted to introduce the notion of ontological engagement by ontologically engaging them in a topic connected to the American Civil War, in which they had not been previously interested. He started his lesson by defining ontological engagement abstractly and as an opposition to boring education that many of the students experienced in their conventional schools. A student asked Eugene to demonstrate ontological engagement with them. Eugene asked his students if they were currently thinking about the Civil War. Surprised by the question, they replied that they were not. Then, he showed them an episode from a movie *American Tongues* (Kolker, Alvarez, & Center for New American Media, 1986), in which a young woman from Boston, MA, the North, speaks about her trip with her boyfriend to his family in the South. As they drove to the South, her boyfriend started using Southern English dialect to her growing consternation. The woman in the video said,

[My boyfriend] became filled with all these hillybilly kind of regionalisms. You know, this real kinda “you all” stuff. And, as well, a lot of the ... hand gestures. This man was becoming a different person ... mostly to language. By the time we got to Sparta [in the state of Georgia], I had had it! I just knew that someone with those little accents was not going to crawl around inside of me! I was not going to have little Southern babies who talk like that! And I got a plane home. No question! (Quoted in Matusov, 2009b, p. 366)

Eugene’s students were upset with this story and thought that the woman in the video had a lot of stereotypes about White Southerners being racist, uncultured, and close-minded. Eugene wanted to bring these issues closer to his student’s own personal lives to make the topic less intellectual and more ontological for them.

He asked his female students (most of whom were from the American North East) whether *they* would date a person who speaks with a Southern accent or not. What would the reaction of *their* families be? Their friends? Would it bother them personally, why, why not, and so on? The students felt immediately uneasy. Some said that their family might have problems with that, although they themselves did not. They tried to move to other tangential issues—of their family reaction to dating foreigners (e.g., Germans), diffusing the tension about the South–North divide. Eugene recognized that it might be still not safe for the students to discuss the North–South issues openly, and he introduced a safer topic of discrimination against the Irish at the beginning of the twentieth century in the USA. He asked his students (some of whom were Irish) if they ever experienced such discrimination or if their parents or grandparents talked about it. No one had such experiences nor heard about them in their families. Eugene pointed out that the issue of the discrimination against Irish Americans is no longer alive today, but that the South–North issues were apparently still alive for them. He asked them how and why that

was the case, as he, being an immigrant to the United States, could not understand it. This now opened up a whole lot of personal stories involving a whole range of their reactions to and judgments of White people in the South, their mixed feelings when they travelled to the South, or about their relatives and families. Some recognized that their reactions were similar to the woman in the video, even admitting that the Southern accent sounded annoying to them. They talked about how White people from the South seemed close-minded, illiberal, racist, uneducated, and stupid. The students became puzzled and perplexed by themselves.

Eugene began to problematize their judgments by bringing alternative views of Southerners about Northerners, discussing with students what they think would be Southerners' perspectives and why. The students discussed how Southerners would view Northern people as rich and yuppie, but also disrespectful to authorities, rude, unfriendly, and selfish. Eugene and the students developed a conceptual map of the stereotypes that each side may hold about the other, and in developing it, they re-experienced the North–South Divide in the classroom.

Eugene pointed out how these issues of the North–South Divide were still alive, but many other conflicts and problems (like discrimination against the Irish) were not. He asked what the reason could be for that. One student replied that racism was still a problem in the USA since the Civil War. Eugene started problematizing this issue of racism. Was racism the main reason of the Civil War? Racism existed before and after the Civil War. Some students brought the issue of the South seceding from the rest of the Union, and Eugene asked, why did the South want to secede at that particular moment in time? Why not before or later? When the students pointed out that it was because the North wanted to stop slavery and the South wanted to continue with slavery, Eugene asked what made the North want to stop slavery at that particular time? Why was the North OK with slavery before that time and then “suddenly” decided to stop it at that time?

The inquiry of why the Civil War started when it started—not earlier, not later—seemed to puzzle my students indeed. It seemed to become a “killer question” leading to the students' ontological engagement—raising the question in and by them. ... [T]he students were engaged in rapid and intensive brainstorming, building on each other's ideas in search of a satisfactory answer. ... Through the students' brainstorming I was learning how they think about the Civil War. The students provided alternative and conflicting discourses for each other ... The students provided a variety of rather sophisticated economic and political explanations of causes for the Civil War. Some of the explanations were compatible (e.g., the North getting economically independent from the South because of trade with England) but some were not (e.g., whether industrialization made slavery ineffective or, on the contrary, it could use slaves more intensively than before). ... [T]he students themselves were testing each other's ideas ... [Finally one student asked]:

SARI [to Eugene]: Will you tell us?

EUGENE [looking down at Sari]: You mean, “The truth”?! [Eugene smiles and says it with irony. Sari smiles in response, apparently appreciating the joke, and nods her head.] [pause]... It’s actually an interesting question.

However, at that moment, Eugene stopped the discussion about the Civil War and returned the students back to the educational topic of designing a class for students’ ontological engagement:

EUGENE: OK, guys, [lowered voice] back to our lesson on designing students’ ontological engagement *now!* What was the point of that demonstration?! [Sari laughs; some other students laugh] Think of that. We came here to this class without much interest in the Civil War. But now many of you have started caring about that [many more students are laughing]. And you start asking me questions about the Civil War—you are really interested in the Civil War here and now. Now you’re teachable about the Civil War. This is the best way you can teach students—when they start asking you questions about the topic you brought to the class. Right? [gasp, from Sari] When your little students start asking questions, you say to yourself, [loudly] “Y-E-E-E-A-A-H!!!! Of course, my dear students, I’m happy to provide answers on this topic that I brought to you,” right? And this is what designing ontological engagement is about. It’s when your students start [getting] interested in the things that you brought to them to teach.

The students were shocked and even upset that Eugene stopped their discussion of the Civil War to turn back to designing ontological engagement—this was how deeply ontologically engaged the students were at the time:

SARI [upset]: You’re not going to tell us about the cause of Civil War?!! (Matusov, 2009b, p. 375)

Ontological engagement not only powerfully grabs the students’ attention and makes the topic owned by the students, but also it makes education a dramatic event in the life of the students. Thus, when Eugene stopped the discussion of the Civil War, his students experienced it as a violent pull-out from this important event.

When students are ontologically engaged in a curricular topic, they start asking questions of their own deep and urgent interest and replying with full seriousness to questions by others. This constitutes Bakhtin’s definition of meaning making as a relationship between asking an interested information-seeking question and a serious reply to it (Bakhtin, 1986).

Without ontological engagement, students’ meaning making often becomes impaired, shallow, and disconnected from their life experiences, as many teachers and educational researchers of conventional schooling noticed. For example,

In one [high school] classroom, students were asked to find the weight of a brick after measuring its length, width, and height, and being given the value of its density in pounds per cubic inch. The exchange went something like this:

Teacher: “Who can tell me the weight of the brick?”

Student: “1016 pounds.” (Looking at his paper)

Teacher: “Lift the brick. Now, how much does it weigh?”

Student: (Again looking at his paper) “1016 pounds.”

The student had failed to make the connection between the problem and real life. Calculations were unrelated to common sense. This example was not an isolated incident. Time after time we witnessed the use of numbers with little or no thought given to implications and applications. (Boyer, 1983, pp. 108–109)

Like Boyer, many educators often find that without ontological engagement, students make no connection between what they study in school and their life—school learning is bracketed from life and life is bracketed from school learning. Not only is there no connection between the two, but it looks, like in the example above, as if these are two completely unrelated and unrelatable realms. Even worse, the students often engage in pattern-recognition and pattern-production in the realm of school learning (Lemke, 1990)—what Barnett and Coate (2005) would probably call the most primitive form of “operational engagement”—as if they cannot use any dialogic meaning making.

<<Antti Rajala, feedback reply (2018-04-30): *Eugene’s example of the Civil War made me think were all the students ontologically engaged or just only a few who were cited. I have had a lot of class discussions with my students and very often there are some of the students who are very engaged when many remain silent and it is not clear how engaged they are.*>>

We noticed in our interviews that all SIBEs craved their students’ ontological engagement in one way or another. Even when they were unsuccessful in provoking it in class, we can still see traces of this craving. Below we describe diverse types of ontological engagement in the teaching cases presented by the SIBEs and then turn to discussion of the observed issues of ontological engagement in these cases. We conclude with a discussion of the relationship between Bakhtinian educators’ ontological engagement and alienated learning common to many conventional schools.

## OBSERVED TYPES OF ONTOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

Analyzing the 29 teaching cases from SIBEs, we abstracted four major types of students’ ontological engagement. We called the first type “extrinsic” because it mobilizes students’ ontological needs and interests outside of education itself. The second type is “intrinsic” because it generates self-contained interest in the learning activities. The third observed type is “eventful” as it is based on emerging here-and-now dramatic events in the classrooms. Finally, the fourth type involves students’ “self-selection” based on their prior interests. We found that some types of ontological engagement had several subtypes. Some of them have been already described or mentioned in the literature and some have not. We discuss them in the rest of the chapter.

### *Extrinsic Ontological Engagement (Applied)*

We define *extrinsic* ontological engagement as engagement with issues, goals, and causes outside of the education and learning itself. We observed four subtypes of extrinsic ontological engagement. The first subtype mobilizes the *social activism* of the students. This subtype, as we understand it, is widely described in the literature on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1986), social justice (Freedom Writers & Gruwell, 1999), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tyson, 1999). The second subtype uses academic material as an entry point for students' *existential* self-exploration and growth. The third type of extrinsic ontological engagement is *autobiographical* in its nature. Meanwhile the fourth subtype mobilizes *understanding* of ontologically puzzling and ontologically interesting phenomena in the students past or current/emerging practices, activities, and life in general, similar to Eugene's teaching case of the Civil War. This subtype was especially documented in Russian and Ukrainian innovative pedagogies, such as the School of Dialogue of Cultures (Kurganov, 2009; Solomadin & Kurganov, 2009).

#### *Academic Material as a Means for Students' Social Activism*

Social activism "consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society."<sup>1</sup> In Case#5, which we titled "How to make school suck less," SIBE Aaron Yost describes his remedial English writing class for "at risk" 10th-grade high school students who institutionally failed their regular English classes a year before. As Aaron reports, many of the students were traumatized by their past school experiences in English and were reluctant and resistant to engage in any academic writing. During the first meetings, Aaron inquired about their past school experiences asking them why they were in his class: "I got all kinds of answers from 'it's required' to some pretty big existential questions. Yeah [laughter]. And I think I was surprised and pleased by that with that particular group of students because they were sharp, they were critical, they could think" (Aaron Yost, Case#5). He focused his students on what had not worked for them in school. The students generated sharp criticism of their past classes and schooling in general. Then he suggested they make a wider inquiry among their friends and peers in school to find out what did not work for them in school and what might work. Based on these interviews and reflection, Aaron proposed his students develop a report for the school administrators. Most students (but not all) enthusiastically accepted the challenge of developing this report and even engaged in generating problems and solutions, such as: managing the pace of learning, managing school administration distractions, and building relationships with teachers and other students. They were even able to test some of the solutions in their class with Aaron. The students titled their report "How to make school suck less." They were plan-

<sup>1</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activism>

ning to distribute their report as a brochure for other students in the school. Unfortunately, the administration let the students and Aaron down, demanding to censor the rough language of the report. In Aaron's words, "Our principal took one look at the cover and said, 'You can't say "suck,'" and I said, 'Well, can you read the thing first? See if it ...'—and I told him about the rhetorical situation, that this was a big part of our class, and that we had talked about audience and making these arguments to this audience and what we needed to do to do that." The students were upset, as they did not want to change the expressive language of their report.

The extrinsic ontological engagement of Aaron's students was based on social justice. It involved identification of and naming the ontological tensions and needs in the students' lives, analysis of these tensions, developing solutions, enacting these solutions, and evaluation of their outcomes and experiences—what works and what does not, as well as what "works" means (i.e., should the values underlining the evaluation be revised). For the students, academic learning (academic writing in Aaron's case) was an accidental byproduct of this process. Yet, academic writing *was* Aaron's hidden agenda, which he had to jump-start and enforce—even by bribing the students with money: "I did all kinds of things to motivate them to keep working. I don't think any of them had ever done anything academic for any sustained period of time [laughter]. So, one day, a research day—I brought \$5 cash. [Laughter] And just said, I need somebody to find something that answers this question. I put a dollar bill down on the top of the computer. I've never seen kids work so fast in my life. It was the money that was motivating them, yeah, I think [chuckles]" (Aaron Yost, Case#5). The engaged students' ontology was rooted in social justice, not in academic writing per se. Learning social justice was ontologized for the students but not necessary learning academic writing. Some of them might have preferred to talk rather than write anything. According to Aaron, by the end of the term, the class had a 50% attrition rate. We wonder whether and to what extent his hidden agenda of imposing "meaningful" writing on the students for their own sake contributed to this. In sum, the students' extrinsic ontological engagement seemed to be exploited by Aaron (see our discussion of exploitation of ontological engagement below).

In Case#19 by Eugene Matusov, it was a student and not the teacher who ontologically engaged his peers through social justice. When he proposed to study "chivalry" as a topic of cultural diversity and his peers voted on it, the professor did not know what exactly he and his peers wanted to study. The professor invited the student to teach the class and lead the class discussion. The student introduced many hot issues and controversies about gender relationships that he and his peers faced on a daily basis in the society where the old traditions of gendered division of labor and responsibilities have collapsed. He and his peers revealed a minefield of many "double binds" in modern society. Whatever men do, they can be damned: to open a door for a woman or not, to give a seat or not, to pay for a lunch in a restaurant or not, to offer to help with carrying a heavy load or not. He and his peers also brought up educational



issues of what and how to teach younger children about that. The class exploded in heated debates. Again, the hot societal and personally experienced tension was revealed, and the student used multiple academic materials to introduce and test diverse ideas and approaches. The goal was to develop a course of actions and a school curriculum to improve gender relationships in modern society. The existing ontological tensions were evoked and dialogized—that is, became the focus of critical dialogue about gendered cultural diversity.

*Academic Material as an Entry Point for Addressing Students' Existential Needs*

Existential needs refer to human needs to critically evaluate their own conscious being (i.e., existence)—our need to understand the nature of our desires, their groundedness in our reality, their contradictions, and to consider if we are at peace that these desires define us. For example, a teacher may strive for effective classroom management—strong control over the classroom—while wanting her students to become self-responsible and autonomous individuals who can make their own informed decisions about what is good and bad. So, the teacher may have an existential need to resolve these contradictory desires, defining the teacher's existence as a person and a teacher.

Alexander Lobok was faced with another challenging pedagogical problem while teaching Marxism-Leninism for engineering students in the Soviet Union (Case #8, Teaching Marxism-Leninism in college). Alexander was expected by the Soviet Communist Party authorities to indoctrinate his students, who might not even be interested in philosophy, into the official Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology, using a boring, monologic mandated textbook. Alexander approached this pedagogical challenge very differently than Aaron. Aaron tried to dialogize the students' existing ontology to promote external ontological engagement: from students' ontology to the assigned text. In contrast, Alexander dialogized the text in the opposite direction: from the assigned text (i.e., original quotes by the philosophers mentioned by the Soviet textbook) to the students' ontology. He tried to promote the emergence of his students' ontological interest in philosophical writings through a critical dialogue among his students and himself as a teacher, about (and with) the philosophers' quotes occasionally brought by the textbook:

I have realized that I was working with that textbook of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in a "Bakhtinian way," even though I did not know it at that time. For I actually addressed my students with, "Guys, please note that there are different voices in this book. Please find these different voices!" By different voices, I meant the quotes. But, it is not enough to find a voice—you also need to hear it. You need *to engage in an inner dialogue with it*. For example, you need to find the famous quote from the "revisionist" [Marxist] Eduard Bernstein [a German social-democrat]: "The goal is nothing, motion is everything," and try to understand it through the lens of your own life—what could it mean really? What associations do we have with the word "goal"? What associations do we have with "motion"? When and in what particular situations can we say that the process of

motion is more valuable than the outcomes and goals *we envision for ourselves?* ... We create a sort of a collective cloud of our questioning in regard to this voice. And, the most important point here is not that we try to understand “what Bernstein really meant by that,” but *that with Bernstein’s help we can hear ourselves.* And that we can hear this phrase as the one that has *existential personal meaning for every one of us* ... (Alexander Lobok, Case#8, stress is added)

The voice of a philosopher (e.g., German philosopher Eduard Bernstein) became alive for Alexander’s students because it was *useful* for the students’ own existential growth. They had developed ontological interest in the original philosophers by interrogating and making sense of their text because these philosophers became increasingly a useful provocation for the students’ own deep self-understanding. Alexander Lobok sees education as a lifelong process of self-growth: “Essentially, a whole human life is a process of acquiring one’s voice, of moving towards this voice” (Alexander Lobok, Case#22).

Similarly, Dmitri Nikulin engaged his American philosophy students in Plato’s texts by revitalizing Plato’s voice and his inquiries:

... when we are talking about “what is good” in Plato, we talk about Plato’s Symposium of the Republics and I’m asking, “What is good?” “What is the idea of good?” “How is it connected with the idea of happiness?” “What does it mean to be happy?” “What is your idea of happiness or love?” Things like that. And in this case, they usually say, “I want to be this and this and that,” “I want to have this and this and that in that relation for myself.” And I ask, “How about the other? What do you want the other to have from this relation?” And we start talking about such things but we also usually have some assigned texts, so we read them and converse and discuss them but in a quite informal way. (Dmitri Nikulin, Case#9)

As Dmitri pointed out, the dialogue with the quotes and text helps the students to engage in themselves through trying to make sense of the material. The academic material was not important in itself, but primarily as a provocation and a means for problematizing and addressing students’ existential tensions.

<<**Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-22):** *From reading your analyses, I get the impression that philosophical questions (or at least some philosophical questions) are somehow intrinsically engaging for everybody. Having studied philosophy myself, I can sympathize, but it’s also all too clear to me that most people don’t share this attitude. Some even actively resent any philosophical inquiry (I’ve often had interlocutors pretty brutally and abruptly cut off a conversation when anything remotely philosophical came up).*

*The point is that if you don’t take it for granted that any discussion of philosophical questions automatically generates ontological engagement from students, you have to answer the question: What exactly made Lobok’s students engaged (if indeed they were engaged at all), and the same for Nikulin (and note: Nikulin’s students self-selected for a philosophy course, while Lobok’s had not, so motivations may have been very different in the two cases). Answering this question might perhaps lead you to categorize these cases differently (in terms of the source of ontological engagement, if any).>>*

*Academic Material as Students' Autobiographical Encounter*

Hitting a student's biographic accord can create an important dialogic encounter and, thus, lead to the student's extrinsic ontological engagement with the academic material at hand. For example, in his Case#25, Mikhail Gradovski describes how his graduate student got rather excited with an imposed reading task because she realized that the author, a famous educational philosopher, was her relative.

Meeting her relative's writing—what her famous relative offered to say about education—a subject of the student's own interest—was apparently an important “dialogic encounter/meeting” (Bakhtin, 1986, 1991; see also Alexander Lobok's discussion of this Bakhtinian notion in Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015) for the student. Dialogic encounter with a relative not in the context of a big family but in the context of her classroom and the student's professional interests apparently constituted an important event for her. Her biological and familial kinship with her relative seems to transcend into an intellectual and professional kinship of their ideas. The very fact that the famous educational philosopher was her relative personalized and ontologized his educational and philosophical ideas for her.

*Academic Material as an Entry Point for Students' Deep Understanding of the World*

Academic material can be an entry point for a deep understanding of the world, important for the students. Tara Ratnam was teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at the Pre-University level in India (Case#11). She was using a prescribed unit, the poem “Five ways to kill a man” by Edwin Brock. She started by posing some questions about different ways of killing a man to prime the students for the poem. After having the students read and respond to the poem, she asked who they thought the “psychopath” mentioned in the poem referred to: the bomber's pilot, people who make bombs, politicians who ordered the dropping of the bomb, or the scientists who provide the knowhow. In justifying the choice they had made, the students went beyond the academic material to question the ethical soundness of Einstein's action of urging the US president to build the A-bomb. What would they do under coercive circumstances that often make scientists compromise their values? The curricular material became ontologically engaging for students as they generated self-exploratory questions to understand the deeper implications of the choice they made.

In Case#23, Silviane Barbato was teaching moral development to her Brazilian undergraduate students. She used the case of a Brazilian high school math teacher in the slums around a Brazilian town:

... very poor people, children living in a context of drugs and prostitution. So he invented a test that was about how many kilos of cocaine you can sell in the street at that price. And if you mix it, with another chemical, you should get much more money for the product. And how, if you are a girl with an addiction,

a drug addiction, and you should work for a pimp, how many jobs she should do to get one gram of, I don't know, crack. See? And this was the test, and some of the children, just the teenagers, just had a good laugh. (Case#23)

The math teacher apparently tried to engage his high school students ontologically using the social justice approach described above. Unfortunately, the press scandalized his teaching approach without much investigation. Silviane put this case on the class online polemic forum asking her students to assume diverse positions to make moral judgments of the participants' actions and various possible ways of dealing with the situation using diverse theories of moral development that they had studied. The students were debating with each other to find a better moral approach in the case through addressing academic conceptual texts about moral development.

In all these cases, students' ontological engagement was induced via problematizing an academic text that helps the students understand deeply the world phenomena of the students' interests through a dialogue. This dialogue of searching for understanding ontologized their educational engagement.

### *Intrinsic (Self-Contained) Ontological Engagement*

Intrinsic ontological engagement involves students' engagement in the curriculum because they are interested in or excited about the curriculum itself as an activity or process for no other reason. Students often refer to learning being fun, interesting, enjoyable, and exciting. Learning and learning activity are self-contained and cause-in-itself types of ontological engagement rather than being useful for something else as in extrinsic ontological (or non-ontological, instrumental) engagement. Sometimes, it can overlap with extrinsic ontological engagement. For example, studying a foreign language for reading books of a personal interest (extrinsic ontological engagement) can overlap with the person's enjoyment of learning the language (intrinsic ontological engagement) (Matusov, Baker, Fan, Choi, & Hampel, 2017). Some educators argue that extrinsic ontological engagement should developmentally precede intrinsic ontological engagement. For example, young students may passionately study applied math because it is very useful for solving their important everyday problems, which may lead to their deep interest in theoretical math. These educators argue that abstract math problems, and intrinsic ontological engagement, emerge out of applied, everyday, "real world" math problems—that is, from extrinsic ontological engagement (Blum & Niss, 1991). However, other educators disagree, arguing that students' deep interests in a pure academic subject and activity can emerge independently of their interests in applied, everyday academic subjects and activities (Davydov & Kilpatrick, 1990).

Although our Bakhtinian educators did not discuss the origin of intrinsic ontological engagement, several of them—Charles Bisley, Paul Spitale, and Silviane Barbato—described intrinsic ontological engagement in their teaching cases. Thus, Charles Bisley generated intrinsic ontological engagement in

Shakespearian playcrafting in his middle school students in the following way. He asked his students to discuss with their parents which of the Shakespearean plays they should choose for a school performance in order to ground Shakespeare in their children's home culture. He said to his students,

“Go and talk to your parents and your families and come back and tell us what kind of plays your family likes and who would be influenced by that.” It's like what Madeleine Grumet says in *Bitter Milk* (Grumet, 1988)—you draw from families' cultures, from where their language is coming: if you don't, you are disempowering children, and yourself as a teacher. That's Bakhtin too isn't it? (Charles Bisley, Case#24)

In the process of choosing between *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, before even reading the plays, he assigned an element of the play's *fabula*—a problem that the characters of *King Lear* are faced with—to the children to solve it in their own ways:

... we don't look at the text [of a play] straightaway. I don't tell them the story in a detailed way. I don't because the narrative is so strong and doesn't give them enough room to think [for] themselves. So, I try a number of openings, “What if you had a king who was very ambitious, what would he do? What would happen, if a king gave away his kingdom?” Or create a contemporary context. And we explore. We do some improvisation, around family rivalry. Take something from the play, like the love contest for example, as a pretext. And then I send the kids off to ask friends and family for their opinions, and we assemble them and make them into a performance. Only then do I say, “Well, read this!” And then, we might watch a film version—again not directly the text, an adaptation of the story. ... The texts are recondite. And the historical context is a lot for a 12-year-old to get their head around. (Charles Bisley, Case#24)

The overall goal of Charles' guidance seemed to generate students' intrinsic interest in the Shakespearean play itself, “And if there was one idea that came to dominate this discussion it was that the play itself had a voice and had a kind of power and some of the kids agreed on something. It was that the play somehow had asserted some kind of power over them, had spoken to them” (Case#24).

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-20): *I would say that getting interested in and getting to know the original play is one, proximate goal, but not the end goal; the original text is opened up, changed by the kids encounter with it and even the first choosing stage shows that process starting. The kids get to know the text in order to open it up and change it from an abstract given to a new creation. The play the kids refer to is their play, not the original text, but the play as adapted, changed, and performed by their dialogue with it. The architectonics are dynamic.*

*One goal of the choosing process is to open up the play to the children. Before they see the text, they hear others talking about it, and Shakespeare.>>*

Similarly, teaching English writing, Paul Spitale asked his undergraduate students to enact the key scenes, the ones that are most important from his students' point of view, from Theodore Roethke's poem *My Papa's Waltz*. Through making the "tableau"—that is, snapshots, motionless pictures—the students started problematizing the father character in the poem. Was he a child abuser or "just a little tipsy and he's playing a little rough with his kid"? This problematizing became even deeper when they enacted the scenes: "So, I thought that was really, really interesting. Once they're given this opportunity to embody the characters that they're really thinking, it almost gives them a chance to see the characters as human, rather than a fictional piece ... just a piece of paper...—very, very interesting" (Paul Spitale, Case#1). The students' intrinsic ontological engagement in interpreting the poem emerged through their embodied work on their tableau.

Silviane Barbato taught constructivism in cognitive development (Piaget) to her undergraduate students. She promoted her students' intrinsic ontological engagement by first involving her students in playing the game of Tangram.<sup>2</sup> In this game, the players had to construct different assigned shapes using seven geometric pieces (e.g., triangles, rectangles, squares). In small groups of five, they discussed and observed each other as they were solving these abstract cognitive problems, and they took notes on each other's strategies. This became very interesting to the students. After this experience of solving problems the students read about little children solving tasks "in which the teacher uses many constructivist strategies with the [3-year-old] child" (Silviane Barbato, Case #28).

When the students see the contrast between their own cognitive strategies and what the children do, they become intrinsically ontologically interested in learning more about cognitive processes, and in discovering what processes may be taking place through observing little children, too, in the videos. Cognitive strategies that both they and the little children use become an exciting and surprising discovery for Silviane's students.

Finally, Mikhail Bakhtin himself (2004) engaged his Russian middle and high school students intrinsically and ontologically (and instrumentally, as Tara pointed out in her comments) in learning complex Russian grammar through testing quotes from famous Russian literature classics (Bakhtin, 2004). The question for the students was how the deep meaning of the text would change if a word connecting the two clauses of a complex sentence was omitted or added. For example, Bakhtin offered his students to test the original sentence taken from Russian literature classic, "Sad am I: no friend beside me" (Pushkin's poem "October 19") versus "I am sad since I have no friend beside me." Bakhtin's high school students were engaged in ontological debates about how they felt about the changes in the different grammatical versions. The students were puzzled by how a grammatical structure could induce dramatically different effects

<sup>2</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangram>

on readers when the literal meaning of grammatically diverse sentences was the same. They kept exploring this issue with the teacher.

In some types of extrinsic ontological engagement (e.g., Alexander Lobok, Dmitri Nikulin), the curricular material (e.g., philosophical texts, philosophical inquiries) is primarily an ontological entry point for the students to examine and understand themselves. In contrast, in intrinsic ontological engagement (e.g., Silviane Barbato, Mikhail Bakhtin), the students' own emerging experiences (e.g., playing Tangram, testing the sense of sentences) are primarily an ontological entry point for the students' exploration of the curricular material (e.g., cognitive development, Russian grammar).

### *Eventful Ontological Engagement*

Eventful ontological engagement involves the creation or emergence of important dramatic events in the classroom around certain academic material. We have noticed at least two types of eventful ontological engagement in the interviews. The first type of eventful ontological engagement we called, after Plato's Meno dialogue, "torpedo touch"—using a metaphor of a torpedo-fish causing disturbing and frightening numbness after getting in contact with it to describe an emerging immediate dramatic event. "Torpedo touch" is the birthmark of a particular Socratic dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009a). The second type of eventful ontological engagement is about students' tasting their own medicine of applying an action or approach desired and directed at others, to themselves.

#### *Torpedo Touch*

We found three teaching cases involving eventful ontological engagement using the torpedo touch by Eugene Matusov (Case#3), One-who-withdrew (Case#7), and Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Case#13). All three cases involved dramatic events shaking the existential well-being of some of their undergraduate or graduate students. In the case described by Eugene Matusov, he intentionally designed this existential crisis in advance, targeting all of his undergraduate students. Meanwhile, in the case described by Ana Marjanovic-Shane, dramatic events emerged through Ana's *in situ* actions affecting some students more than others. In her torpedo-touch case, Ana deliberately aimed to shake her targeted student's deep behaviorist convictions revealed in the class. It was similar to what Eugene did with his students, although it happened more improvisationally, and not in a preplanned manner like for Eugene.

In Case#3, Eugene Matusov described how he had asked his undergraduate students to bring peanut butter, bread, and a knife for the next class meeting. Then he asked them to teach each other how to make a peanut-butter sandwich. By the end of the class, one of Eugene's students asked him what the point of his exercise was, Eugene asked them to guess:

Some students replied [that the purpose ... was] to learn about scaffolding—a type of guidance we studied. And I told them, "Not exactly. The point of this



exercise was to show to you that I can ask you to do whatever nonsense [I want], like for example, ‘teaching’ how to make a peanut butter sandwich [to] people who already know perfectly well how to do that, and you will do [it] without asking me about the purpose [of the lesson] or challenging me. Your last question actually a little bit violates my point, but other than that, my illustration was pretty good. Indeed, the teacher can ask students to do whatever nonsense he or she wants and the students in their conditions will do it without questioning that unconditionally.” The students were visibly upset but quiet. The class was over. (Eugene Matusov, Case#3)

After the class meeting, a senior student emailed Eugene that Eugene was his “worst professor” ever. Many of Eugene’s students wrote negative evaluations for Eugene after the course. However, surprisingly, about two-thirds of the students from that class signed up for Eugene’s other class next quarter, because, as they reported to Eugene, “they had realized how important the class was for their lives, how it had forced them to rethink their lives and their education” during the break (Case#3). Eugene intentionally designed a painful and, arguably, humiliating experience for his students to engage them in ontological reflection about institutional education, based on students’ unconditional conformity—an education, in which Eugene’s students, arguably, had been uncritically socialized. The humiliating dramatic event promoted a painful but apparently deep reflection in many (but maybe not all) of Eugene’s students, who later came to appreciate this reflection and even the learning experience. However, this teaching experience planted deep doubts in Eugene, making him wonder whether this powerful type of torpedo touch based on humiliation is either ethical or necessary.

Finally, in Ana’s Case#13, in her undergraduate class for future teachers, she was faced with a pedagogical situation of wanting to undermine several of her students’ commitment to behaviorist techniques of punishment and reward as their main approach to working with younger children with autism (for more description and analysis of the case see Marjanovic-Shane, 2016; Marjanovic-Shane, Meacham, Choi, Lopez, & Matusov, 2018, in press). Ana showed her students a movie about famous behaviorist psychologist B. F. Skinner and made a parallel between Skinner training pigeons by starving them and one of her students using punishments and rewards with young autistic children. Ana moralized the parallel to make her behaviorist students feel guilty of treating misbehaving children like starving pigeons.

Painful torpedo touch creates powerful memorable events in the lives of the students experiencing it. Often, but not always, it leads to important critical reflection and deep learning. It can generate not only epistemological but also relational and existential crises in the students at times undermining the student’s entire being. Based on the Bakhtinian notions of “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov, 2009a; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010) and “penetrating discourse” (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2009a; Matusov & Brobst, 2013), torpedo touch may forcefully start vicious internal dialogues in

students, what one of Eugene's former students called "mindfuck," leading even to suicidal thoughts (Matusov & Brobst, 2013). As we discussed above, we do not reject torpedo touch as such in dialogic education, which may be both unavoidable and even desired by some students, but we argue that torpedo touch has to be welcomed by the students and not imposed on them—it should be consensual.

We think that at the core of the torpedo-touch controversy there is a disagreement within Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy. On the one side, there are Lensmire (1997) and Miyazaki (in Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014), who argue that a dialogic teacher should be like Dostoevsky, the author of polyphonic novel analyzed by Bakhtin (1999), treating his or her students as heroes or heroines of the teacher's polyphonic classroom. From this pedagogical perspective of "teacher as polyphonic novelist" (Lensmire, 1997), a torpedo touch imposed by the teacher is legitimate. On the other side, there is Matusov (in Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014) who argues that students need to be regarded as authors of their own education assisted, when asked, by their teacher. From this pedagogical perspective of students authoring their education, a torpedo touch initiated by the teacher is legitimate only when it is sanctioned by the students.

### *Tasting Your Own Medicine*

The "tasting your own medicine" pedagogical approach involves a sudden twist, when students' conceptualization of their desired actions directed at somebody else in the future is tested by asking them how would they like to be treated like that. For example, in Case#27, at the start of his course on cultural diversity, SIBE Eugene Matusov engaged his undergraduate students, future teachers, in an academic discussion and an analysis of a hypothetical educational situation in which they were to design different ways to educate two groups of students, diverse in their motivation. When his students created different pedagogical approaches that they desired, basing them on some imaginary, hypothetical future with children they might be teaching, he turned the tables back to them and revealed that they might have been designing these instructional approaches for themselves.

In Case#26, it was the students, not the teacher, who turned the table and asked their peers to taste their own medicine, so to speak. In Eugene Matusov's other undergraduate class for preservice teachers, a student pointed out to his peers their hypocrisy in prescribing one type of multicultural pedagogy, an oppressive one, to their own future pupils, while appreciating a very different multicultural pedagogy, a progressive one, for themselves. On the one hand, his peers wanted to transmit knowledge and truths to their future pupils but, at the same time, the very same students wanted critical dialogic pedagogy to explore diverse ideas for themselves. The student called his peers to take responsibility and resolve this existential crisis in their own conflicting pedagogical desires as current students and future teachers. The academic material of this lesson—studying diverse pedagogical approaches to multiculturalism:

conservative, radical, and progressive (Liston & Zeichner, 1996)—was an entry point for the existential inquiries.

In this approach, ideas and approaches that were initially mostly intellectual and epistemological, suddenly become ontologically charged for the students who experienced almost the Kantian categorical moral imperative: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law [of people and nature]” (Kant, 2013, p. 493). Of course, Kant’s categorical moral imperative comes from the Golden Rule famously articulated in the Old and New Testaments and elsewhere: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”<sup>3</sup> In our view, the “ontological hook” of the Golden Rule is not rooted in egoistic calculation that one can save him- or herself from abuse by not abusing others; nor in individualistic universality; nor in empathy with others’ misery. Rather, it is rooted in deeply felt fairness or, better to say, in deeply felt unfairness when other people are not treated equally to oneself. In this deeply felt (un)fairness, a person is the measure of all other people<sup>4</sup>: What is good for me must be good for everybody else; what is bad for me must be bad for everyone else. The measurement of others by oneself brings the comfort of control of the social world. Deviation from this brings anxiety of social chaos, including the uncertainty of violence. It also eliminates the diversity of uniqueness, authorial judgment, and contextualism of morals. The hypocrisy perceived by the students creates eventful ontological engagement. It has some similarity to the torpedo-touch ontological engagement—am I a good person or a hypocrite?!—but, perhaps, the event is not as dramatic and hurtful as with the torpedo touch.

### *Ontological Engagement Through Self-Selection By Interest*

Finally, ontological engagement can be based on students’ self-selection based on their prior interests. This self-selection can be based on students selecting a particular major, class, class topic, or learning project. Thus, SIBE Paul Spitale describes his work with high school students enrolled in a summer elective class about drones at his university. Paul designed a multifaceted curriculum for these students involving diversity of discourses and practices (i.e., “heterodiscoursia” in Bakhtin’s term; see Bakhtin, 1986; Matusov, 2011b):

This past summer, I taught about drones, flying drones, and the science and the engineering behind them. And not just that, the history, the purpose, the hot button issues regarding them, drones in the news, they’ve been in a lot of news

<sup>3</sup>A commandment based on the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Luke 6:31). The Mosaic law contains a parallel commandment: “Whatever is hurtful to you, do not do to any other person” (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbath* 31a). This Golden Rule has been articulated in many ancient religions, traditions, and cultures ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule))

<sup>4</sup>Probably after the Axial Age (about sixth–fifth centuries BC) a “man is the measure of all things” (Protagoras, ca. 490–ca. 420 BC) including all people (Graeber, 2014).

lately with killing innocent people. And everything surrounding it too. And the kids are really excited about it and then they get to fly drones around [chuckle] towards the end. ... [W]hat I do is give them a lot of hands-on ... We use a lot of materials to create things. ... [A]s far as drones go, we talk about the aerodynamics, and they create paper airplanes out of different materials and not just paper and stuff. And they'll do different things like get into groups, and one group will discuss the history of the drone or the airplane, ... someone else will discuss the cultural issues of drones, and ... so on and so forth. And so we'll go beyond, again we'll go beyond what's the actual, the physical drone, which ... [in] comparing it to English class the drone would be the piece of literature I guess. So it's kinda like going beyond that and really understanding where and why and how they came about. (Paul Spitale, Case#21)

Paul's class was not only multidisciplinary, involving English, history, current events, ethics, physics, and engineering, but also heterodiscursive because it involved diverse discourses of diverse practices and communities. This heterodiscursia enriches students' experiences and allows students with diverse interests in drones to continue nurturing their interests that ontologize their engagement. Similar pedagogy, but on a large scale, has been developed by Russian math educator Nikolay Konstantinov (Matusov, 2017).

## ISSUES OF ONTOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

In conventional schools, students' engagement is often non-ontological, but based on expectations and enforcement of students' unconditional obedience and conformity with the teacher's demands (Matusov, 2011a). In non-ontological engagement of conventional schools, students do not have legitimate ownership of what they do. When asked why they do what they do, they often reply, "Because the teacher tells us to do it" (Matusov et al., 2012). Some SIBEs overcome the non-ontological engagement of conventional schools by trying to make learning activities relevant for the students. However, this can be problematic sometimes. In our interviews, we found two major types of these problematic efforts: pseudo-ontological engagement and exploitation of ontological engagement. Pseudo-ontological engagement is essentially non-ontological. It is actually based on the teacher's commands masquerading as ontological engagement from the teacher's point of view. Exploitation of ontological engagement involves students' ontological engagement in activities that are educationally exploited by the teachers.

### *Pseudo-Ontological Engagement*

We observed two cases of pseudo-ontological engagement: Case#16 by SIBE Iryna Starygina and Case#17 by SIBE Beatrice Ligorio. In our judgment, both cases involve abstractions of some features of genuine ontological engagement, understood by these educators as salient, and using these features to design their students' ontological engagements. However, in our view, this approach

does not create genuine, live ontological engagement but a dead one. This is like when in a movie, portraying scientists, the actors do not engage in science, despite the fact that all recognizable features of the science practices are there. Similarly, this approach creates pseudo-ontological engagement. Genuine ontological engagement is rooted in its *spirit* and not in observed features. The spirit of ontological engagement always transcends its observed features (we will discuss this theme of the spirit of ontological engagement further).

For Iryna Starygina, the salient features of ontological engagement seem to be: (1) students' deep familiarity with the material of learning activity and (2) students' experience of a certain challenge in the activity. Indeed, this is true for many cases of ontological engagement listed above. However, the fact that many cases of ontological engagement have these salient features does not mean that these (or any other) features alone would generate ontological engagement just because they are present. Let's consider Iryna's example.

Iryna abstracted from Bakhtin the structure of dialogicity—"Does the author of a text make sure that the text is understandable for the addressee? What reply is expected by the author? Can the addressee reply?" (Case#16). She wants to teach these features of writing dialogicity to her elementary school students to promote the quality of their writing (similar to Aaron in Case#5 or Mikhail Bakhtin [2004]). She defines the quality of any writing by the presence of the structure of dialogicity that she abstracted from Bakhtin (1986). In our judgment, she approaches Bakhtin's notion of dialogicity as a linguistic formalist, an approach that Bakhtin criticized. We argue that she has the same formalist approach to ontological engagement.

To design a learning activity for her students, Iryna selects a familiar material for them: the popular Russian fairytale "Teremok" ("Little hut" in Russian). She uses this fairytale to diagnose the students' competence in applying the structure of dialogicity and later to promote it. In her teaching case, Iryna finds that the child had a rather low level of dialogicity because he merely repeated the fairytale dialogue without transforming it much. In Iryna's interpretation, the child was not active in this assignment because he was not very capable in structuring dialogicity. However, in our interpretation, the example demonstrates the child's non-ontological engagement rather than a lack of any competence in the child (which we cannot judge outside of an ontological engagement).

We argue that the spirit of ontological engagement (and dialogicity) starts with the participants', including the teacher's, genuine interest in the topic and each other. In the example, we do not see either. It is remarkable for us that Iryna also is not apparently interested in discussing the fairytale "Teremok" either with her students or with the readers (i.e., us). Ontology and meaning start with a genuine personal interest. We suspect that if the child were asked why he was doing what he was doing—that is, to "Imagine that the turns of this dialogue are said by cartoon characters and you are watching this cartoon on TV. Try to imagine everything that can be happening in this cartoon and write down the whole episode"—he would answer, "I don't know" (Case#16). The student's reply to the activity assigned by the

teacher is apparently disinterested, that is, non-ontological. He more or less accurately retold the familiar fairytale—what is the big deal?!

To illuminate the non-ontological nature of the child's engagement here, let's contrast it with a possible learning activity, imagined by us, that might promote ontological engagement in the child. Let us start with our own engagement with the Russian fairytale "Teremok." In our interpretation, the fairytale has the following plot. A little animal finds a very small little hut ("Teremok"), which it occupies. Then another, a bit bigger, animal comes by. The newcomer is invited to live in. More and bigger animals keep coming and are invited to live in, until a big bear comes and asks to get in. Some inhabitants of Teremok are concerned that the bear can't fit in their small Teremok. The bear suggests living on Teremok's roof but when it gets on the roof, the whole hut collapses, making all other animals barely escape alive. All animals become upset without a place to live, but the bear suggests building a new and bigger hut. The animals agree, work together, and create a new home—bigger and more beautiful. And they live there happily ever after.<sup>5</sup> In our interpretation, the fairytale is about the unavoidable challenges of unconditional inclusion that can be overcome by the good-hearted openness and collaborative spirit of working together.

If we were faced with a pedagogical task of ontologically engaging elementary school children, familiar with the fairytale, in its meaningful transformation, we would probably ask the children to tell a new fairytale, in which the involved animals are familiar with the classical fairytale. What would the animals tell the bear, if they already knew that the bear would destroy their Teremok by getting on the roof?<sup>6</sup> The challenge for the children might be to invent the new ending of the story and decide if they want to preserve the animals' good-hearted openness and inclusion and if so, how. Alternatively, the children may find some other angle of the story and its challenge, unknown to us yet. We are interested in the children's engagement in the story and beyond—for example, their past and present experiences may transcend the story and the activity. Our genuine interest in the story and in the children opens the space for genuine dialogue (and dialogicity). An actual dialogue can never be guaranteed by a dialogic space—it may or may not happen, depending on the children's reply to our invitation to the dialogic space. We argue that genuine dialogicity so cherished by Bakhtin, Starygina, and us (but, perhaps, understood differently) starts with and lives in the participants' interest in each other and the topic and not with formal features abstracted from it.

Similarly, Beatrice Ligorio abstracted salient features of ontological engagement hoping to promote ontological engagement in her students. In her

<sup>5</sup>There are many versions of "Teremok"; see an English translation of one version, different from Iryna's, here <http://russiaonline-xenia.blogspot.com/2011/01/fairy-tale-wooden-house-in-english.html>

<sup>6</sup>Our idea was inspired by Bakhtin's characterization of Dostoevsky's characters in his early stories as Gogol's characters who read Gogol's stories mocking them (Bakhtin, 1999).

Case#17, these abstracted features involved a division of labor among her undergraduate students—the so-called jigsaw cooperative teaching method<sup>7</sup> (Hedeon, 2003). The teacher assigns diverse roles among students, which is expected to promote students' diverse voices. It is true in our view that live ontological engagement is based on diversity of students' voices, perspectives, and positions. However, it is not necessarily true that assigning diverse roles/voices/perspectives/positions to students would create a genuine ontological engagement or genuine dialogue, although it may happen.

I organized the students in groups of more or less five, six maximum eight people in each. I then used some educational strategies, for example, the jigsaw, which is a strategy in which you assign to each student different material, and then you ask them to enter a collective discussion. I used my own interpretation of the jigsaw technique. I told them, "You enter the discussion with your own voice, what you think and the voice of the authors that you've been studying." So, in this way, I thought that the discussion could be polyphonic because each student had at least two voices. Then I told them that I had my own voice as a teacher so they could use also what I was claiming as my own opinion during teaching, during the lesson. They also could expand this polyphony by searching other material and other voices. The requirement was to come up with a map, a conceptual map. They designed a map to understand how these voices were organized and related to each other. I do not know if this is a correct interpretation of Bakhtin, but this is what I did.

I think I allowed the discussion to be more educational. I mean, when I started with the idea of having an online discussion, I used web forums. In the first year, the discussions were kind of shallow. I mean, it did not really go in any direction. Students were expressing opinion or just giving statements, but the discussion was not really able to advance the knowledge, was not really a learning occasion, a learning situation. By introducing this idea of the voices and giving them the awareness that the same topic could be viewed from a different point of view, I turned the discussion into a space for learning. It helped when I asked them to look for the connections, the differences, and the similarities among the voices. I told them that it is not necessary to reach one shared point. The main thing is to get an overview over the tensions between dispositions. The discussion became much more involving, much more compelling. Students got motivated where the discussion became exciting. I could see that the number of notes, the time that a student would spend online discussing improved tremendously and they learned more. It really contributed to their understanding of the general concept. They could have a deeper understanding. For some students Bakhtin became so interesting that they wanted to know more about Bakhtin. One of them is now doing a PhD in Finland.

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-23): *Why aren't these signs of true ontological engagement? (After all, these students came to that class seeking an education in the subject she teaches, didn't they? So there were grounds for*

<sup>7</sup>Jigsaw was designed by Aronson: <https://www.jigsaw.org>



*developing true engagement.) And really, if that PhD student indeed got inspired by Ligorio's class (we only have her word for it), that would be a sign of pretty deep ontological engagement. You don't start writing a dissertation on any odd assignment some professor once gave you.>>*

... it requires a lot of organization from my side. I mean when I lecture, I just have to prepare the lecture. For this type of teaching, I have to organize the groups, I have to monitor the groups, I have to prepare the virtual space and I have to monitor what is happening in the virtual space. I have to implement some kind of technique. I also organize role taking, because I believe that this is also somehow connected to Bakhtin as role-taking activity makes the groups more productive.

[*Why is role taking Bakhtinian? Why do you define it as Bakhtinian?*] The role represents a perspective. In this way role taking enables one to use a voice that you would never use otherwise. You would not use it anyhow, without. If I say to a student, "Okay. Now you are ... Your role is to be the leader of this group or to be the critical." They have to criticize, to be skeptical about the statements, or to be the researcher who is going to find more information. It is a way for the students to shape their participation and to acquire a voice, a perspective, a position that they would not be able to have otherwise. (Beatrice Ligorio, Case#17)

In contrast to Iryna's case, in her interview with us, Beatrice did not feel that it was even necessary to describe what exactly the learning activity was, what the actual content of learning was, and what the students' contributions were.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *Actually, I think I did describe the activity. You [are] right about the content, but activity and content are two different things.>>*

In our view, all of that seemed unimportant for Beatrice because all that matters for her was the presence of the salient features that she abstracted from live ontological engagement (and dialogue): the roles, voices, perspectives, positions, and tensions. The content—the students' and her own discussion of the text and ideas promoted by the text—was unimportant for defining her Bakhtinian pedagogy. The organization of the learning activities was. However, similar to Iryna, in her description, Beatrice herself was apparently interested neither in the topics nor in her students as evident from the interview: "For this type of teaching, I have to organize the groups, I have to monitor the group, I have to prepare the virtual space and I have to monitor what is happening in the virtual space. I have to implement some kind of technique. I also organize role taking, because I believe that this is also somehow connected to Bakhtin as role-taking activity makes the groups more productive" (Beatrice Ligorio, Case#17). In our view, the spirit of ontological engagement was absent, both for her students and for her. As such, the learning activities were not promoting the students' ontological engagement inherently.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *I did not mention the material because it was somehow obvious that I did select it. As I stated earlier, through the Jigsaw I assigned different material to each student, therefore I do*

*spend a lot of time searching for the right material. I did not mention it because this is something that I regularly do, in the sense that I do it also for other courses. The list here refers only to things I do in this course.>>*

However, this does not mean that some of Iryna's or Beatrice's students could not engage in their learning activities ontologically. Like dialogue, non-ontological engagement is also not guaranteed because under some circumstances some students may redefine any otherwise non-ontological activity as meaningful, relevant, and ontological for them. When a learning activity is not inherently ontological for its participants, it means that it does not afford and invite ontological engagement in itself. However, anytime a teacher puts students in small groups, as Beatrice did in her jigsaw activity organization, and when the teacher is absent from these groups, a space may open for the students' authentic creativity, ontology, and dialogue, which may or may not be educational or academic or on the topic of the teacher's focus. In this sense, Beatrice's jigsaw activity organization provides a much greater possibility for students' ontological engagement, than the activity organization in conventional schooling.

### *Exploitation of Ontological Engagement*

Another pitfall of ontological engagement we observed in the interviews with SIBEs is the teacher's exploitation of students' genuine ontological engagement in activities for educational purposes as defined and controlled by the teacher (probably mediated by the school administration, by the state, and so on). In this case, education per se remains non-ontological and arbitrary (i.e., authoritarian) for the students, which leads them to shallow learning often based on pattern recognition. We found two of these cases of exploitative ontological engagement in our interviews: Case#6 by Beatrice Ligorio and Case#15 by Alexander Lobok.

In Case#6, SIBE Beatrice Ligorio asks her undergraduate students to imagine a community of experts who need to develop exam questions for the students to demonstrate their proficiency and competence in the subject matter they study. Beatrice's students may have diverse interests and diverse orientations toward her course, which may generate diverse perceptions toward Beatrice's innovative pedagogy. Some students in conventional educational institutional settings may feel like *prisoners of education* who do not view the taught/imposed academic subject as interesting, important, or relevant for them. These prisoners of education students may be mostly concerned with their institutional survival while putting minimum efforts into the classwork. For them, designing their own exam questions presents an opportunity to make the questions easy, as Beatrice was concerned. Alternatively, they may not be interested in that endeavor altogether to save their efforts. In both cases, there is no ontological engagement in creating the exam by the "prisoners of education" students.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *This may be true in general. Not sure my students feel like “prisoners.” The attendance to the course is not mandatory. The [exam] questions are not easy at all. Because of this collaborative preparation, the questions are rather complex.>>*

Other students may feel like *credential students*, interested in obtaining a credential, and thus getting access to, providing security of, and gaining mastery in the targeted practice associated with the class. In some cases, credential students might be ontologically interested in defining the entry-level skills and knowledge for the targeted practice when the practice in which they want to socialize consumes them. We will discuss below why we think this ontological engagement of credential students is exploited in this innovative pedagogy of students’ designing their own exam questions.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *Hard to say. You are just speculating. Maybe by interviewing the students we could know how they perceive this practice.>>*

However, when credential students approach the practice instrumentally, engaging in developing the exam questions might not be ontological for them. An instrumental attitude to the practice might involve the following. Credential students may want to make sure that they will get access to the targeted practice through institutionally recognized credentials by pleasing the practice expert gatekeepers enough. The credential students may also want to learn how to act safely as novices in the practice. Finally, they may want to acquire enough initial mastery so they can enter the practice and survive long enough to start learning through the practice itself.

Finally, some students may feel like *learners*, critically examining the targeted practice. This category can be rather diverse and may include the following (the list is not exhaustive):

- 1) very peripheral learners—*lurkers*,
- 2) learners who want to play and explore the practice—*explorers*,
- 3) learners who are geeking out, passionate participants—*geeks*,
- 4) innovators who transform the practice—*jailbreakers*,
- 5) learners who like to critique the practice—*critics*,
- 6) learners who are interested in examining the practice in the context of life—*philosophers* (see discussion of the first four categories in Ito, Horst, Antin, & Finn, 2010; Matusov, 2018; von Duyke, 2013).

For all these diverse learners, imagining what the practice experts might view as important can be an ontologically interesting endeavor, especially outside of the exam—summative assessment—context.

An exciting part of Beatrice’s innovative practice here is that the curriculum becomes open for these students to develop rather than preset by the teacher in advance. The emergent curriculum of the course seems to come from the interactions between the students and the assigned texts, students’ dialogues among each other and the teacher (Beatrice), and from her guidance about the

imaginary expert community and salient features of the targeted practice itself. This can promote an ontological dialogue, described by Bakhtin (1999), around issues, in which the participants are genuinely and deeply interested.

However, we argue that it is the context of the summative assessment, aiming at sorting students on a scale of institutionally defined success and failure, which exploits this ontological engagement for these diverse learners and some credential students, discussed above. Summative assessment per se is alien to ontological engagement and dialogue. It finalizes students' ideas and objectivizes the students making them objects of the teacher's pedagogical actions. It is interesting that when Bakhtin needed examples of excessive monologism, he always used conventional schooling with its core in summative assessment.

Summative assessment is legitimate outside of education to provide gate-keeping for competent practitioners. However, in education itself, summative assessment inhibits genuine dialogue by finalizing ideas and objectivizing the participants.

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-25):** *Although in general I agree with this idea, couldn't the summative assessment be arranged in a different way?>>*

Summative assessment undermines the trust in the relationship between the teacher and the student and genuine interest in each other. When students can be punished by poor grades for their mistakes, they may start hiding their ideas from the teacher. In addition, summative assessment assumes the existence of the universal uncontested truth possessed by the institutional authority of the teacher. This promotes authoritarian discourse at the expense of internally persuasive discourse, in which students collectively with the teacher are the final authority for what is right and what is wrong (Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010; Morson, 2004).

In Beatrice's innovative pedagogical practice of asking students to imagine the expert community to develop questions for their summative assessment, the students' interests, inquiries, and enthusiasm for the targeted practice are exploited by the summative assessment in order to make the students study harder to prepare for the exam. At the end of course, the students have to please their teacher with answers that are approved by the institutional authority of the teacher. It distracts and disrupts the students' ontological engagement in an internally persuasive discourse.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *My intention is not to make the students study harder but to study differently. Elaborating the questions is already a learning moment, learning through discussion and through assuming a different point of view and this is not summative assessment.>>*

Another case of exploitation of ontological engagement—this time ontological engagement in play—comes from self-identified Bakhtinian educator Alexander Lobok (Case#15). Alexander describes his use of fun, improvisational, mostly, if not always, competitive, games with children for “exciting training of their writing, reading, and spelling skills,” which also involve

counting and calligraphy. Alexander Lobok called his pedagogy “addictively fascinating” (“азартный” *azartnyj*)<sup>8</sup> in Russian) reading, writing, and math. In our judgment, this pedagogy is rooted in addictive games that involve elements of reading, writing, and math. For example, Alexander uses Scrabble, a competitive game,<sup>9</sup> with the children, complicated by additional rules to prove their understanding of the words by creating complete sentences. The longer the sentences the more extra points a competing group will get. Also, Alexander judges the creativity of the created sentences and gives bonus points to children. Alexander keeps transforming the rules of the game to make it more complicated, involving more and more challenges based on the reading, writing, and math academic curricula. At times, he even invites children to change the rules of the game or make a new game. The whole pedagogical idea is to make academic learning peripheral and invisible for the participants while they are staying excited in the game.

In our analysis, the children’s excitement is with the game—winning the game—and not with the academic curriculum per se. The children’s ontological engagement, if it is not entirely focused on winning, is rooted in the game and not in education. The academic curriculum is unilaterally defined and choreographed by the teacher. It is smuggled into the game by the teacher. The regime of being in a game itself is unbreakable and non-negotiable—the participants cannot break out of the game itself and move away from it to something else at will.

This highly contrasts with a case also involving games presented by Eugene Matusov (2011a; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). In this case, Eugene became involved with a 10-year-old boy by the name of Zion in an afterschool program who must finish boring homework of copying “new words” three times and putting them in a sentence of his own. To make this boring homework bearable, Eugene created a game for Zion of finding small words in the assigned “new words” from his textbook that he needed to copy for this homework. The game became fun and interesting for Zion and the meaningless homework became a bearable peripheral extension of the game. The game was collaborative and not competitive, focusing on the excitement of finding more and more new small words in a word. At times, Eugene asked Zion the meaning of the small words they found. When they came to the textbook word “exit,” Zion noticed two words: “ex” and “it.” Eugene asked Zion what is “ex” and Zion referred to his mom’s ex-boyfriend. The conversation shifted from the game to an inquiry of why good people do not get along with each other—Zion’s mom and her former boyfriend. At some point of this discussion, Zion suddenly got excited because he noticed that “exit” is a compound of “ex” and

<sup>8</sup>In Russian, this word can be positive and negative or a bit of both in its connotations. “Азартные игры” as a Russian legal term banned in the Soviet Union should be translated as “addictive or intoxicating games.” We use the translation “addictively fascinating” because Alexander Lobok seems to imply that children will want to return to playing these educational games of their interest again and again. They will become addicted to their feeling of fascination with these games.

<sup>9</sup>For the classical rules of the Scrabble game see: <https://scrabble.hasbro.com/en-us/rules>

“it,” but he was challenged by another child Maria who disagreed with him. Eugene helped Maria to articulate her disagreement that “ex” does not contribute meaningfully to the word “exit.”<sup>10</sup> Suddenly the children—Zion and Maria—became interested in morphemes—meaningful parts of the words, explained by Eugene. They found words around them—on the computers, on the wall posters, in their textbooks—and searched for morphemes in those words (e.g., the morpheme “s” in “apples” makes the word “apple” plural).

In our analysis, the main difference between Alexander Lobok’s and Eugene Matusov’s pedagogical approaches to education is in Alexander’s pedagogy games that are used to smuggle in academic learning, while Eugene’s pedagogy focuses on *critical dialogization of life*, which may or may not involve a game. In Eugene’s case, the game was a self-worth activity, smuggled into the deadly homework to make the meaningless homework bearable for Zion—Zion was aware of it and appreciated Eugene’s move. In contrast to Alexander’s pedagogy, Eugene’s pedagogy does not have a hidden curriculum.

We argue that Alexander Lobok’s game pedagogy exploits ontological engagement with games and, especially, competition to promote academic learning desired by the teacher. That is why we argue that this pedagogy is based on educational exploitation of children’s ontological engagement in playing games. In saying all that, it is true that some students can shift their ontological focus from gaming to academic learning by being exposed to it by the teacher. This may require that these students have freedom to stop playing Alexander’s addictive games. However, this shift, based on students’ own educational activism, is possible in any other pedagogy, even one that is based on non-ontological engagement.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have found that kindling and nurturing students’ ontological engagement is an omnipresent pedagogical desire of all SIBEs we have interviewed, including Mikhail Bakhtin (2004), as a schoolteacher of Russian. This pedagogical desire is to overcome *alienated* learning—learning which is prevalent in contemporary conventional schooling based on the instrumental, technological assumption “that students [must] learn [a] predetermined toolkit of essential knowledge and skills unrelated to the students’ immediate goals and needs, which are often bracketed [out] and delegitimized in the classroom” (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012, p. 159). This essential knowledge and skill is assumed to be available for the students later in life. In other words, in conventional schools, students’ ontology (and, thus, ontological engagement in their learning and education) is often bracketed and excluded from institutionalized education itself, and is relegated to “after” the school is over (in the afternoon, on the weekends, in school breaks, or after graduation). In contrast, SIBEs we

<sup>10</sup>This is questionable as the English word “exit” comes from the Greek compound word “exodus”—a way (odus, cf. odyssey) out (ex-).

interviewed, as well as Bakhtin himself as an educational practitioner, strongly desire to include student life itself in education.

Despite the many differences in the ways they attempt to realize this pedagogical desire, all SIBEs we interviewed strive to spark students' ontological engagement in their education. Students' ontological engagement seems to be the foundation of dialogism as described by Bakhtin (1999), where the participants in a dialogue ask sincere and deeply ontologically relevant questions and seek and/or provide meaningful, important, and relevant answers to these questions. In genuine dialogue described by Bakhtin (1999), the participants test their ideas against the ideas of others in an internally persuasive discourse. Once so moved, the students' engagement in education becomes pervasive, taking over their life, breaking the boundaries of time and space and penetrating their life beyond the classroom, class meeting hours, semesters, or school years.

We have also found that in some cases, attempts to move away from the alienated, non-ontological engagement of conventional schools can lead to problematic endeavors: pseudo-ontological engagement and exploitation of the students' ontological, yet non-educational, engagement in play and games, for educational reasons. In these cases, students' engagement was not met by the sincere dialogic interest of the educators, but was instead used by them to serve and to fulfill their inherently still authoritarian monologic impositions of the preset curricular endpoints (often broadly defined). Finally, some powerful ontological engagement involving humiliation and the torpedo touch can be problematic, at least for us.

Yet, all SIBEs we interviewed recognized the utmost need to overcome and/or prevent students' educational alienation and, thus, they attempted to design education that can generate ontological engagement. They created ways of teaching that may induce an "educational vortex of fascination" for their students. In the next chapter, we describe the Bakhtinian educational vortex as a way to "sweep" the students into a powerful fascination with the academic curriculum. In this chapter, together with some SIBEs (e.g., Alexander Lobok, Case#22), we will raise the issue of the limitations of ontological engagement.

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## Chapter 2.3: The Educational Vortex in Bakhtinian Pedagogy

The Holy Grail of education is genuinely engaging all students, including the reluctant ones, in any curriculum at all times. It is how to make all students fascinated with a targeted academic subject so that they become active and enthusiastic in studying it. Is not students' active engagement a primary marker of the quality of education? When disengaged, a student learns little or not at all. Also, being bored, a disengaged student often distracts the teacher from teaching and other, engaged, students from learning. The American progressive educator Jerome Bruner insisted that "any subject could be taught to any child at any age in some form that was honest" (Bruner, 1986, p. 129). The question is how an educator can find this "honest" way of teaching that creates "an educational vortex" of fascination for every student that forcefully pulls them in to any curricular topic each moment of the lesson. In other words, the task of creating an educational vortex is to make students like, if not even passionately love, any academic subject and curricular theme that the society (or the teacher) finds important for them to learn.

In our analysis, the SIBEs whom we interviewed were engaged in at least four issues with regard to an educational vortex. The first issue is what Bakhtinian pedagogy can offer to promoting strong and ubiquitous student engagement in a given curricular topic in contrast to other approaches. The second issue is whether an educational vortex is achievable for all students in any curricular topic at any time. The third issue is whether a lack of student engagement is necessarily a marker of poor education. Finally, the fourth issue is whether an educational vortex is desirable.

### THE BAKHTINIAN EDUCATIONAL VORTEX

Socrates' dialogue with his student Meno starts with Meno's question of whether a virtue can be taught (Plato & Bluck, 1961). In contrast to dialogues with Socrates, lessons rarely start with students asking the teacher questions of

their interest. Thus, the issue of student engagement becomes very acute for educators, most of whom are working in conventional educational institutions. Without genuine and voluntary engagement, students have to be forced or bribed to study, which may lead to resistance, passive learning, and students' hatred of academic learning. SIBEs seem to address this challenge with *dialogic provocations* that they either design in advance or improvise during their lessons. The dialogic provocation is aimed at provoking interest and inquiries in students, causing them to ask genuine questions and to become deeply engaged in the given curricular topic. An old Russian teacher joke illustrates the concept of dialogic provocation in education and its pedagogical power.

A young enthusiastic female geography teacher got a job straight out of college in a dysfunctional middle school. She was assigned to the worst 8th-grade class that nobody wanted to teach. The cynical male school principal and male vice-principal had a bet on whether the young teacher would survive more than 10 minutes in the classroom. They both came up to the classroom door to eavesdrop just after the lesson started. They could hear a lot of noise initially and then suddenly silence. They waited 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, but nothing dramatic happened. When the school bell rang indicating the end of the lesson term, the door opened, and the 8th-grade students were walking out passionately discussing geography. The amazed principal and vice principal rushed to the young geography teacher asking her how she managed to make her students engaged in geography. The young teacher replied, "Nothing special. I came to the classroom and patiently waited in silence until the students noticed me. When they noticed me and got quiet for a moment, I asked, 'Who can pull on a condom on a globe?' A student asked, 'What's a globe?' And I so started my geography lesson." This dialogic provocation can be characterized as "bait-and-switch."

Similarly, self-identified Bakhtinian educator Alexander Lobok and his wife and colleague Irina Khristosenko created dialogic provocations for their young students by capturing their attention and excitement through oscillating between games and academic learning. When they started their innovative experimental class in the early 1990s, they faced many problems their 6-year old students had with their engagement:

Some [children] were hyperactive, some were hyper-aggressive, others were communicatively closed, or had articulation and speech pathology problems, or had dyslexia or dysgraphia ... Our [class] included students whose parents realized that they would have serious problems when they went to school. So, our [class] was the last hope for those parents ... We were given students with various issues and it was mine and Irina's responsibility to get those children fascinated with reading, writing, and math, and also, to loosen the bonds of their psychological problems. That was exactly how we saw our main goal: to *fascinate* with math, reading, and writing, as opposed to "teach" how to read, and write, and count. That was the way we presented our project to the parents. Although before that, they had met a totally different point of view. Their children had been *taught* how to read, write, and count but, as a rule, the result was that their children started

to hate reading, writing, and doing math. Eventually, the children would develop a strong resistance to learning. They had not even entered school yet, and yet they were already hating it. Therefore, we used to say, we should not “teach them to read” but, instead, ... create a sum of motivational drivers to ensure that the child would learn how to read by himself. We should make sure that the child really wants to read, that he gets “addicted” to reading. And the same can be said about writing—not to teach how to write, but to create a “drive” to write. Same about math ... (Alexander Lobok, Case#15)

Thus, Alexander and Irina saw an educational vortex—fascinating their students with the academic subjects—as their pedagogical goal. To address this pedagogical goal, they employed a series of improvisational dialogic provocations. Often, their dialogic provocations were highly “ontologized”—that is, making them highly relevant to the children’s lives—by promoting the students’ here-and-now concerns. Alexander Lobok explained how he prompted children to imagine many things they could do in the class, while he wrote them up on the blackboard. When the blackboard was full, children played with written words (see more of the Case#15 above),

... I attempted for the first time to make a series of lessons with schoolchildren that would be based thoroughly on improvisation instead of a carefully planned script. I would do some impromptu provocations, the children would somehow react to them, and I would “thread” those reactions into a single common “fabric.”

... So, it all ended up being an exciting training of their writing, reading, and spelling skills, whereas all the content of our learning was born right “there and then.” And it was extremely important for me that the children could feel that they are just as important coauthors of the lesson. Because all the words that I wrote down on the board were suggested by them. Besides, they knew that the more words they would come up with, the more interesting our lesson will be. And they knew that each of their voices was important for me. Whereas my task was to orchestrate the process and help their various voices to mingle into an impromptu symphony.

... We did not just play—we were also acquiring important skills. It was only natural that those lessons became a good training ground for my own pedagogical creativity. And for the children’s creativity too, of course. That was probably the most important outcome: the development of children’s co-creativity and their understanding that the course of our motion was not set by me but was indeed created “then and there”—in the process of our real-life collaboration. And also it meant that I consciously followed the path of creating unforeseen situations, which forced me to activate my pedagogical creativity. (Alexander Lobok, Case#15)

Alexander’s initial dialogic provocation asking the students what they want to do in the class was highly ontological. Probably most of the children came to the classroom not because they wanted to. However, it seemed that many of them were open to discuss what they might want to do in the classroom. Thus,

a genuine engagement did occur in response to the teacher's dialogic provocation. It opens a possibility for a genuine dialogue described by Bakhtin (1999) where the participants are genuinely interested in each other, where people ask questions of their genuine interest and their interlocutors seriously reply to them (Bakhtin, 1986).

However, this discussion of the classroom plans was a bit disingenuous on the part of the teacher, from our point of view. It is because the teacher did not want and did not allow a genuine discussion of the classroom plans with the children but rather he wanted to use their replies to engage them in learning reading, writing, and math (as Tara Ratnam pointed out, the same can be said about Bakhtin's own teaching [2004]). This reading and writing had little to do with collective considering what to do. It did not facilitate a collective decision-making. For example, a list of possibilities might have helped children to vote on them or decide which to do first, and so on. Rather, the list of words was used to engage the children in playful finding of phonetic, grammatical, morphemic, semantic, mathematical, and so on patterns that the teacher improvisationally posed for the children. In other words, the teacher smuggled "politically correct" learning into the classroom while (some of?) the children might have been thinking that they were playing "politically incorrect" funny games.

We sense that the educational vortex in Alexander's Bakhtinian pedagogy has roots in Progressive Education emerging in the Enlightenment. There is a part of the *progressive* educational vortex to make learning invisible for the students by making the students believe that they do one thing while they actually do another thing. Children study academic subjects, while they think they play fun games. Students do not actually own their education, nor are they responsible for it, in this case, as it is invisible for them. One of the fathers of Progressive Education, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), nicely, if not a bit cynically, described this pedagogical manipulation in his educational novel "Emile":

Take the opposite course with your pupil [in the child-centered, proto-Progressive, education that Rousseau advocated in contrast to a conventional authoritarian teacher-centered education]; *let him always think he is master while you are really master*. There is no subjection so completed as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will [of the child] itself is taken captive [by the teacher's hidden manipulation]. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength, or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? His work and play, his pleasure and pain, are they not, unknown to him, under your control? No doubt he ought only to do what he wants, but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do. He should never take a step you have not foreseen, nor utter a word you could not foretell. (Rousseau, 1979, p. 120; italics ours)

However, dialogic provocations do not need to be manipulative to engage students. In another case of his Bakhtinian teaching (Case#8), Alexander described teaching Marxist-Leninist philosophy to his polytechnic undergraduate students, mostly majoring in economics and engineering, in the USSR in



the early 1980s. The challenge for the Bakhtinian educator was not only that many of his polytechnic undergraduate students were not interested in philosophy in general and the Marxist-Leninist philosophy in particular, but the subject was monologically ideological. On top of these challenges, Alexander had to use an imposed textbook of very bad pedagogical quality. Yet, he managed to create successful dialogic provocations.

So, how did I teach? I would enter the classroom, sit on the edge of a desk, and say: “Here you can see this textbook. Please, open it, leaf through it, and tell me what questions you have about it. Do you have *any* questions?” This was literally how I would start my first class meeting. And it was totally novel for students. They were used to professors delivering some “knowledge” to them. Whereas here was a weird young man—me—who was asking them not to learn the text but to come up with questions for it. And he was asking for *any* questions—they could be childish, silly—*any* questions. Questions beginning with “Why?” “What?” “How?” “Why the heck ...?” “Is it true that...?” (Alexander Lobok, Case#8)

Through authoring their own holistic and vague personal relationship with the original quotes by the philosophers mentioned in the official Marxist-Leninist philosophy textbook—a quote is incomprehensible, stupid, exciting, confusing, interesting, untrue, and so on—the students started genuinely engaging in the philosophy. The next educational question became investigating these authorial personal relationships between the students and the quotes. It seems this became the core of his Bakhtinian pedagogy for Alexander. Through these dialogic investigations of the selected quotes, the students developed their own philosophical voices. Although, as Alexander pointed out in his interview, only about a quarter of his undergraduates were genuinely involved in philosophy, in his estimation.

Bakhtinian educators Ana Marjanovic-Shane and Eugene Matusov, who teach education students in the USA at the college undergraduate and graduate levels, also face a problem of reluctant students. They have developed the notion of “Open Curriculum” to ensure that what they teach is relevant, meaningful, important, interesting, and engaging. Conventional education uses a “Closed Curriculum” pedagogical regime, in which the taught curriculum is predefined by the teacher and/or by the state. In the regime of an Open Curriculum, the students have active roles in defining what they are going to study. The Open Curriculum involves a list of curricular topics—a Curricular Map—that the professor considers to be relevant and important for the academic subject. Often Eugene and Ana develop their Curricular Maps based on their own authorial professional ideas of what is important, on advice from their colleagues, who are experts in the area, and syllabi of similar classes available on the Internet. They also provide brief “teasers” for each topic on the Curricular Map for the class.

For example, this is one of the listed topics of a Curriculum Map for an undergraduate course on cultural diversity in education:

“Cultural mismatch”

What is a cultural mismatch between the teacher’s and students’ cultural expectations and behavior? Have you experienced ones [*sic*]? What educational problems result from a cultural mismatch? Is it possible to prevent cultural mismatches or not and why? How can a teacher recognize a cultural mismatch (and not intentional violation of cultural norms and expectations)? Facing a cultural mismatch, what should the teacher do: a) make the student learn and use only the cultural pattern of expectation and behavior dominant in the mainstream culture that the teacher belongs to, b) learn the student’s cultural pattern of expectations and behavior for providing better guidance and comfort to the student, or c) something else (what is it and why)? What would you do, as a teacher, when facing a cultural mismatch? (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017, pp. E5–E6)

There are many more curricular topics on the Map than class meetings in the term. Also, students can and do add new topics (along with their teasers) of their interest to the class Curricular Map throughout the class term. At the end of each class meeting, the students decide what to study next. They review the current Curricular Map, make choices, try to convince their peers of their choice, and finally vote. Sometimes, the students vote for the current topic to continue to be studied. Sometimes a few topics are scheduled to be studied in the next class one after the other. Sometimes, students disagree with each other and split a class into a few groups, each studying its own topic. Sometimes, students vote to let the professor decide the next topic. Sometimes, encouraged by the professor, a student volunteers to teach or lead a group or the entire class.

Eugene and Ana also engage their students in democratic self-governance. Each emerging issue in the class (e.g., should the class have a break) they turn into a collective discussion about possible options, pros, and cons and then have a vote. As the semester progresses the ownership for these collective discussions often shifts to the students. Also, in the middle of the semester they have a “Mid-term Town Hall meeting,” where the students evaluate the class—how it feels, what works and what does not—and make proposals for improvements. The pros and cons of each proposal are generated by the students and the professor and discussed before voting. The improvements continue being evaluated by the participants through the end of the class. Engaging students in decision-making about their teaching curriculum and the class organization makes them more active learners and more responsible for their own education (Matusov, 2015; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017).

In addition to the dialogic provocations described above and the “Open Curriculum,” Matusov also often uses his students’ reluctance as a dialogic provocation in itself. Here are three different examples of how he does it:

*Example#1*

My previous graduate class [on “Critical and Interpretative Methods of Educational Research] consisted of [many] students who just hated the class from the beginning. One graduate student wrote before the class, in a class survey, that she was not interested in a philosophical discussion of whether a

table really exists or not. So, my goal was to engage positivistically minded students in thinking about epistemology, about many other philosophical issues, relevant for research making. It was a rather successful class. I remember that the first day of the class, we had a discussion of the people's research epistemology—that is, on what counts as knowledge/data for them. This resulted in one student so brilliantly defining positivism for herself. She said that she did not have any epistemology because she was studying the truth. There was silence and one of the students replied that denying epistemology was the epistemology in itself. The first student answered negatively about her own epistemology and got back a reply that the rejection of epistemology was her epistemology ... That puzzled the first student and, thus, made her engaged in the class subject matter. Some other reluctant students were puzzled by an unexpected fact that many of their peers disagreed what would and what would not [be] considered to be data for them. (Case#26)

Thus, together with his students, Eugene Matusov managed to reveal the relevance of the class by problematizing some students' own reluctance about the class since they expected the class to be irrelevant to them.

#### *Example#2*

Based on my previous experience, I know that some students who will take the undergraduate class are not interested in multiculturalism or even in education. So, it's hard to teach classes of students who don't want to take it—although it's always an interesting pedagogical challenge. For me, this challenge is a part of the cultural diversity issue. ...

One way for me to engage these reluctant students in my cultural diversity class on education is to turn the table around by asking them what they would do if they had reluctant students. (Case#27)

After asking students to discuss what would they prefer—to teach a class of eager students or reluctant students—Eugene continues:

However, it is interesting my students discuss how differently they would teach the students from class A and class B. Many say that basically, you need to drill the students from class B who don't want to learn and you need to be very strict with them—I record all suggestions on the blackboard. They often propose a very oppressive regime for class B and very nurturing pedagogical regime for students from class A. However, some would disagree and argue that students from class B need more supportive and nurturing pedagogical regime because these are needy and traumatized students.

Then I ask them why they have chosen this class and whether or not they would take this class if it were not required. ... A majority would be reluctant students. Then I ask my students how I should teach based on their discussion of how they would teach classes A and B. They become perplexed and puzzled. This is when many of them (but probably not all) become ready to learn. This usually generates their attention and engagement in the class at least initially. Then I have to keep earning their attention and engagement by trying to make the class relevant, exciting, and useful for them. (Eugene Matusov, Case#27)

This case is a very ontological provocation because Eugene Matusov asks reluctant students for advice on how he, their professor, should teach and treat them in their class. It opens opportunities for the control and ownership of the students' own education, which initially and institutionally they did not have.

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-26):** *Would Eugene really always follow student's propositions?>>*

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-06-13):** *This is a question that interests me too!>>*

<<**Eugene Matusov, feedback reply (2018-06-14):** *My current short answer is: Big Yes, and small no. My "Big Yes" comes from my conviction that a student is the highest authority for his or her own education. My small "no" comes from my pedagogical desire to engage my students in critical dialogue about their own education, educational values, and desires—so, I try to offer a critical dialogue space for my students when they make their propositions. Of course, there can be other issues, like safety for the student and a possibility that a student's proposition may affect other students. In general, I am not shy to share my concerns or questions with my students about their propositions, but other than in emergencies, often the decision is theirs. In short, I try to run my classes democratically, being highly influenced by the Democratic School Movement (Greenberg, 1992a; Neill, 1960; Rietmulder, 2009) embedded in the Bakhtinian critical dialogism framework, in my understanding and interpretation of both of them.>>*

They are forced to take classes that they considered irrelevant and uninteresting for them. This invites the students' critical reflection on their institutional (oppressive) being and ownership of their education. Accidentally, it may also generate a learning engagement in some of them (at least for this class discussion). In this approach, student disengagement becomes a legitimate curriculum for all students, including the disengaged students.

### *Example#3*

I often start with dialogic provocations that induce the students' own authorial opinions and promote their engagement into a learning issue at hand. I often use voting on issues with discrete options to induce a holistic opinion-response to it from my students. For example, a definition of bullying sounds very abstract and non-problematic for many of my students. So, I show them an ambivalent case of school bullying<sup>1</sup>—ambivalent from my point of view—and ask them to vote on whether it is actually bullying, with the following options: Yes for sure; No for sure; Dunno/not sure; Don't care. Sometimes some students offer additional options, like, for example, in this case: Grey area. I record the students' voting on the blackboard and ask why they voted as they voted, starting with a minority opinion. People who voted "don't care," reluctant students, become an important educational resource for the rest of the class because I ask the other students to explain why they care about the issue and I ask the reluctant, "don't care" students if the reasons are convincing and make sense for them.

<sup>1</sup><https://youtu.be/WHV1sUqr6fs?t=64>

<<**Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-24):** *But you don't give them the opportunity to convince other students that they shouldn't care either, or let them present the reasons for not caring?>>*

<<**Eugene Matusov, reply (2018-06-04):** *They have opportunities for both and I encourage them to do so.>>*

Thus, these reluctant, “don't care” students also become engaged in the class and in the curricular topic we discuss. (Interview with Eugene Matusov, 2015-08-18)

Eugene Matusov puts his disengaged students into a dialogic position of people challenging the relevancy and meaningfulness of the curricular topics that won the students' vote for those students who are engaged. Of course, this dialogic position is possible only if these disengaged students choose to reveal their disengagement and choose to engage in dialogue with the rest of the class, challenging the relevancy and meaningfulness of the topic at hand. If they decide not to engage about their disengagement, a dialogue with the disengaged remains impossible (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017).

Our analysis of the interviews and their online forum discussions reveals several pedagogical approaches toward student disengagement developed by SIBEs:

1. Developing ontological dialogic provocations for the students, problematizing salient aspects of the students' lives;
2. Getting into the students' own ontological territories, engaging them in activities of their liking (e.g., games for young children);
3. Trying to make learning invisible and a by-product of their otherwise non-educational activities of interest and enjoyment;
4. Promoting an encounter between the voice of a scholar (via a quote) and a student who develops first a holistic authorial response to it and then a differentiated authorial position;
5. Engaging students in making decisions about their own education by their collective deciding what to study;
6. Engaging students in democratic self-governance of their class;
7. Making student disengagement a legitimate curriculum for the class;
8. Transforming student disengagement into a dialogic position of “don't care,” challenging the engaged students who “care” and demanding the latter to explain and justify their “care” to those who disengaged;
9. Provoking such an interesting dialogue among engaged students that it draws in disengaged students without much effort from the teacher. (Isn't this flirting with an educational vortex? We think so.)

But, what does it have to do with Bakhtin? Why would Bakhtin inspire these pedagogical approaches to the educational vortex to fascinate and engage students in the academic subject of the class? We can think of at least the three following Bakhtinian principles that guide pedagogical approaches to the educational vortex. First, Bakhtin insisted that the meaning-making process is

inherently dialogic, involving the relationship between a genuine interested question and a serious answer (Bakhtin, 1986). To engage a student in education means to provoke him or her in asking genuine questions of his or her interest. Second, Bakhtin's notion of responsibility/answerability involves questioning one's own life and actions/deeds/postupki by oneself and by other people and replying to these questions (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993). Thus, engaging a student in education means to engage them in questioning their own life and education (and their own disengagement), in replying to this questioning, and in actions resulting in these dialogues. Third, Bakhtin understood dialogue as an encounter of two (or more) consciousnesses, opaque to each other, generating inexhaustible interest in each other—consciousnesses with equal rights to be taken seriously (Bakhtin, 1986, 1999). Hence, to engage a student means to become genuinely interested in him or her, in the student's own subjectivity and life, including the student's disengagement.

Out of the eight pedagogical approaches to student disengagement employed by Bakhtinian educators we interviewed, two approaches seem to be less Bakhtinian and more Progressive, namely #2 and #3 (and perhaps even #9) from the list above. The reason for that is that in our reading of Bakhtin, he always appealed to conscious and visible aspects of the participants' life and subjectivity to stay in dialogue (see this point developed by Bakhtin's close colleague Voloshinov, 1976). Thus, he argued that in his polyphonic novels, Dostoevsky did not tell the readers about his characters anything that his characters did not know about themselves. In our view, points #2 and #3 make the teacher embrace the students' consciousnesses, put the teacher's consciousness above the students' consciousnesses, thus, undermining their dialogic relationships. It seems to us Bakhtin's dialogic principle of consciousnesses with equal rights gets compromised in the pedagogical approaches to student disengagement. We argue that these two pedagogical approaches (#2 and #3) are guided mostly by Progressive education, as developed by Rousseau, Dewey, and others, insisting that any imposed curriculum can be taught in a deeply engaging way for any student.

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-19): *Like the case [by Bakhtin himself]<sup>2</sup> does? The need for teaching a certain grammatical item seems to have come from the teacher's perception of the need. We don't know what the students felt about it, whether they wanted to voluntarily engage in it, or if they were subjected to it, although the class seems to have been engaged, generating discussions.>>*

Thus, American philosopher of education John Dewey argued that society must develop the teaching curriculum for students and then a teacher has to "double psychologize" this curriculum for each student to be deeply engaged. The first psychologizing is historical, in which the teacher reveals the historical needs of humankind in order for the important curriculum to emerge. The

<sup>2</sup>Tara's question is about Case#30, by Bakhtin, that was a part of our book in the first draft. The reader can refer to this in the following published text (Bakhtin, 2004).

second psychologizing is biographical/experiential for the particular student, in which the teacher reveals how the student's life—in its past, present, and future—may be touched by the important curriculum to study (Dewey, 1956).

Bakhtinian educator Ana Marjanovic-Shane contrasted the Progressive and Bakhtinian approaches to the educational vortex: “I think the main difference [between these two approaches] is that ... provocation is aimed not at the subject-matter of the students' learning interests [as it is in a Progressive approach], but at [the students'] reflections on the educational process. In other words, [in a response to a dialogic provocation, a student] asks for an answer to oneself, and not [for] an answer to the teacher” (interview with Ana Marjanovic-Shane, August 19, 2015). For Bakhtin-the-philosopher, the content of dialogue does not preexist the dialogue and emerges in dialogue through the encounter of consciousnesses interested in each other. In our view, societal design of the overall curriculum, accepted by Progressivism, is a point of imposition of curriculum by the society. This Progressivist conviction contrasts with the Bakhtinian, emphasizing the emergence of the curriculum in a dialogic encounter of the consciousnesses with equal rights. This is a point of divergence between Bakhtinian and Progressive education. In contrast to Progressive education, a Bakhtinian pedagogy may question if student engagement in the curriculum can be possible for any student in any curriculum at any time.

### IS AN EDUCATIONAL VORTEX ALWAYS POSSIBLE?

On our online forum, Bakhtinian educator Ana Marjanovic-Shane listed difficulties that educators face while designing an educational vortex for disengaged students and raised the question of whether an educational vortex can always be successful,

I think it is very important to realize the legitimacy of the differences in the quality of the students' engagement in the class. Some students may be only interested in credentials, others may be interested in being given scripted predefined “answers” to the “experts' questions” (what experts in the area think is important to know), others may not be interested in the subject matter at all but are forced by their program to take it anyway, still others are occupied with different life problems, but the way our education is organized does not let them take a break in their courses—and so on.

But even making these differences in the students' engagement legitimate is not easy: it is hard, at least for me, to find ways to guide some of the students: those who have existential problems, and/or for whom I think that they are not “present” in the class. Even though I respect their “Fifth Amendment”<sup>3</sup> rights, it sometimes bothers me that I am not “successful” in provoking them enough.

<sup>3</sup> Students' rights to remain silent in the class and not to reply to the teacher's question or explain why they are silent, similar to the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution, which gives witnesses and criminal suspects the right to remain silent to avoid incriminating themselves (Matusov, 2015; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017; Shor, 1996).



So, I think, my Bakhtinian orientation to provoke a student to ask their own questions, was successful not because of me, but it was successful because of Debra [a student in her class]. Or because of the dynamics of dialogue Debra and I could create between the two of us. Our dialogue unfortunately was not joined by most of the other students in that particular class.

I want to search ways to make my teaching orientation be more meaningful to more different students' ways of being in my class. Do you think it is possible? (Ana Marjanovic-Shane, online forum, 2017-03-17)

It seems to us that Ana Marjanovic-Shane has a pedagogical anxiety that she does not do enough for some of her disengaged or insufficiently engaged students. She apparently sees maximizing her students' engagement as her pedagogical goal. However, at the end of her posting, she doubts that it is always attainable.

SIBE Eugene Matusov replied negatively to her question on the online forum. He argues that a teacher's pedagogical desire to engage each and every student in the curriculum at hand, or at least maximize this engagement, comes from an uncritical acceptance of the monologic hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student imposed by modern educational institutions (both conventional and many innovative). Eugene Matusov writes,

In a monologic educational setting, the teacher operates in a huge differential of power of monologism. In a dialogic educational setting, a student invites a teacher to help them study. Students can join together, if they have a somewhat shared endeavor and interest in each other.

In a dialogic educational setting, when a student is with a teacher, it means that the student invites the teacher to help with his or her inquiry, like, for example, in the case of Meno and Socrates (Plato & Bluck, 1961). In monologic educational institutions, this assumption is wrong. When a teacher is with his or her students, it often means that students are forced to be with this teacher.

We, dialogic educators, often try to compensate [for] the absence of our students' asking for help by dialogic provocations that are supposed to generate the students' inquiries and their invitation to us for help. We should be careful about working hard on making all our students fall in a vortex of omnipotent provocations. I think this is a monologic (Progressive) pedagogical desire that is generated by the monologic educational setting. (Eugene Matusov, online forum, 2017-03-17)

Ana disagrees with Eugene that the teacher should not care about expanding a number of students he or she teaches:

Let us imagine that I have complete freedom in creating a dialogically, democratically based school in which the students are truly the ones who have complete control over deciding whose classes to attend based on their perception of how meaningful some professor's guidance is for them. And let us imagine that there is a professor (teacher), maybe me, who nobody chooses to come to (or very small number of people). Shouldn't such a professor try to "improve" his or her approach to teaching so that he or she becomes more relevant? Or stop being a teacher?

In other words, I think that such general pedagogical desire—to be a more meaningful and a more relevant teacher to more students—is a legitimate pedagogical desire. At the present moment, it may be conflated with and hijacked by the hierarchical, monologic educational institutions that define “being a better teacher to more people or to all people” in a different, monologic way. But in a democratic school based on the “student inviting the teacher to help them study,” a teaching desire to be more meaningful, more relevant to more students, would have a different sense. It would potentially have an expression in “being invited” more times, by more students. (Ana Marjanovic-Shane, online forum, 2017-03-21)

Eugene Matusov replies:

I can still see a Progressive vortex in your pedagogical desire. Why should a teacher desire to have more students, beyond an economic concern, which is monologic in its nature? Socrates did not search for more students because he was not paid by them—but sophists, who were paid by their students for their teaching, did. In a dialogic educational setting, teaching stops being a labor and becomes a voluntary passion. A teacher can invite new students but only because these students may find his or her guidance interesting and helpful for them.

In my view, in a dialogic educational setting, it is a student who should decide whether a teacher is meaningful, relevant, helpful, and even needed<sup>4</sup>—not the teacher. If the teacher is not sure about that, he or she should check it with his or her students. A person becomes a true teacher only when a student grants this role to the person. (Eugene Matusov, online forum, 2017-03-22)

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-25): *But obviously, your own practice fails to live up to this ideal, because you are working in traditional educational institutions, where you have a captive audience of students sent to your course against their free will, and instead of quitting to set up your own democratic school, or making a living doing something else, you continue working within this system, and pretending you are doing dialogical teaching, when in fact you are in a monological setting, with all the attendant power imbalances.*

*So, in the end, this sets up a principled dilemma which, I feel, you project (and it would have been beneficial if it had been at least properly foreshadowed much earlier on in the book). Is dialogical teaching possible in a monological setting? If you think it is, then that means treating compromises as legitimate, not as forms of betrayal or fraud (which is how some of the teaching case studies in the book are criticized), and creating an overall much more nuanced discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of any particular strategy an educator uses (not focusing just on the disadvantages of what Ligoio and Lobok are doing and only on the advantages of your own—Eugene’s—practice, as is typically the case so far).*

*If, on the other hand, you think it is not possible to be a dialogic teacher in a monologic setting, if you believe entering the system is a pact with the devil and is worse than staying out (or can only be justified as a humanitarian intervention*

<sup>4</sup><<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-26): *Yes, but isn’t a task of a teacher to help a student discover his or her ontological need?>>*

*in rare cases), then you should reframe the book. Your target audience then becomes different: not educators, currently working in the system, but a small radical group of current and potential reformers (nay, revolutionaries), who are willing to blow the system up and replace it with something new.*

*What I think you can't do is oscillate between the two modes without explaining your stance to the readers.>>*

People's here-and-now ontology—what they are interested in, pay attention to, participate in, and are concerned about—is very particular. In the same vein, their flexibility to expand or move this ontology is limited. People may not be able or be willing to engage in each and every dialogue and thus dialogic meaning making at any given moment. Our freedom for disengagement (or limited engagement) and limitations for their engagement are inherent in defining us as humans. The pressure on teachers, including SIBEs, to engage all their students in their curriculum all the time comes from the institutional disrespect for students' freedom for disengagement and their natural limitations to engage. Thus, in our view, Bakhtinian pedagogy leads to the legitimization of students' freedom to disengage or engage in a limited way with any curriculum at any time.

*<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-26): And what follows from a radical disengagement of students?>>*

### IS LACK OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT NECESSARILY A MARKER OF POOR EDUCATION?

The answer that we got from interviewing the SIBEs is no. Thus, Bakhtinian educator Eugene Matusov reports the following case from his educational practice, while being interviewed by Ana Marjanovic-Shane and Mikhail Gradovski:

EUGENE: I like Progressivism because it really does not allow a teacher to get [off] the hook by rationalizing his or her pedagogical failures. If something doesn't work with students' education, Progressivism always blames the teacher for not finding "the honest" way of teaching, using Jerome Bruner's words. This blame has some healthy aspects but only to the point. Progressivism is healthy because it prevents a teacher from being lazy or from blaming students for the teacher's own pedagogical problems. Progressivism keeps teachers from being lazy and mean but also it can create impossible tasks for us, teachers, and promotes pedagogical manipulation, which is not a very Bakhtinian tendency, in my view.

ANA: So, what tendencies do you have that you have progressed in yourself?

EUGENE: Well, the same Progressive things like, for example, if something doesn't work for my teaching, I am trying to put more and more pedagogical efforts rather than let the situation [laughs] go with that and sometimes I know that it is bad. Let me give an example of ...

ANA: Exactly.

EUGENE: ... [S]ometimes I need to legitimize non-participation, student's non-participation. On the other hand, it creates a tension: Should I legitimize student non-participation or am I just a lazy and insensitive teacher by giving up my pedagogical efforts? It creates an interesting tension between these two important considerations. My Progressive tendency is to think that I can engage all my students in any curricular topic all the time, if I do things right pedagogically.

ANA: All the time?

EUGENE: All the time. Well, maybe only most of the time, okay? But at least in the past I thought that should be my pedagogical goal. But now I know that it is a wrong pedagogical goal and a wrong pedagogical desire. Let me give you a good example of how this [laughs] is wrong.

I was teaching an awesome multicultural class for future elementary school teachers with a practicum, where the students were going in ... I think, to an African American center and engaging with minority kids. They were just playing with them, engaged in fun activities, and so on and so forth. And I had a student whom I couldn't engage in my class ... [nor] in the practicum. I tried to do all that I could in class, using all my "brilliant" [laughs] dialogic provocations—this and that—but it did not help. In the practicum, I even sent kids to her asking for help and ... You know, kids could be very persistent when they need help from adults. We are talking here about elementary school kids, little kids that are very cute when they are in need. Nothing helped. [The student] was either texting on her phone or tried to distract my other students from being with the kids ... You got the picture, don't you?

In my class ... it was very difficult to get something less than an A, but she managed to get a C, which meant that basically she didn't do anything. [Laughs] [And] ... so I give her a C at that time.

Then a year later, I bumped into her on the street on campus ... For me bumping into my students on a campus street after the class is over is the final test of my teaching [laughs]. If they try to pretend that they don't recognize me and pass by, I didn't do my work well. If they kind of acknowledge me—good. If they say, "Oh, Eugene, great to see you! How are you doing? I'm here and here, blah, blah, blah. Let's drink coffee!"—that means that I did my work well.

So, I was passing her, that student whom I gave C, expecting that she would pretend that she didn't know me. Then suddenly she was like, "Oh, Eugene, nice to see you!" Blah, blah, blah. I thought, maybe she confused me with somebody [else] [laughs]. In the United States, or at least at the University of Delaware, A-minus is already considered to be a bad grade by the students. And C is like, I don't know, [laughs] like "a cruel and unusual punishment."<sup>5</sup> [Laughs] It's viewed as unconstitutional! [Laughs] So, I kind of looked at her with a puzzlement [which was silently] saying, "Are you sure you kind of rec-

<sup>5</sup> A reference to the definition of torture in the US Constitution.

ognize me?” [Laughs] And she seemed to have recognized my puzzlement and replied to it: “Oh, Eugene, your class was the best class that ever happened with me in my life!” I said, “What?!!! Don’t you remember that I gave you a C?!” “No, no, no,” she said, “I learned the most important thing, in your class.” I asked with amazement, “What was that?” [She said,] “I learned that I don’t want to be a teacher. You know what I was thinking back then, ‘How come I’m so disengaged in your class?’ I saw all your efforts to engage me. I saw you sending these cute kids. But I just didn’t want to do anything with kids and the class. And you didn’t force me. And after the class was over, I started thinking about that. Why? Why didn’t I want to be with kids? Why didn’t I want to learn to be a good teacher? And I just realized that I want to work with people but not as a teacher.” And I asked her, “So what did you decide?” And she said, “I switched to acting, I want to be an actress. And I am so happy! You can’t imagine. And it’s your class that helped me to realize that. Thanks, Eugene. And, I know that you tried hard to engage me, but you did not force me. If you forced me enough, I might engage but I would not have learned the most important thing in my life that I don’t want to be a teacher but want to be an actress.”

MIKHAIL: You did your job well.

EUGENE: Yeah, but for me, back then, when I still was a Progressive educator, it was not legitimate. You see, I thought I had failed her, and I had failed myself. And, by the way, I really struggled about giving her a C. Because I thought, “Actually, I should have given a C to myself, not to her, because I failed her through my poor teaching.” As a Progressive educator, I thought, “Everybody can learn. She could learn. She could learn about multicultural education, which our class was about. But I prevented that through my poor guidance. Instead of admitting that to myself, instead blaming myself, I hit her with a C.” But I had run out of Progressive ideas. I felt that I didn’t teach her much about multicultural education, which is true.

MIKHAIL: That’s interesting. Does it mean that your expectations as to what your students can achieve and how much you can influence them have become lower? Do you lower your expectations of yourself?

EUGENE: No, no, no. Good question, Mikhail! Thanks! This is what I struggled with back then. And what, I would say, is still an unresolved struggle for me now. It’s not the case that I lower my expectations. Rather, I also see another pedagogical goal. Before, I saw my pedagogical role in helping them learn about cultural diversity in education—to learn critically, yes. But now, I see my pedagogical role also in helping them to test their professional desires—“Do I want to be a teacher or not?” This learning is legitimate for me now. This means I should respect the student’s disengagement as a part of their educational professional test. I also have learned that I need to give my students more space and respect their disengagement. But I still struggle when I should and should not push for their engagement. I struggle to recognize when I’m lazy or insensitive as a teacher or too bossy and hovering ... (Interview with Eugene Matusov, 2015-08-18)

## CONCLUSION: IS THE EDUCATIONAL VORTEX EVEN DESIRABLE?

In our interview, Russian SIBE Alexander Lobok nicely articulates the issue of the undesirability of the educational vortex, when it can be powerfully created by a teacher for his or her students:

Yes, it is feasible to create [educational] vortices, but, in my case, practically from the very beginning I treated such issues from a different angle. Both when I worked with children and with university students, it was the last thing on my mind to make them fascinated with myself. And this philosophy was dominating my teaching over a long period—and if we return to Bakhtin, that was the philosophy connected to the development of children’s voices, as opposed to imposing my own personal voice (albeit in a very captivating form) on them.

... I always thought that, if I do fascinate [elementary school] children with something, I deprive them of something else. Because human life is not endless, and if I with all my charisma had enthralled them with something that I myself found enthralling, I would definitely have taken something away from them. I would have taken away multiple other possibilities. For example, I got a student captivated with math and now he is doing only math day in and day out. Whereas [a student] could be contemplating running water in a creek instead ... That is why I thought that I should not get them fascinated too much. I just offer a range of opportunities for a child, but I do not try to involve [the child] in all these opportunities by all means possible. The most important thing was not to captivate them with myself and not to cut off the other possibilities—not to become a “vortex” that sucks in children’s enthusiasm. I thought that it was paramount that the child could keep a distance and critically assess him- or herself. Only in that case would he be able to belong to him- or herself and to build his or her own subjective trajectory. My role was to be a factor of his development, but not a milestone, or a lighthouse, and certainly not a “vortex” ... (Alexander Lobok, Case#22)

If the education and its curriculum are defined not by societal urgencies or a teacher’s passions, they must be by the student’s self-realization. Thus, a student—and not society or the teacher—is the highest authority for the student’s own education (Klag, 1994). A student has to find his or her own voice in his or her own curricular areas by addressing and replying to other people. Some of the curricular areas will become primary for the student, some peripheral, and some not at all. Moreover, the student’s curricular focus—central, peripheral, and disinterested—is changing dynamically and/or purposefully throughout the student’s life.

Alexander Lobok further problematizes the student’s highest authority for his or her own education. In order not to impose his own educational passions on his students, he decides to distance himself from them.

[As a teacher] I worked a lot on the creation of conditions for [a student’s] free self-determination. It was very important for me to create situations of uncertainty, in which children would have to make their own choice. It was essential for

me to keep to the philosophy of noninterference in their choices. For a long time, my greatest fear was that the children would become fascinated with me and with what I was doing. And here we come to a very tricky paradox. On one hand, I was constantly trying to create certain educational motivations for children—in order to foster their own interest towards various forms of education in general. On the other hand, it was important not to “fascinate” them with something that was interesting to me, so as to preserve their right for their own trajectory, which they had to build themselves and which could be different from mine. So, it was important for me to get them involved—and at the same time to create a distance. (Alexander Lobok, Case#22)

However, Alexander’s initial solution for the problem of imposing his own educational passions by distancing himself from his students creates its own problems. An indifferent teacher, a teacher without educational passions, is dull. It can be difficult to ignite and support the flame of a student’s passion in the student’s authentic curricular areas. An indifferent, passionless teacher may handicap a student’s educational development of his or her authentic voice.

And probably it was taken a bit too far. Because, at some point, I began to feel a problem within myself, which I can describe as a problem of being too distanced from my students. My growing-up students perceived it as my unconcern, my indifference, and lack of love. I tried to convince myself that it was only up to the children to determine their trajectories, that I should not fascinate them too much with anything, that it was not their convergence with me but their divergence that was valuable—and at some point it put too much psychological stress on them. After all, children do need a teacher in the traditional sense of this word—a teacher that can get students involved in his subject and infected with his own drive to study it. This is also a very important right of a child—the right to meet teachers who are passionate about their subjects and who can “infect” children with their passion ...

Being afraid of my own charismatic qualities, I became too absorbed in the idea of my distancing from students and, at some point, it became my trap, my own weakness. And if you ask me about how my pedagogical problems have changed—then, the main change is probably this. Yes, I do want each child to develop his own subjectivity and his own voice. But this does not mean that I should minimize my own voice out of the fear that my voice can silence the child’s voice. If the child’s voice is coming from within and is genuine, it cannot be silenced. But here we approach the question of “what is a genuine voice?” and what is a pretend-voice, an imitation-voice. Frankly, this question is the most difficult one. (Alexander Lobok, Case#22)

The fear of contamination of a student’s own educational voice and imposing curriculum is very common for educators of the Democratic School movement (e.g., Greenberg, 1992b; Neill, 1960; Rietmulder, 2009). They see any curricular imposition as undermining the student’s final authority for his or her own education. Also, they see it as frivolous “entertainment” of students who could not find their own authentic curricular area. Democratic School educa-



tors are often very strict in limiting themselves to helping and guiding only those students who explicitly and actively ask them for help and guidance. Usually, they even refuse to be called “teachers” but rather call themselves “school staff.”

Alexander Lobok raises the problem of the authenticity of a student’s voice. Do students always know their authentic curricular areas here-and-now? Can they be confused? Can they be distracted with their own inauthentic desires and motivations?

<<**Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-25):** *But then, who’s to judge which desires are authentic and which not?*

*I’m currently facing these exact questions as a parent, especially with my older son, who’s going to be three in a few months (that’s precisely the age when this issue is in particularly sharp relief—he’s young enough for me not to be able to fully trust his judgment just yet, but old enough to talk to, discuss things with). My personal solution to the dilemma is first, of course, to listen to him, to always at least attempt dialogue, and to respect his freedom as much as I can, and also to show him my love and care, and all that. But beyond this baseline, the principle is that if I am being authentic in my interactions with him, his authentic voice will grow stronger and come through, and we will have a true dialogue. My only way, over time, to allow him to develop an authentic voice, is to lead by example.>>*

A voice is not a process of speaking out loud—rather, it is an expression of something existentially significant. Essentially, a whole human life is a process of acquiring one’s voice, of moving towards this voice. The acquisition of that genuine quality of utterance (an utterance which is not just expressed in words but expressed through life itself), in which I truly feel and recognize my inner self. After all, it may only seem that each of my utterances and actions are indeed my utterance and my action. Very often, a person lives and expresses himself in ways that are alien to himself. It seems that he does what he wants, what he likes, but at the same time, there is always a feeling of “not being true”: *in essence, it is not me*. This is what ultimately leads a person to an existential personal crisis. On one hand, you may feel that you have achieved a lot, but on the other hand, you have a feeling that you live somebody else’s life, not your own life. And where is “my life” then? What does “my life” really mean? This is, by the way, one of the key themes that I have to deal with in my psychotherapy. When I counsel seemingly successful people, who have enough financial means to satisfy their various needs, I have a feeling that there are huge existential holes in their lives. And that they have some deep, hidden personal needs that have remained unidentified and unsatisfied. (Alexander Lobok, Case#22)

How can a student become the final authority for his or her own education if the student’s own educational desire and motivation may be not authentic?

In our view, Alexander Lobok’s search for the solution of the problem in defining the correct distance between the teacher’s educational passion and the student’s authentic curricular area is a trap in its own right. We agree with Alexander that the person’s authenticity—in this case of education, how and

whether the curricular areas are authentic for the person—does not preexist the person's present but it is in active making throughout the person's entire life. A person must be exposed to diverse curricular areas to find his or her own authenticity. This is especially true for young children, for whom situational emergent interest dominates over personal self-generated interest in activities, including educational activities (von Duyke, 2013). Literacy education researcher Patricia Alexander illustrates students' situational and personal educational interests and educational disinterest with the following example:

Samuel, Meredith, and Riley are ninth graders reading a chapter on genetics in their biology textbooks. Even though Samuel is not a particular fan of biology, he finds the subject of genes and gene-mapping intriguing. Meredith, by contrast, has long found the domain of biology personally relevant and engaging, in part because a number of family members suffer from certain biological disorders. Even as a young student, Meredith enjoyed reading about the human body and she hopes to become a pediatrician. Riley, however, finds all things biological to be dry and boring. It does not matter if the topic is genes or digestion.

Based on this description, we would say that Samuel shows situational interest in the topic, whereas Meredith is individually interested in the domain. Riley, however, appears to be neither situationally nor individually interested in reading about genetics. (Alexander, 2005, pp. 419–420)

Elsewhere, we, Eugene Matusov and Ana Marjanovic-Shane (2012), argue that education has to become a focus of critical educational examination in itself. We define the goal of education as a critical examination of life, self, society, and the world, which includes education itself. The authenticity of curricular areas for the student should become a focus of the student's own critical examination.<sup>6</sup> We agree with Alexander Lobok that a student may not know what desires of his or hers are authentic. However, the response to this problem is not patronizing by the society, or by the teacher, nor leaving the student to his or her own devices, nor searching for the right distance. Rather, we see the solution in engaging the student in a critical examination of his or her own educational authenticity. Education about authenticity of one's own voice is probably the crux of education itself.

This is how we envision such engagement of the students in a critical examination of their own authenticity of curricular areas. First of all, authenticity is a choice among other choices that cannot be possible without the student being exposed to diverse curricular areas. This can be possible via creating both physical and virtual rich learning environments involving diverse activities that a student can access, observe, peripherally or centrally participate in, and can be invited to.

<sup>6</sup><<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-26): *On the topic of student's authenticity see D. Cooper's idea of three concepts of authenticity: Polonian, Dadaistic, and real authenticity (which is, in my opinion, always dialogical: "Resoluteness, as authentic Being-one's-self, does not detach Dasein from its world, does not isolate it as a free-floating 'I.'" (Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, p. 238). D. Cooper (2011), Authenticity and Learning (Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy) [London and New York: Routledge]>>*

Diverse and dynamically shifting commitments and diverse modes of participation: window-shopping, lurking, hanging out, socialization, messing out, geeking out, jailbreaking, and so on have to be legitimate and available to the students (Ito et al., 2010; von Duyke, 2013). Also, students should have a legitimate right to not participate or freely leave any educational activity at any point.

<<**Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-25):** *Yes, in principle, but in practice things don't always work out that smoothly. On another occasion, I had the chance of telling you about a phenomenon I've heard of from friends interested in Democratic education in Israel, namely that you have groups of adolescents, 12 and older, never joining classes, many of whom never acquired basic literacy. It is also often the case that people in these groups are coming from working-class and/or ethnic minority families, while most pupils and teachers in Democratic schools are very much from an upscale background. This is secondhand information, and I am oversimplifying, so take this with a grain of salt as a reflection on Democratic education in Israel and beyond (and, to be sure, it's not that all pupils in ordinary Israeli schools acquire basic literacy—far from it), but even so, this perhaps brings up a potential issue to consider in the present context.<sup>7</sup> Also what about teenagers developing drug addictions, and really, what about addictions more generally? These also complicate matters, don't they?>>*

Second, students should be involved in a critical dialogue about their educational engagements and disengagements, focusing on the authenticity of their curricular areas. Alexander Lobok's important concern that a student's involvement in some activities and curricular areas precludes them from involving themselves in other activities and curricular areas can be part of these critical dialogues. Critical dialogues about curricular authenticities will allow the students to reflect on their curricular experiences to see if these curricular areas are truly theirs. Of course, critical dialogue in education (and beyond) is a cultural value among other competing cultural values (Matusov, 2018; Matusov & Lemke, 2015). Not everyone would like to subscribe to this cultural value. This education of education, based on critical dialogue, can only be promoted but cannot be guaranteed, like any education. Educational pluralism must be legitimized, promoted, and defended (see our further discussion of that in Chap. 2.5).

This vision of education as critical examination of life, self, society, and the world seems to fulfill American educational philosopher John Dewey's credo of making education life itself rather a preparation for life (Dewey, 1897). However, this achievement is only possible when education is always partial, rather than comprehensive; always fragmented, rather than integral; always

<sup>7</sup>Watch an interview with an alumnus of Summerhill, a Democratic school in UK, who chose not learning to read and write—he did not attend any formal class at Summerhill: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o58xTHGYzIY>. Later, as an adult he got a degree in economics. In our view, although his life pathway was not easy and straight, his love of learning on his own and confidence of coping with emerging challenges that he developed in Summerhill seemed to enable him to learn later when a need and desire emerged in him. He taught himself how to read and write when he needed it. This Summerhill alumnus experience constitutes an interesting hypothesis that the best “preparation for the future life” is a student's intense engagement in education about the student's life at hand. This hypothesis has to be tested.

incomplete, rather than finalized; always voluntary, rather than imposed. Its authenticity is always limited and always questioned by the student and others. Thus, as particular SIBEs, we reject the notion of the omnipotent educational vortex as a Holy Grail of education of engaging all students in any curriculum at all times for the sake of critical education or educational authenticity.

<<**Antti Rajala, feedback reply (2018-04-30):** *Especially Chap. 2.2 and to some extent this chapter seemed to rely heavily on the authors' already published ideas and theories, and the interview cases seemed to help to refine the existing theory and bring new illustrations, nuances, and subcategories. Yet, the main categories and argument (especially ontological vs. non-ontological engagement) seemed to be normatively theory-driven and the overall theory did not seem to go through much change in the process of analysis (from how it was stated already in Eugene's book [2009]). Accordingly, there seems to be a tension between (a) how the authors describe the method of analysis building from grounded theory and being dialogical and (b) imposing somewhat strong ideas about the ethically right way of teaching on the presented data. I wonder if those who were interviewed for the cases agree that ontological engagement should be a top priority in teaching, or if in their interpretation this is the most important idea in Bakhtin's theory. (I found ... that this degree of [genuine] dialogicality seemed to be missing in Chaps. 2.1, 2.2 and this chapter.)*

*Having said this, I still liked the chapters I read a lot and felt they were very thought-provoking. I think as authors you bring a very important voice in the field, which I value a lot. Despite some limitations in its dialogicality, which I pointed out above, I feel that the book constitutes really a new genre of writing that fits very well with its Bakhtinian content.>>*

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## Chapter 2.4: Teacher–Student Power Relations in Bakhtinian Pedagogy

In this chapter we analyze ways SIBEs attempt to deal with this paradox inspired by Bakhtin’s non-educational literary notions of “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991) and “carnival” (Bakhtin, 1984). Thus, we describe dilemmas of the SIBEs who attempt to establish teacher–student relationships based in at least two pedagogical approaches: (1) eliminating power from education entirely or (2) eliminating teacher power while preserving students’ power.

In conventional educational institutions, the teacher–student power relations are hierarchical and authoritarian.<sup>1</sup> School authorities—teachers, school administrators, test makers, state bureaucrats, politicians, and so on—define all or nearly all aspects of education for the students: whether to study, what to study (i.e., curriculum), how to study (i.e., instruction), with whom to study, where to study, when to study, when and how to move, when and how to talk, what is successful learning, whether the learning was successful, how to manage motivation to study, how to solve all interpersonal and organizational issues, and so on. Although in some national conventional educational institutions, there can be some degrees of freedom for the students: taking elective classes, choosing a specialization, selecting a place to sit, selecting a topic of an essay or a project usually within strict limits, having optional extracurricular activities after the school day is over, and so on, these degrees of the students’ freedom are very limited. The main justification for this authoritarian unilateralism in conventional schools is based on a strong belief about the students’ ignorance and immaturity. This is especially true for children-students but it is

<sup>1</sup>In our view, hierarchy can be non-authoritarian, while authoritarianism can be non-hierarchical. For example, a hierarchy based on trust and legitimacy of limited negotiation may be authoritative but not authoritarian. Also, there can be several sources of authoritarianism unincorporated in one hierarchy, contradicting, clashing, and undermining themselves at times.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27): *In the described case in this comment, you are speaking about multi-hierarchical and not non-hierarchical authoritarianism.*>>

true for adult-students as well (Freire, 1986). As educational philosopher Alexander Sidorkin argues, even in countries with liberal democracies as their political system, modern conventional schools remain bastions of the feudal social and political relations based on highly hierarchical, non-negotiable authoritarianism (Sidorkin, 2002).

The paradox of the modern conventional educational institutions, based on feudal authoritarianism, has been pointed out since the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers noticed that genuine education cannot occur within the bounds of authoritarian social and political relations because such sociopolitical relations promote dogmatic thinking (e.g., Rousseau, 1979). Basically, school authoritarianism transforms education into a “civic church” (Collins & Halverson, 2009) encouraging students to search for discursive patterns that would please the school authority in the classroom and on the exams (Lemke, 1990). Thus, many students claim that the Earth is round because this is written in their textbook or that  $1/2 + 1/3$  is not  $2/5$  because they would fail a test if they write so (Matusov, 2009; Schneps, Sadler, & Crouse, 2003). The Enlightenment thinkers argued that genuine truth for a person can be established only in dialogue, free of coercion, where a person can be persuaded by empirical evidence, argument, reasoning, logic, testing alternative ideas, observations, experiments, and not by authority and its system of rewards and punishments (see Habermas, 1984). Genuine truth is established through an agreement among free-thinkers in free dialogue. In essence, these Enlightenment thinkers implicitly called for power-free education.

However, as far as we know, none of the Enlightenment thinkers actually accepted power-free education because of their distrust of the students in general and young students in particular. From their point of view, to be persuaded by empirical evidence, argument, reasoning, logic, testing alternative ideas, observations, experiments, a person has to be already rather mature, skillful in argumentation and logic, disciplined in keeping their attention on an inquiry for some time, motivated, reasonable, rational, and relatively well informed. Since they viewed students not as free-thinkers yet, some compromise with feudal authoritarianism was seen as necessary. Thus, Rousseau proposed to use power, hidden from students, to control and guide them to truth while the students feel as if they are free-thinkers engaged in a free dialogue of their own free will (Fendler, 1998; Matusov, 2015; Rousseau, 1979). In contrast, Kant proposed starting education with strong authoritarianism and then gradually transforming it into a limited free dialogue as the students become more informed, mature, and skilled by continually molding them into rational free-thinkers (see in LaVaque-Manty, 2006; von Duyke, 2013). The Kantian educational proposal can be compared with Neo-Vygotskian emphasis on gradually transferring responsibility for thinking to children/students (cf. Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). The issue here, indirectly raised by the Enlightenment, is whether free-thinking can emerge from any limited or invisible or dying-out authoritarianism *or* from a dialogue free of coercion as a social and political precursor of free-thinking.



<<**Katherine von Duyke, feedback reply (2018-04-24):** *[I see other possibilities for the emergence of free-thinking.] Free-thinking as a practice [can emerge from] ontological and experiential bases which broaden with experience and responsibility. Also, [I wonder if] “dialogue free of coercion” [is] an idealistic or ideological view and perhaps why dialogism has an oppressive moralism to it that exists above people and practitioners. Or is “dialogue free of coercion” a societal practice that must change over time (like no longer being comfortable with slavery or spanking children)?>>*

In our view, in regard to the teacher–student power relations, modern innovative education remains under the Enlightenment paradox spell. A diversity of ideas and approaches exists today. Some modern innovative educators argue for a power symmetry between the teacher and the students (Gradovski, 2008; Knowles, 1980). Some argue for power in the hands of the students (Illich, 1983). Some suggest the elimination of any form of power whatsoever (Piaget & Smith, 1995; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Some suggest the legitimate negation of power by, for example, paying students for their learning desired by the society (Sidorkin, 2002, 2009). While some others suggest the regulation of teacher–student and student–student power relations by a democratic communal governance (Greenberg, 1991, 1992; Neill, 1960; Rietmulder, 2009).

Bakhtin’s non-educational literary notions of “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991) and “carnival” (Bakhtin, 1984) afford at least two pedagogical approaches: (1) eliminating power from education entirely or (2) eliminating teacher power while preserving student power.

In our interviews with SIBEs, we have noticed similar issues and struggles with what constitutes good teacher–student power relationships in education. Thus, in his teaching Case#1, Paul Spitale seemed to promote an interesting two-step model of good teacher–student power relationships. In the first step, using his teacher’s unilateral authority, Paul sets the stage and activity for his students’ groupwork completely autonomous from the teacher. In the second step, the students’ groupwork realizes itself with no or minimum input from the teacher. Thus, in the first step the teacher power is used to create conditions for eliminating teacher power in the second step, which is viewed as the core of Paul’s Bakhtinian pedagogy. Somewhat similarly, Dmitri Nikulin (Case#9) seems to be arguing for no power in a genuine dialogue. An implication of his pedagogical approach is that power will destroy a genuine Bakhtinian dialogue. In a genuine Bakhtinian dialogue only learners can participate—genuine learners are always partially ignorant and partially knowledgeable but always different. If we are correct about his approach, the teacher has to become a learner among other learners (although, maybe, a different one).

In contrast, rather than eliminating teacher power, Beatrice Ligorio attempts to reduce the differential of a conventional strong power hierarchy by inviting her students to design the final exam questions, which would define their class curriculum and, to some degree, promote a dialogic instruction (Case#6). However, it is not fully clear whether Beatrice’s approach to teacher–student power relations is driven by her compromising with her conventional educational institution, or by her own pedagogical convictions, or a bit of both.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *You may just ask! ☺ Anyhow in general I am uneasy when your comments are based on just speculation and not information gathered from the interviews.>>*

<<**Authors' reply (2018-04-30):** *What is your approach to teacher–student power relations? Is it driven by your compromise with your conventional educational institution, or your own pedagogical concerns or a bit of both? We are looking forward to your answer.>>*

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-05-01):** *Thanks for asking. Here is my answer. It is mainly guided by my pedagogical concerns and beliefs. I feel quite free to use the pedagogical model I like. I only have two institutional constraints: (a) I have to come up with a grade for each student, and (b) I have to adjust my teaching strategy to a set of over 250 students.>>*

We suspect her approach is driven by her own pedagogical convictions. Similarly, Aaron Yost also tries to give his students more power, while keeping some power for himself, by making the students' academic writing a power tool for students' critique of their oppressive school conditions and by providing suggestions for their improvement (Case#5). Aaron's residual teacher power is evident in the fact that his students' involvement in this project and academic writing itself remain non-negotiable in his Bakhtinian pedagogy.

Rather than trying to reduce teacher power, Tara Ratnam apparently uses her teacher power unapologetically as “a midwife” to students' giving birth to truth in a Bakhtinian dialogue (Case#11). She guides her students to discover and dialogically develop issues, inquiries, and tensions, ontologically important for them, in the poem of her choice (or the choice of her educational institution, to be exact), through a series of her guiding questions. Tara's teacher–student power approach in education is somewhat similar to the Socratic (see “The Theaetetus,” 150 b–c, in Plato, 1997).

Below, we critically analyze four of the most complicated teaching cases, from our point of view, with regard to their teacher–student power relations. In each teaching case, we summarize its Bakhtinian pedagogy, abstract its teacher–student power relations and their potential attractiveness for Bakhtinian educators, critique them, and provide our imaginary alternative scenario that may address our criticism along with our critical analysis of that imaginary scenario. The reader is invited both to imagine more alternatives and to evaluate the cases and our critique of them. In our conclusion, we return to the bigger theme of considering “good teacher–student power relations.”

### FORCING STUDENTS TO FACE AN ETHICAL MIRROR OF THEIR ONTOLOGICAL WRONGS: CASE#3 BY EUGENE MATUSOV

In his Case#3 of Bakhtinian pedagogy, Eugene Matusov aimed to disrupt the conventional institutional oppression of students by using dialogic ontological violence. In his prior analysis of students' conditions in conventional educational institutions, Eugene had noticed institutional oppression involving students' unconditional cooperation with teachers' demands and assignments.

Many students often take institutional oppression for granted. For them, it remains invisible, unreflected, and unproblematized. Eugene wanted his college students—education and psychology undergraduates—to face their own institutional oppression. He wanted his students to critically reflect on their institutional oppression, moralize on their own unconditional cooperation, and take responsibility for it as it becomes visible for them (Freire, 1986). What conclusions the students might draw from revealing oppressive conditions and how they would take responsibility was up to the students themselves, according to Eugene’s pedagogical desire. In other words, Eugene wanted the students to have freedom to decide what they want to do with their moral disturbance, when they become informed and not “innocent” anymore.

Eugene approached this pedagogical task by designing a meaningless and absurd learning activity, in which he expected his students would unquestionably engage. He hoped that at the end of this absurd activity, students might raise a question about it or, if not, Eugene planned to raise questions himself. He wanted to design a penetrative, “torpedo touch” (Plato & Bluck, 1961) discourse (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2009) to make students uncomfortable and morally disturbed by their unconditional collaboration with institutional oppression. To do so, Eugene asked his students to bring supplies for making a peanut butter sandwich and engaged them in teaching each other how to make a peanut butter sandwich. His students were lively engaged in “teaching” each other how to make a peanut butter sandwich, even though they all already knew how to do that. As Eugene had expected, they did not ask why they were doing this “learning” activity until finally one student asked Eugene what was the purpose of the activity. Eugene’s reply slapped the students hard. He said that the point of this activity was to demonstrate that students would do any meaningless activity the teacher asks them without questioning. The students were upset and felt offended. However, as Eugene expected, many of them indeed became involved in critical reflection of their institutional oppression. This experience and Eugene’s words were penetrating for them. The students could not stop thinking about this event long after the class was over and, with passing time, they even started appreciating Eugene’s pedagogically violent Socratic dialogic approach.

Eugene’s pedagogical approach is rather attractive for many innovative educators. Thus, one of the participants in an online Facebook discussion of Eugene’s Peanut Butter Sandwich teaching case, an innovative educator, got very interested in trying out a variant of this teaching approach with his undergraduate students.

In our view, Eugene’s approach can also be attractive for some *Bakhtinian* educators for the following reasons:

- a. A liberating awakening of students to the oppressive conditions in their lives (Freire, 1986; Shor & Freire, 1987a, 1987b);
- b. The pedagogical goal of revealing and dialogizing people’s own being—especially ontologically wrong being (cf. Socrates’ motto, “the unexamined life is not worth living”; Plato & Riddell, 1973);

- c. An aesthetic flip of something familiar and unproblematic becoming unfamiliar and problematic (Shklovskii & Sher, 1990);
- d. The students were engaged in a powerful ontological dialogic provocation (Matusov, 2009);
- e. The students had to deal with the problem by themselves—no molding into some shape preset by the teacher (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2009);
- f. The teacher exposed the students to a “torpedo touch” educational experience, forcing his students to reflect and to rethink wrong ontological conditions of their lives (Matusov, 2009; Plato & Bluck, 1961);
- g. Powerful responsive authorship (Matusov, 2011; Matusov & Brobst, 2013): many students became involved in deep self-reflection and self-questioning about their being (in the educational institution);
- h. Eventful, dramatic, and memorable education for the participants, leading to their autodidactic examination of the penetrative inquiry (Bakhtin, 1999);
- i. The teacher demanding that the students take responsibility for their own lives and for their future professional practices (cf. “no alibi in Being,” Bakhtin, 1993);
- j. Although there was psychological pain, there was no institutional harm (no bad consequences for the students)—it was institutionally safe (Matusov, 2009);
- k. Both the teacher and the students faced surprises. The teacher was surprised that: a) all students unconditionally collaborated, b) one student asked for the purpose of the activity at the end of the lesson, c) many of his students surprisingly came back to the teacher’s new class the next term (cf. the importance of “the points of wonder” for dialogic pedagogy; Berlyand, 2009; Bibler, 2009). The students were surprised to be authentically engaged in their own education through this unpleasant educational experience. The learning result was very visible and had been effectively achieved. Many students reported that this activity led to their rude awaking to a reality where it was necessary to be pro-active in one’s own life.

All these attractors as such are not problematic for us.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27): ??? haven’t you spoken differently, when you have described torpedo touch?>>

Yet, we see the teacher’s power over the students in the following series of the teacher’s non-negotiable unilateralisms<sup>2</sup> and compromises for dialogic pedagogy (as we define it) in Eugene’s approach:

<sup>2</sup>Unilateralism can be negotiable. For example, a teacher may say to a student, “You can try to convince me but I’ll be the ultimate judge if your argument is persuasive and I’ll be the final authority on the decision-making.” In our view, in this situation, the teacher’s unilateralism is negotiable.

1. The teacher unilaterally identified students' ontological wrongs in advance;
2. The teacher unilaterally designed a test revealing these wrongs for his students;
3. The teacher unilaterally engaged the students in the ontological test of their oppressive conditions without their consent;
4. The teacher unilaterally utilized the institutional power of oppression on the students to make this oppression visible for them and morally questionable by them;
5. The teacher unilaterally threw the students into a moral and existential crisis of revealing to them that they had been colonized by and had unconditionally collaborated with their institutional oppression, without their consent.

Later, Eugene himself started questioning the legitimacy of his own violent dialogic pedagogy and we, the authors of the book, want to join his questioning:

[My students] had started realizing that it was really something important that had happened. So, [the next semester] they just came to this new class to dig deeper. My students' replies made me realize that I was doing something very important in my teaching for them, but I don't need to be that violent. I realized that I didn't need to be that Socratic in a way. I didn't need to humiliate students for them to learn. That was my part of my learning. (Eugene Matusov, Case#3)

We agree with Eugene's later self-doubts. First of all, we see a problem that the teacher induced a sense of *humiliation* in the students by making them feel mindless, self-oppressing, infantilized, docile, conforming drones and willing collaborators with their oppressors. Second, arguably the teacher abused his institutional and professional power by breaking the trust of his students that the teacher won't do any wrong to them, like, for example, inducing a sense of humiliation even for educational purposes. Third, the teacher used deception by hiding the main motive of the activity from the students. Fourth, the teacher employed a series of unilateralisms of defining and forcing an educational agenda (curriculum) on the students. Finally, fifth, the teacher threw the students into existential crises without their consent, which could break some of them (and in extreme cases, could even lead to suicide, see Matusov & Brobst, 2013)—that is, messing with the students' ontology.

In our analysis, Eugene/the teacher's position is that of an educator who is not just aware of the presence and importance of power relations in a classroom but also the one who demands that his students also become aware of that power and actively take a critical position in relation to it. The teacher's awareness of his own power is manifested in the fact that the teacher chose the theme, the plot, and the activities (i.e., the contents of the Peanut Butter Sandwich teaching Case). This teaching case illustrates that for some educators

inspired by Bakhtin, the emergence of students' voice and students' ownership of their life is crucial for defining the goal of Bakhtinian education. Power is an imposition of actions and/or beliefs on a person who would not do these actions or subscribe to these beliefs of his or her own free will. Power is always relational. Thus, it is expected in this Bakhtinian education that the students would not only become aware of their own participation in power but also take responsibility for their own ontological and epistemological journey to critically examine this power and to do something about that.

Since many of Eugene's original pedagogical goals are attractive and important, we wonder if this goal—that is, helping the students realize and dialogize the oppressive conditions of their own being—can be achieved differently, avoiding the criticisms listed above (see 1–5).

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-29):** *A similar problem is very well described in a German movie Die Welle (The Wave)*<sup>3</sup> *which speaks about the efficiency of pedagogical provocation, but also about the possible tragic consequences of such a pedagogical method (using “torpedo touch”).*>>

We want to offer our reader one of several possible pedagogical activities which would avoid the pedagogical violence rooted in Eugene's approach while preserving his dialogic attractive goals. In our imaginary learning activity, a teacher presents the students—future teachers or psychologists—with two contrasting scenarios. In one of the scenarios, Pupil A is asking the teacher to justify the curriculum, learning activities, and assignments, while, in the other scenario, Pupil B is unconditionally complying with all the teacher's assignments, curricula, and learning activities without ever considering how the taught curriculum is relevant, interesting, or useful for him or her. The task for the students is to evaluate which of the two pupils—Pupil A or Pupil B—is a better student and why—better for what and for whom? What kind of pupil they may prefer teaching in the future and why? The students can vote on these options (and create their own additional options) and justify their choices by developing pros and cons. After the discussion, the teacher can ask the students if they have experienced being Pupil A or Pupil B or observed them through their own long student career.

We see one major advantage of our imaginary learning activity over Eugene's activity. In our imaginary learning activity, the students have an opportunity to identify a problem of pupils' unconditional compliance demanded by conventional school institutions and critically reflect on it in general and in their own experiences in particular, without being humiliated, deceived, or thrown into an existential crisis (unless they chose it themselves). Still, in our imaginary solution, we see a potential problem with the teacher's enduring unilateralism.

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27):** *It seems to me that you are trying to avoid too much expressive power of a teacher and his or her “torpedo touch.” For me, the loss of expressive power is also a problem of [teaching] methods,*

<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Wave\\_\(2008\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wave_(2008_film))

*when we totally avoid teaching through experiential situations, manipulatively constructed in advance by a teacher, not allowing students to recognize the pedagogical goals of such events in advance.>>*

The curriculum is still chosen by our imaginary teacher unilaterally. Also, in our imaginary scenario, arguably, there is much less ontological power and urgency of the dialogic provocation for the students than in Eugene's original case. Our imaginary scenario is too cerebral and much less eventful, much less dramatic, much less provocative, and, probably, less memorable than Eugene's was.

FASCINATING CHILDREN INTO LEARNING BY HELPING THEM  
DEVELOP THEIR OWN VOICES IN THE ACADEMIC CURRICULA:  
CASES#15 AND 18 BY ALEXANDER LOBOK

At first glance, there are no teacher-student power relations in the teaching cases of Alexander Lobok working with 7-year-old elementary school children in his innovative school in Russia in the early 1990s. Everything is a game; everything looks happy, exciting, and effortless; everything looks free and improvisational:

My role as a teacher in all this is limited to creating this game mode, triggering the start of the game among children, and upholding some discipline boundaries (the way an orchestra conductor does it), in order to bring about a polyphony, a dialogue of voices that can hear each other, as opposed to a cacophony, in which voices go over each other and fail to hear both others and themselves. My other role as a teacher is that I react with a special emotional emphasis to those children's remarks in which, to my mind, the individuality of the child's voice is manifested most vividly. As for the content of their remarks—this domain belongs entirely to children. I do not want them to speak with my voice—I want them to speak with their voices. Moreover, it does not matter if I “like” or “do not like” a child's voice—the point is for the child to *have* a voice. In other words, it should be heard among the general noise due to its individuality. Due to its personal traits. Due to its “uncommon expression.” And this is exactly what I try to foster in children. “Your own voice” is something that needs yet to be found and manifested. And it should be your own voice and not an imitation of somebody else's voice. The development of a child's voice is the most arduous and important task in the work with children. (Alexander Lobok, Case#18)

It seems to us that Alexander justifies his power over students by deficits in children's psychological and mental levels of functioning, their immaturity in taking responsibility for their own choices and learning, and the fact that children's authorial agency is not fully developed. In Alexander's own words,

It is obvious [to me] that a child does not always speak in his own voice. He often speaks in accordance with the standard [cultural] templates and patterns—in accordance with the expectations of the adult world. The acquisition of one's



own voice is a serious and arduous task. Everyone feels in a unique way. But when it comes to expressing one's feelings, the standardization begins. It is super hard to express one's own inner "I" in one's own voice. And it is the special task for an adult to support the crystallization of his inner voice in a child—and to help him believe that his voice has the right to exist. And only when the voice has been crystallized can we talk about the possibility of a dialogue—the possibility of endless listening to the unique qualities of this voice. This is how I see Bakhtin in my pedagogy. (Alexander Lobok, Case#18)

In our interpretation, behind Alexander's decision to shape the power relations in the way that he does lies his belief in the fact that many children have learned to speak in accordance with the standard cultural templates and patterns. In other words, he does not agree that these standard cultural templates and patterns can be of much value beyond cultural conformity and socialization, that they can represent children's own authorial voice, and it is important for education to break through this given standardization. In our judgment, breaking this cultural standardization and nurturing students' unique voices is the basis of teacher–student power relations in Alexander's Bakhtinian pedagogy.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27): *I don't agree with your interpretation! What about the special task for an adult to support the crystallization of his inner voice in a child? This is one of the main problems of this book. You are advocates of dialogic being, but you don't support the idea that also our self is dialogical/relational. Look for example to Bingham, Sidorkin—No Education Without Relation: "The self is a knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations; pull relations out of the web, and find no self. We do not have relations; relations have us"* (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7).>>

<<The authors' reply (2018-05-02): *Do you disagree with our interpretation of Alexander Lobok or do you disagree with Alexander Lobok? Can you clarify for us, please?>>*

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-05-03): *I feel that neither you nor Alexander Lobok really has in mind dialogic/relational structure of the self. I agree with Alexander's notion that "the special task for an adult is to support the crystallization of the child's inner voice," but I'm not so heavily scared about a conversation with children about educational topics that we—adults—chose to show to the child as possible interesting objects/topics for him. As Gert Biesta (2017) writes in his latest book "Letting art teach", this teacher's gestures "must remain hesitant and gentle." I'm understanding the phrase "to get my inner voice" similar to the phrase "to become a subject in a dialogue." Being-as-subject is something I'm not born with nor is it something I can learn from the other in a dialogue.<sup>4</sup> It is something that can be provoked by a teacher—offering to the child*

<sup>4</sup>In our view, Robi seems to be in a disagreement with Gert Biesta's insistence that a child is always a subject in dialogue and teachers should always treat their students as such: "As all educators know, we can never force another human being to exist as subject, because by doing so we would deny the very 'thing' that we seek to promote, namely that another human being exists as

*an interesting topic/story and supporting him, and from the cultural patterns of a teacher's story he builds his own story/interpretation (see Rancière [1991, 2011], "The Ignorant Schoolmaster" and "The Emancipated Spectator").>>*

We define Alexander's overall pedagogical purpose as to fascinate students into learning by helping them develop their own unique voices in the academic curricula. Although there is no apparent coercion in his pedagogy, in our view there are the teacher's hidden impositions driven by the teacher-student asymmetrical power relations. In our view, these teacher-student power relations must be revealed, analyzed, and evaluated. Just from the fact that power relations are asymmetrical it does not necessary follow that there is something wrong with them.

Alexander's approach can be attractive for some Bakhtinian educators for the following reasons:

- a. Education is based on enjoyable, exciting activities and not on pedagogical coercion, in contrast to conventional institutionalized education;
- b. Students learn to love education;
- c. At the end of the day, the students will be willingly learning what society wants them to learn as a by-product of their exciting student-centered activities (cf. "double psychologizing"; Dewey, 1956);
- d. Education is eventful and improvisational, coming from surprising contributions by the students and surprising, authorial, and improvisational guidance by the teacher;
- e. Students' educational desires, voices, and creative (and at times even critical) authorship are prioritized over their mastery and preset curricular endpoints—the priorities of conventional schooling;
- f. Each student is unique, and education is unique for each student both in terms of their exact learning outcomes and their unpredictable learning trajectories;
- g. Both students' learning and the teacher's guidance are authorial, unique, and deeply personal.

However, we also see the teacher's power over the students in the following series of the teacher's unilateralisms and compromises for dialogic pedagogy (as we define it) in Alexander's approach:

1. The teacher unilaterally defined and induced students' educational drives: "we should not 'teach them to read' but, instead, to create a sum of motivational drivers to ensure that the child would learn how to read by himself. We should make sure that the child really wants to read, that he gets 'addicted' to reading. And the same can be said about writing—not

subject rather than object. That is why the educational gesture must remain hesitant and gentle (Biesta, 2012)" (Biesta, 2018, p. 15).

- to teach how to write, but to create a "drive "to write. Same about math" (Alexander Lobok, Cases#15 and 18 combined);
2. The teacher unilaterally decided that education was needed for the students in general and at the given time in particular;
  3. The teacher unilaterally decided what was important to learn for the students—that is, societally recognized "academic curricula" of socializing in reading, writing, and math (cf. the goals of Progressive education, Dewey, 1956);
  4. The teacher exploited students' enjoyable and eventful activities for teacher-unilaterally-defined academic learning;
  5. The teacher was unilaterally authoring students' voices and subjectivities: the teacher unilaterally decided what kind of contribution by the students was valuable, interesting, and authorial and what was not valuable, interesting, and authorial—and, thus, what constituted the students' voice and authorship: "I was looking exactly for polyphony and not for a sum of these ultimately homogenous sounds. A voice only becomes a voice when it presents its personal content and when it represents the person's individuality. At that, I am just a *radar*. My task is to catch the signals and impulses coming from children and to follow those which most fully manifest the individuality of voices" (Alexander Lobok, Cases#15 and 18 combined);
  6. The teacher measured the values and quality of the students' contributions exclusively by the teacher's own personal interest and taste.

We found Alexander's teacher–student power relations problematic for several reasons. First, the teacher desires to create an "educational vortex," keen for Progressive education (see Chap. 2.3, for our and Alexander's own critique of it). The teacher wants to make students like what they are supposed to do and learn in school, rather than, as in the Democratic School Movement, students doing and learning what they like (Greenberg, 1991, p. 101; Matusov, 2015). The teacher wishes to make students into "educated subjects" by subjecting and colonizing their desires (Fendler, 1998). The educational vortex hijacks and exploits students' own intrinsic interests in the activities in order to engage them in teacher-defined academic learning. Thus, it constitutes manipulation and social engineering of the students by channeling their intrinsic activities into academic learning. This social engineering remains invisible to the students. In spite of their excitement and even exuberance with the classroom games, the students do not have ownership of their learning activities and education. By filtering the students' voices, the system of values, and the quality of authorship, the teacher molds their voices by his or her personal tastes and interests. At the same time, some students' voices, values, and authorship get suppressed when the teacher does not find them "interesting." This may, and probably does, lead many students to engage in pleasing the teacher in order to be noticed, recognized, confirmed, and praised. The teacher's consciousness is above the students' consciousnesses—the consciousnesses

do not have equal rights as Bakhtin (1999, p. 6) demands. There is no critical evaluation of the teacher's own personal values and tastes. The teacher assumes the role of the director of the students' activities and education. Students are expected to fit and cooperate with the teacher's pedagogical design.

Finally, Alexander Lobok apparently assumes that his young students are mostly voiceless beyond parroting cultural clichés. Only after they develop their own unique voices, in his view, are they ready for a genuine dialogue of consciousnesses with equal rights. In our view, this is a classic example of "the deficit model" (Sautter, 1996) and a Kantian approach to education, broadly criticized by Bakhtin (1999) as being excessively monologic.

What can be done differently in this pedagogical approach to address our critique? As we showed in Chap. 2.2 in the case of Zion (Matusov, 2011; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016), a teacher playing with young students can promote play's own organic dialogic provocations rather than making play a bait for teacher-defined academic learning, as in our view, it was in Alexander's case. While Alexander smuggles learning of spelling through games, Eugene Matusov brought the game to the second-graders Zion and Maria to provoke them into several deep inquiries (e.g., why a person can be good with one person and bad with another, what compound words are) that they fully owned. The children's inquiries emerged organically from the play activity. The students were heterodiscursive rather than monodiscursive as it was in Alexander's case. Although in Alexander's educational games discourse could vary as well, it was only the teacher who could legitimately change or authorize a change of the topic or the nature of the game. In contrast to Alexander's pedagogy, in the case of Zion, academic learning was owned by and visible to the students.

Of course, from Alexander's approach, probably the biggest con of Zion's case is that this pedagogical approach and the teacher-student power relations cannot guarantee that the students would learn the academic curriculum, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic that society considers important and mandates to teach in modern schools (and are demanded by many parents). In addition, Matusov's pedagogical approach is unique and idiosyncratic for the particular situation and the particular children (and even a particular teacher's subjectivity at the given moment) and cannot be replicated, so learning and being fascinated by writing is not guaranteed. The attractiveness of Alexander's pedagogical approach is based on its guarantee of success and replicability within its uniqueness, improvisation, student and teacher creative authorship, and particularity, which puts him at peace with society, parents, and school administrative establishments.

Our reply to this important critique is that we believe that in genuine education, a learner, regardless of his or her age, is the final authority for his or her own education who defines its curriculum, with or without the teacher, peers, and other people (Klag, 1994). In our view, making peace with society, parents, and school administrative establishments at the expense of the learners' genuine education is to undermine, if not to betray, genuine education.

## CHANNELING STUDENTS' VOICES THROUGH A MANIPULATION OF THEIR FREE WILL: CASE#24 BY CHARLES BISLEY

Was it a case of the teacher's manipulation of his students' choice of Shakespearean play or not? Charles Bisley, the teacher, thinks it was not. We think it was.

In teaching Case#24, Charles involved his students in deciding what Shakespearean play they wanted to choose for their school performance. To do that, he sent his students to discuss diverse Shakespearean plays with their families and he also showed them and encouraged them to watch several movies and TV performances of diverse Shakespearean plays. From the start, the majority of his students leaned toward selecting *Hamlet* while Charles's preference was *King Lear*. After a back-and-forth between students lobbying for *Hamlet* and Charles lobbying for *King Lear*, suddenly Charles capitulated:

I thought, "Well, *King Lear* doesn't look like it's gonna fly, that's fine." So, I say to the kids, "That's fine." They looked at me, "Are you sure, Mr. B?" I said, "Yeah, *Hamlet*, I love *Hamlet*. We could do that too. It's hard but we could try, we could give it a go. I can see it working around the play within the play." I really do like *Hamlet*, I prefer it to *Lear* but I preferred *Lear* for this class. I knew a lot of the kids and I thought they'd make something of it. So, you see, when I took my objections away from them to doing it [*Hamlet*], they became more quiet, open-minded, because I wasn't opposing them. I think some misbehaviour is just because as a teacher, you are to be opposed ...  
(Charles Bisley, Case#24)

The students voted and to Charles's surprise 17 out of 21 middle school children voted for *King Lear* and only four for *Hamlet*!

Charles's pedagogical approach can be attractive for some Bakhtinian educators for the following reasons:

- a. Education is defined as promoting students' creative authorship and agency;
- b. According to the teacher, students must have freedom of judgment and freedom of decision-making in education, although it can be constrained by the teacher;
- c. The teacher actively promotes diversity and dissent in students' voices in lively, eventful dialogues;
- d. The teacher creates a rich learning environment by promoting students' exploration of the existing cultural, social, ideological, aesthetic, and family-related points of view, ideas, desires, ideologies, and so on.
- e. The teacher promotes students' ontological transcendence—that is, the transcendence of the person's given being, becoming a whole new person—through self-reflection addressing the self, the teacher, the peers, the play, and the play's characters.

We see the teacher's power over the students in the following series of the teacher's unilateralisms and compromises for dialogic pedagogy (as we define it) in Charles's pedagogical approach:

1. Super-Rousseauian masking of the teacher's manipulating power over the students' will;
2. Romantic mystification of the powerful text of a Shakespearean play in the process of self-transcendence, for example his claim that he and the children thought that the play itself had a power over them;
3. Critical ontological dialogue was subordinated to creative collaboration in playcrafting, for example, the energy of the dissenting dialogues was redirected to the collaborative creative process;
4. Defining genuine education as students' cultural socialization in a creative process without focusing on critical examination;
5. In our view, Charles had mystified his teacher power, instead of critically deconstructing it. Rather than exploiting the students' lives (energy created by lively dialogues) for playcrafting choices, he could have used *Hamlet* or *King Lear* as sources of provocative ideas about life for the students' exploration of their own lives, selves, others, the world, and so on.
6. The goals of creative artistic playcrafting interfered with goals of authentic education, based on critical dialogue.

In our analysis of the teacher-student power relations, Charles had an epistemological power over the students in a political/ideological game of persuasion, in which he engaged the students. He was capable of developing a strong, informed, argument for or against a particular Shakespearean play, while often his students were not. It seemed to us that Charles did not want to play "fairly" in the polemics with his students to reveal the weaknesses of his position and the strengths of theirs. In other words, he abused their ignorance like Socrates did in his dialogue with Meno (Matusov, 2009; Plato & Bluck, 1961). In Charles's own words, "We don't need to have an ideological debate because they're children, they don't know what their position is. They don't know enough yet to adopt a critical position. They were opposing me because I was a teacher. Children misbehave because you're the teacher. If you're not being the teacher, they don't misbehave" (Charles Bisley, Case#24).

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-13): *I see my comment here, out of its overall context, is misleading.*>>

Furthermore, Charles gained another epistemological power by his sudden withdrawal of his opposition to the children's choice of a Shakespearean play. Left to their own devices, many students probably felt overwhelmed with the teacher's (possibly overblown) cons against their choice of play (*Hamlet*) and with perceived weaknesses of their own counter-arguments that now sounded unconvincing to themselves when the teacher's polemic opposition was suddenly dropped. In other words, they might suddenly feel helpless in the face of

their own choice. So, they surrendered—or better to say, the teacher cleverly manipulated them into surrender.

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-13): *The children didn't surrender to me—the plays started speaking to them in a variety of voices and discourse, "Lear" the most, as their choice showed. The choosing phase was the beginning of a process in which the script went from being an abstract signified to a concrete, dialogical utterance.*>>

If our analysis of the teacher–student power relationship is correct, Charles created a super-Rousseauian Progressivist approach to power in education. Rousseau cynically called for a tacit manipulation of a student by the teacher, so the student has an illusion of free will: “Let him [the student] always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive” (Rousseau, 1979, p. 120). Charles seemed to add another twist to make sure that he, the teacher, himself could not see his own manipulation of the students’ will. Rather, in our view, for Charles it became a mystical power of the particular Shakespearean play itself that made the students adopt his choice of the play,

And if there was one idea that came to dominate these discussions afterwards, it was that *the play itself* had a voice and *had a kind of power* and some of the kids agreed on something: it was that *the play somehow had asserted some kind of power over them*, had come to speak to them. And *it was because of the play, it couldn't possibly have been because of me, because so many disagreed with me*. You see? It was the voice of the play itself, a written text that they had engaged with and changed, became part of, as authors and actors. The text only got that power from their dialogue with it. Just kind of astonishing, isn't it? (Charles Bisley, Case#24; italics ours)

In our opinion, Charles sincerely believes in the power of the play, *King Lear*, to draw the opposing children into it. Of course, we cynically suspect that on another occasion, another Shakespearean play might “*miraculously choose*” the students (although it would still “*miraculously*” be in agreement with the teacher’s original choice). In our judgment, Charles skillfully hid his own power not only from his students but even more from himself. The teacher developed a teacher–student power regime that affords him to hide his own power from all participants, including himself.

In our analysis, Charles had the power to direct the energy of dialogic ideological disagreements among the teacher, the students, and their parents into generating an aesthetic, collaborative, creative, socially cohesive process,

Speaking of the chorus. A chorus piece—the first way we made *Lear* our own ... was a turning point. Another phase of the choosing. The kids made some verbatim theatre based on collecting parents’, family first, thoughts on the play, and theirs. I have the recording on my phone. It’s quite moving. The kids cut and pasted all these lines together on a shared doc[ument] and then chose ten in a



random order. They chose a piece of music for an accompaniment and then sat in a circle, taking turns to say their lines ... You no longer have a child at a time reading a line, but a coherence, a flow, that comes from the voices mingling in the space out there. It's so moving hearing the change—how distinct the voices sound in relation to each other. I saw how attentively the children listened to the playback. It was a new experience. I'd say the children realized something from performing and hearing this interchange of voices, of their own voices—it was new space, a new level for them, and it set the scene for where we were going with the play. I didn't put my spin on it, I let the experience develop through new performances and improvisations. At our school we talk about collective agency as well, agency as singular and plural ... It was only when I represented the play that I became influential in the decision. And the kids picked up this role too as they became more active in developing the play. (Charles Bisley, Case#24)

In our view, the teacher exploited an emerging critical dialogue among students for their collaboration on playcrafting.

What can be done differently in Charles's pedagogy while addressing our criticism? In the process of making choices about which play to choose, we imagine that the teacher aims at facilitating students choosing the play *in a critical dialogue* by informing them about diverse alternatives that they may not know. Asking parents is a big plus. The students do not need to know anything about the teacher's play preference, unless they ask for it. The teacher guides the students to critically weigh all the pros and cons for each choice of play, find alternative ideas, and to test diverse ideas.

In our view, the main advantage of our imaginary pedagogical approach is that it would involve critical ontological dialogue not only about the choice of a Shakespearean play but also about the power relations, authority, relationships between parents and children, teachers and students, and so on. Thus, this critical ontological dialogue would be the goal rather than an instrument of education to generate creative authorship of a particular play.

We expect that Charles may object to our imaginary scenario by pointing out that critical ontological dialogue can lead to losing allure of artistic mysticism and may undermine the creative process of playcrafting and aesthetic inspiration. Too much dissent may destroy collaboration, which is often necessary for artistic playcrafting.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27): *I agree with this interpretation of Charles's manipulative inquiry but I also believe that a dialogic teacher should use "artistic mysticism" as a source of dialogic provocation.>>*

<<Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-04-08): *I would have preferred it if you had raised serious questions like my super-Rousseau [approach] early on. I rejected Rousseau early on in my career; at the same time, I acknowledge that all classroom dialogue is mixed, teacher role and power are always problematical but there is nothing wrong with the various asymmetries I am a part of. As we discussed the other day, there can be different kinds of discourse going on in a complex process like this, and there was an epistemological dialogue going on, to get the process started. I know it is difficult for you as you weren't there but I wonder why*

*you don't accept my observations. There is also the problem with the Skype interview, which was hardly dialogic—I think just because of the circumstances.*

*There I am at the end of term, worn out like all teachers are and talking in a lively but imprecise way. I thought to leave some of that imprecision in for its oral quality, but now of course I regret that imprecision because it has enabled misinterpretation. First, because I'd argue that you show an ideological preference for critical over creative thinking, and second because your interpretation is dyadic, critical versus creative. I know what I do and think, I have learnt this from children.*

*I do not have a mystical belief in the power of the play but I do have a belief in the power of the encounter children have with the play, with me as the go-between, and the creative work and the internally persuasive dialogue it generates. I also understand that you have not experienced what I and the children have, the way different kinds of discourse and thinking overlap, and that choosing the plays was only one part of a nine-part process, the part where the frame was tightest, where my voice was strongest, but where the children first learnt to take agency.*

*I'm not sure why you discount the voice of the child at the end who felt she had experienced a remarkable event, for the first time in her schooling. I did choose the child who was most opposed to Lear who wanted to be Ophelia, and also because I think her mother was opposed to kids doing Lear. Olivia loved Hamlet and the part of Ophelia because I had introduced that part of Hamlet to those kids in a prior class. That backstory wasn't part of this chapter, for space reasons more than anything.*

*I am definitely not a super-manipulative Rousseauian, and if you walked into any of my classes you would experience the reverse, the amount of autonomy the children have and take. I didn't lead the children into the choosing argument as a ruse. I had not expected one group to be so oppositional to me and to Lear. They were the high-status opinion leaders in the class—they expected to win with the others and I thought they would. And no, I don't think there is anything mystical about the creative process, about interactive, multimodal language use and improvisation in the aesthetic space, and the creative, reflective, and critical hybrids of thought that it involves and generates. The critical thinking emerges more explicitly as the later processes I did not describe show.*

*My approach is not manipulative, a trick. The children do initially depend on me to help them gain access to the plays—as at first the plays are on or over the horizon. It's a paradox—they need me to introduce them and interpret them before they can experience them. My thinking is more in line with Kierkegaard's view of influencing people's opinions through literary and artful means, or Gadamer's view of the aesthetic as annunciative. That is, the plays are strange and over the horizon, the children need to experience them, before they could discuss them. They knew I preferred 'Lear' and moreover I told them why I liked it. There is an element of manipulation, inevitably, but I was always clear about my pros and cons, for all the plays. There was nothing strategic about my shifting to Hamlet. Actually, it is my personal favourite, and I was genuinely excited about reinventing the play from the play within the play.>>*

## NOT ALLOWING STUDENTS TO BE MONOLOGIC: CASE#25

### BY MIKHAIL GRADOVSKI

Mikhail Gradovski likes dialogism and students' making choices and dislikes monologism and absence of students' decision-making in education. He worked in a conventional institution of Norwegian higher education, which, nevertheless, allowed him a little space to be dialogic: "Although I could not be wholly dialogical because the reading list and the themes for the course had been decided upon before I was hired, I was allowed to organize the teaching in a way that would allow students to become active" (Mikhail Gradovski, Case#25). So, he told his master's graduate students,

"Okay, here is a half of the reading list that we have for this study. Please, choose whatever you want, and you will be responsible for: presenting it and the way you present it—whether to make it a lecture, or make it a seminar, it's up to you! *The only thing that I require is that you would ask questions. You're not allowed to be just monologic. You can make it, if you want, part[ially] monologic.* But, there should be a discussion because we're on the master's level. There should be questions, there should be provocations. Please, try to do it!"

I remember there was a woman ... and she didn't like me very much as a teacher ... [S]he made one of the most dialogic presentations. She chose an article by a famous philosopher of education ... [O]nce she did research on that article, she suddenly found out that, actually, this philosopher was her relative! ... And that changed her approach ... [B]eing related to this philosopher was one of the things that she used in her presentation: the presentation was a thoughtful and deep analysis that was followed by good questions. It was obvious that her questions had a personal value. (Mikhail Gradovski, Case#25; our italics)

Can a teacher order students to be dialogic? What kind of teacher-student power relations does it demand? Are these relations legitimate in Bakhtinian pedagogy?

Mikhail's pedagogical approach can be attractive for some Bakhtinian educators for the following reasons:

- a. The teacher involved students in making open and closed choices of their projects from the predefined list of literature;
- b. The student found her own personal connections and, thus, ontological engagement in her academic learning;
- c. The student did not need to like the teacher for the student's engagement in deep ontological learning;
- d. The teacher tried to find an oasis in the oppressive institutional settings to practice limited dialogic pedagogy, while surviving in the institution.

We see the teacher's power over the students in the following series of the teacher's unilateralisms and compromises for dialogic pedagogy (as we define it) in Mikhail's approach:

1. Dialogism cannot be demanded and mandated but only promoted and invited;

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27):** *In my opinion only dialogic provocations were used in described case: “The only thing that I require is that you would ask questions ...”>>*

2. Monologism cannot be banned but rather problematized;
3. Students cannot be punished or threatened to be punished for their monologism as this in itself creates a monologic power framework;
4. The teacher unilaterally decided what is dialogic or monologic;
5. The teacher did not involve the students in critical dialogue about educational monologism and dialogism and institutional oppression, including his own;
6. The teacher did not share his institutional survival dilemma with his students;
7. The teacher acted as a reluctant agent of institutional oppression;
8. The teacher was willing to compromise dialogic pedagogy.

What can be done differently in Mikhail’s pedagogy while addressing our criticism? We propose several areas, in which we suggest a different pedagogical approach addressing the teacher–student power issues. The first area is identifying the course curriculum. The teacher could start the course by asking the students the following questions: “Why are you taking the course? What would you like to learn in this course, if anything, and why?” The teacher could create a curricular map of the students’ interesting topics relevant to the class. If the students cannot articulate their interests, the teacher can show them the mandated curriculum and ask them if they are familiar or not with any of the listed topics, and if they are interested to learn any one of them. This way, the students might be engaged in a discussion about their interests in diverse topics.

The second area is a critical examination of institutional oppression. The teacher could tell the students that the institution has a mandatory list of topics/readings for this course. The students could compare the topics they reported as interesting to this institutional mandatory list—and see how much their interests coincide or not with the institutions’ list, including potentially the purposes and rationales for the importance of these topics.

The third area is transcendence of the mandatory curriculum. The teacher could ask the students to find in the mandatory readings those topics of interest they reported, and maybe other interesting themes and topics emerging for them as they are reading. The students could discuss what is interesting, puzzling, repelling, or disagreeable in these readings, and so on, and critically evaluate readings themselves in dialogue with peers and the teacher. This could lead to critical dialogic evaluation of the whole mandatory list of topics and readings by the students and the teacher: whether it lives up to their

expectations or not, whether it omits something or not—they can propose additional topics and readings for the study, and so on. As the course goes on, the teacher could plan to bring additional literature and topics as suggestions for the students in response to their emerging ideas and inquiries.

In our view, the pros of our imaginary pedagogical approach are the following:

1. The students and teacher would be actively involved in critical evaluation of the mandated topics/readings;
2. The students would be involved in critical examination of their own existing and emerging interests;
3. The students' voices would be promoted as consciousnesses with equal rights (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6)—by stating their interests, rationales and by making evaluations and judgments about studied curricular topics and literature;
4. Our imaginary pedagogical approach has a potential to critically evaluate the institutional power and authority.

We expect that, from Mikhail's point of view, our imaginary pedagogical approach does not address the fact that the list of topics/readings was mandatory and imposed on the students (and the teacher) and had a limiting power for critical dialogue. What if no one finds anything interesting in the mandatory list of topics/readings? In addition, our imaginary pedagogical approach does not take into account that some students may not want to get involved in critical dialogues and evaluations of ideas and topics. They might have different desires about the course—to get credentials, to socialize in the profession, to get by in the course that they might perceive as unnecessary for them, and so on—accepting what the experts mandate, or to just survive in a course that is not important but is mandatory for them. Finally, it might be risky for a junior professor to involve students in the critical evaluation of the institution itself—the institution might prohibit this activity.

## CONCLUSIONS

What are good teacher-student power relations in Bakhtinian pedagogy? In his literary theory of the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin argued for “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991), in which “truth is tested and remains forever testable” among equals (Morson, 2004, p. 319). So, it seems that according to Bakhtin (in certain philosophical literary readings and interpretations, not when he was a teacher himself), there should not be any power in education. However, as Morson (2004) argues and Matusov (2007) concurs, this is impossible and even undesirable in education. They argue that the teacher's epistemological authority is needed for starting up internally persuasive discourse among students. Students may need to know a variety of diverse

interesting inquiries to choose to study or alternative ideas and approaches not available for them for testing their dear ideas. Paradoxically, the teacher needs power to kill his or her own power and the power of students' ignorance.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-27): *Yes! This is also the idea of my concept of "self-limited authority" (Kroflič, 2005).*>>

Matusov (2007) compared the teacher's epistemological power in Bakhtinian pedagogy with a constant phoenix cycle of death and rebirth of the teacher's authority. Internally persuasive discourse in education (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010) is promoted by the teacher's epistemological authority and then generates it when the students find the initial epistemological authority useful for their internally persuasive discourse, so the next time they may trust in the teacher's epistemological authority even more. In the same vein, in addition to the teacher's epistemological authority, Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2015) extended the need for the teacher's pedagogical, community-leadership, and axiological authority. They also discuss the cycle of all these types of teacher authority jump-starting internally persuasive discourse in order to die in it and then to be born again from internally persuasive discourse when this teacher authority is successful, as judged by the students. In addition, Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane argue that students also may have similar diverse types of student authority—epistemological, pedagogical, community-leadership, and axiological—that the students can legitimately exercise to jump-start their internally persuasive discourse in a similar phoenix cycle of power death and power rebirth.

However, as our analysis of the SIBEs shows, all these theoretical Bakhtinian frameworks of teacher–student power remain untested by educational practice. We wonder if more radical experimentation with teacher–student power in Bakhtinian pedagogy requires a more institutional leeway and probably a broader society. The issues of Bakhtinian pedagogy situated in conventional educational institutions will be discussed in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 2.5: Bakhtinian Pedagogy in Conventional Educational Institutions

This chapter is dedicated to our analysis of tensions and struggles of Bakhtinian educators, who are often situated in *conventional* educational institutions. We have abstracted from our interviews several big themes regarding this issue. The first big theme of Bakhtinian pedagogy situated in conventional institutions is how to institutionally survive and even flourish in *monologic* institutions. The second is how not to lose the spirit of their Bakhtinian pedagogy practice. This includes the third big theme involving Bakhtinian educators striving not to lose *dialogical humanity* in their relationships to themselves, their students, their colleagues, and their institutional administrators, and so on—while surviving institutionally. The fourth big theme is how to involve students and teachers in a *critical examination of conventional educational institutions* and their underlying power structure and ideology. The fifth big theme is about Bakhtinian educators' diverse understanding of education as either *instrumental* to the otherwise monologically preset institutional goals vs. education as *ontological authorial projects* of the learners. Finally, the sixth big theme is about Bakhtinian educators' *finding* “*weak spots*” in the institutional hegemony and monopoly, where they can make some room and advance their Bakhtinian pedagogy. We describe these struggles and strategies of survival in the next two sections of this chapter.

### STRUGGLES OF INNOVATIVE BAKHTINIAN EDUCATORS IN CONVENTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Many non-Bakhtinian innovative pedagogies have been faced with similar issues of institutional survival (struggle#1) and survival in-spirit (struggle#2) in conventional educational institutions. Those innovative educators might employ diverse strategies to address it: persuasion, spreading out, finding oases of support or safety, compromises, sabotage, smuggling, flying under the institutional radar, developing alliances and networks of support, and so on

(DePalma, Matusov, & Smith, 2009; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994; Holt, 1970; Matusov & Smith, 2011; Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). As a result of these strategies and institutional responses to them, their innovative practices might become corrupted, eliminated, expelled, limited, under-grounded, tolerated, spread out in the institution, or removed from a conventional institution to start its own institution altogether.

One specificity of some Bakhtinian educators dealing with conventional institutions, probably in contrast to many non-Bakhtinian innovative pedagogies, is yearning to treat the ideological proponents and functionaries of conventional instrumental monologic institutions as opposing dialogic partners rather than purely as objects of their organizational game of survival and/or expansion. This yearning comes from these Bakhtinian educational practitioners' deep commitment to Bakhtin's (1999, p. 6) call for "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world" as the guiding principle of a truly dialogic relationship (struggle#3). Of course, this is not always possible in a conventional monologic educational institution and this commitment may even jeopardize the very institutional survival of Bakhtinian educators. It creates a need to compromise the Bakhtinian humanistic convictions. As a result, it also creates a feeling of philosophical, ethical, and moral ambivalence of being torn apart between institutional survival and in-spirit survival. For example, Alexander Lobok had to teach Marxism-Leninism—the official deadly totalitarian ideology of the Communist Party—in a Soviet technical college in the early 1980s. However, in the interview, Alexander expressed his deep sympathy to the author of the deadly Marxism-Leninism philosophy textbook, Soviet Professor Fedoseyev:

Of course, I did not pose the question at that time [to my college students] about how we could understand Professor Fedoseyev, as it was a totally different question—a question of the ideological death of a certain living philosopher. Because I have no doubts that, fundamentally, even Professor Fedoseyev had been a genuinely thinking person—but at some point a person may start to work for a certain ideology and that person perishes as a philosopher and turns into a slave of the ideology ... (Interview with Alexander Lobok, 2015-10-30, Case#8)

As a part of a fourth struggle, some non-Bakhtinian innovative pedagogies may engage their students (and definitely other teachers) in critique of the conventional educational practices and institutions (cf. Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). For example, in the US movie *Teachers* (Hiller, 1984), an innovative urban high school social studies teacher engages his class in a learning activity of documenting what was wrong with their high school that his students criticized. The students were allowed to produce not only essays but also multimedia presentations. This movie, and specifically this episode, has been influential for the visualization of a certain version of "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Some Bakhtinian pedagogies also engage in a critique of conventional pedagogies as it was exemplified in our interviews (struggle#4).

Probably one of the most striking examples of this critique was teaching Case#3 by Eugene Matusov, who engaged his undergraduate students in a peanut butter sandwich “teaching” activity to reveal their own unconditional and uncritical cooperation with any teachers’ demands. Another striking example is teaching Case#5 by Aaron Yost of engaging his remedial high school students to develop a manual “How to make school suck less?” In teaching Case#27, Eugene Matusov describes how he developed a curriculum of cultural diversity class from the fact that some of his students were forced to take his class against their will and, thus, constituting a particular motivational culture, requiring a certain pedagogical approach his students were asked to explore. For these Bakhtinian pedagogies, the critique of conventional educational institutions is probably a part of their commitment to critical examination of the self, life, society, and the world (cf. Socrates’ motto “The unexamined life is not worth living”; Plato & Riddell, 1973).

This commitment to examining life as a goal of Bakhtinian pedagogy spills out to critical examination of the students’ ontology in broader contexts, which was demonstrated by several Bakhtinian educators in our interviews. This fifth struggle involves a struggle between an instrumental understanding of pedagogy—as an impersonal technique—that is, a “research based” or “best practice” to achieve curricular endpoints preset by the society—and an ontological authorial understanding of pedagogy, as authored personal practical wisdom and axiology (i.e., a system of values), situated in unique circumstances where unique people (teachers and students) encounter each other in dramatic events as consciousnesses with equal rights. Thus, Tara Ratnam (Case#11) engaged her students in a critical examination of the responsibilities of scientists and politicians for war tragedies and crimes against humanity. Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Case#13) tried to reveal the oppression of a behaviorist approach to classroom management in education to her students, current and future teachers. While teaching psychology to her education undergraduate students, Silviane Barbato (Case#23) engaged her students in problematizing the use of taboo scandalous vices as curricular materials in teaching disadvantaged students who experienced these vices. Eugene Matusov (Case#19) encouraged his undergraduate students to raise their own curricular topics, important for their lives. His male student proposed and then taught, with the encouragement of his teacher, a new topic of “chivalry” for the class on cultural diversity in education, which involved a critical examination of the ongoing changes of gender relations in modern American society, problematizing the existing gender norms and envisioning how to treat their future male and female students.

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-26): *A total aside (it also belongs in the “ontological engagement” chapter, really): In my not-very-long career as a high-school English teacher (for kids, most of whom were kicked out of regular schools), probably the liveliest discussion my students ever engaged in was a total surprise for me. Much of our time in class was spent drilling the pupils to prepare them for the matriculation exam, the most significant portion of which is reading comprehension tests. So we spent a lot of time reading (or rather skimming)*

*short texts and answering stupid questions about them (and learning the methods used to write the questions, so that the “correct” answer could be reliably guessed, even where the test question was badly designed and misleading). Anyway, I always tried to at least add some value to that drill routine by selecting texts that won’t be entirely boring to practice on, even hoping, on occasion, to spark a real discussion in class. But some of the texts, I understood perfectly well, would be a bore. So, one day I brought to the class a text which I frankly considered to be pretty lame, uninformative, and didactic (and had other issues with), about women applying self-defense methods against assault. And what do you know? The class (boys and girls alike) erupted into a full hour, even more, of hotly debating that issue (in Hebrew, but I didn’t mind).*

*My lesson from this story: The teacher can’t always tell in advance what will turn out to be “ontological” (in your terminology) for the students.>>*

The complexity of the issue of Bakhtinian pedagogy in conventional education institutions is aggravated by the fact that different Bakhtinian educators define their Bakhtinian pedagogy differently while working in drastically diverse conventional institutional and political and economic settings, which make the conditions for the Bakhtinian educators’ practices tougher or easier (struggle#6). Thus, *instrumental* Bakhtinian pedagogies (see Chap. 2.1: Beatrice Ligorio, Case#6; Ana Marjanovic-Shane, Case#13; Iryna Starygina, Case#16) might find easier ways to situate themselves in their conventional institutions with their own *instrumental* educational practice and ideology that may be similar to their institutions’ ideologies; than *ontological* Bakhtinian pedagogies (see Chap. 2.1: e.g., Charles Bisley, Case#24; Alexander Lobok, Cases#8, 15, 18; Eugene Matusov, Cases#3, 14, 19, 26, 27). Even further, *critical authorship* ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies (see Chap. 2.1: e.g., Tara Ratnam, Case#11; Dmitri Nikulin, Case#9; Paul Spitale, Case#1) might have a more difficult time than *creative authorship* ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies (see Chap. 2.1: Charles Bisley, Case#24; Alexander Lobok, Cases#15, 18; Mikhail Gradovski, Case#25) because conventional institutions commit to reproduction and, occasionally, to creative production of culture and society rather than its critique (Passeron, 1977). Finally, *critical authorship* ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies directly challenging conventional institutional power structures (see Chap. 2.1: Eugene Matusov, Cases#3, 27; Aaron Yost, Case#5) might be riskier to practice than critical ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies that limit their criticism to academic material (see Chap. 2.1: e.g., Tara Ratnam, Case#11; Dmitri Nikulin, Case#9; Paul Spitale, Case#1).

Political, economic, and societal considerations also affect the relationship between Bakhtinian pedagogies and conventional educational institutions. Thus, for example, it is easier to introduce ontological Bakhtinian pedagogy of creative authorship in a state school in modern New Zealand, “a good reputation because of the quality of its teaching, and its arts programmes, including drama” (interview with Charles Bisley, April 13, 2018), *in the academic field of literature and drama* and specifically in the high culture of Shakespearean plays because this field is often viewed as creative and authorial (Charles Bisley,

Case#24), than, let's say, it could have been done in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist terror period (1929–1953) when this academic area would be seen as highly ideological, and under the strict control of the Communist Party (Mikhail Bakhtin, 2004). However, *teaching formal grammar*, which might be seen as a technical aspect of writing in many societies, gave Mikhail Bakhtin a safe space to develop ontological, authorial, and critical examination by the students and teacher in the Stalinist totalitarian USSR (Bakhtin, 2004). In the USSR, especially after Stalin's death in 1953, it was much easier to engage in pedagogies based on dialogism, creative and/or critical authorship *in the academic fields of math and natural sciences* seen as very important fields of science, especially due to their contribution to the development of new military weapons, and being less ideological than the humanities, social studies, and arts (Krementsov, 1997; Matusov, 2017). In contrast, in many modern neoliberal democracies with their focus on standardized testing, natural sciences, social sciences, and math become more measurable academic subjects than the humanities and arts (Winner & Hetland, 2008). Thus, in many modern neoliberal democracies arts and humanities have more pedagogical freedom for authorial teaching and learning than math and the natural sciences. So, while in the Soviet Union, math and natural sciences were safer spaces for innovative pedagogies, including Bakhtinian ones; in modern neoliberal democracies, it has been arts and humanities.

For different Bakhtinian educators, their Bakhtinian pedagogy hits the wall of the conventional educational institutions in different places, so to speak, generating different tensions. Thus, Beatrice Ligorio (Cases #6 and #17) was confronted with the educational apathy and passivity of her undergraduate students, on whom their conventional educational institution imposed a necessity to focus on taking lecture notes and passing exams, which represented “the wall” of her conventional institution. Guided by her Bakhtinian pedagogy, Beatrice tried to break this wall to promote her students' active role in their own education by organizing small group discussions based on a division of labor (Case#17) and by engaging them in designing their own exam questions based on imagining important issues, by which the experts might define their academic field (Case#6). Apparently, so far, Beatrice's conventional institution might have either not noticed or approve/allow or tolerate her innovative efforts.

<<Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28): *This is again a speculation. You have no information about this from the interview. Anyhow, in general we are free to use the teaching method we prefer. Case#17 is now part of the more general teaching innovation although not clearly under the umbrella of Bakhtin.*>>

In the case of Mikhail Gradovski (Case#25), his institution was explicit in “allowing” him to be Bakhtinian (“dialogic”) within certain limitations in order to keep students active in their prescribed academic learning,

In 2010 when I got a one-year position in a university, I was responsible for teaching three subjects, and in one I was allowed to be dialogic [by my institution].



Although I could not be wholly dialogical because the reading list and the themes for the course had been decided upon before I was hired, I was allowed to organize the teaching in a way that would allow students to become active. So I said to students, “Okay, here is half of the reading list that we have for this study. Please, choose whatever you want, and you will be responsible for: presenting it and the way you present it—whether to make it a lecture, or make it a seminar, it’s up to you!” (Mikhail Gradovski, Case#25)

Mikhail did not seem to break any institutional wall but used the institutional leeway as an opportunity to engage his students in a limited version of his Bakhtinian pedagogy.

By breaking their institutional walls, Bakhtinian educators often create new freedoms of dialogic authorship for their students, where students can author their own ideas, views, tastes, values, and opinions supported by their teachers. Thus, Alexander Lobok (Case#8) faced the institutional wall of using a deadly Marxism-Leninism philosophy textbook for teaching his technical college students. His Bakhtinian pedagogy solution to this problem was to focus on finding original quotes by original philosophers:

I actually addressed my students with, “Guys, please note that there are different voices in this book. Please find these different voices!” By different voices I meant the quotes. But it is not enough to find a voice—you also need to hear it. You need to engage in an inner dialogue with it. For example, you need to find the famous quote from the “revisionist” [Marxist] Eduard Bernstein [a German social-democrat]: “The goal is nothing, motion is everything” and try to understand it through the lens of your own life—what could it mean really? What associations do we have with the word “goal”? What associations do we have with “motion”? When and in what particular situations can we say that the process of motion is more valuable than the outcomes and goals we envision for ourselves? And so on, and so forth. We create a sort of a collective cloud of our questioning in regard to this voice. And the most important point here is not that we try to understand “what Bernstein really meant by that,” but that with Bernstein’s help we can hear ourselves. And that we can hear this phrase as the one that has existential personal meaning for every one of us ... The Soviet ideological cliché qualifier associated with Bernstein and some other Marxist philosophers criticized by the Soviet ideological officialdom. (Case#8)

Alexander tried to find life in the deadly textbook. He found Bakhtinian dialogic life in the scarce quotes of the original philosophers affirmed or criticized by the textbook and in the voices of the students themselves who were encouraged by Alexander to make sense of these original quotes by applying them to their own lives.

At the same time, Alexander seemed to hear the hostile voices of institutional officialdom, of what Bakhtin called “internally polemical discourse—the word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 196), and tried to address their hostile concerns, challenging his very

institutional existence, in a very witty way to defend and mask his philosophy of life, alien to the authorities. Being an innovative educator, especially a Bakhtinian educator, in a hostile conventional educational institution, often puts the educator in a position of “an underground person,” who is forced into “a vicious internal dialogue” of polemics with the imaginary hostile voices of authority (Bakhtin, 1999).

And if I were asked by a government committee, “What are you doing that for?”—I would reply: “Well, that helps us understand Marx better.” “It helps us understand that Marxism is not just an ideology but something that grows within each of us from some common human ground!” I would say, “Well, this is such a methodology! ...” And I would prove it. Well, no one really knew exactly how far we would go in our subjective interpretations. However, I will repeat—there was no [political] dissidence in my classroom. For, what is dissidence? I mean: classical political dissidence? It is when we begin critiquing Marxism and refuting it. What we did, though, was to create a space of interpretational polyphony, where the voice of the textbook was also one of the important voices. And at the final exam, students demonstrated nothing but the voice of the textbook—according to the game rules. (Alexander Lobok, Case#8)

Thus, Alexander apparently tried to fool his (imaginary) institutional gate-keeping authority by creating a “boundary object”<sup>1</sup> (Star & Griesemer, 1989) of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy final exams that looked like affirming the Soviet official ideology for institutional functionaries but for the students they were affirming their own authorial voices and the authorial voices of the cited original philosophers. Thus, by creating a boundary object, Alexander smuggled in his Bakhtinian pedagogy masquerading as a loyal Soviet study of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, for Alexander, it was very important not to sound like a political dissident, struggling against the political regime of Soviet totalitarianism, in the eyes of the authority, his students, and even in his own eyes.

In contrast to Alexander, struggling with teaching *the deadening* text (i.e., the Marxist-Leninist philosophy textbook), Tara Ratnam (Case#11) did not struggle with a text—in fact she was assigned by her conventional institution to use a very *lively* text (i.e., a terrific and deep poem) for her teaching. Her Bakhtinian struggle was with the deadly instruction of this lively text imposed on her by her institution. The institutional wall was exemplified by her male colleague, a conventional teacher, who was asking his students deadly bureaucratic quizzing questions, in which apparently nobody was interested: neither the students, nor the teacher himself. For instance, the conventional teacher asked, “Question number 19, in this poem, Psychopath refers to: (a) The man who manufactured the bomb, (b) the scientist who gave the formula, (c) the man who ordered the dropping of the bomb, (d) the man who actually pressed the switch? So, now tell me, which one is the right answer?” (Case#11). Instead,

<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boundary\\_object](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boundary_object)

guided by her Bakhtinian pedagogy, Tara pushed for promoting “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov & von Duyke, 2009) with her students’ creative and critical authorship by addressing and replying to the text of the poem.

Tara broke the wall of the institutional conventional monologism of standardization and homogenization through dialogizing her instruction and the studied text, which was full of dialogic possibilities. She did not experience much opposition from her conventional institution per se as she was provided with opportunities to exercise professional autonomy and a flexibility in her college. But rather she was confronted with authoritarian cultural traditions among some students and some parents going hand-in-hand with the spirit of her conventional educational institution:

But there was also this problem. [Some students and their communities] are very conservative in their ideas, and the [female] children especially are made to feel [that they have to] surrender their own individuality for the sake of the parents. They have to be married. ...

The [conventional] school teaching did not disrupt their [conservative] thinking because it’s also kind of reinforced it by the kind of authoritarian stance that was there, ... whereas my class disrupted [the conservative communal thinking] to question their beliefs [and their] cultural practices. So, it linked to the larger community and the history of the community, and the practices there, and it made them [i.e., the students] question [their communal beliefs]. For example, it brought us up as the split between [these communal conservative beliefs and their participation in our internally persuasive discourse and their own ideological becoming] ... They weren’t even conscious of [this conservative cultural framework as being cultural and thus arbitrary]. It was working at the “taken-for-granted” level. They never questioned themselves, “Can I do what I want to do?” That was just something that was lying dormant in them.

Because of all those autonomy-motivated strategies [that I employed in class], like, we used in the classroom which promoted independent thinking and those kind of things, then they realized for the first time in these conversations that there was a split between what their parents wanted them to do and what they wanted to do. We had them think of the possibilities. For example, in the beginning, they said, “Yes, we have dreams. But we can’t do anything because we have problems, because we have to listen to our parents and we have to get married and we have to do the ...”

The issues of their life, marriage, and education reflect the kind of dilemma that they are in. ... And I was also talking to the parents at the same time. I was going there to find out and they were telling me their stories and their experiences, and their ways of thinking and being. There was a parallel kind of dialogue with the students and even with the parents. There was some kind of a rethinking on these dialogues that happened between me and the parents ... But after 19 they’re supposed to get married ... Girls, they have to help their mother when they are at home and after marriage, they have to bear children ... Where is the space for their aspiration? They can’t even think about it or dream about it. (Interview with Tara Ratnam, 2015-12-10)

Some of Tara's students complained to her college principal that she asked them questions before teaching, interpreting her open-ended, interested, meaning-making questions as unsafe quizzing. What seemed to save Tara institutionally were the bureaucratic hurdles of replacing her that the principal had to take into account. Also, the students' parents were happy that their children did well on tests. Students doing well on English tests developed Tara's protective reputation for the school's administrators, students, and parents later on. Although they might not understand and appreciate her Bakhtinian pedagogy, they highly appreciated the conventional learning outcomes resulting from this pedagogy.

The level of student active investment did not happen overnight. Initially, I had to contend with the big gap between students' expectations of me based on their conventional views of teaching as transmission of knowledge and learning as practicing the given (an individual activity) for examination on the one hand and my larger purpose and efforts of enabling them to develop an authorial voice on the other. So, my first challenge was to change their expectations of teaching/learning and teacher-learner role relationship. I have had to face a barrage of complaints that students carried to the principal and questions from parents ("She asks questions before teaching the lesson. If they [students] are supposed to know the answer on their own, what is she there for?"). Very often students have protested, demanding to change the "English teacher." This put the principal in a dilemma and in the early years of my Bakhtinian practice, he or she would request me to explain the given lessons and give notes just to avoid complaints by students and parents. Over the years, the principal and other colleagues seemed to understand why I did what I did in class. So, if the students went to the principal to change the teacher, he would ask them to give him a month's time to find another English teacher for them. He was very confident that the students would never go back to him after one month and they never did, because that gave them time to get attuned to what I was doing (that was now internally persuasive for them) and start to enjoy it. (A student: "I thought ... you don't know the way [to teach] ... slowly we started understanding ... It is not just learning answers by heart [by rote]. We have to think and answer. I found your class very difficult, first six months, very, very difficult. Then I improved. I used to read, try to understand and express in my own way. That is good. If you plot time and interest, first of all, the interest would decrease, then it will go high.")

The parents were happy when students performed well on the tests, because that's their ultimate concern. I had mixed responses from my teacher colleagues—a few appreciated what I did from the feedback they got from the students, others were distant and did not want to acknowledge, although outwardly polite. (Tara Ratnam, online forum, 2017-02-11)

Tara also faced a *cultural mismatch* between her pedagogical dialogic orientation and her students' pedagogical expectations based on their past and present experiences in conventional schools.

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-20): *I would see my relationship with my students as being non-authoritarian in a hierarchical institutional setup.*

*In this setup, the teacher's institutionally recognized authority constrains complete dialogic relationship. The dialogization in this "real life" situation means for me, in Bakhtinian terms, that instead of acting as a constraining rule upon students, imposing my will and meaning, I enter into a dialogic interchange with them, changing myself as much as it changes them.*

*As long as we work within the framework of formal education, however democratic, I wonder if it can be fully dialogic because of teacher's authority. If the teachers' authority is dispelled, it doesn't remain "education" in the common cultural sense, does it? This is because, pedagogy, Socratic (early Socratic dialogues were unfinalizable, weren't they?) or Bakhtinian, open or closed curriculum, has in it a directive motive (stated or unstated). If not, would it be pedagogy or something else?>>*

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR, STRATEGIES BY, AND FAILURES OF BAKHTINIAN EDUCATORS IN CONVENTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Tara's advice to Bakhtinian educators situated in conventional institutions is "creative compliance" by pleasing the most important conventional institutional goals through innovative pedagogical means and, thus, subverting these conventional goals for the students. This will give a Bakhtinian educator institutionally legitimate autonomy and freedom for his or her authorial pedagogy.

Regarding the obstacles to dialogic teaching: We work within institutional bounds with their own tacit and explicit expectations, which are often contradictory. For example, official voices that publicly exhort teachers to see diversity as a resource, acknowledge and value the experience and knowledge children bring to school, in reality they promote the dominant culture and interests monologically that exclude culturally diverse students. A Bakhtinian practitioner has to work against the grain; educational institutions with deep structures that support monologic practices and work with the narrow goal of promoting students' [preparation for exams] rather than learning, where preparing students for preset tests and examinations dominate classroom instruction. Teacher autonomy is curtailed by having to comply with the top-down regulations (the norms of the institution) every step of the way. The challenge for a Bakhtinian educator [me] is, as I mentioned, in my response to Eugene, to understand these constraints to act so that we can work around them to change ourselves to change the situation in which we are bound. What has helped me gain a certain amount of autonomy in the classroom to promote free communication is, in Bakhtinian terms, playing with borders that frame my context (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 343) to creatively substitute these borders. I ensure that curricular requirements are met even if it violates students' intentions to an extent. For instance, students have to complete the workbook exercises and submit them on time, even if many of them find it "boring." This is a "creative compliance" (a term Jack White used during a conversation, August 4, 2010) to earn our freedom and by and by students have understood this. It is not as if this kind of practice exercise is something new to these students. They do it

in other classes, which are largely traditional. However, they take the liberty to grumble about it in my class. This is perhaps because they know that I am sympathetic to their plight! (Tara Ratnam, online forum, 2017-02-17)

When the state gets weaker due to societal cataclysms, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the hegemony of conventional educational institutions, backed by the state, also gets weaker. This can promote professional sovereignty and freedom for innovative educators and especially for authorial pedagogies, including Bakhtinian ones:

After all, it [1992] was an absolutely magic time. ... We were given total “carte blanche”: no [administrative] checks, no control from the “authority organizations.” We could do whatever we wanted and move to wherever we wanted. We could build the trajectory of the collective educational movement not well in advance but in progress. Besides, the children we enrolled were not what you call “easy students,” as they had various developmental and psychological problems. With all that, we had a purely instructional goal, which was formulated as follows: we need to make sure that all the children become “addicted” to learning, so that, in the course of our probabilistic movement, all the children fall in love with reading, writing, and math. Under the existing circumstances, it was quite a bold ambition, I must admit ... (Alexander Lobok, Cases#15 and #18)

In contrast to Tara, Charles Bisley (Case#24) was faced with *institutional pressure* to promote school public relations and standardized outcomes, masquerading as dramatic art education. This high-status successful state middle school had a tradition of producing high-culture, Shakespearean plays and other generic school productions with their children to demonstrate school achievement as a superb educational institution to the parents of current and future students and important guests. In reality, this so-called art education was largely reduced to students memorizing the text of the plays and performing them under strict directorship of their teachers. Charles and a few of his colleagues wanted to make the dramatic art education genuine for his students, guided by his version of Bakhtinian pedagogy. He was met with opposition from some of his colleagues that he had to overcome:

We’ve got a tradition of performing scenes from Shakespeare. A lot of the children look forward to doing these plays when they reach grades 6 and 7. And when I came to the school, one of my roles was to lead the performing arts and integrate them into the curriculum, the way the kids learn. That was a big part of our school’s curriculum development. I found the plays unremarkable—you know, dramatized play readings. The kids have fun, well those with lead roles, and the audience go away satisfied. It’s a community occasion but I doubt the kids are learning, not much. Only a few kids shine. So I said that’s not what we’re gonna do anymore. Let’s get the kids involved. Let’s adapt the scripts, use the drama process.

You can imagine, some of [my colleagues] didn’t think this was a plan. They weren’t drama teachers. If it ain’t broke don’t fix it—that’s the way it is down

here. So, we had arguments ... It was a long conversation. It went further than Shakespeare. If drama and the dynamic use of language, and that way of thinking, were going to be part of the curriculum, [then] they need to be a part of everyday literacy, not a script reading, not a whole school production. Now it's all changed. You can see this in how different each class play is. Now I'm suggesting to the other teachers they could choose the play with the kids. Some aren't confident to do that. It's easier said than done. (Charles Bisley, Case#24)

From the interview with Charles, it appears that the opposition by some of this colleagues, administration, and community was eventually overcome when these teachers observed rehearsals of Charles's students and they were impressed by "a complex, overlapping of voices, a multivoiced discourse that was so involving—each kid, me, each other, their parents, texts, performances as well. That's how we reinvented the play. And the other teachers that were watching said, "That was fantastic!" (Case#24).

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-06-07):** *The administration has been largely overcome in a gradual process of introducing arts and dialogical pedagogies. Adapting Shakespearean plays has been part of this change. The change was driven by the demonstrable and authoritative learning of the children, such as the dialogue between [my] students that some teachers observed.* >>

In other words, Charles's colleagues, administrators, parents, and students became impressed by the students' educational achievements, liveliness of their experiences, voices, and creative authorship, and finally by the quality of their dramatic production of Shakespearean plays that were much higher than in previous years before Charles took it over as the Director of the Performing Arts in the school. As one parent wrote to the school principal and CEO of the Board,

We feel especially grateful that [our daughter's] education at [the name of the school] included an imaginative, questioning approach to pedagogy and was not bound by a "tick the boxes" mentality. She was extremely fortunate to be part of [Additional English], but we've also observed that the [Additional English] ethos extends across other classes in the senior school. Bringing the children into contact with Shakespeare, poetry, "challenging" writing, and their own creative expression has extended them and taught them so much. In [the name of school] arts they're encouraged to work together and also develop their individual power. We've seen this give [our daughter] a strong sense of self as well as respect for others and an ability to collaborate. They say you only need to encounter one great teacher in your life to set you on a path, and there are many at [the name of the school], including ... Charles Bisley. (Parent letter, February 18, 2018, submitted by Charles Bisley, 2018-04-20)

The publicity of the school grew even higher.

<<**Charles Bisley, feedback reply (2018-06-10):** *The reputation of the school and its pedagogy have grown through these creative projects.*>>

In a way, Charles and his colleagues won the institutional right to practice his Bakhtinian pedagogy in his educational institution and its subversive values



by winning on the conventional school turf (i.e., promoting good publicity). Thus, as we see it, Charles managed to create a boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989): for some school administrators, teachers, and parents, his achievements, driven by his Bakhtinian pedagogy, raised the school's high status, while for others (including many of his students), his guidance promoted creative authorship, multivoicedness, and deep engagement with the arts.

Alexander Lobok proposes a completely different move of dealing with the conventional institutional *instrumental* hegemony by cleverly addressing its desires for and concerns about promoting instrumental education. He suggests changing the conventional educational institutions through what can be called “a crawling pedagogical revolution.” One issue with the contemporary conventional education is its instrumentalism, according to Alexander. Society and many parents often pressure educators to teach academic skills and well-defined important factual knowledge (Ravitch, 2013). Alexander wants to liberate educators, interested in dialogic pedagogy that promotes students' voices and informed creative authorship, from the burden of this instrumentalism. Instead of criticizing instrumental education of conventional schools as non-authentic, Alexander suggests to embrace it as a necessary nuisance and to find ways to accomplish it quickly and painlessly (cf. Barab, Pettyjohn, Gresalfi, Volk, & Solomou, 2012). His particular project involves developing a series of excitement-inducing educational games, which literally draw the students and their parents in, to make instrumental education enjoyable, invisible, embodied, painless, and deep for the students (see Chap. 2.3 on “educational vortex” for further discussion). By playing these games voluntarily with their parents and on their own, mostly outside of the school, the students will acquire these academic instrumental skills while freeing the teacher for providing dialogic guidance to the students by involving them in critical exploration of bottomless meanings and understandings (cf. Bakhtin, 1986).

Thus, Alexander Lobok's approach to the conventional educational institution involves addressing its needs as quickly and painlessly as possible to free innovative Bakhtinian educators' time and efforts for their Bakhtinian pedagogy. His approach creates excitement and high appeal among conventional educational institutions and their proponents of instrumental education because Alexander promises to address the two major conventional educational problems: (1) the lack of student motivation to study and (2) the shallowness of their academic learning. At the same time, his approach creates an interest in and possibilities for innovative education committed to non-instrumental, intrinsic, education (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019). From conventional education's point of view, Alexander's pedagogical approach might be characterized as “Conventional Plus”: it addresses all the mandated preset curricular endpoints and it promotes creative and critical authorship as somewhat desired “extracurricular education” argued by some Progressive educators (cf. Ravitch, 2013). Of course, from a Bakhtinian pedagogy perspective, this view would be problematic because what is prioritized in a conventional education is often de-prioritized in a Bakhtinian pedagogy and vice versa. In

our judgment, if doable, Alexander's "shielding" approach is a bit subversive, putting his Bakhtinian pedagogy in plain sight but still keeping it away from any confrontation and from a genuine critical dialogue with conventional pedagogy and its philosophy/ideology.

In contrast to Alexander Lobok, who does not like to make dissidence against conventional oppressive monologic institutions a part of his Bakhtinian pedagogy, Aaron Yost (Case#5) embraced confrontation with a conventional institution as a part of his students' curriculum and his Bakhtinian instruction. In teaching a remedial high school English course, he engaged his "at risk" students, failing the school, to develop a manual involving suggestions for improving the school for their peers and the school administration. The manual was based on the students' school experiences, interviews with peers, and their reflections (cf. Hiller, 1984). The enthusiastic students called their manual, "How to make school suck less." However, when Aaron shared the project with his principal for his support and approval to distribute the pamphlet in the school, the principal demanded the title be changed:

Our principal took one look at the cover and said, "You can't say 'suck'," and I said, "Well, can you read the thing first? See if it ..."—and I told him about the rhetorical situation, that this was a big part of our class, and that we had talked about audience and making these arguments to this audience and what we needed to do to do that. (Aaron Yost, Case#5)

Aaron tried to convince his principal to keep the original title by the students but failed to do so and agreed to change the title to an institutionally safe alternative, "How to get more out of school." At the end of the day, Aaron had to comply with the conventional school authority at the expense of losing his students' respect and trust: "And so, I had to bring that back to the remaining students in that class and propose the language change. They were furious, I mean, just furious that they had a perfectly good rationale for the language choice, but somebody from outside made them change it" (Case#5). Arguably, by compromising with the conventional institutional authority, Aaron did not fully survive in-spirit with his Bakhtinian pedagogy.

Some conventional educational institutions may tolerate an openly practiced Bakhtin-inspired teacher by "looking the other way" for a while, as long as such a teacher does not openly threaten the very existence of the conventional institution. However, as instructional circumstances change, the institutional survival of a Bakhtinian educator may be in danger by an institutional expulsion. Like in Charles's situation, described above (Case#24), Ana Marjanovic-Shane's administration had valued students' educational activism and ownership promoted by Ana's Bakhtinian pedagogy before the process of the state accreditation started. Ana did not institutionally survive when her conventional institution went for state accreditation. She has developed and practiced her Bakhtinian-inspired teaching in a rather conventional small college for almost ten years and shared some of the details of her innovative pedagogical practices

with her colleagues and some administrators. For instance, she introduced open curriculum teaching, in which her students could choose topics of their interest. Her non-conventional Bakhtinian educational approach could not be hidden from her colleagues and administration in a small teaching college, where all the faculty knew all the students and where her students discussed their experiences in her classes with other professors. Her teaching practices were tolerated and even appreciated by some of the administrators for a while, who even encouraged Ana to go for tenure review, which was successfully granted.

However, when Ana's college entered into a state-mandated accreditation process which would be crucial for the further financing of her department of education, the college administration introduced various forms of standardization of all teaching practices in accordance with the conventional instrumental, outcome-based educational policy, although that was not always required by the state accreditation agency. These college administrators probably felt that they could not "look the other way" any more, demanding that Ana comply with their newly minted, extremely rigid, conventional educational templates. The conflict between Ana's educational philosophy and practice, on one hand, and the bureaucratic approach of her conventional institution on the other, became acute and open now, forcing Ana to choose between institutional survival but death in-spirit on one hand, and survival in-spirit but institutional death, on the other. "I was told by an administrator, 'You can teach about it [human development, dialogic learning, meaning making, etc.], but you are not allowed to practice it!' These words made me realize that I could not teach in that college while keeping my professional integrity anymore and I resigned." Aaron's and Ana's professional trajectories showcase these terrible dilemmas that many Bakhtinian educators may face, the dilemmas between institutional survival and professional survival in-spirit.

In part, in a response to these terrible dilemmas, Eugene Matusov's approach to conventional educational institutions is complex. Eugene embraces a "flying under the radar" approach of dealing with institutional bureaucracy, keeping many of his administrators and colleagues unaware of what he is doing, while ostensibly following the letter of institutional regulations, as he does not believe in a dialogue with an "institutional machine." Substantively, Eugene tries to involve his students in critical examination of their own subjectivity as participants in conventional educational institutions. Thus, in his Case#3 of students "teaching" each other how to make peanut butter sandwiches, he forcefully made them realize their unconditional and unquestionable cooperation with conventional school authority's demands, however meaningless these demands could be for them.

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-26): *Did Eugene have tenure at that point? Because absent tenure, getting all those bad teaching reviews from students is a sure-bet way of losing your job. I'm mentioning this also because coping strategies with institutions differ quite a lot depending on one's level of tenure and standing in the institution. It's much harder (institutionally speaking) to*

*start out being a Bakhtinian (or other non-conformist) educator than to become one with tenure in hand (but then, changing your ways that late in your career is unlikely for other reasons).>>*

<<**Eugene Matusov, reply to Sergey (2018-06-05):** *No, I did not have tenure back then in Case#3.*>>

In his Case#27 of teaching reluctant students, Eugene helped his students reflect on the fact that conventional schooling produces reluctant students by forcing them to take classes, in which they are not interested. At the same time, he engaged his students in decision-making about their own education by providing curricular, instructional, and organizational choices and democratic self-governance (e.g., Case#19) and critical examination of diverse educational philosophies and paradigms (e.g., Case#26) (Matusov, 2015; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017).

Recently, Eugene has introduced a Multi-Syllabus pedagogical regime, in which students' diverse pedagogical philosophies are respected and they have a choice to follow their own vision of their education path or no path at all, when they feel that education is forced on them by the conventional institution (Matusov, 2019a, in preparation). These aspects of his approach to conventional educational institution are guided by his dualistic Bakhtinian pedagogy of having a Bakhtinian critical ontological dialogic *vision* of education—a critical examination of life, self, society, and the world, including education itself—and by his *educational pluralism* of respecting other people's educational philosophies and visions, including the conventional, as dialogic partners (see Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016 for more discussion of this educational philosophy dualism).

Finally, in contrast to Alexander Lobok, Eugene does not believe in a comfortable solution for the monopoly of instrumental conventional educational institutions within pedagogy itself. Rather, Eugene argues that ubiquitous instrumentalism is the birthmark of the contemporary need- and necessity-based civilization, rooted in its economy, state, bureaucracy, and so on (Matusov, 2019b, in preparation). In his view, unless this civilization is changed through the emergence of a leisure-based civilization, Bakhtinian pedagogy can exist only on the margins of the monopoly of conventional educational instrumentalism as an experimental pedagogical laboratory of the future.

## CONCLUSION: UNCOVERING HIDDEN TENSIONS

There are several hidden tensions regarding Bakhtinian pedagogy in conventional educational institutions. First, there is a tension between fighting for an educational philosophy monopoly backed by the power of the state versus fighting for the pluralism of educational philosophies. Many innovative pedagogies try to replace the monopoly of the conventional educational philosophy of transmission of knowledge with their own educational philosophy in public education or even in all of institutionalized education (e.g., Ravitch, 2013). For them the main question is which educational philosophy controls the

power of the state to impose it on educational institutions. However, SIBEs are ambivalent about this desire for monopoly.

Thus, on one hand, Alexander Lobok talks about the corrupting power of any monopoly and insists that Bakhtinian pedagogy cannot be imposed from the outside but only grown from inside an educator as a certain craving for genuine dialogue. Similarly, Paul Spitale and Silviane Barbato argue that forceful implementation of Bakhtinian pedagogy will kill its spirit. Eugene Matusov argues that forcible scaling-up of Bakhtinian pedagogy is “impossible and undesirable.” According to him, it is impossible because Bakhtinian pedagogy is always unique and authorial—involving unique authorship by the teacher and the students (Matusov, 2011). It is undesirable because students should have the right to define education in whatever way they want, as, to a certain degree, students’ education is a part of their own critical examination of their lives.

On the other hand, Aaron Yost accepts a position of “an educational tsar” and believes that Bakhtinian pedagogy can be scaled-up by hiring “Bakhtinian consultants,” demanding that teachers read Bakhtin’s texts, providing team teaching, reducing the class size, promoting collaborative learning and the informality of an educational environment: “I picture more of the coffee shop atmosphere for classroom and school spaces, more open but also like really specific places to go and work” (interview with Aaron Yost, 2015-12-03). Beatrice Ligorio thinks that scaling-up Bakhtinian pedagogy to the national and international levels is possible and desirable. Tara Ratnam also thinks it is desirable but difficult to achieve because of institutional and personal resistance as scaling-up Bakhtinian pedagogy requires a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1996). Finally, Ana Marjanovic-Shane argues that although spreading Bakhtinian pedagogy is desirable, it is impossible to achieve, “because you cannot impose on people to dialogue, if they are not ready for dialogue. You can hijack them to dialogue, but if they’re in a position in which you can’t hijack them like some authority who doesn’t even want to hear, that wants to have absolute power over whatever subjects, then you just can’t” (interview with Ana Marjanovic-Shane, 2015-08-19).

Throughout the interviews, Bakhtinian educators oscillate between rejecting the desirability and/or possibility of Bakhtinian pedagogy monopoly and entertaining it. We wonder if this ambivalence toward the monopoly of one educational philosophy is specific to Bakhtinian pedagogy. Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2016) argue that Bakhtinian *dialogic* pedagogy is inherently pluralistic for two related reasons: (1) dialogue resists any monopoly, as a manifestation of excessive monologism, and (2) Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy involves a critical examination of pedagogical dialogism, which requires tolerance to its alternatives (while judging and critiquing them, like in the case of freedom of speech).

Nevertheless, many, but not all, interviewed SIBEs proposed some practical measures and projects that might facilitate Bakhtinian pedagogy practices. This represents the second tension between proposing such practical measures and

providing a bigger sociocultural, historical, political, and economic picture, in which Bakhtinian pedagogy is situated and, thus, constrained.

The first tendency of suggesting practical measures facilitating Bakhtinian pedagogy can be exemplified by the following Bakhtinian educators. Silviane Barbato suggests more scholarly publications on Bakhtinian pedagogy, orienting educators who may want to develop an interest in Bakhtinian pedagogy. Paul Spitale proposes producing hardcore educational research proving the advantages of Bakhtinian pedagogy, which can become convincing for many conventional educators. Meanwhile, Tara Ratnam dreams about involving all educational stakeholders in a dialogue, “students, administrators, teachers, parents, and everybody, all of these people. Then pull all the stakeholders into a dialogue, by which they influence each other, and be influenced by the other also” (interview with Tara Ratnam, 2015-12-10). In contrast, Beatrice Ligorio insists on democratizing the power relationship between the teachers and the students facilitated by technology. Charles Bisley and Mikhail Gradovski focus on teachers’ working conditions that may promote Bakhtinian pedagogy. Charles praises teacher autonomy and flexibility provided and affirmed in New Zealand in the past. Mikhail needs more time, money, and other resources for enriching his Bakhtinian pedagogy:

... dialogic education is a luxury ... It requires resources. And one of the most valuable resources is time ... That is one of the main challenges ... What I would want to have extra money for is the opportunities for setting the background for the [studied] questions. For example, it would be nice to speak about Germans building democracy in the Clarksville castle in Germany in Frankfurt because that would be the place where German ... democracy was born after the Weimar Republic was born. That would be an interesting sort of point of view, an interesting scene to start asking questions about, if we were talking about [the birth of German democracy]. ... I would need the money ... [because] it gives you freedom. So I would like to have resources. If I had a [curricular] question to be explored either by me or by students that needs extra resources, [these resources] would be in place, but that’s an ideal situation ... (Interview with Mikhail Gradovski, 2015-08-22)

Probably the strongest example of providing interesting practice measures facilitating Bakhtinian pedagogy is brought by Alexander Lobok. He has two big proposals. First is creating a professional peer-reviewed online forum for Bakhtinian teachers, who will post their teaching cases for analysis and critique by each other. Both authors of the teaching cases and their reviewers will be financially compensated, so they can find time in their busy instrumental lives for this important professional dialogue. This online forum will create a professional dialogue among practicing and conceptualizing Bakhtinian educators. Second is developing a series of excitement-inducing educational games (see above) that tacitly socialize students in important academic skills and knowledge to liberate Bakhtinian educators working in conventional institutions, for Bakhtinian pedagogy.



In contrast, Dmitri Nikulin and Eugene Matusov talk about a bigger socio-cultural, historical, political, and economic picture, in which Bakhtinian pedagogy is embedded. Thus, Dmitri Nikulin has a rather pessimistic view about prospects for Bakhtinian pedagogy in the political and ideological contexts of growing neoliberal educational policies around the world: standardization, measurement, testing, efficiency, instrumentalism, and monetization of education. Eugene Matusov sees the power of conventional instrumental pedagogy of transmission of knowledge rooted in the current instrumental need- and necessity-based civilization prioritizing economical concerns. Only when it shifts to a leisure-based civilization through upcoming robotization and universal basic income, Bakhtinian pedagogy may have its strong ontological basis (Matusov, 2019b, in preparation). He reminds us that the Greek word “school” means “leisure.”

<<Tara Ratnam, feedback reply, (2018-04-20): *I see that the present is already ripe with the rapid changes that digital technology affords. We are uncertain of students' future needs and the kind of “knowledge-based” education that is still in place in mainstream curricula is getting becoming anachronistic (and redundant, more now than ever before), although the institutional inertia (fed by the deeply established monologic practices) fails to recognize and act on it. A dialogic pedagogy (informed by Bakhtin's ideas) is perhaps very relevant for helping students become self-evolving learners and do things that the machine can't.>>*

The third tension that we have picked out in the interviews was about the personal vs. the societal nature of educational practice. Almost all Bakhtinian educators strongly value the development of students' voice and authorship as the primary goal of education. However, very few of them—namely, Eugene Matusov, Ana Marjanovic-Shane, Dmitri Nikulin, and, probably, Alexander Lobok, go far enough to its logical implication that education is in the first place a personal business of the learners, who are the primary stakeholders of education and not their teachers, parents, school administrators, and boards, politicians, academicians, taxpayers, employers, state, or the entire society. These Bakhtinian educators seem to argue that a genuine dialogue of “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1999) requires the freedom to pursue the participants' interests and that education is an existential human need and right (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019).

As to why the rest of the interviewed Bakhtinian educators might not go that far, it is perhaps related to the final, fourth tension, we have suspected in our interviews—the colonization of the Bakhtinian educators by conventional instrumental schooling institutions and by the ideology of Progressive education. Since colonization is not easily observable but rather experienced, it makes sense for us, Eugene Matusov, Ana Marjanovic-Shane, and Mikhail Gradovski, to talk about our own colonization by the conventional educational institution that we experienced and then noticed.

For example, for me (Eugene Matusov) it took many years of my pedagogical practice before I could realize that the ubiquity of teacher's assignments (e.g., homework) and teacher's grading students' projects suppressed



my students' educational agency and that my students should be involved in democratic decision-making about their curriculum and instruction and define their own pedagogical regime. For a long time, these features of conventional instrumental institutional education, contradicting my emerging Bakhtinian dialogic ontological pedagogy, were natural and unquestionable for me.

Similarly, I (Ana Marjanovic-Shane) realized that my Bakhtinian ideas about teaching do not automatically translate to my teaching practice.

<<**Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-29):** *All chapters should be "authorized" and later you can think how to describe possible different statements/ideas/interpretations of authors.*>>

Specifically, I noticed that although I have believed that meaning making takes place in a genuine dialogue, for a long time my teaching practice had remained monologic, that is that in the actual class dialogues I had tended to "silence" my students. In a recent publication, I analyzed ways in which my monologic teacher orientation stopped potentially very important dialogues before they developed into a true testing of everyone's ideas (Marjanovic-Shane, Meacham, Choi, Lopez, & Matusov, 2019). It became important for me to find ways to "decolonize" myself from the monologism in my teacher orientation. I have been working for a long time on noticing "monologism colonization" in my teaching by discussing and analyzing particular instances of my recorded class dialogues with my Bakhtinian colleagues.

In the case of Mikhail Gradovski, there were some obvious consequences of the cultural colonization manifested in his early teaching practice due to the fact that Mikhail was born and partly educated in the former Soviet Union. These manifestations included an understanding the notion of respect of human beings that was limited to the values supported by the totalitarian and authoritarian state. There even existed a belief, now no longer supported, that a dialogue where a learner's subjectivity would not be taken into account could be practiced in educational settings.

Of course, this process of decolonization will continue as colonization is only powerful when it is invisible for the colonized.

<<**Tara Ratnam, feedback reply (2018-04-20):** *My experience supports this fully. As an educator this has engaged me in an ongoing examination of the emerging inconsistencies between my intention (democratic) and practice (that smacks of pedagogical violence, though unaware to myself at the moment of acting) and finding ways to get my practice closer to my values within constraints.*>>

We—Eugene, Ana, and Mikhail—are sure that we are still colonized by conventional instrumental educational institutional practices, ideologies, discourse, and their power relations, but some of the particular methods of this colonization still remain invisible for us. We grew up embedded all our life in these conventional instrumental educational institutions, socialized in their practices, and embodied their power relations. On top of that, we are often under the gun of these institutions trying to survive and flourish there with our compro-

mixed versions and limited understandings of authorial and unique Bakhtinian pedagogies. Finally, we often try to rationalize our compromises with conventional institutions driven by our real and imaginary fears of institutional threats to our institutional survival, skillfully hiding these rationalizations as such from others and ourselves.

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## Dialogic Research Art

This part of the book focuses on the topics and issues of our research, research philosophy, and diverse approaches in the study of pedagogy inspired by Bakhtin. Thus, in this part we address a different audience: not educational practitioners, but rather educational researchers and scholars. Our dialogic relationship to our participants, ourselves, and our readers drove us to start developing a different approach to scholarly research focused on dialogic meaning making, a different research paradigm that we call “dialogic research art” in contrast to “research method.” The main contrast between the two research paradigms we see is in their relationship toward truth and toward their research participants. In a conventional positivist research epistemology, truth can be achieved (although as an approximation) through *a correct scientific method* that defines scientific practice; in contrast, dialogic research epistemology rejects the notion of a research *method* in favor of the concept of research *art*. Equally important is the related contrast in the researchers’ relationship to the research participants and to the dialogue that is in focus of the inquiry. On one hand, in the (positivist) “research method,” the researcher positions her or himself as an “objective observer” of an “objective given (positive) reality,” attempting to exclude her or his own bias and subjectivity, and aiming to follow predefined steps in the search for truth. In contrast, in dialogic research art, the researcher engages in dialogue about (the studied) dialogue with his or her (subjective) heart and mind, relating to the research participants as a consciousness with equal rights (Bakhtin, 1999). Finally, in this part, we attempt to define a boundary between the legitimate domains of research method and dialogic research art.

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## Chapter 3.1: Introducing Dialogic Research Art

Our main goal in this book was to develop a state of current Bakhtinian pedagogical practice to address educational practitioners and scholars who may be interested in it. However, instead of providing an authoritative overview and finalized judgment of current Bakhtinian pedagogy, our intention was to engage our participants, ourselves, and our potential readers in a critical dialogue about Bakhtinian pedagogy as it has been understood and practiced by our participants, the ideas and values driving their practice, and to provide inspirations for future experimentations and innovations. We, the authors of this book, aim at a critical dialogue as our serious and sincere attempt to understand our participants' and our own Bakhtinian educational practices by relating to them through our own interests, surprises, disagreements, puzzlements, agreements, tensions, excitements, gaps, contradictions, sympathies, endearments, admirations, aesthetic catharses (small and big), occasional misunderstandings, and even lack of our understanding. We focused on our dialogic relations with the participants' teaching cases and interviews by developing our points of interest—what we called “juicy issues and topics”—and then reflecting on what made them so “juicy” for us (see Part II). We developed very particular, subjective, interested, and problematic vistas on the presented Bakhtinian pedagogy. We hope that our readers find many disagreements with us and with the described Bakhtinian educators, which may contribute to enrichment of Bakhtinian pedagogy and our collective understanding of it. Thus, our dialogic research and presentation are authorial. Different authors and observers would probably come to different analyses, views, “juicy issues and topics,” reflections, and unfinalized conclusions. Hence, this book is not just about a finalized authoritative statement about Bakhtinian pedagogy but about our particular authorial view of Bakhtinian pedagogy.

Let us provide several examples of our dialogic relationships with our participants. In his feedback reply to our first draft of the manuscript, Charles Bisley commented on Chap. 2.1, “I disagree with ‘heavily and controlled,’ [our judgment of

an aspect of his pedagogical approach] and the value judgement that goes with these words. The process became dialogic, the authorship is shared, especially once we had chosen the play and I have plenty of evidence to show that, but there was no time for it here.” From our point of view, the issue was more rooted in a paradigmatic disagreement—a paradigm often prioritizes different “points,” “missed,” “misunderstood,” or “misjudged,” by another paradigm. In our dialogic framework, “misjudgment” is unavoidable, reflecting non-transparency of human consciousnesses (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2015c). Recognition of “misjudgment” by one of the parties creates a dialogic tension that must be addressed and replied to without necessarily being ever resolved. It is up to our readers to encounter this tension and come to their own authorial judgment of it. Did we really misjudge Charles’s pedagogy or was it the case of paradigmatic differences between him and us or was it a bit of both or entirely something else? It is for the readers to judge and forever to be judged (cf. Morson, 2004, p. 319).

In another situation, we were delighted by Alexander Lobok’s tension and dilemma about the desirability of the educational vortex—a “juicy issue” that highly resonated with us, pushing us to develop it into a separate analytical chapter (Chap. 2.3). In Cases#15 and #18, Alexander described his excitement-inducing, almost addictive (“азартные”), educational games that powerfully drew children into learning reading, writing, science, and math skills without them even noticing or putting special efforts into that academic learning. And, yet, in Case#22, Alexander raised his doubts about his own powerful pedagogy: “I always thought that, if I do fascinate [elementary school] children with something, I deprive them of something else. Because human life is not endless, and if I with all my charisma had enthralled them with something that I myself found enthralling, I would definitely have taken something away from them.” Alexander’s dilemma inspired us to investigate this issue and find its roots in Progressive education. At the end of the day, we sided with Alexander’s “second” voice criticizing the desirability of the educational vortex, although we are not sure that he would agree with our reasons. What are the legitimacy and limitations of the educational vortex and who should decide that and how?

We strongly criticized Beatrice Ligorio’s Bakhtinian pedagogy for her authoritarianism while appreciating her Bakhtinian pedagogical innovations and sympathizing with her institutional challenges. Thus, on the online forum, Ana Marjanovic-Shane wrote,

First, I can see a depiction of a very rigid, authoritarian, conventional university (school) institution that is monologic through and through. Students have to *prove* that they have learned and understood something prescribed by the educational authorities. [Beatrice] tells the students “Come on, let’s play another game! So, *what questions do you think really would make it possible for me to realize if you really understood the topic we’re discussing?*” (Emphasis in original)

At the same time, in Chap. 2.2 on ontological engagement, we appreciated Beatrice’s Bakhtinian guidance that might promote ontological engagement for some of her students:

An exciting part of Beatrice’s innovative practice here is that the curriculum becomes open for these students to develop rather than being preset by the teacher in advance. The emergent curriculum of the course seems to come from the interactions between the students and the assigned texts, students’ dialogues among each other and the teacher (Beatrice), and from her guidance about the imaginary expert community and salient features of the targeted practice itself. This can promote an ontological dialogue around issues genuinely and deeply interested by the participants described by Bakhtin (1999).

Finally, we sympathized with Beatrice in facing institutional pressures and with her Bakhtinian pedagogy-inspired ways of addressing them in Chap. 2.5:

Beatrice Ligorio (Cases#6 and 17) was confronted with the educational apathy and passivity of her undergraduate students, with their conventional educational institution mostly focused on taking lecture notes and passing exams, which represented “the wall” of her conventional institution. Guided by her Bakhtinian pedagogy, Beatrice tried to break this wall to promote her students’ active role in their own education by organizing small-group discussions based on division of labor (Case#17) and by engaging them in designing their own exam questions by imagining important issues, by which the experts might define their academic field (Case#6). Apparently, so far, Beatrice’s conventional institution has either not noticed, or approved/allowed, or tolerated her innovative efforts.

<<Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28): *In general it feels you are judging the cases. I was expecting a more open discussion and I wonder how Bakhtinian this is.*>>

Our complex dialogic relationships with Beatrice’s Bakhtinian pedagogy deepen our discussion of the relationship between Bakhtinian pedagogy and conventional institutions, in which many Bakhtinian educators often have to be situated. What are “good” or “bad” compromises between Bakhtinian pedagogy and conventional monologic institutions, in which the former is located?

Further, we admired Dmitri Nikulin’s focus on the ecological aspects of dialogue, discussed in our Chap. 2.1, and especially his serious attempts to unpack the “I–Thou” aspect of dialogic relations. We wrote,

In our view, Dmitri Nikulin captured the bidirectional nature of education: one is a purposeful activity of a particular meaning making (e.g., “I-with-You-about-It relationship,” using Buber’s terminology, Buber, 2000; “critical dialogue,” Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015; “internally persuasive discourse,” Matusov & von Duyke, 2010; “dialectic,” Nikulin, 2010; “critical examination of life,” Socrates, Plato & Riddell, 1973) and the other dimension is a particular way of being with others<sup>1</sup> (e.g., “I–Thou relationship,” Buber, 2000; “conviviality,” Illich, 1973; “community of learners,” Matusov, von Duyke, & Han, 2012; “social relations,” Sidorkin, 2004). Nikulin (2006) makes the most dialogic definition of this second dimension of education, that is, unpacking the notion of the pure dialogic I–Thou, dialogic being together relations. In our judgment, his contribution is original and deep.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gert Biesta (2017)—Robi Kroflič’s reply (2018-04-25).



This admiration signals the importance of the underlying values of dialogue in Bakhtinian pedagogy that remain underexplored by us. Does an I–Thou dialogic relationship, as a particular way of being together and not being much concerned about any topic, have any place in education?

In our view, the birthmark of dialogic research is that findings by the researchers and/or research participants become data for the readers and/or observers embedded in the critical and heterodiscursive dialogue about diverse phenomena they have been noticing and becoming interested in. In dialogic research, everyone (or almost everyone) becomes a researcher and researched. In dialogic research, truth lives in the critical heterodiscursive dialogue. In contrast, in a conventional research approach, truth resides in the statements—the research findings.

<<**Beatrice Ligorio, feedback reply (2018-04-28):** *At the beginning of the book, you claimed “We wanted to study educational practice of SIBEs—what they meant by claiming to be Bakhtinian, what attracts them in Bakhtin not merely in abstract or ideological terms but in their own pedagogical teacher practice.” Now you are talking about research. I feel this is beyond the aims of the book you declared.>>*

Our dialogic approach to research is very different from a conventional research approach in social sciences. We argue that the conventional research approach is still heavily shaped by a positivist epistemology, focusing on studying the physically, chemically, biologically, psychologically, culturally, historically, socially, institutionally, politically, and economically *given*.<sup>2</sup> Below we both appreciate and criticize the conventional positivist research approach and contrast it with a dialogic research approach that we have been developing here and that has started emerging in the research of some of our colleagues. In our critique of conventional positivist research epistemology, we do not seek its annihilation but rather try to appreciate its truth—as an important achievement of the Enlightenment Age in its struggle against totalitarian and authoritarian dogmatism (religious or political) and disengaging capricious relativism—by drawing a boundary of the separation between its legitimate and illegitimate reach.

## CONVENTIONAL POSITIVIST VERSUS DIALOGIC RESEARCH APPROACHES IN (SOCIAL) SCIENCE

Probably the most important difference between the conventional positivist and dialogic research approaches is their attitude toward truth. In a conventional positivist research epistemology, truth can be achieved (although as an

<sup>2</sup>In Latin, the word “positive,” from which the term “positivism” originates, means “given.” Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993) in his early writing often distinguished being “the given” (дан, дан, in Russian) and “the assigned/created” (zadan, задан). The latter expresses the essence of ethical subjectivity, “the ethical *subiectum* is present to itself as a task—the task of actualizing itself as a value, and it is in principle incapable of being given, of being present-on-hand, of being contemplated: it is *I-for-myself*” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 100, italics in original).

approximation) through *a correct scientific method* that defines scientific practice in contrast to many other somewhat similar practices such as religion, journalism, jurisprudence, and so on. Method, to be a method, must be universalized, decontextualized, and recursive, although it may have a conditional relationship with its research data and its particular research inquiries. As the guarantor of truth, the research method must be developed and defined in advance. Although a particular method can be initially developed in some research study, to become really a research method, it must be self-sustained and preexist any particular research. The research method is a given (“positive” in Latin) in positivistic research.

Using Aristotelian terminology (Aristotle, 2000; Carr, 2006), the positivist idea of research methodology is based on the concept of *poiesis*. Aristotle defined *poiesis* as such an activity where its goal, value, form, and the definition of what constitutes its quality preexist the activity itself. Probably, a good example of *poiesis* is the mass production of common goods (e.g., cars, computers, shoes) in the modern economy (Aristotle’s own example was about shoe-making). Mass production is based on well-defined production methods that preexist the particular production itself. If one follows a preexisting method *correctly*, one guarantees arrival at a quality product. At the same time, since the definition of the quality of the product preexists the production, there is always a preexisting measure by which one can assess the quality of the product. Any gap between the preexisting ideal of the quality and the actual product is a deficit or a fallacy. *Poiesis* does not know personal authorship and personal responsibility—rather it knows impersonal method/technique and person-free objectivity.

According to the positivist epistemology, a research method, when applied *appropriately*, guarantees an arrival at scientific truth, although even a correct scientific method may have its limitations for truth (i.e., valid verifiable findings), which must be acknowledged by the researchers. A good scientific method guarantees freedom from any authority and bias, including a political one. The validity of a scientific method is established by the entire relevant scientific community through its deliberation and critique and, consequently, through a consensus (or a near consensus) among its most influential, relevant, and respected members (Latour, 1987). Description and, especially, justification of particular research methods, including their limitations and their consequences for the research findings, constitute research methodology (Creswell, 2007). The concept of *method* is based on the *techné* way of knowing (cf. “technology”): if one follows correctly a particular chain of well-defined actions, one can come up with a product, whose quality is predefined in advance. In positivist research, such a product of method leads to the establishment of a scientific fact. The predefined quality of a scientific fact is its exact or near exact correspondence with reality. Scientific fact is a unit of *episteme*—a body of self-contained true statements about the world.

Dialogic research epistemology is very different, as it rejects the notion of a research *method* (cf. the notion “anti-methodology” developed by Matusov,

2013) and, thus, methodology, in favor of dialogic research *art*.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to method, the concept of *art* is based on the *phronésis* way of knowing (Aristotle, 2000; Carr, 2006), which can be loosely defined as practical wisdom situated in a unique context. The definition of the success of this practical wisdom in the unique context does not preexist the art-making but emerges from it. This new definition of success in art-making and its new underlying value has to be recognized and defended in the act of taking responsibility—literally an accepted duty to reply to challenging questions about the new artwork.<sup>4</sup> The art of dialogic research is aimed at deepening the understanding and meaning embedded in dialogue itself. The outcomes of this art are dialogic provocations to be tested and deconstructed against alternative ideas.

Rather than conceptualizing truth as being *located in, grasped by, reached in, and finalized by* statements (i.e., findings) as it is in positivist research epistemology, in dialogic research epistemology, truth *lives* in a critical heterodiscursive dialogue of diverse participants and communities with diverse foci, where alternative ideas are examined and tested by the participants—that is, what Bakhtin called “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010). Dialogic truth is unfinalizable, relational, authorial, and thus intangible. Dialogic research is aimed at generating dialogic provocations, grounded in a studied phenomenon, for critical dialogue. In our project, these grounded dialogic provocations were interviews, teaching cases, their online forum discussions, and our analyses guided by our emerging interests, with expectation for future dialogic provocations by our readers.

In another dialogic research, a dialogic research study of preschool in three cultures—Japan, China, and the USA—by Joseph Tobin and his colleagues, the researchers developed grounded dialogic provocations from their videotaped observations: they offered/authored their own and other people’s puzzles for discussion for educators from these different countries (Tobin, Davidson, & Wu, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). “Following Bakhtin, we believe that meanings arise out of dialogical engagement of speakers. Rather than viewing interviewing as a strategy to uncover preexisting positions of research subjects, we view interviews as occasions for the co-construction of meaning by our informants with each other as well as with us” (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 7). After grounded dialogic provocations are generated, diverse ideas and perspectives are revealed and critically examined by the researchers and research participants (and later by the readers). This critical dialogue generates endless new grounded dialogic provocations, new ideas, and new analyses, and so it remains “bottomless” (Bakhtin, 1986). However, one way in which grounded dialogic provocations are produced and critical dialogue organized

<sup>3</sup>Our term “dialogic research art” or “art of dialogic research making” is akin to “art of war making” or “culinary art.”

<sup>4</sup>Since the responsibility-based justification of artwork is a part of art itself, there is no such term as “artology,” which could have been parallel to “methodology”—justification of a scientific method of research.

remains particular to the researchers' authorship, their research material, their interests, their situations, and their participants. This is how Tobin and his colleagues described this dialogic research process:

A final source for [our art of research making] comes from the Akira Kurosawa film *Rashomon* (based on a short story by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa)<sup>5</sup> in which an encounter between three people on a path in the forest is described differently by each of the participants. The discussions we held with early childhood educators following the viewing of our videotapes show that these audiences often have different understandings not only about what the teachers should do, but also about what transpired in the videotape[s]. Like the participants and eyewitnesses in *Rashomon* who give different accounts of the same crime, our informants reveal something about themselves and their worldviews as they comment on our videotapes.

As each of these influences suggest, in our [art of research making] the videotapes are not the data; rather, they are cues, stimuli, topics for discussion, interviewing tools. In much of social science research the researcher asks informants verbal questions, questions such as, "What is your philosophy of classroom management?" Preschool teachers tend to find this sort of question difficult to answer because it is too abstract and too much like a final exam question. A better, more concrete question would be, "When a child in your class misbehaves, what do you do?" But this question is still ambiguous and abstract: in attempting to answer this question, one teacher may picture children not sitting properly at the lunch table while another teacher may have in mind a sword fight with umbrellas. In our video-cued method, we show teachers a scene in a video in which, for example, a group of girls struggle over a teddy bear, with two of them ending up rolling around on the floor, grabbing and pulling the bear and each other, and we ask, "What would you do in this situation?" Each scene in our twenty-minute videos functions as a nonverbal question, a cue to stimulate a response that will provide insight into the beliefs of an informant. In addition to classroom routines, key issues we videotape include: separation (scenes of children and parents saying good-bye in the morning); fighting (including not just the behavior of the fighting children but also the reactions of their classmates and teachers); misbehavior (for example, a child refusing to follow directions or share); mixed-aged play; and intimacy between teachers and children (for example, a teacher comforting a crying child). (Tobin et al., 2009, pp. 7–8)

However, in contrast to Tobin and his colleagues, in our dialogic research, we did not just observe diverse perspectives, dialogically crossing them among each other, but we are also involved in authorial evaluative judgments about those perspectives, from our particular *invested*, biased, Bakhtinian pedagogy approaches.

Again, using the Aristotelian terminology (Aristotle, 2000; Carr, 2006), the dialogic research art of emerging research questions is based on the concept of *praxis*. Aristotle defined *praxis* as such an activity where its goal, value, form,

<sup>5</sup>Actually, two stories: "Rashomon" and "In a Grove" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashomon>).

and the definition of what constitutes its quality emerge in the activity itself. A good example of *praxis* is art. Thus, Bakhtin (1999) argued (in our interpretation) that while writing his stories and novels, Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky invented a new type of literary novel—the polyphonic novel—which nurtured new literary sensibilities and aesthetics in its readers, who started appreciating this innovation. The idea of a polyphonic novel—how a polyphonic novel should look, what the quality of such type of novel may be, why it is good, and so on—did not preexist Dostoevsky’s novels but emerged in them. In art, there is no method of writing a masterpiece and any attempts to create such a method often create artistic clichés. For each artistic masterpiece, an artist creates its own unique form of art, which is uniquely appropriate for the relationship between the particular artistic material and the artist’s creative authorship. Of course, the artistic forms of previous art masterpieces serve as the materials and provocations for artists’ authorial creativity. *Praxis* also heavily involves the given—the given culture, the given values, the given norms, the given nature of people and things. However, rather than being guided by the given or coded by the given, as it happens in *poiesis*, *praxis* transcends the given.

In our project, the trajectory of our research was unique, emergent, and authorial (i.e., *praxis*) and did not preexist the research itself as a method (i.e., *poiesis*), as is expected in conventional positivist research methodology. Our research plans were changing as we encountered particular contributions, situations, difficulties, and, probably most important, our emerging interests, puzzles, and tensions. For example, we had preplanned that “novice SIBEs” would read the transcribed interviews with “seasoned SIBEs” to raise issues, comments, and questions for the latter. This did not happen as we could not find “novice SIBEs” who would agree or be interested to do that. In another example, instead of focusing on analyzing how Bakhtinian this or that interviewed educator was—the *normative* inquiry we had envisioned before our project—we focused on an analysis of what constituted Bakhtinian pedagogy for each of our interviewees, in a *qualitative* inquiry (see Chap. 2.1).

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-29): *Your research was also normative in some dimensions. For example: your valuing some described pedagogical practices as “Bakhtinian” or “Progressive.”*>>

Reading rich interviews and teaching cases we suddenly become ashamed of sorting our colleagues on the scale between being “weak Bakhtinian” and “genuine Bakhtinian”—an arguably monologic, if not even arrogant, endeavor. A qualitative inquiry of what Bakhtinian pedagogy constitutes for them in their practice and ideology became a more attractive inquiry for us as it engaged us in dialogue with these diverse practices and ideas. The first analytical chapter that we wrote (Chap. 2.3), which is now the third analytical chapter in the book, was on educational vortex because Alexander Lobok’s ambiguity about this issue that he had expressed in his interview powerfully drew us to consideration of this controversy. The chapter we initially planned on “open vs. closed educational chronotopes” (Bakhtin, 1991; Marjanovic-Shane, 2011, 2016;

Matusov, 2015a; Matusov & Brobst, 2013; Renshaw, 2013) suddenly morphed into Chap. 2.2 on ontological engagement, probably because our interaction with the teaching cases and interviews shifted our interest.

Of course, emergent issues and concepts were rarely developed from scratch, being either rooted in or oppositional to the given, existing, issues and concepts. For example, our recognition of Progressive desires and struggles in many of our Bakhtinian educators was based on our prior familiarity with Progressive education. We also had had prior expectations that diverse Bakhtinian educators would engage in a controversy on instrumental vs. ontological dialogic pedagogy and we were proven to be correct. However, we argue that we tried and did not impose preexisting issues and concepts on our data just because we had been interested in them. Rather, the existing issues and concepts were driven in our analysis as it was needed and prudent. Thus, before this project we had not known how relevant Progressive education was for analysis of Bakhtinian pedagogy—as this issue emerged for the first time for us in our interview with Alexander Lobok for this book in 2015. The preexisting issues and concepts were transformed in and by our research. For instance, Progressive education has become defined by the notion of “educational vortex” now for us due to our research. We also were surprised that our certain prior expectations were wrong. For example, we expected that the Bakhtinian notion of “genre” would be influential for some of our Bakhtinian educators, but we did not find it.

We did not know our “research questions,” guiding our actual findings, in advance, because we did not know our findings yet as we did not engage in and did not develop our relationship with the phenomenon yet. Rather, other preexisting “research inquiries” were our research provocations, throwing us into particularities of the lives of our research participants. These original “research questions” were outcomes of some kind of previous proto-research that we had done, although it often remained invisible to us. Let us give a historical example. Christopher Columbus’s original “inquiry” was to find the sea route to India by going to the West, the opposite direction from where India had been located by Europeans, that is, to the East. This original “inquiry” was led by his (and his other contemporaries’) proto-research coming out of their discovery that the Earth is round. The roundness of the Earth affords these researchers (in a broad sense of this term) to raise a paradoxical possibility to go in the opposite direction of a location to reach it. However, while following this original “inquiry,” Columbus and his followers were thrown into diverse provocations of diverse encounters with people and lands that could not be imagined before. Columbus’s and his European contemporaries’ real research questions quickly became how to adjust to, settle down, exploit, rob, convert, and conquer the new people and lands, although it was far from his original “inquiry” of finding a new trade route with India, rich with goods desired by Europeans.

The actual research questions have to be abstracted from the emerging findings as a way of making sense of them. According to Bakhtin (1986), meaning/sense making is a dialogic human relationship between a genuine,

information-seeking question and a serious answer. Thus, to make sense of the emerging finding is for the researcher to find out what question the finding responds to. In a dialogic research, a finding emerges from the researcher's initially vague feeling of his or her undifferentiated bias that represents the relationship between the researcher and the researched material. This relationship manifests itself as the researcher's interest—that is, something about the researched material attracts the researcher's interest for some reason. The actual specific research questions are generated through a series of the researcher's investigations such as: Why does this “something” attract the researcher's attention (“why bother?”)? Is it worth the researcher's and the research community's attention (“who cares?”)? What actually is this “something” (“describe it to me”)? And what does it mean from the points of view of other already-known phenomena, existing research questions, and the researchers (“what does it mean?”)?

All the above may well be true for any research, including in the natural sciences, but this often remains hidden for other, more positivist-minded, research approaches. The dialogic research approach embraces, expects, and acts upon it.

In the natural sciences and, specifically, in physics this debate about the nature of scientific inquiry occurred between Albert Einstein, defending a traditional positivist (“realist”) epistemology, and Nils Bohr, defending a relational epistemology that is closely aligned with the dialogic one. Einstein articulated a realist epistemology in physics: “What we call science has the sole purpose of determining what *is*” (cited in Kumar, 2008, p. 262). Einstein pointed out that science practice is based on refinement of people's experiences to represent reality, “a refinement of everyday thinking” (Einstein, 1936, p. 349). This refinement involves a public discourse of testing ideas and expanding people's experiences. In contrast, Danish physicist Nils Bohr (together with German physicist Werner Heisenberg), in his famous Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, argued that “‘It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how nature is’, Bohr would argue later. ‘Physics concerns what we can say about nature.’ Nothing more. He believed that science had but two goals, ‘to extend the range of our experience and to reduce it to order’” (cited in Kumar, 2008, p. 262). Bohr's epistemology argues that we study our relationship with what we are interested in and not with reality out there. Despite apparently absurdist predictions<sup>6</sup> coming from the Copenhagen interpretation, many of which were developed by Einstein himself (Kumar, 2008), growing empirical evidence in quantum physics finds in favor of Bohr's relational rather than Einstein's realistic epistemology<sup>7</sup> (Macdonald, 2016, 24 May).

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Einstein deduced that the Copenhagen interpretation predicts an apparently absurd possibility for two different quantum particles, existing in different places, to change simultaneously (Kumar, 2008), which only recently was empirically confirmed (Macdonald, 2016, 24 May).

<sup>7</sup>Using Latour's sociological dualistic theory of science practice, it is possible to say that Einstein's positivist epistemology represents “ready-made science,” while Bohr's relational epistemology represents “science-in-action” (Latour, 1987).



In contrast to natural science, social sciences (and humanities) deal with people equipped with a subjectivity of the consciousness (Bakhtin, 1986). Conventional positivistic research epistemology reduces human subjectivity to *objective* subjectivity, where subjectivity is viewed as relatively stable (i.e., replicable), similar to another subjectivity (i.e., replaceable), certain (i.e., predictable), transparent (i.e., observable), recurring (i.e., generalizable), given (i.e., preexists the research), and indifferent to the researcher (i.e., object-like). Positivism is limited to study necessity, which is rooted in the given. Bakhtin argues that the very category of necessity is essentially inhuman while humanness is found in the striving to liberate oneself from necessity: “[The concept of] ‘necessity’ is an ‘inhuman’ category, according to Bakhtin” (commentary by Gogotishvili in Bakhtin, 2002, p. 622, translated by Eugene Matusov).

Objective subjectivity is based on the bird’s-eye view (or God’s-eye view) on human subjectivity, with an assumption that it is or can be totally transparent to the researcher’s consciousness (at least in principle). The researcher positions him- or herself above his or her research participants, assuming to know more and better about them than they themselves know and are even able to know. Objective subjectivity automatically generates an epistemological hierarchy with scientists being at the top, patronizing everybody else (cf. Plato’s Republic ruled by philosopher-kings, Plato & Waterfield, 1993).

Meanwhile, dialogic research epistemology views human subjectivity primarily as *authorial* subjectivity, where subjectivity is seen as unique (i.e., always essentially different from other subjectivities and itself at different times), creative (i.e., transcending the given), surprising (i.e., breaking expectations, norms, affordances, and mundaneness of life), opaque to other subjectivities (i.e., unfinalizable), eventful (i.e., having knots of dramatic encounters in human life), dialogic (i.e., addressing and responding to others), voiced (i.e., revealing yourself to others and to self), and biased<sup>8</sup> (i.e., interested and interest- and desire-driven, agenda-driven). Authorial, dialogic subjectivity is based on the principle of “a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6). The bird’s-eye view of super-subjectivity of the researcher, totally consuming the subjectivities of the researched, is both impossible and undesirable. Authorial subjectivity can only reveal itself through a dialogic encounter with the other (see our discussion below), who will remain unfinalizable and, thus, never fully known (Matusov, 2015b). Thus, in a dialogic framework, the opposition to a positivist epistemological hierarchy is not equality of the consciousnesses (i.e., relativism), which is still based on their transparency and the bird’s-eye view, but on recognition of the uniqueness and opaqueness of the consciousnesses in principle. Of course, a dialogic research approach acknowledges that human subjectivity can be partly objective, and,

<sup>8</sup> Often “biased” in research epistemology has a negative connotation. In our view, it can have both positive and negative connotations.

thus, positive and calculable (see below), but this aspect is *not* what defines the humanness of the subjectivity of consciousness (Matusov, 2017).

The primary focus of *dialogic* research epistemology makes it predominantly *qualitative* in nature. The *qualitative* aspect of research involves research situations when *differences* in the studied phenomenon cannot be ignored for the purpose of the research. In our project, when we focused on abstracting different types of Bakhtinian pedagogy from the teaching cases we looked for their similarities and differences. Thus, for instance, we abstracted instrumental and ontological Bakhtinian pedagogy. We found teaching cases of three Bakhtinian educators, Beatrice Ligorio (Cases#6 and #17), Iryna Starygina (Case#16), and Ana Marjanovic-Shane (Case#13), presenting, in our judgment, instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogy. Although all these teaching cases represented instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogy, each teaching case was different. For example, for Beatrice in her teaching Case#6, dialogism, so important for Bakhtin, meant students authoring their accountability of exam questions that an imaginary expert community might ask them. In contrast, Ana Marjanovic-Shane in her teaching Case#13 critically challenged (cf. the notion of critical dialogue) her students' attraction to behaviorism in education because Ana did not like these ideas. It is precisely the differences and not similarities among the abstracted types of Bakhtinian pedagogy and individual teaching cases that constituted the qualitative nature of our analysis.

The primary focus of positivist research epistemology in social sciences on *objective* subjectivity makes it predominately *quantitative* in its nature with its focus on *similarities*, when differences can be legitimately ignored. Still, predominately qualitative research always involves qualitative aspects, which often remain hidden by the researcher. In predominantly quantitative research, the qualitative aspects involve defining the unit of counting and making sense of the quantitative differences. For example, the mathematical inequality  $5 > 3$  becomes a quantitative pattern *only* when the quantitative difference between 5 and 3 generates an important *qualitative* difference in the studied phenomenon, otherwise 5 and 3 are qualitatively the same (for some particular activity). For instance, when a movie ticket costs \$10, it does not matter if a person has \$5 or \$3 because she or he still cannot buy a movie ticket—in both cases the person is short and the mathematical difference is qualitatively meaningless. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1987) defined the unit of information as “A difference that makes a *difference*.” The second difference in Bateson's formulation is what defines the qualitative aspect of research. A *purely qualitative* research studies uniqueness, which is irreducible, irreplaceable, and non-generalizable (e.g., a historical or personal biographic event).

When quantitative positivist research objectifies subjectivities, the objectified subjectivities are viewed as mutually replaceable within units of counting, generalizable, predictable, measurable, calculable, and, thus, manipulatable. When totalized, quantitative positivist research creates an assault on human dignity, human agency, human self-worth, human creativity, human self-actualization, human self-transcendence, human liberty, human rights—

humanness in general. Bakhtin illustrated this possibility by quoting a scene from Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel *The Brothers Karamazov*:

Truth is unjust when it concerns the depths of *someone else's* personality. The same motif sounds even more clearly, if in somewhat more complex form, in [Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*], in Alyosha's conversation with Liza about Captain Snegirev, who had trampled underfoot the money offered him. Having told the story, Alyosha analyzes Snegirev's emotional state and, as it were, *predetermines* his further behavior by *predicting* that next time he would without fail take the money. To this Liza replies:

... Listen, Alexey Fyodorovich. Isn't there in all our analysis—I mean your analysis ... no, better call it ours—aren't we showing *contempt* for him, for that poor man—in *analyzing his soul like this*, as it were, *from above*, eh? In deciding so certainly that he will take the money? [SS IX, 271–272; *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book Five, I]. (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 60; italics in original)

Calculating, predetermining, and predicting people is robbing them from their agency and dignity and, thus, transforming them into objects of manipulation and social engineering.

Of course, there are always objective aspects of human subjectivity but, as stated above, these aspects are not what define people as being uniquely human, rather than being calculable organic smart machines. A children's fairytale "The goat who learned to count" by Norwegian writer Alf Prøysen (1961), reflects both disrespect of counting people and its power when people can be legitimately objectified. In the fairytale, many animals got upset that a goat kid, who learned to count, was counting them without their permission, thus, erasing any personality and dignity from them. However, when the animals embarked a boat, the boat started sinking because it could carry no more than ten animals. The goat kid saved the day by counting the animals on the boat.<sup>9</sup> Hence, when authorial subjectivity of a unique person is not important for an activity at hand, quantitative positivist social study research is legitimate and powerful.

The *quantitative* aspect of research involves research situations when differences across people, situations, or themes in the studied phenomenon can be safely ignored for the purpose of the research. Thus, the *sameness* and not the difference defines the quantitative aspect of research. For example, in our project, we safely ignored differences among Beatrice's, Iryna's, and Ana's Bakhtinian pedagogy teaching cases for defining the instrumentality of their Bakhtinian pedagogy approaches. Thus, we could count four teaching cases of instrumental Bakhtinian pedagogy approach, but we did not because we could not find a meaningful quality in this number. Quantitative research, based on erasing differences, can be done even without using number-based counting

<sup>9</sup> See a Soviet animation version of this story in English here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2I7HVyTzUZc>

and measurement. Although, when counting is done, it may or may not involve numbers. Counting can be done impressionistically by words and not precisely by numbers. For example, each time a researcher uses such words as “more” or “less/fewer,” they reflect the quantitative aspect of the research, where counting and measurement is done impressionistically. Quantitative research emphasizes replaceability, recursivity, and generalizability. However, we argue that, in contrast to purely qualitative research (of the uniqueness), a purely quantitative research is impossible, since the qualitative aspect always penetrates it at least twice: (1) for defining the unit of counting/coding (i.e., the basis for the first quantitative difference, in Bateson’s terms) and (2) for making sense of the quantitative patterns found (i.e., the second difference of the quantitative pattern that makes a qualitative difference).

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## Chapter 3.2: Dialogic and Positivist Research in the Social Sciences

In the social sciences, in a dialogic research, an encounter of two or more unique consciousnesses is both the focus of research and the way of doing research. There is a double encounter in dialogic research. A researcher studies an *encounter* of two or more consciousnesses by *meeting* this very encounter with the researcher's own consciousness. According to Bakhtin, the encounter/meeting of consciousnesses is the core of dialogic research in social sciences and humanities (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 123). Bakhtin argued that the encounter populates one's own consciousnesses with the particular content of subjectivity: "[the content of internal subjectivity] takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold. And everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 287). Similarly, Alexander Lobok elaborates on the concept of the encounter of two consciousnesses as a point of mutual puzzlement and interest—what Matusov refers to as “interaddressivity” (Matusov, 2011):

The encounter/meeting is the ultimate opportunity to hear yourself in the other [and for the other to hear him- or herself in me]. 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. (Lobok, 2014; the fragments are from 2 video conferences, transcribed and translated by us). (Cited in Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015, p. 216)



Our dialogic research has involved several such encounters: the first encounter took place in *education practice*, often involving a teaching case, in which an SIBE had met his or her students—the pedagogical practice that defined his or her Bakhtinian pedagogy. The second, *reflective*, encounter started with our interview with the SIBE, where the SIBE described and reflected on his or her teaching case as he or she was addressing us. This reflective encounter then went through an online forum, continued to our analyses in Part II, feedbacks on the drafts of this book, and, hopefully, will meet yet other consciousnesses in our readers. Each of these primary and secondary encounters is punctuated by points of puzzlements and interests in others, provoking further critical reflections in a spreading dialogue and, consequently, new innovative pedagogical practices. Through these dialogic processes of encounters, voices emerge and reveal themselves. New visions and lenses on pedagogical practice are developed.

This dialogic research process is contrasted with a conventional positivist research in social sciences where the research participants' voices and subjectivities are finalized into statements of findings only to be verified and generalized. A finding statement, when verified and generalized, adds a solid brick to the positivistically built wall of expanding knowledge. In conventional positivist research, voices and subjectivities become predictable and stable “things” among other things and, thus, ironically, they stop being truly voices and subjectivities—they become *objective voices* and *objective subjectivities*. As we argued above, this move of studying objective voices and objective subjectivities in the social sciences can be legitimate when the studied social or psychological phenomenon belongs to the world of *the given*—becomes *the positive* (i.e., “given” in Latin)—when human authorship has extinguished itself and been fossilized in the studied phenomenon. However, in our view, when human authorship is alive and still in the making, research must become dialogic. Research participants' voices and subjectivities will be authorial, encountered, and revealed in dialogic relationships of addressivity and responsivity with the consciousness of the researcher: within the researcher's interests, puzzlements, reflections, research questions, subjectivity, voice, biases, and agendas.

#### DIALOGIC RESEARCH STANCES: DIALOGIC SUBJECTIFYING, DIALOGIC PROBLEMATIZING, AND DIALOGIC FINALIZING

Dialogic research is based on dialogic subjectifying, dialogic problematizing, and dialogic finalizing (Matusov & Smith, 2007). *Dialogic subjectifying* involves the research participants revealing their own subjectivity: how they feel, how they think, how and why they act, how they respond to challenging by others and themselves, what their perception of the situation is, what their interests, puzzlements, and concerns are, and so on. In our dialogic research project, dialogic subjectifying initially occurred through our *dialogic problematizing*—in our asking interview questions, full of our genuine interests about our participants' Bakhtinian pedagogy: how they view it, why they think it is Bakhtinian,

what are good incidences of Bakhtinian pedagogy for them, how they encountered Bakhtin, how Bakhtin affected their pedagogy, why they were attracted to Bakhtin in the first place, what external and internal struggle they experience in their Bakhtinian pedagogy, and so on. However, already in the interview, many Bakhtinian educators volunteered to reveal their subjectivities beyond our questions, which often was a case of the participants' heterodiscoursia—their engagement in diverse discourses during the interview. Thus, without any prompt, Silviane Barbato shared her fear about her Bakhtinian pedagogy, based on dialogue and not on direct instruction, that it was being seen as lazy teaching by some of her students and colleagues: “Because there are always people that come from this history of very authoritarian learning, and they think that they should receive everything, and think about nothing, and just answer the questions. And this is another way of learning about people too, isn't it? How to respect but also how to show other ways of doing it, I don't know, without prejudice. This is my problem” (interview, 2015-11-23). This is also a good example of self-dialogic problematizing, which involves raising issues and asking questions of one's own genuine interest.

Findings in dialogic research involve *dialogic finalizing* (Matusov, 2011). Dialogic finalizing involves researchers capturing a pattern in a research participant's subjectivity to address the research participant with this pattern, asking him or her for a response. For example, in a dialogic research by DePalma and her colleagues (2009) of students transitioning from a progressive learning-loving middle school (called NCCL) to conventional high schools, the researchers found a theme of betrayal of their past school educational values in their desire to become successful conventional students. When the research findings were presented to the students (and their parents and their former teachers), one of the students felt that the qualifier “betrayal” was too strong: “I think it could be better phrased ‘neglecting values learned at NCCL.’ I just don't think betrayal is the best fitting verb, personally ... ‘Betrayal’ just seemed too strong a word” (DePalma, Matusov, & Smith, 2009, p. 248). For the researchers, it was not an issue of verification or correction but rather a dialogic provocation. They interpreted the student's discomfort as “evidence of an ongoing struggle by some NCCL alumni between socializing in their conventional high school and retaining NCCL practices and values. Sarah's paraphrase of the definition of the term betrayal seems to relieve NCCL alumni of their responsibility for their choices and decision making” (pp. 948–949). This new dialogic finalizing (characterizing the students as wanting to be relieved of responsibility) was again offered by the researchers as a new dialogic provocation to the studied community for their replies.

Often dialogic finalizing involves the researcher's evaluation of the noticed pattern of participants' subjectivity. Thus, Matusov argues, “[A researcher's] statements constitute his or her personal [authorial] truth [pravda] because they respond to [the] personal truths of others, beg for responses from others, and provoke dialogic finalizing (evaluation) to reveal personal responsibility for the deed-statements through one's ontological being” (Matusov, 2009,

p. 210). Thus, in DePalma's research project, the researchers' characterization of some NCCL alumni's attitude as "betrayal" called for their personal responsibility to themselves in their struggle between wanting to commit to their old NCCL values of intrinsic "learning-loving" education and wanting to succeed in a conventional instrumental high school. Bakhtin argued that dialogic finalizing is "capable of actively and confidently interfering in the interior dialogue of the other person, helping this person to find his own voice" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 242). Of course, DePalma and her colleagues could be wrong that some of the NCCL alumni were engaged in this betrayal or, even if they were, they might still reject DePalma's dialogic finalizing. However, in any case, this possibility of betrayal for alumni of an innovative "learning-loving" educational institution going to a conventional instrumental school has been firmly grounded in the presented evidence by the researchers to be judged by the readers (DePalma et al., 2009).

This concept of dialogic finalizing is apparently self-contradictory. Indeed, Bakhtin (1999) associated finalizing with monologism, so the term can be read as dialogic monologizing. Matusov explains how this apparent contradiction can be resolved and understood in the following way:

... let us consider a following analogy. When a child learns how to write, his or her degrees of freedom get highly reduced—not any drawing, any scribble is acceptable anymore unlike in a visual art expression but only very rigid, conventionally recognized, cursive patterns of the 26 letters (in English). This new constraint, however, creates new degrees of freedom for the child associated with writing expression. So through learning how to write, a child's drawing gets "finalized" while writing gets "unfinalized" at the same time and through the same process ... This is similar to dialogic finalizing that defines the person in order that the person is able to transcend this definition through his or her additional efforts. In dialogic finalizing, unfinalizing occurs through finalizing by ... efforts of the person to respond to it. (Matusov, 2009, p. 241)

In our project, we were also constantly engaged in dialogic finalizing by capturing patterns of Bakhtinian pedagogy and their justifications authored by their Bakhtinian educators in our interviews, in the online forum, in our analytical chapters, and, of course, in the entire book. The SIBEs had opportunities to reply to our questions, agree or disagree with our formulations, analysis, and evaluations of their practices, provide their alternative interpretations, analysis, and evaluations, testing and commenting about our dialogic finalization of them, and dialogically finalize us. Some of them took these opportunities and replied to our dialogic finalizing but some did not. Thus, Charles Bisley considered our dialogic finalizing claim that his pedagogical Bakhtinian approach could be manipulative tacitly forcing his students to accept his choice of a Shakespearean play to enact seriously: "As for the question of me being manipulative, I'd answer that these children got my classroom as a place for role playing and parody, a place in which I played a variety of roles and took a variety of positions, including parodying my own (which parody gives me

power I guess). They responded actively to this playfulness, this mobility, especially as it accorded with aspects of their own experience. I think that teacher unilateralism, the teacher monologue, is hard to deconstruct, so indirectness is the way around it. I'd argue it's difficult to tackle it head on, especially with 11- and 12-year-olds" (Charles Bisley, Case#24, online forum, March 26, 2017). When we problematized Dmitri Nikulin's notion of "interruptibility" as possibly culturally biased, he replied to us, "I think that interruption is essential to dialogue." He argued that sometimes there might be no place for a dialogue, or dialogue can be nonverbal, thus, with nonverbal interruption, or, finally, some cultures may not respect the value of dialogue (and, thus, interruptibility):

Of course, there are culturally significant situations (e.g., collective mourning) when interruption is inappropriate, but dialogue cannot simply go on without interruption. It can be nonverbal, for instance, in silent dialogue, by gesticulation, facial expressions, body movements. This all occurs in communication and also in class on a daily basis. Modern culture is based on the cultivation of the self as autonomous and thus does not tolerate interruption, teaching us from early on that interruption is impolite. But then every uninterrupted utterance turns into a long solemn monologue. In monological modernity, if I interrupt the other, I do not take her seriously. On the contrary, I want to argue that in dialogue if and when I interrupt the interlocutor, I take her seriously. (Dmitri Nikulin, Case#9, online forum, January 29, 2017)

In this situation, our dialogic finalizing and dialogic problematizing allowed Dmitri Nikulin to elaborate and push farther his ideas. In the teaching case of Aaron Yost (#5), our dialogic finalizing came as an alternative idea to his failing pedagogical action of surrendering to his principal demand to censor his students' title of their research pamphlet, "How to make school suck less." The interviewer, Eugene Matusov, suggested, "I would strike the word 'suck' with a black marker and put a footnote, 'this is what was censored by the school administration'." Aaron replied, "I am so upset that I didn't think of that ... I needed to seek some better sources on what to do there" (interview, 2015-12-03).

Sometimes, our interviewees were involved in self-dialogic finalizing prompted by our interview questions. Thus, Alexander Lobok suddenly realized, "And, you know, it is only now that, thanks to your question, I have realized that I was working with that textbook of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in a 'Bakhtinian way,' even though I did not know it at that time. For I actually addressed my students with, 'Guys, please note that there are different voices in this [official text]book. Please find these different voices!' By different voices I meant the [textbook] quotes [of the original philosophers]" (interview, 2015-10-30). He might not have had this understanding of the Bakhtinian nature of his pedagogy of teaching Marxist-Leninism philosophy using a very oppressive official textbook before the interview.

## THE STATUS OF DISAGREEMENT IN DIALOGIC RESEARCH

In conventional positivist research epistemology, disagreements among researchers, or between the researchers and research participants, or between the researchers and the readers of their research report about findings, their interpretations, or the ways of doing the research, are often viewed as some kind of failure, signaling fallacies of the research to be fixed. In a positivist research epistemology, there are bad disagreements and good disagreements. Bad disagreements often mark mistakes, inaccuracies, shallowness, biases, sloppiness, ignorance, laziness, falsification of data, incoherence, contradictions, unprofessionalism, violation of ethics, lack of validity, and lack of critical thinking and creativity in the research and/or by the researchers. Thus, these bad disagreements are usually seen as undermining the quality of research. Good disagreements, conceptual disagreements, disagreements among scientific ideas, may be tolerated as temporary tensions to be resolved through fair scientific polemics and new empirical discoveries. Nevertheless, the fewer the disagreements, the better the research, the more objective are the findings, within conventional positivist epistemology (Latour, 1987). An agreement about research makes its findings a solid brick in the wall of knowledge. The findings become scientific facts.

In contrast, in dialogic research epistemology, disagreements as such are viewed as permanent and highly appreciated. Dialogic research epistemology also recognizes that a research may entail mistakes, inaccuracies, shallowness, unfair biases, sloppiness, ignorance, laziness, falsification of data, incoherence, contradictions, unprofessionalism, violation of ethics, lack of validity, and lack of critical thinking and creativity. However, in contrast to conventional positivist research epistemology, reference to universal or conditional decontextualized methods, rules, principles, procedures, and so on may not be enough to justify flaws in a research per se. These methods, rules, principles, and procedures may be relevant for the evaluation of research but their relevancy must be justified in the unique context of the research. Behind these critiques, charges, and analyses of (ir)relevancy, there are *authorial judgments* rooted in critical dialogue, which may or may not generate agreements among the researchers. Authorial judgment demands that the author of this judgment takes responsibility for it by willing to stand by this judgment, risking his or her own communal reputation (which still does not mean that the authorial judgment is wrong or right).

Even more importantly, in dialogic research epistemology, the permanency of some disagreements can indicate the important value of a particular research study. Here, we are talking about the notion of disagreements in a broader sense within some compatible framework, agonisms, antagonisms, misunderstandings, lacks of understanding, and non-understandings (Mouffe, 2000). In the Bakhtinian dialogic framework, a dialogic relationship is characterized by difference—unique and opaque difference—and not similarity with the other. Unique and opaque difference manifests itself in a disagreement (in a broader

sense) and not in an agreement, which could be masking, neglecting, or legitimately ignoring this difference. In human affairs, agreement is always an artifact of ignoring the uniqueness and opaqueness of consciousnesses for some practical reasons: “Disagreement, dissensus, conflict, misunderstanding, non-understanding, non-cooperation, and non-participation are primary over agreement, accord, understanding, and consensus” (Matusov, 2015, p. 400). This unique and opaque difference, manifested in disagreements, is primary to human nature. Lobok powerfully articulates this unique and opaque difference in the following two excerpts:

For an “objective” [positivist] external onlooker, the childhood of different children is largely indistinguishable. All children play certain games, absorbedly listen to fairytales, react to various events, and so on. In fact, nearly all modern psychology research testifies to these “childhood uniformities” and their typologies. The reason for this supposed uniformity is a flaw in the main approach of modern psychology. Modern psychology often focuses on universal, generalizable, predictable, and regular principles, which is the standard of the science. Anything else is viewed as non-scientific. How else it can be?!

The problem with this conventional approach to psychology, however, is that the human being is the only “object” in the Universe that is defined by a *subjective cognizing world* [orig. emphasis] of her or his own, building above the subjective lived experiences and feelings and redefining them—a world, unique for each person, which cannot possibly be viewed from outside, except for some of its outward objective artifact manifestations of this subjective cognizing world. If so, a question emerges: can a particular human being, his/her particular and unique subjective cognizing world be a subject of science—a subject of scientific observation and interpretation? Can a particular child with his/her unique subjective world, subjective Cosmos, not overlapping with subjective cognizing worlds of all other people in principle, be a subject of science?

Thus, for a [dialogic] researcher, it would appear strange to avoid addressing this individually subjective world since it is exactly the disparities of people’s inner subjective experiences that, in all likelihood, make up our essence as humans. *It is not what a person has in common with other people that makes her or him become a unique personality* [orig. emphasis]. On the contrary, what makes one a genuine person is precisely what he or she by no means shares with the others. I strongly argue that the phenomenon of childhood is not defined by those things that make children of a certain age group category look mostly alike. Childhood, rather, is made of a diversity of children’s views, experiences, and fantasies that are unique for each person and different from anyone else’s experiences. Probably, this non-overlapping of human subjectivities is the deepest and the most *important enigma* [our emphasis] of human beings. (Lobok, 2017, p. SIa:2)

... [A]s an educator, I will deal not just with behavior of the child, but with a mystery of the child. I would know that any child has a mystery. Any genuine educator knows firmly that any child is a mystery. And this mystery will never be fully revealed and deciphered. And this is great. Similarly, I cannot decipher a mystery of a woman I love—that’s also good. God save us from living in the world of fully deciphered people! 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 or her and it's always true, regardless of the age of the person. When developmental psychology textbooks in all their totality describe a one- or two-year-old toddler, they actually do not describe anything important about the child. (Lobok, 2014, translation from Russian is mine [Matusov]) (cited in Matusov, 2015, p. 400)

In sum, good dialogic disagreements capture the unique and opaque differences in human subjectivities. That is why disagreements are so valued and appreciated in dialogic research epistemology in social sciences.

### THE LEGITIMACY, IMPORTANCE, AND LIMITATIONS OF POSITIVIST SCIENCE

Yet conventional positivist research may have its legitimacy with its focus on agreement as a proxy for non-dialogic truth—when relevant people in a scientific community agree, it becomes a true fact<sup>1</sup> (Latour, 1987). The main goal of positivist science (and technology, economy, bureaucracy, religion, etc.) is to objectivize our human subjective experiences and actions into new thing-like objects: both semiotic and physical. Positivist science tries to extinguish and even entirely eliminate any traces of human authorial subjectivity and dialogic meaning making from our human experiences and actions by making these experiences and actions independent of their subjects/actors. Anyone (who is informed, skillful, and rational) can see *it*, anyone can understand *it*, anyone can make *it*, anyone can talk *it*, anyone can do *it*, and anyone can use *it*; where *it* is the objectified human experience and actions, like for example, navigation in the open sea, conceptualizing the atom or a chemical reaction, using a computer, perceiving the Earth as round and moving around the Sun, explaining the seasons or the Moon's phases, and so on.

Of course, in reality, not always everyone can do *it* but often only those who are specially educated/socialized, informed, rational, honest, and trained. Thus, objectifying human subjective experiences involves reliable education/socialization and training of some specialized group of people who can reliably experience and act in such ways that the differences of their experiences and actions become not important for themselves and for other participants and/or consumers of their experiences and actions. The successful replaceability of these experiencing, understanding, and acting people is the practical criterion of objectivity. Paraphrasing a maxim of the French sociologist of positivist science Bruno Latour, “When relevant people become replaceable, their ideas, perceptions, and actions become objective” (cf. Latour, 1987). In a positivist

<sup>1</sup>This principle of agreement as proxy for truth is often used in social science methodology as a verification of coding; cf. “intercoder reliability”: when an agreement between or among two or more trained but independent coders is statistically high, the reliability of coding has been established.



science, an agreement among reputable scientists about some scientific ideas, or arguments, or sensibilities, or models, or evidence or theories is the manifestation of the scientists' replaceability that certifies the objectivity of these ideas and, hence, elevates the scientists' statements into "the highest modality" of a scientific fact—the non-dialogic truth (Latour, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Latour argues, and this goes far beyond the scope of our essay, that objectivity (or what he calls "inter-objectivity") is produced by a special type of education (i.e., socialization and training) and diverse networks of discourses, practices, power, bureaucracies, technologies, and so on (Latour, 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2004, 2005).

Although many modern and ancient practices like commodity-based economy, institutionalized religion, modern bureaucracy, and so on are also involved in objectifying human subjective experiences, the specificity of positivist science (and technology) is that it employs *limited critical dialogue* for this end. Paradoxically, (limited critical) dialogue is used by positivist science to eliminate any dialogism and subjectivity from human subjective and dialogic experiences. For a scientific idea, authored by a scientist, to become elevated into the highest rank of a scientific fact by the society, it has to become attractive to other scientists and other influential members of society and survive objections, counter-arguments, counter-evidence, hostile journal peer reviews and publication rejections, grant and job competitions, reputation undermining, and political and epistemological oppositions outside of science. Thus, a *limited critical dialogue* in the scientific community (and even a bit beyond) has to be launched. This process of scientific objectification is *dialogic* because it relies on the dialogic meaning-making relationship of addressivity and responsivity. It is *critical* because it involves testing ideas through examination of alternative ideas, alternative evidence, and alternative reasoning. It is *limited* both by its nature and by time. By its nature, the scientific critical dialogue is limited because not all diverse consciousnesses of participating scientists are viewed as having equal rights as they are loaded with different preexisting and emerging scientific reputations and have an unequal access to the institutional and material machinery of the science practice (e.g., funding, equipment, assistants, colleagues, time, and so on). By its time, the scientific critical dialogue is limited because at some point, "when most of the relevant [scientists] agree," the scientific community closes the critical dialogue about the now established scientific fact and its legitimacy in the scientific community (it can open it in the future again via a new scientific revolution). For example, in 1775 the French academy of sciences stopped considering "perpetuum mobile" projects—devices producing perpetual movement without any external source for its energy—as legitimate scientific projects.<sup>2</sup> The scientific debate on the feasibility of this project was closed.<sup>3</sup> The more scientists socialize in (i.e., "agree with")

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.hp-gramatke.net/perpetuum/english/page0060.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Although not the debate about the reason for its infeasibility, which continued until around 1840, when the principle of conservation of energy was established, thus, ending another limited critical dialogue for some time.

the scientific idea authored by a particular scientist or scientists through this limited critical dialogue, the less dialogized and less authored this scientific idea becomes. When a scientific idea survives<sup>4</sup> a test by this limited critical dialogue, it becomes a token of this limited critical dialogue, a token of the history of the diverse challenges, and replies to them. This token—a statement of non-dialogic scientific truth—is often confused with the notion of meaning in positivist science.<sup>5</sup> Finally, another reason of why critical dialogue is limited in positivist science is because this critical dialogue is instrumental. It is used as a tool for arriving at non-dialogic truth.

In essence, positivist science's enterprise is to reduce dialogic meaning making about subjective human experiences to pattern recognition and pattern production<sup>6</sup> (see Matusov, 2019, in preparation, for more discussion). Scientific theories, facts, explanations, formulas, and so on are powerful discursive patterns. Standardized human skills are powerful patterns of actions, behavior, and relations. Machines are powerful patterns of technology. Writing, speech, voice recognition, and production devices and self-driving cars are recent marvels of this achievement. Positivist science, as a project powerfully launched by the Enlightenment, has provided us with a lot of benefits. It has curbed religious and political dogmatisms and relativisms, it has firmly established and justified the (limited) value of critical dialogue (and political democracy behind it), it has broadened our epistemological horizon on *objective* reality (including objective subjectivity), it has improved our life conditions via technology and science, and it has freed the time of some of us to engage in diverse fields of authorial dialogic meaning making. Although critical dialogue did not appear for first time in positivist science, its legitimation had a powerful role in establishing the Enlightenment, the age of reason.

However, as many critics of positivistic science (e.g., Adorno, 1997; Bakhtin, 1986; Barzun, 1964; Capra, 1989; Feyerabend, 1978; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Matusov, 2013; Rollin, 2006) have argued, positivist science is not very helpful for studying authorial subjectivity, dialogic meaning making, ethical responsibility as such beyond examining their limitations rooted in thing-like aspects of human subjectivity, which cannot define the essence of human authorial dialogic subjectivity (see Kahneman, 2013, for an example of a study of limitations of human subjective cognition; also see Matusov, 2017, as an example of appreciation and critique of this approach). That is why dialogic science is needed.

<sup>4</sup>Although it may be also changed through this limited critical dialogue testing it.

<sup>5</sup>Here we provided a very brief dialogic analysis of positivist science “in-action” (cf. Latour, 1987). A dialogic analysis of “ready-made” positivistic science is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>6</sup>We do not mean to claim that positivistic science succeeds in its enterprise of eliminating authorial subjectivity and dialogic meaning making in general and from its own practice specifically but a nuanced discussion of this is beyond the scope of this essay.

## BOUNDARIES OF DIALOGIC HUMANISTIC SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

The main enterprise of dialogism (and, thus, dialogic research and dialogic science)<sup>7</sup> is to deepen dialogic meaning making through unlimited critical dialogue involving a plurality of unique and opaque consciousnesses with equal rights and each authoring and living in its own dialogically bounded world (cf. Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6). Deepening dialogic meaning making occurs through raising and addressing new questions of the participants' genuine interests, brining and testing alternative ideas against each other, developing new evidence and counter-evidence, revealing, authoring, and deconstructing new and old values against each other, creative authorship transcending the cultural given, and so on.

Dialogic science is similar to positivist science because of its valuing of critical dialogue in its enterprise. However, dialogic science is also different from positivist science because of its stress on *unlimited* critical dialogue and on *deepening*, rather than eliminating, dialogic meaning making and authorial subjectivity. While positivist science is concerned with the accuracy of representation of objective reality, dialogic science is concerned with the bottomless depth of authorial meaning-making process and subjective reality. Dialogic science is similar to art because it values bottomless meaning making. However, dialogic science is also different from art because of its prioritization of critical deconstruction over creative authorial construction of new ideas and values.

In dialogic science, truth is revealed as a personal commitment to an authorial idea in dialogic opposition to alternative ideas, by a scientist taking responsibility for and standing by this authorial idea in an unlimited critical dialogue at risk of losing his or her standing in a community. In Russian, this personal authorial truth is called “pravda” (“truth as lived,” Sullivan, 2011, pp. 1–2), which is in opposition to positivistic science truth—“istina” (“truth as abstract,” Sullivan, 2011, p. 2) (Bakhtin, 1993). Positivist istina is impersonal, unified, objective, agreement-based, bounded, and decontextualized. In contrast, dialogic pravda is personal, partial, authorial, contested, bottomless, and contextual. If istina *comes out* of limited critical dialogue, pravda *lives in* unlimited critical dialogue. Istina is revealed through an agreement among relevant and most influential/respectful members of the scientific community (Latour, 1987). Pravda reveals itself in disagreement, commitment, and a process of taking responsibility. Positivist scientific research is finished when istina has been established in limited critical dialogue. Paraphrasing the famous state-

<sup>7</sup>Some cultural critics and scholars (e.g., Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 2006) consider the practice of science as inherently positivistic. We are rather ambivalent about that. Eugene and Ana gravitate to disagreement with these scholars—they view the practice of science as a particular inquiry that may or may not be positivistic. In contrast, Mikhail is more sympathetic to the view that science is inherently positivistic.

ment<sup>8</sup> attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, it is possible to say that dialogic research is never finished, only temporarily abandoned to be continued by different people in a different place at a different time; although it can be occasionally lost, destroyed, and even entirely forgotten.

Matusov claims that in contrast to positivist research, where a scientific text has mainly an *informative* function, in dialogic research, a scientific text has mainly a *transformative and eventful* function:

... the text produced in the humanitarian science is *eventful*. The existing ideology of the exact science prioritizes the *informative* function of the text over its *transformative* function (Lotman, 1988). This means that it is assumed in the ideology of the exact science that after reading a scientific text, the reader of this scientific text remains essentially the same person (plus new knowledge). In contrast, in the truly humanitarian science the transformative function of a scientific text, changing the reader on a small or big scale, is recognized and valued ... From the humanitarian science point of view, text involves an event—a dramatic meeting of consciousnesses in which participating people (i.e., the author and the readers) cannot anymore continue their old ways of being-in-the-world (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, St. Julien, & Hayes, 2005). This is a bit similar to what Kuhn (1996) described as a change of a paradigm for a person on a big or small scale. The person's perception and vision of the world and the self has been changed. Some (or even all!) old inquiries and ways of approaching them become irrelevant, meaningless, and inappropriate. New inquiries emerge along with new relationships with people and with the world. (Matusov, 2013, pp. 129–130, italics in original)

We argue that both positivist science and dialogic science have their legitimacy and limitations. Thus, it is legitimate for positivist science to study objective things and objective subjectivities. For example, we praise (see Matusov, 2017) cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman who studied flaws of human gut subjectivity (Kahneman, 2013). However, when positivist science tries to study authorial subjectivity, live voices, dialogic meaning making, or ethical responsibility, it kills what it studies in its process. In essence, we both agree and disagree with the postmodernist critique of positivism (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We agree with the critique of its limitations and of its inappropriateness in some areas of research. But, we respectfully disagree that positivism is wrong in each and every case and that it has to be eliminated.

Similarly, dialogic science has its own limitations and applicability. When dialogic science tries to study the objective world (and objective subjectivity), at best it generates good poetry, metaphors, or fiction prose, anthropologizing and ventriloquizing voiceless things, and at worst it creates new oppressive

<sup>8</sup>“Art is never finished, only abandoned”; see a discussion: [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Leonardo_da_Vinci)

religious mysticisms<sup>9</sup> or “alternative facts.” It can be legitimate for dialogic researchers to study astronomers involved in a positivist study of stars by addressing and responding to astronomers, but it is not legitimate for these dialogic researchers to try to address and respond to stars or talk with trees (see a debate on that here: Matusov & Wegerif, 2014).

### DIALOGISM MEETS POSITIVISM: DIALOGIC RESEARCH OF OBJECTIFICATION

Finally, since human subjectivity always has simultaneously an objective aspect (i.e., “consciousness-as-it”) and an authorial aspect (i.e., “consciousness-as-you”) (Matusov, 2015, p. 401), we think that both positivist and dialogic paradigms are legitimate in social sciences. This *dualistic* science epistemology for social sciences and humanities was unapologetically proposed by Bakhtin (1986). Bakhtin seemed to accept the objectification of human subjectivity promoted by positivist social sciences as legitimate under certain conditions when personal human uniqueness, personal authorial authorship, and personal voice do not dominate a phenomenon. However, Bakhtin apparently argued for the normative prioritization of authorial subjectivity over objective subjectivity in his famous ethical motto, “there is no alibi in [the objectivity of] Being” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 10). Alternatively, Bakhtin suggested, “I can ignore my [authorial, creative] self-activity and live by my passivity alone. I can try to prove my alibi in [the objectivity of] Being, I can pretend to be someone I am not. I can abdicate from my [ethically] *obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness,*” but essentially, for this person, life would become meaningless and ethically irresponsible (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 12, italics in original). Of course, probably the most interesting case is when objective subjectivity, studied by positivist social sciences, and authorial subjectivity, studied by dialogic social studies research, strongly coexist in the phenomenon targeted by a social science study.

In our research project, the strongest encounter of an objective subjectivity, studied by positivism, with an authorial subjectivity, studied by dialogism, probably occurs in the last chapter of Part II, Chap. 2.5, “Bakhtinian Pedagogy in Conventional Educational Institutions.” In that chapter, we studied how Bakhtinian educators, working in conventional institutions that constantly try

<sup>9</sup>We found several places in Bakhtin’s texts of such illegitimate penetrations of dialogic research into the realm of positivist science that, in our view, led to Bakhtin’s religious mysticism (see Groys, 2017; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017). For example, Bakhtin insisted that “It should be pointed out that the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth [istina]. It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth [istina] that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that in principle cannot be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at that point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth is only one of the possible ways. It arises only where consciousness is placed above existence” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 81; italics in original). In our view, a unified objective truth, istina, rooted in a plurality of opaque consciousnesses, is a mystification, bounded with religion.

to objectify their subjectivity, address, respond, and react to their objectifying working conditions, which may or may not kindle their own authorial, creative subjectivity. Conventional institutions expect their educators, including Bakhtinian educators working there, to be reliable and mutually replaceable competent instructors, who successfully accomplish the goals that these conventional institutions preset for them. In this situation, the objectifying pressure of conventional institutions meets the potential authorial subjectivity of Bakhtinian educators.

We argue that there are two main sources of the objectification of human subjectivity. One main source is rooted in objective ways of how a person feels, thinks, acts, and behaves due to physical, chemical, biological, psychological, cultural, social, economic, political, historical, and institutional pressures that make human subjectivity predictable and replaceable. For example, a cognitive study shows that when some people are primed to remember words depicting old people, they might tend to walk slowly (Kahneman, 2013). Here, priming—the preexisting objectivity of human subjectivity—is revealed by the positivist research.

The other main source of the objectification of subjectivity is when people are treated as objects of other people's or their own actions. For example, in conventional schools, students are often treated as objects of teachers' pedagogical actions to make them predictably and systematically arrive at preset curricular endpoints, to be measured by educational tests, quizzes, and exams. Alternatively, some people consciously want to limit their own uniqueness and authorial authorship in some areas to save their creative efforts for other areas. Thus, famous physicist Albert Einstein and former US President Barak Obama deliberately made their choice of everyday dress cyclical and predictable, while other people may find a choice of their everyday dress a part of their creative self-expression. Here, the objective subjectivity is new and actively constructed by other people or by the people themselves.

In short, objective subjectivity can be calculated (i.e., the first type of objectification) and/or manipulated (i.e., the second type of objectification). Behaviorist psychology has nicely captured the two main sources of the objectification of human subjectivity in its credo that its goal is “to predict and control human behavior” (Hartmann, 1992). Their goal to “predict,” that is, calculate, other people's subjective behavior refers to their attempts to reveal the preexisting objectivity of human subjectivity, while their goal to “control,” that is, manipulate, people's subjectivity refers to their attempts to actively construct a new objective subjectivity desired by behaviorists and authorities behind them.

From a dialogic framework vista, unavoidable objectification of people is addressed in the notion of “dialogic objectifying.” Matusov and Smith (Matusov, 2009, ch. 7) introduced the notion of pedagogical “dialogic objectivizing” as a way of doing dialogic pedagogy: “Dialogic objectivizing involves safe ‘tricking’ of participants into new ontological positions so participants can compare and evaluate their old and new ontological settings” (Matusov, 2009,

p. 250). They exemplified pedagogical dialogic objectivizing by an episode from Matusov's childhood when his parents bribed him to try to taste smoked fish by offering chocolate candy he liked. His parents' goal was not to make 5-year-old Eugene eat smoked fish, which he had never tried and had an aversion to how it looked and smelled, but to make him taste smoked fish to decide by himself if he liked it or not. He was "safely tricked" into tasting unattractive smoked fish by a bribe of chocolate candy. The tricking was *safe* because it was transparent to little Eugene and he could legitimately refuse it without the use of any force or a threat of force at any time. Matusov and Smith argued that the use of bribe by Eugene's parents constitutes their *objectifying* of him both by calculating his preexisting predictable attraction to chocolate candy and by manipulating him into tasting smoked fish. However, it was a *dialogic* objectivizing because the parents involved Eugene in considering his taste for or against smoked fish through his own test, in which he was manipulated. Little Eugene was calculated and manipulated into an "internally persuasive discourse." In their chapter, Matusov and Smith compared and contrasted dialogic objectivizing and social engineering. They argued that although both involve calculation and manipulation of people (i.e., objectifying), in contrast to social engineering, dialogic objectivizing provides people with the legitimacy to refuse to go along with the "tricking," to stop it at any time, and to draw their own conclusion and transcend the manipulated situation they found themselves in. Meanwhile, in social engineering, people are forcefully canalized into the given, preset for them by other people.

In our research project (see our Chap. 2.5), we did not trick Bakhtinian educators into conventional educational institutions or into Bakhtinian pedagogy—rather they found themselves there.

<<Paul Spitalé, feedback reply (2018-04-28): *Absolutely. Did you run into any subjects who were self-identified Bakhtinian educators but in fact were not?*>>

Conventional educational institutions try to socially engineer their participants. They calculate, manipulate, and colonize the subjectivities of their educators (and students) to predictably perform actions and successfully accomplish tasks assigned by the conventional educational institutions to the educators and the students. We have seen our research goal in focusing on whether our Bakhtinian educators have noticed their conventional institutional monologic conditions and how they react, address, and respond to them. For us, dialogic research of objectification involves the researcher abstracting objective aspects of the research participants' being and their responses to them so the participants are able to transcend their objective aspects of being in the future, if they wish to do so. Rather than being an ontological prison, the person's objectively given (i.e., "positive" in Latin) can become material for a person's creativity, authorial subjectivity, and uniqueness.

<<Robi Kroflič, feedback reply (2018-04-29): *This is similar to Ricœur's (1991) notion on reading the text as a source of sedimentation (of culture) and innovation (constructing personal meaning).*>>



Thus, positivist research, revealing people's objective aspects of their subjectivity, can be an important part of a dialogic research study.

In sum, in the social sciences, positivist research studies human weaknesses, constraints, and limitations, while dialogic research studies human strengths, potentials, and responsibilities. The crossover of positivist and dialogic research studies transcend human weaknesses.

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## Chapter 3.3: Summarizing Contrasts and Boundaries Between Positivist and Dialogic Research

We argue that positivist research aims at revealing, describing, explaining, and verifying the given, while dialogic research aims at sense making, deepening meaning, critical examining, and transcending the given. Positivist research and dialogic research both complement and contradict each other. They complement each other because the given of the positivist research should make sense, meanwhile sense making of dialogic research is rooted in the given. They contradict each other because positivist research finalizes and reifies the meaning, while dialogic research opens up, deepens, problematizes, and dialogizes the meaning. Some research can be mostly positivist, some research can be mostly dialogic, and some research can be in-between. However, we argue there is no purely positivist or purely dialogic research. In Table 1, we provide a summary of the differences between positivist and dialogic research epistemology discussed in our chapter.

Our research project was mostly driven by the dialogic research epistemology because we were mostly interested in authorial meanings of Bakhtinian pedagogy by the participating SIBEs. However, there were some positivist aspects of our research, discussed above, when, for example, we tried to typify the SIBEs' approaches through our dialogic finalizing and dialogic objectivizing.

Our research dialogism was limited. We wish more Bakhtinian educators had participated in the online forum and provided their feedback on earlier drafts of our book manuscript. Still the overall goal of our positivist aspects has been to provoke the Bakhtinian educators and reader for further critical dialogue deepening meaning making about the nature of Bakhtinian pedagogy and beyond.

**Table 1** The contrast between positivist and dialogic research epistemology

<i>Research epistemology</i>	<i>Positivist</i>	<i>Dialogic</i>
Meaning	Located in particular self-contained statements, reflecting reality	Lives in a dialogic relationship between interested question and serious answer
Subjectivity	Objective: Replaceable, stable, predictable, calculable, measurable, and manipulatable	Authorial: Unique, unpredictable, creative, responsible, addressable, responsive
Truth	Istina: Objective, impersonal, universal, reliable, recursive, finalizable, bias-free, agreement-based, accurate correspondence to reality	Pravda: Authorial, personal, contextual, unfinalizable, unique, calling for responsibility, interested, disagreement-based, depths of meaning
A process of investigation	Method: General, self-contained, <i>poiesis</i> , guarantees approximation to istina	Art: Particular, contextual, authorial, <i>praxis</i> , facilitates unlimited critical dialogue
Findings	Recognized patterns reflecting istina, finalized subjectivity	Dialogic finalizing to become a provocation for further critical dialogue
Critical dialogue	Limited bounded convergent critical dialogue from which istina emerges, monodiscursive, instrumental	Unlimited bottomless disagreement-based critical dialogue where pravdas live, divergent, heterodiscursive, ontological
Research approach	Primarily quantitative of sameness	Purely qualitative of unique differences
Researched consciousness	“Consciousness-as-it”: Transparent, replaceable, typified, bird’s-eye view	“Consciousness-as-Thou”: Opaque, unique, voiced, dialogized
Finalizing	Findings capturing istina, a solid brick in the wall of expanding knowledge	Noticed patterns of participants’ subjectivity to provoke responses from the participants and readers to engage them in dialogue on meaning and responsibilities
Subjectifying	Producing data	The participants’ own revealed subjectivity to be patterned, addressed, and responded to
Problematizing	Checking accuracy of the data	Involving the participants in dialogic meaning making by challenging their ideas
Objectifying	Calculating and manipulating people	Abstracting objective aspects of participants’ being and their responses to them so the participants are able to transcend their objective aspects
Social relationship between the researcher and the researched	Hierarchical	The encounter of unique consciousnesses with equal rights
Relational epistemology	Knowing more, knowing less, or knowing equally	Knowing differently, knowing uniquely

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

<i>Research epistemology</i>	<i>Positivist</i>	<i>Dialogic</i>
Agreement	A proxy for istina-truth	Temporary disregarding differences
Disagreement	Temporary problematizing	The basis of unlimited critical dialogue
Important questions about the findings	Are the findings reliable, accurate, valid, falsifiable, generalizable, verifiable, and to what degree?	What is it? What does it mean? Why is it important? For whom? And for what? When does it stop being true?
Pragmatics	Mostly instrumental: Worth for other practices (e.g., economy, bureaucracy, engineering)	Mostly intrinsic: Self-worth (critical dialogic meaning making)
Overreaching	Killing authorial subjectivity, dialogic meaning making, and the essence of humanity	At best poetic metaphor, at worst religious mystification (e.g., talking with stars)

## Conclusion: Lessons, Regrets, and Hopes

Based on our dialogic research art, we want to conclude our book with a discussion of the lessons we learned through this project, “regrets” about our dialogic/polyphonic research, and hopes about the future of Bakhtinian pedagogy and dialogic research. By discussing lessons we have learned, we want to answer the questions we raised in the beginning: What did the SIBEs mean by “Bakhtinian pedagogy” and what attracts them in Bakhtin’s philosophy and literary critique? In discussion of our regrets, we focus on analysis of how much our research was or was not dialogic and/or polyphonic and to what degree. In our discussion of our hopes for the future of Bakhtinian pedagogy, we propose new possibilities for deepening and promoting Bakhtinian authorial pedagogical practices. Finally, we end our conclusion chapter with the holistic feedback judgments on the first draft of our book by some of the project participants.



## Chapter 4.1: Lessons We Learned About Bakhtinian Pedagogy

One of the biggest lessons, we learned in our project is that all the described SIBEs try to address and to challenge the monologism of conventional pedagogy. Based on the abstracted teaching cases of Bakhtinian pedagogy, we may conclude that the most important legacy of Bakhtin's philosophy for our Bakhtinian educators is his dialogic framework. These findings allow us to argue that the most influential writing by Bakhtin among our Bakhtinian educators seems to be his book on Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1999), among all other writings. This book is the primary focus in developing his dialogic framework, so much appreciated by our Bakhtinian educators.

Our SIBEs mostly understood Bakhtin's dialogic framework *ethically* rather than *discursively*. Ethical dialogism means that the participants treat each other as "a plurality of [opaque, non-transparent] consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6, italics in original). In contrast, discursive dialogism is about particular forms and patterns of the talk and language in the classroom discourse that defines pedagogical dialogism. Discursive dialogism in education can be characterized by discourse analysis. In his chapter of an edited book on dialogic pedagogy (Skidmore & Murakami, 2016), David Skidmore nicely summarizes the particularity of classroom talk that, in our view, defines the *discursive dialogism* based on Bakhtinian *linguistic*, genre-like or stylistic, ideas:

Drawing mainly on the theoretical ideas of Bakhtin on the dialogic nature of language, a number of authors have stressed the educative potential of teacher-student interaction which enables students to play an active part in shaping the agenda of classroom discourse. Examples include: *dialogic instruction*, characterised by the teacher's uptake of student ideas, authentic questions and the opportunity for students to modify the topic (Nystrand, 1997); *dialogic enquiry*, which stresses the potential of collaborative group work and peer assistance to promote mutually responsive learning in the zone of proximal development (Wells, 1999);



*dialogical pedagogy*, in which students are invited to retell stories in their own words, using paraphrase, speculation and counter-fictional utterances (Skidmore, 2000); and *dialogic teaching*, which is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. (Alexander, 2004; Skidmore, 2016, p. 98, italics in original)

Often discursive dialogism in education involves a structural and/or functional analysis of a classroom discourse. We suspect that historically the discursive approach to dialogue in education has emerged from a very fruitful structural analysis of a conventional classroom discourse that led to the discovery of so-called “triadic classroom discourse” (Lemke, 1990; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Wells, 1992). This triadic conventional discourse involves three sequential discursive moves: (1) the teacher initiates quizzing a student about some information known to the teacher in advance, (2) the student replies to the teacher’s quizzing question, and (3) the teacher evaluates the student’s reply and often provides a necessary follow-up. The triadic classroom discourse has been criticized as inauthentic, shallow, and monologic. Dialogically minded educational researchers have tried to develop an alternative idea for classroom discourse, based on discursive dialogism (see, for example, Skidmore, 2000).

However, the discursive efforts of these Bakhtinian scholars to find a dialogic alternative to the monologic triadic discourse of the conventional classroom have often remained also structural or functional. Structural or functional analysis of discourse focuses on coding certain structural and/or functional features or patterns of discourse, such as the teacher–students talk ratio, heteroglossia, heterodiscoursia, open-ended information-seeking questions, inquiries, reciprocity, safe learning environment, disagreements, purposefulness, ownership, building on each other’s ideas, and so on. Purely structural or functional discursive approaches do not involve *engaging of the researchers’ mind and heart* in a deep investigation of the ideas expressed and emerged in the studied discourse. In purely structural or functional discourse analysis, meaning making is limited to defining structures and functions.

In contrast, dialogic meaning-making discourse analysis involves the researchers’ deep and personal, authorial, engagement and passionate participation in a drama of ideas seeded in the studied classroom discourse—thus, the researcher and, consequently, the readers of the research report become dialogic co-participants. For examples of meaning-making analysis see Hammer and Zee (2006), Tobin, Davidson, and Wu (1989), and, of course, our analysis in the book. Dialogic analysis involves and provokes the minds and hearts of researchers, research participants, and the readers of the research. Thus, dialogic analysis is authorial rather than objective. We argue that while being highly appropriate for studying conventional monologic triadic discourse based on the participants’ pattern recognition and production (Lemke, 1990), structural or functional analysis *alone* is not enough for a dialogic discourse, deeply rooted in dialogic meaning-making process.

But, even more, *ethical* dialogism goes beyond any meaning-making discourse. Ethical dialogism cannot be captured by discourse analysis<sup>1</sup> alone because it is *eventful and ethically charged*. To illustrate *the eventful aspect* of ethical dialogism let us consider a joke that generates a good laugh. A joke, generating a good laugh among friends, can be viewed as a good joke. However, a discourse analysis of a good joke can never pick up what makes this joke good. It is because if one repeats the same joke to the same people several times, it stops being funny, which means it stops being good. What makes a joke good is its unique eventfulness, which cannot be captured by discourse analysis. It is not the shape of words or language, or intonation, or discourse what makes a good joke—what discourse analysis can only capture. The joke is not self-contained in the discourse of the joke. Of course, ethical dialogism is not equal to a good joke, but it has a similar quality of eventfulness, among other qualities, discussed in Chap. 2.1.

The eventful dialogic meaning making that involves consciousnesses with equal rights brings into focus *ethical and political issues of human relationships and pedagogical regimes*, under which the equal rights are possible, legitimate, and promoted. Bakhtinian dialogism involves issues of ethics—the evaluative analysis of dialogic relationships of the participants, challenging their ethics, and demanding from them (and from researchers’ themselves) to take responsibility for their pedagogical actions. It is impossible to capture ethical dialogism through capturing the quality of classroom talk alone because ethical dialogism is based on a unique, eventful, ethically charged encounter and its evaluation. In the big picture, all of the tensions of the Bakhtinian pedagogies, abstracted in the book, are about ways of being with others: instrumentally or ontologically; in a creative or critical authorship; whose authorship has precedence (the teacher’s, the students’, or neither); is the teacher the author among heroes or an author among authors?; monodiscursively or heterodiscursively, purposefully or existentially.

Another big finding concerns students’ *ontological engagement* where students’ lives generate the educational curriculum, in a form of their own inquiries and puzzlements, and also where the educational curriculum becomes a part of the students’ lives of self-actualization, in the form of new passions, their new commitments, and their new interests. We have found that kindling and nurturing students’ ontological engagement is an omnipresent pedagogical desire of all our Bakhtinian educators. Ontological engagement is a way for our Bakhtinian educators to address and overcome *alienated* learning—learning which is prevalent in the contemporary instrumental conventional pedagogy. Despite the many differences among our Bakhtinian educators in the ways they attempt to overcome alienated learning, all Bakhtinian educators we interviewed strived to spark students’ ontological engagement in their education. In our evaluative analysis, we criticized some of the Bakhtinian educators

<sup>1</sup>We use the term “discourse analysis” broadly, which includes other research approaches such as, for example, Conversation Analysis.

for excessive monologism in their pedagogical practices, but we agreed with their sincere pedagogical desire to dialogize their pedagogical practice that they described as Bakhtinian.

We have also found that in some teaching cases our Bakhtinian educators' attempts to move away from the alienated, non-ontological engagement of conventional schools have led to problematic pedagogical moves. Probably the most serious problematic issue of genuine and powerful ontological engagement involves the humiliation of the torpedo touch (e.g., Case#3). As we argued in Chap. 2.2, the ontological engagement resulting from torpedo touch can be good or bad. A torpedo-touch pedagogical action can be designed in a form of welcomed critique or in a form of shaming and humiliation. It can lead to powerful transcendence of a student's being and epistemology or to an imposed devastating existential collapse. It can be ethically problematic for an educator when a student does not welcome this violent torpedo touch. Should it be the ultimate right of the student to allow or disallow the torpedo-touch ontological engagement? If so, how can a Bakhtinian educator offer this choice to his or her students and ethically negotiate it? If, however, it can be the right of an educator in some cases, what are these cases and what are the ethical obligations of the educators in those cases?

Another tension, we noticed, regarding ontological engagement in the Bakhtinian educators' teaching cases was centered around what we can define as "temptation by Progressive education." This temptation was nicely described by one of the leaders of Democratic education, a founder of the Sudbury Valley School, Daniel Greenberg, who conceptualized that Progressive education wants to make students *like what they are supposed to do and learn in school*, while, in contrast, in Democratic education, students *do and learn what they like* (Greenberg, 1991, p. 101). In our judgment, some of our Bakhtinian educators follow this Progressive pedagogical desire by creating pseudo-ontological engagement and/or exploitation of the students' ontological, yet non-educational, engagement in play and games for educational reasons. In these cases, students' engagement was not met by the sincere dialogic interest of the educators but instead was used by them to serve and to fulfill their inherently authoritarian monologic imposition of the preset curriculum. These Bakhtinian educators, tempted by Progressive education, try to create such ways of teaching that may induce an "educational vortex of fascination" with the academic curriculum desired by the teacher (and society) for their students (see Chap. 2.3). We formulate this tension of educators' desire for an educational vortex with regard to the students' ontological engagement here as follows: Should the students' ontology serve education (i.e., academic curriculum), defined by society, as Progressive education argues, or should education be a part of the students' ontology—education as an existential human need?

<<Sergeiy Sandler, feedback reply (2018-05-28): *You seem to assume three things here: (a) that all humans have this need; (b) that all humans feel this need, and (c) that all humans are able to prioritize this need over more fleeting needs, whims, and desires. Is this really the case? We know that people (of all ages)*

*struggle quite a bit with performing unpleasant duties (ever delayed an unpleasant, but potentially important, medical procedure or test?) and with prioritizing important tasks over urgent ones. So it is quite conceivable that, for whatever reasons, some people will tend to put their deep existential need for education on the back burner for years (perhaps for a lifetime) because some other needs or desires they have keep feeling more urgent, that others will avoid fulfilling their need for education because they perceive it as unpleasant and don't feel like it, and that others still really won't have such a need at all (though their not getting themselves educated may put others around them at risk—think Donald Trump). Add to this mix such situations as drug addictions and mental disorders, where people's ability to pursue any needs or desires is impaired, and we find ourselves with a non-trivial leap of faith we have to make (and at best, the response that the usual type of education is no better at facing such problems).*

*Another “easy” solution to such dilemmas: in the spirit of “educational pluralism,” we, Bakhtinians, can leave such problematic cases to our monologic adversaries to sort out.>>*

As we argued above in Chap. 2.1, our Bakhtinian educators seem to commit to Bakhtinian ethical dialogism “*plurality of [opaque, non-transparent] consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event*” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6, italics in original). This raises a question about the special role of the teacher in Bakhtinian pedagogy and, especially, about the teacher–students power relations. Should the teacher lose any special role and become a learner among learners, with no special power at all? Or should the teacher become an author of a polyphonic education-novel, teacher-as-a-Dostoevskian-novelist, who has a right to create dramatic events, disrupting the students' ontological beings and relationships, in order to reveal to them important critical points about the world and themselves through the “polyphony” of their own voices (Lensmire, 1997; Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014). Or should the teacher induce and promote students' unique authorial voices salvaging them from ideological traps of cultural clichés imposed on the students by society through using the teacher's own interest and taste? Or should the teacher throw, at times rather violently, his or her students into a critical dialogic examination of their lives (Matusov & Brobst, 2013)? Or should the teacher demand his or her students to be dialogic? What are legitimate teacher–students power relations in Bakhtinian pedagogy? These are all the issues of teacher–students power relations that our Bakhtinian educators struggle with, as discussed in Chap. 2.4.

In Chap. 2.5, we discussed struggles and tensions that Bakhtinian educators face in conventional monologic educational institutions. We have conceptualized and abstracted six struggles that Bakhtinian educators might and did experience in their conventional monologic institutions. The first struggle is for institutional survival to get a job, not to be fired, not to be closed, and so on. The second struggle is for preserving the spirit of Bakhtinian pedagogy in the face of institutional survival and its resulting compromises. These two struggles are probably common to all innovative pedagogies. The third struggle is specifically Bakhtinian,

arising from the requirement to treat ideological and institutional opponents as “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6) rather than objects of manipulation to be outsmarted. The fourth struggle, which can also be common to some other innovative pedagogies, is to involve students and colleagues in the critique of conventional monologic pedagogies and institutions, while surviving in them. The fifth struggle is between an instrumental understanding of pedagogy—as an impersonal technique, “research based,” or “best practice” to achieve curricular endpoints preset by the society—and an ontological authorial understanding of pedagogy—as authored personal practical wisdom and axiology, situated in unique circumstances where unique people (teachers and students) encounter each other in dramatic events as consciousnesses with equal rights. Finally, the sixth struggle is a political one of finding “weak spots” in the political and institutional hegemony to introduce Bakhtinian pedagogy.

In addition to the six struggles, we also have noticed five tensions *within* our Bakhtinian educators. The first is a tension between a desire for educational monopoly—that their Bakhtinian pedagogy acquires a near monopoly status on education backed by the state, as being the best pedagogy—and a desire for educational pluralism. Like many other innovative educators, some of our Bakhtinian educators desire to spread their Bakhtinian pedagogy across all or nearly all educational institutions by ideological persuasion and/or by the force of the state. However, some other Bakhtinian educators view this monopolistic striving as undesirable, monologic, and ultimately as anti-Bakhtinian in spirit. They see a diversity of authorial pedagogies and, thus, pluralism of educational values as crucial for critical dialogism that needs diverse ideas and axiological alternatives.

The second tension among the Bakhtinian educators is about their views on what facilitates or hinders their Bakhtinian pedagogy. Some of our Bakhtinian educators primarily see educational practice measures that can facilitate their Bakhtinian pedagogy, like the dissemination of Bakhtinian pedagogical ideas or Bakhtinian training of current and future teachers. However, some other Bakhtinian educators argue for an analysis of a bigger sociocultural picture—economy, politics, history, culture—to understand forces that may hinder or promote their Bakhtinian pedagogy.

The third tension among the Bakhtinian educators is about their vision of the nature of education. Some view this nature as primarily societal—serving societal needs, which implies that society has a legitimate right to define education for their students, while others view this nature as primarily personal—as an integral and existential part of human being, which implies that the students are the highest authority for their own education.

As the fourth tension, we have noticed, especially in ourselves, a phenomenon of colonization of Bakhtinian educators by the instrumental ideology of conventional schooling and the ideology of Progressive education. Many, if not all, of our Bakhtinian educators grew up in conventional institutions with instrumental ideology and practices that were naturalized for them and, thus, often remain invisible and uncritically acceptable to them.

Finally, the fifth tension is about the Bakhtinian educators' overall strategy of navigating their Bakhtinian pedagogy in the monologic instrumental institutional hegemony. Some of the Bakhtinian educators apparently have embraced a "real-politics" approach, accepting the instrumental hegemony as a permanent and unavoidable institutional and political reality. Their Bakhtinian pedagogy has to adapt to this hostile reality. In contrast, other Bakhtinian educators consider visions of new possible realities that can transcend the current instrumental hegemony by experimenting and creating oases of Bakhtinian pedagogy and, thus, can create favorable conditions for promoting the legitimacy of authorial pedagogies, in general, and Bakhtinian pedagogies, in particular, recognized by society.

For Mikhail Gradovski (the third author), the process of collaboration in writing this book has been a travel of discovery in how ethical dialogism ("plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights") really can be practiced. This process, which stretched itself over three years, has made Mikhail aware of the differences and influences that culture, environment, and personal experience can have on the choices we make in how we view and analyze the world around us. It also has made Mikhail believe that the truth and understanding that comes as the result of the process of meaning making is highly subjective, as the theorists of post-foundationalism would have us believe, and that each and every one has a right to his or her own subjective truths (i.e., *pravdas*).

Due to the different cultural, generational, and personal experience-related backgrounds, the three authors sometimes disagreed with each other on how to view and analyze the cases. An example of this is Chap. 2.5 on Bakhtinian pedagogy in conventional educational establishments. There we argued that the conventional educational establishments view people as objects of administrative and/or pedagogical actions, which we illustrated with an example of the college administration's treatment of Ana Marjanovic-Shane. In my (Mikhail's) view, there is nothing wrong with such an analysis, and in the case of Ana, this is true: in American society, some of its higher educational establishments objectivize their citizens and employees in the worst possible way, as Ana's employer had done with her. However, in my personal experience (living in Norway), in the Scandinavian countries where I have developed my Bakhtinian pedagogy, the educational establishments with their bureaucracy and leadership are viewed as collective subjects based on the idea of "a collective effort" (*felleskapet* in Norwegian). This explains why I did not break or wanted to break any walls in my conventional educational establishment by practicing my variant of Bakhtinian pedagogy. For me, my educational establishment and I are one collective subject that pulls in the same direction towards our common goals. It is possible that my take and views are not always winning the ground on certain aspects in my educational establishment, but this does not mean that one must be disloyal or counteract one's educational establishment in any way: one has to do one's work as good as one can, be true to oneself, and believe in what one does.



I (Mikhail Gradovski) see another important difference among the three authors (Eugene, Ana, and Mikhail): the difference in views on the teacher–students power relationships in Bakhtinian pedagogy (see Chap. 2.4). A good example that illustrates the difference is the analyses of Alexander Lobok’s cases. For Eugene and Ana, Alexander Lobok’s Bakhtinian pedagogy might have authoritarian *aspects*. Unlike for Eugene and Ana, in my judgment, this power asymmetry of Alexander Lobok’s Bakhtinian pedagogy is *the birthmark* of an authoritarian variant of dialogic pedagogy, in which the teacher favors those learners who are of interest to the teacher. For me, the Bakhtinian pedagogy of Alexander Lobok is an example of dialogical pedagogy where the power asymmetry between the teacher and learners in its every aspect is desired and consciously practiced. Although Alexander Lobok’s pedagogical practice is allowed to exist in the Russian cultural environment, such practice is completely unacceptable in the Scandinavian cultural environment, where I live and teach, because in Scandinavia students should be respected as human beings, no matter how interesting they are to the teacher and their co-learners. In contrast to Alexander Lobok, I argue that the act of respectfully telling any human beings, who are in a position of learners gathered in one space, that some of them are interesting and some are not is an act of utter disrespect to any human being, as it does not motivate those who are not interesting for the teacher to engage in learning and triggers further the mechanism of social comparison among the learners. In my view, the act of respectful favoring, either open or undisclosed, some over others, belongs to communication that is situated outside pedagogical encounters between learners and teachers.

These and other disagreements among us were brought up and openly discussed during our regular Skype meetings that we had during the writing of this book. Such a take on the collaborative project, where it was OK to disagree and keep one’s own point of view unchanged was for me (Mikhail Gradovski) a very enriching experience of practicing equal rights as it contributed to a strengthening of my own professional agency. The most precious knowledge for me that I acquired in the process of our collaboration on this book project was understanding of the fact that the process of meaning making happens when there is an open dialogue between partners who enjoy equal rights, something that I enjoyed on numerous occasions during the collaboration with Eugene and Ana. I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that this collaboration provided me with several very important opportunities for boundary learning. The result of these boundary learning experiences is another important and no less precious piece of knowledge—knowledge about myself, my own opinions, my likes, my dislikes, and boundaries-limitations of my deeply held ideas.

Finally, we have learned a lot about a process of dialogic research making. In the current era of bifurcating between the oppression by modernistic instrumentalism, reducing everything and everybody to impersonal objective number patterns, and the oppression by “alternative facts” of social political manipulations—what Matusov (2015) described as Neo-Premodernism—dialogic polyphonic research



may represent an attractive alternative. We developed the dialogic research framework based on Bakhtin's (1986) insight about the dualism between "thinged" and voiced realities. Bakhtin argued that the voiceless reality of things is *legitimately* studied by the positivist-minded natural sciences, while the voiced reality of people has to be studied by the dialogically minded "human sciences." In accord with Bakhtin,<sup>2</sup> we argue that this dualism also legitimately belongs to the "human sciences": "Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 161). There are "thinged" aspects of human reality that should be legitimately studied by positivist-minded social sciences, focusing on what we characterized as "objective subjectivity." At the same time, there are voiced aspects of human reality that should be studied by dialogically minded social sciences (and humanities), focusing on what we call "authorial subjectivity." Of course, the boundary between the "thinged" reality and the voiced reality is not always clear-cut, as we discussed it in Part III. The question of how much the described dialogic and polyphonic framework guided our study of the Bakhtinian educators presented in this book remains open, and we are turning to its discussion in the next section.

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<sup>2</sup>However, it is possible to find an articulation of the opposite position in Bakhtin arguing for complete liberation of the social sciences from positivism rooted in necessity: "It is hardly possible to speak about necessity in the human sciences" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 139).

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## Chapter 4.2: Regrets About Our Polyphonic Dialogic Research

We start our discussion of the limitations of our research by considering the issue of whether our research in its strongest aspects was polyphonic, dialogic, both, or neither. Of course, this raises a question of what “polyphonic” and “dialogic” are. There are different approaches to both of these Bakhtinian concepts. Some Bakhtinian educational scholars equate the term “polyphony” with a plurality of independent voices not centered on the teacher’s own “ideological world” (e.g., Yazdanpanah, 2015, p. 277). Any presence of independent free voices is evidence of polyphony: “A research interview will inevitably be polyphonic—replete with the use of many voices, words, and discourses that structure the conversation” (Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1499). From this definition, polyphonic research may or may not be dialogic but dialogic research is always polyphonic. Polyphonic research is dialogic when a plurality of independent voices is involved in internal dialogue. Polyphonic research is monologic when this plurality of independent voices is involved mainly in monologic relationships of either imposing their truths or relativist juxtaposition. However, from this position, dialogic research is always polyphonic because it is based on a plurality of independent, ideologically non-centered, voices. From this perspective on polyphony and dialogism, our research seems to be polyphonic because many independent voices were presented, having the freedom to define their own “ideological worlds.” However, the dialogism of our research would probably be judged as rather limited because we often could not fully engage our research participants in dialogue with each other or with our analysis of their contributions. Our voices, the voices of the researchers, were the strongest in the book, probably making some other voices gravitate to our “ideological worlds” or keeping silence. Thus, from this multivoiced perspective, our research was polyphonic but rather limited in its dialogic quality.

Other Bakhtinian scholars understand the Bakhtinian notion of “polyphony” as a unity of students’ voices orchestrated by the teacher (e.g., Lensmire, 1997; Miyazaki in Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014). In education, the polyphonic

unity is an open-ended curricular focus-tension (agenda) authored by the teacher (e.g., social justice, a particular epistemological investigation). From this definition, polyphonic research involves a unity of research participants' voices orchestrated by the researchers. A polyphonic research involves the research participants' dialogue focused on an open-ended issue shaped by the researchers. Thus, polyphonic research is always dialogic but not the other way around because a dialogic research may lack a unity-agenda authored by the researchers. In our judgment, from this perspective, our research was not polyphonic, since we did not try to author any unity. However, the proponents of this definition of polyphony would probably judge our research as dialogic in its nature (probably with some flaws and limitations) because diverse voices were presented in the research, brought into dialogic contact, and judged without the researchers' desire to have the last word. Thus, from this orchestration perspective, our research was not polyphonic but it was dialogic.

Finally, following Morson and Emerson (1990, p. 234), Matusov (2009) defines "polyphony" as: (1) having a strong presence of dialogism among the participants and (2) the participants' strong appreciation of this dialogism as an important value. Translated into the research epistemology and informed by our discussion of dialogic research in Part III, research dialogism under this definition manifests itself in its focus on the deconstruction and bottomless deepening of meaning making, living with strong tensions, rather than on social construction or discovery of the positivistic objective truth. Polyphonic research is where all of its participants appreciate research dialogism of bottomless deepening of meaning making as an important research epistemology. From this dialogue-appreciation point of view, polyphonic research is always dialogic but dialogic research may or may not be polyphonic. Thus, our research, focusing on unfinalizability and bottomless deepening of meaning making, can be judged as dialogic but probably not polyphonic, or not fully polyphonic, because we are not sure that all of our participants commit to this value of dialogic research.

This discussion of diverse definitions of the Bakhtinian notions of "polyphony" and "dialogism" leads to consideration of our research limitations of what was missing but desired by us in our research. We are very concerned about the scarcity of non-academic Bakhtinian educators in the pool of our research participants. This scarcity could be an artifact of our snowball enrollment, of our having limited access to non-academic educators, or it could be a valuable finding about Bakhtinian pedagogy being located mostly in the academia of this historical moment. Although some of our Bakhtinian educators have taught in K-12 educational settings as presented in their teaching cases (Charles Bisley, Aaron Yost, Paul Spitale, Iryna Starygina, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Alexander Lobok), only Charles is not an academician from this list. In addition, we did not find SIBEs outside of kindergarten–postgraduate educational settings (formal or informal). Also, although we had an international diversity of Bakhtinian

educators, this diversity was rather limited by our snowball enrollment.<sup>1</sup> If this is a finding and not our research-doing artifact, it may reflect a relative immaturity in Bakhtinian pedagogy practice.

We were surprised by our finding that most of our SIBEs define their Bakhtinian pedagogy through ethic dialogism and not in other ways, like for example through discursive dialogism or through genres or carnival and other Bakhtinian concepts, which can be attractive for educators. Again, it may be an artifact of our enrollment or it may reflect the practitioners' rather than educational researchers' focus. More investigation of this issue is needed.

Another limitation of our research was us focusing on “espoused theories” rather than on “theories-in-action” of Bakhtinian pedagogy (Argyris & Schön, 1978). In contrast to Joseph Tobin and his colleagues (Tobin, Davidson, & Wu, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009), we did not videotape the pedagogical practices of our Bakhtinian educators but instead we relied on our interviews for them to describe their teaching cases depicting their Bakhtinian pedagogy. We wonder if some of our interviewees could not articulate their teaching cases, while experiencing them, or their articulations were too ideological/conceptual or not ethnographically descriptive enough at times. Some of our SIBEs, like Beatrice Ligorio, Iryna Starygina, and Dmitri Nikulin, could not provide teaching events, limiting their cases to generalized descriptions. Often, we could not hear the voices of students of the Bakhtinian educators. Also, had we had an opportunity to videotape pedagogical practices of Bakhtinian educators, we or other participants might have focused on different teaching cases than the Bakhtinian educators themselves chose, as happened in Tobin's research.

Guided by Tobin's dialogic research, we wanted back-and-forth discussions of the extracted teaching cases by our Bakhtinian educators and novices of Bakhtinian pedagogy. Despite initial enthusiasm, this happened on a very limited scale on the specially organized online forum. This might have happened for many possible reasons. The first reason can be the difference between online reflective discussions, which we organized, and face-to-face reflective discussions, organized by Tobin. The second possible reason can be that people's lives are busy, while participation in an online forum requires sustained commitment, time, and effort, in contrast to a one-time event for Tobin. Maybe our research participants had to be paid for their time and efforts, as Alexander Lobok suggested in his interview. The third possible reason is that it could be that the culture of the academic and teaching practice goes against public dialogue about one's own teaching. Academicians are more accustomed to providing feedback and judgments on drafts of their academic papers, and that could be why we got such a wonderful feedback response to our first draft of the

<sup>1</sup> Also, the historical timing of our book project started in 2014–2015 was disadvantaged because unfortunately our Ukrainian colleagues, Bakhtinian educational practitioners from the School of Dialogue of Cultures (Bibler, 2009), could not participate because their minds were literally traumatized by the ongoing war in Ukraine, as they reported to us.

manuscript from the project participants. The fourth possible reason is that Tobin's unit of dialogic provocation of a particular problematic moment seemed to be "smaller" than our unit of analysis—teaching case, rich with diverse tensions—and, thus, Tobin's unit of analysis was more engaging, that is, constituting a problematic event. Also, the media of video events may be more engaging than a written story of a teaching case (Matusov, 2017). Finally, and fifth, academic educators and academic researchers, united by global academic institutions and practices, might be more concerned about peer critique that might affect their future academic and institutional status, prestige, and even job than might be the case for preschool teachers in Japan, China, and the USA. These issues of dialogic research making also require future investigation.

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## Chapter 4.3: Hopes About the Future of Bakhtinian Pedagogy and Dialogic Research

In contrast to many other innovative pedagogies, our hopes for Bakhtinian pedagogy are not centered around issues of sustainability, dissemination, and spreading pedagogical innovation. Rather, we hope for deepening Bakhtinian pedagogies through critical dialogues based on disagreements and for securing the societal freedoms and rights for teachers' authorial pedagogies and learners' authorial education, both Bakhtinian and non-Bakhtinian, which can be highly diverse and even unique. Our hopes for deepening and freedoms are rooted in the focus of many Bakhtinian pedagogies on deepening meaning making and authorship rather than on the rhizomic survivals or viral proliferations of some patterns (Gregory, 2018). Thus, we view our book as a contribution to deepening Bakhtinian pedagogy and justifying academic freedoms and rights for authorial pedagogies and education. Below we discuss our five big hopes for Bakhtinian pedagogy that involve issues of diversification and experimentation, creating professional reflective networks, promoting educational philosophy pluralism, considering the institutionalization of Bakhtinian pedagogy, and, finally, envisioning favorable economic conditions for Bakhtinian pedagogy.

### DIVERSIFICATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

Our first big hope for Bakhtinian pedagogy is associated with educators' diversification and experimentation with Bakhtinian pedagogy in diverse, innovative, and conventional educational settings with diverse populations. We expect that this process will involve educational practitioners being inspired by the Bakhtinian philosophical framework (as, for example, was the case for Aaron Yost) and/or discovering the Bakhtinian philosophical framework as being helpful for articulating their already existing innovative pedagogical ideas and inclinations (as was the case for Alexander Lobok).



This process also involves translation of Bakhtinian literary and philosophical ideas into education by educational scholars (e.g., Ball & Freedman, 2004; Bibler, 2009; Dysthe, 1996; Fecho, Falter, & Hong, 2016; Lefstein & Snell, 2013; Lensmire, 1997; Lobok, 2014; Marjanovic-Shane, 2016; Matusov, 2009; Morson, 2004; Nikulin, 2010; Sidorkin, 1999; Skidmore, 2000; Wegerif, 2007; Wells, 1999; White & Peters, 2011) and educational practitioners themselves (e.g., Charles Bisley, 2016, and also educators from the School of Dialogue of Cultures; Kurganov, 2009; Osetinsky, 2009; Solomadin & Kurganov, 2009). Their work has been facilitated by the expansive scholarship of Bakhtinian philologists (e.g., Emerson, 1988; Holquist, 1990; Morson & Emerson, 1989, 1990), who at times challenge educationalists for their uncritical or unimaginative application of Bakhtinian scholarship (see for a discussion, Matusov, 2007). In conventional institutions, experimentation may create a local and limited oases of Bakhtinian pedagogy.

### PROFESSIONAL REFLECTIVE NETWORKS

Our second big hope is for the emergence of local and international professional reflective networks of Bakhtinian educational practitioners. Such local networks have existed, noticeably among Bakhtinian educators of the School of Dialogue of Cultures (e.g., Kurganov, Solomadin, Osetinsky, Berlyand, Savvinykh). In his interview (2015-10-30), Alexander Lobok provides a great vision for such global and local professional reflective networks, which we decided to extensively quote here:

... I realize that one of the super important goals I have is building a system of [professional reflective networks for Bakhtin-minded educators], in which everything would be centered around the analysis of live, specific situations of interactions with real, specific children, because it is only through the work with specific ... multifactor and nonlinear, pedagogic situations that we can shape the reflexive pedagogic vision. Without such a pedagogic vision we cannot imagine an educator who can work productively in situations of open dialogic interactions with children.

I am doing this locally, situationally, but if I had substantial funds for it, I could grow from this work of mine a global, systemic project of pedagogic education of an entirely new type and, at the same time, a project of searching for really gifted and highly qualified teachers and funding their work.

Obviously, a question arises—what is highly qualified pedagogy?

To me, it is a pedagogy of dialogue, a pedagogy in which an adult meets with the deep self-actualization needs of children. So, if I had that magic money you were talking about, I would invest it into the creation of a very specific system of finding and supporting truly effective pedagogical practices. I would create an inventory of authors' pedagogic practices, based on the idea of the author's pedagogic journal. I would create a map of these kinds of practices and the system of navigation around this map, which would be that system of pedagogic education I am talking about ...

My idea is that any teacher working with children creates a certain personal pedagogic stylistic. The brighter the teacher is, the more personalized his style would be, which is that space of his interactions with children he creates. This space is valuable due to its [authorial pedagogical] uniqueness and not because it can be somehow generalized [researched-based best-practice pedagogy], translated as [pedagogical techniques] for other teachers. ... The value of this kind of individual pedagogic cosmos is hidden in its uniqueness, as opposed to the conventional efforts to create a possibility for methodologically generalized best-teaching practices and [then] to transmit them to other teachers as a model they must copy.

The art of pedagogy (and this is true about any genre of art) is valuable due to the fact that it gives birth to unique [authorial] stylistics and unique [authorial] practices and not because these practices can be converted into some method-based patterns. Why do we value artists and poets? First of all, for their uniqueness. Because they create their personal style, personal language. And I insist that this should be the benchmark we should apply to pedagogical practices as well. Identification and inventory of truly outstanding pedagogical practices is the identification of acts of pedagogic art and identification of pedagogic styles and pedagogic languages.

Is it possible to somehow “catch” such space and to see its volume and depth? Can it be described? Yes, I am sure it can.

The basis of such a description is the teacher’s journal in which all daily pedagogic situations are compiled. It is a journal in which the teacher actually describes the “texture” of pedagogic daily routine—all those situations, which for some reason stick in his memory by the end of each working day. It does not matter if those are situations of pedagogic success or pedagogic failure. What matters is that these situations stuck in the teacher’s memory and left their imprint there. Such a journal can be either written or audio-[and even video-]recorded. And my first working hypothesis is that the more unique and individualized the teacher is, the more willing she would be to create such a journal. The more unique, engaging, and pedagogically equipped the [Bakhtinian] teacher is, the more unusual pedagogic situations she encounters in her practice, which she wants to record and analyze afterwards ...

It is true that, usually, teachers do not have the time or energy left to describe their pedagogic daily chores. Also, many of them think, “Who am I doing it for?” Therefore, the first part of my idea is to create a special system of motivation of teachers for such work [in our time- and leisure-scarce society]. ... I would spend the lion’s share of that [imaginary] million on stimulating teachers to write such journals and theoretical scholars to conduct the interpretations of their journal entries. We know that, in regular circumstances, teachers do not have time to make such journal notes—nor do they have any energy left or even the confidence that someone would need it. To keep such a journal regularly is very consuming work. It consumes both one’s time and effort. Just imagine that, as a teacher, you have to work five hours with students—and then, on top of that, you need to spend two more hours to recollect some pedagogic situations that happened in those five hours and write them down ... However, if such a teacher’s activity is financially rewarded, she will more easily overcome this psychological barrier—which is basically a fear of regularly keeping such a journal [and exposing herself to a professional public]. At the same time, it is evident that it is the most advanced

and gifted teachers that will commit themselves to such work. So, even participation in such a project will be a sign of high quality of a teacher and her pedagogic thinking. Thus, it will become a means of finding those pedagogic practices and those teachers who deserve to be financially rewarded. The same can be said about the interpretive work of pedagogic theorists and psychologists. In order for it to be efficient and productive, it also needs to be sponsored. ...

So, it should all start from the creation of a special portal of pedagogic [online] journals with ongoing financial support for their creators. We should instill an idea in the minds of teachers that to write a pedagogic diary is awesome—it is trendy! And they should know that such work can give them excellent bonuses—including financial ones. I am sure that even the fact of a teacher's participation in such a type of project is in itself a good sign of quality teaching. A well-qualified teacher is characterized by the fact that she finds it engaging and important to tell others about the “pedagogic situations” in her classroom—about her victories and failures, about the situations that puzzle her and make her wonder and reflect ...

As for the second part of my idea, it consists in the creation of a special [online] space, in which these journals can become the subject of reflexive theoretical discussions. The same [online] portal that hosts all these published journals becomes the venue of constant interpretations, comments, feedback, and discussion of these journals. Besides, it is obvious that the more interesting a journal is, the more complex and engaging the situations it describes are, the more complex the problems it raises would be—and the more interpretive mirrors it will garner, the more interesting and multifaceted comments will be posted in this journal's [online] space.

And then, such [an online] portal will become a [virtual] space for the self-organization of the community of practicing educators and educators-theorists—for the huge number of such journals [i.e., teaching diaries] will provide startlingly exciting material for the community of professional pedagogic theorists.

What I am talking about now actually exists today, albeit just locally and in moderate volume. The creation of such a global [online] portal with financial support for all those who will participate in its work would allow us to get new insights into what is happening in modern pedagogy. It would bring pedagogy to a totally new level and foster the further development of pedagogic theory. Also, it would create a [professional reflective] network model of pedagogic education, because an important condition of the efficiency of such a portal would be a system of proper navigation around the portal—including tags and markers that help the users navigate successfully in this ocean of constantly emerging topics and problems. ... This project can become possible as a totally new model of pedagogic education and as a space of crystallization of genuinely productive, non-scholastic, theoretical pedagogic thinking. (Alexander Lobok, interview, 2015-10-30)

Interestingly, we see our book as a contribution to the big project of development of such global professional reflective networks described by Alexander Lobok. Through abstracting particular teaching cases, we attempted to capture grounded Bakhtinian pedagogical ideas as dialogic provocations for reflective dialogue-agreements and dialogue-disagreements (Kurganov, 2009). We hope that our teaching cases, their grounded analysis, and dialogue-agreements and

dialogue-disagreements will inspire other Bakhtinian and non-Bakhtinian educators in their own innovative and unique authorial pedagogies and professional reflective dialogues.

### EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY SOCIETAL PLURALISM FOR AUTHORIAL PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION

The third big hope of ours involves institutional pluralism and tolerance for diverse pedagogies, including ones recognized as authorial. It seems to us that we live in increasingly instrumentalized and mechanized societies focusing on effectiveness, techniques, preset outcomes, measurements, accountability, fiscal efficiency, scientific positivism, transparency, mutual replaceability, and philosophical monopoly. These tendencies do not recognize the importance of educational pluralism and unique authorial practices, based on Aristotelian notions of *praxis* rather than *poiesis*.

Politically, pluralisms stand on the following four pillars: (1) a plurality of centers of administrative, policymaking, and fiscal power; (2) a diversity of horizontal and vertical power; (3) a division of diverse powers; and (4) a local sovereignty—that is, legitimate non-transparency and non-accountability (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Kukathas, 2003; Labaree, 2017; Mouffe, 2000). The notion of pluralism goes against politically right-wing neoliberalism, reducing everything to market profitability (Blacker, 2013; Matusov, 2011), and against politically left-wing social-democratic statism, expecting to solve all societal problems by governmental decrees, bureaucracies, rationalities, plans, and regulations (see for more critique, Hayek, 1994; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016, 2018). The fight for who and what political ideology or educational philosophy should control public education and education in general must end with the termination of the legitimacy of the educational monopoly, even when this monopoly has been established democratically. In our view, the primary legitimacy for defining educational philosophy and quality of education belongs to the student/learner with the state promoting and guarding this legitimacy and this right (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016).

We want to add the fifth, non-political, pillar of pluralism—ethical dialogism (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). According to Bakhtin, genuine dialogue can occur only among consciousnesses with equal rights, who must be recognized as opaque, sovereign, authorial, unique, and ethically responsible to each other. This genuine dialogue can only be promoted in the political regime of pluralism and not monopoly, as institutionalized education has been existing predominantly up to now.

## BAKHTINIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In contrast to many innovative pedagogical movements like Progressive education or Democratic schooling, Bakhtinian pedagogy has not yet created its own educational institutions. So far, Bakhtinian educators have existed mostly in conventional educational institutions with various levels of hostility, indifference, tolerance, or support.<sup>1</sup> In our view, it is interesting to envision entire schools and other educational institutions inspired by authorial Bakhtinian pedagogies. What might these Bakhtinian schools look like?

Recently, Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2019) conceptualized the notion of “intrinsic education,” based on authorial pedagogy and education of culture-making, in opposition to mainstream and innovative instrumental education focusing on reproduction of the given culture. They concluded that intrinsic education should be based on the following seven “multidimensional academic freedoms and rights” for the learners, which can be the basis of Bakhtinian educational institutions:

The learner’s right of defining his or her own (intrinsic) education is based on the learner’s multidimensional academic freedoms. These multidimensional academic freedoms and rights involve:

1. Curriculum: Freedom to decide what to learn;
2. Instruction: Freedom to decide how, when, where, and with whom to learn and ask for guidance;
3. Participation: Freedom to engage or disengage, freedom to learn or not to learn, freedom of a no-fault divorce from any teacher or learning community;
4. Valuation: Freedom to determine what is or is not important for the learner to study or to do, the quality, and the purpose of his or her education;
5. Ecology: A right to have access to and opportunity for a rich educational environment, pregnant with and supportive of diverse discourses, practices, and values;
6. Role: Freedom to define what kind of student the learner wants to be in every particular situation and overall (e.g., a credential student, a self-responsible critical learner, an other-responsible critical learner, a creative learner, an autodidact, an apprentice);
7. Leisure: Freedom from necessities and needs such as hunger, sickness, concerns about shelter, concerns about safety, concerns about future well-being, and so on (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019).

We argue that Bakhtinian educators should also have academic freedom for their authorial pedagogies, consented by their students. Bakhtinian educators should expect to engage with diverse students, with diverse and dynamically

<sup>1</sup> Even Alexander Lobok’s experimental class cohort in the 1990s in Russia was embedded in an otherwise conventional school (Lobok, 2001, 2012).

changing interests, foci, needs, ideologies, agendas, goals, and educational and non-educational values rather than expect one type of learner that these educators desire.

However, we are raising an issue of whether the notion of institution itself, as a social organizational mechanism, is compatible with Bakhtinian pedagogies, especially with those Bakhtinian pedagogies that are attractive to a Bakhtinian ontological dialogic framework. By their very nature, institutions are based on predictability, mutual replaceability of its members, efficiency, division of labor, set goals, instrumentality, duty, planning, roles, rules, and regulations, so alien to the Bakhtinian anarcho-dialogism. Are Bakhtinian pedagogy and organizational institutionalism compatible in principle? If not, what is an alternative to institutionalism for Bakhtinian pedagogies to flourish? Or, using the Bakhtinian term, what is a “chronotope” of Bakhtinian pedagogy (Bakhtin, 1991; Bloome & Katz, 1997; Matusov, 2009, 2015; Matusov & Brobst, 2013; Renshaw, 2013)?

### FAVORABLE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Education is often viewed and justified as a servant for the economy to make people knowledgeable, skillful, reliable, cooperative, and productive for the dynamic and changing economic needs of society (e.g., Labaree, 1997). Our fifth and final hope is the emancipation of education from the pressures to serve the economy, which pushes out the hegemony of instrumentalism on education. This emancipation can become possible when an economic need for human labor starts diminishing without reducing production of economic goods and services—that is, technological unemployment (Keynes, 1930/1963). This can become possible by replacing humans, working as smart machines, with smart machines (Markoff, 2015). Of course, people freed from labor have to be supported by a growing basic income, capable to satisfy people’s needs and wants to such a degree to create conditions for their leisure (Marangos & King, 2006). On a mass scale, intrinsic, self-valued education can emerge only within and as one of the forms of this genuine leisure (Matusov, 2019, in preparation).<sup>2</sup> Only in leisure-based societies can people get conditions for relating to each other as “a plurality of [opaque, non-transparent] consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6, italics in original).

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<sup>2</sup>The etymology of the Greek word “school,” which means “leisure” (Arendt, 1958).

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## Chapter 4.4: Project Participants' Holistic Judgments About the Book

**Dmitri Nikulin (2018-04-30):** “Overall, I am really thrilled with your book and want to compliment you on it: it is an extremely original take on pedagogy, not only in essence but also in genre. You use dialogue in order to discuss dialogical education, and you do it very well. Congratulations on a book that stands out so much!”

**Dmitri Nikulin (2018-06-11):** “I should say that your whole book project is very original in that it not only discusses dialogue but also uses dialogue, which thus becomes self-reflective through your (and all the participants’) common dialogical effort, discussed and recorded in the book. Once again, I want to congratulate you on the book.”

**Paul Spitale (2018-04-28):** “This book is incredible! It is a necessary and long-needed perspective of education that has been perfectly articulated. It takes cases like mine, where we as teachers use Bakhtinian pedagogy as a tactic that has gone ‘against the grain’ of traditional education techniques. It has worked for us over the years, and as I have stated, I have been using Bakhtinian pedagogy before I knew a name to attach to it. Then when I studied Bakhtin, I honed my experience, information, and tactics to align to theory. The sections on teaching chivalry and “How to make school suck less” are invaluable! Call me Bakhtin-biased, but some sections were valuable to me personally as a “what I wouldn’t do” (polyphonic classroom, etc.), but I often find that I personally pick and choose the information in a text that will benefit me, retain that information, and brush through the rest. However, this text kept me mostly engaged throughout!”

**Silviane Barbato (2018-04-30):** “I did enjoy reading it. I read it and want to know more about the concepts you use to analyze the cases.”

**Charles Bisley (2018-04-21):** “I wanted to add that I know these cases are very complex. I see that some of your interpretations and critique apply to some of the children and encounters, and I am able to see some implications that I wasn’t fully aware of.”

I am also appreciative of the support and stimulation that your theoretical frameworks and concepts of dialogue lend to the creative chaos of practice and how these frameworks, and the dialogue in the other cases too, present productive tensions and open up new possibilities.

I'd say that the context and narrative are so rich, dynamic, and eventful that any ruses, errors, delusions in my practice are unfinalised and relatively unimportant as they give way to the ontological and transformative learning that gradually evolves, to the power that the children wield as thinkers and artists.

Thanks for all your work on this, Charles."

**Antti Rajala (2018-04-30):** "Overall, I think the book is an exciting project and is very helpful for teachers and pedagogues interested in this kind of a teaching approach. I think the pedagogical proposals in the book are unique in the sense that very few promote these kinds of pedagogical ideas. I feel the book is very useful in helping me to challenge my own teaching. Eugene's and Ana's work earlier had been a great inspiration and provocation for me in this respect.

I like it that you have such long excerpts from the interviews in the book. Those that I have read, and many more cited in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6, are examples of very thoughtful pedagogy that can serve as a model and provocation, at least for me in my own teaching.

Trying to explicitly find something to critique, I feel that despite given quite a lot of space in the book, there was not a full multivoicedness between the authors' voice and the other SIBEs' voices. The first two cases were commented on mainly by the authors."

**Tina Kullenberg (2018-04-23):** "I enjoyed your intriguing draft. It was creative, original, dialogic, and very important, as usual, when coming from your hands. I think the importance lies in the fact that the field (Bakhtin-inspired pedagogy) clearly needs more practice-oriented studies; didactical concerns of how to translate Bakhtinian philosophy into dialogic teaching. It especially needs new ideas that more radically go beyond the 'Vygotsky+Bakhtin-package.'

I think your identified "tensions" work out well in this context. Personally, I reflected mostly here on Socrates' torpedo touch and the peanut butter sandwich and pedagogical violence-theme. You know, I am always especially interested in existential aspects of education, which are related to power issues. It is so cool and special that you, Eugene, share your own 'failures' as usual, thereby taking the reader with you: your own struggles, ambivalences, and further inquiries. On the airplane, actually, I was reading this part and initiated a discussion with my colleagues. We became curious: How did you really teach while focusing on how to learn to do a sandwich, and why this particular educational goal?? We want to know more about the pedagogical details here! Perhaps you write it somewhere. I have not got the time to read it so carefully yet as I wished ..."

**Monica Lemos (2018-05-02):** "When I finished the reading the word that came to my mind was coherence. It is very interesting and clarifying the way you briefly describe the history of Bakhtin and its relation to pedagogy.

In addition, the methodology section is also very well described and besides giving more substance to the section, it is very respectful of you to describe and explain in detail the interviews that do not appear in the book.”

**Richard Beach (2018-04-27):** “I reviewed the book and thoroughly enjoyed how contributors were so open to adopting competing, dialogic perspectives, so you’re walking the talk in the book.”

**Esther Joosa (2018-04-29):** “Bringing together so many different perspectives also requires more insights into the individual cultural beliefs both of authors and dialogues, and the academic freedom. I believe that is the strength as well as the weakness of this book. I believe that within dialogue, a strength would be for the readers to express their disagreements in the various’ argumentations. I believe the lack of focus on the different cultural backgrounds, and lack of attention to the ontologies of the individual authors leads to inaccuracies in the arguments. ... [T]he whole book became a search rather than an answer [which causes a lack of clarity at times] as I believe that was Bakhtin’s life and struggle. For many years, I have been trying to understand Bakhtin and trying to look through his eyes. Perhaps Alexander Lobok’s contribution comes the closest to Bakhtin. Maybe a task that should be set for readers is not to analyze each contribution according to its merits but to relate more to their perspectives. My concerns are that [the book] could lead to strengthening the academic ivory tower rather than leading young people in a search for truth and ethics. Personally, I enjoyed it as I treasure disagreement. My inspiration would be to develop this into a book that I could develop for teaching without books, but based on dialogue.”

**Tara Ratnam (2018-06-14):** “Dear Eugene[, Mikhail,] and Ana, I am amazed at your patience; the amount of work you have put in to read our comments closely and weave them into the main text so seamlessly! I felt fully ‘heard’ and ‘met’ right from the initial interview through the subsequent process of redrafting and editing that engaged all the participants in a true dialogue, listening and responding to each other. This ‘responsive understanding’ on everyone’s part at every stage of the making of the book is a path-breaker. It has opened new horizons not only for Bakhtinian practitioners and those interested in Bakhtinian pedagogy, but also, as you point out, for researchers interested in pursuing/understanding ‘research and presentation as authorial.’

From an active contributor to the book, now I will take a position with future readers of the book to continue my engagement with it both as a practitioner and researcher. Thank you for undertaking this groundbreaking project.”

So, what do you, our reader, think about the book?

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