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# The educational regime of the Bakhtinian dialogue

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*Annotation.* Many dialogue-oriented educationalists are attracted to the Bakhtinian dialogue. In this theoretical essay, I have abstracted five major features of the Bakhtinian dialogue and consider what kind of educational regime emerges from these features. In conclusion, I problematize the notion of Bakhtinian dialogue and its regime for education.

*Keywords*: M.M. Bakhtin, dialogue, education, educational regime

## Setting the problem

The goal of my inquiry presented here is to figure out a regime of education that favors and facilitates the Bakhtinian dialogue – a dialogue among characters in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, abstracted by philosopher Bakhtin. Conversely, as Bakhtin implicitly suggested in his choice of the examples for his notion of excessive monologism, conventional foisted education suppresses dialogism:

> 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 [exchange] (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 81).

Although it is definitely true that the Bakhtinian dialogue is possible under any oppressive condition (Matusov, 2009), it might be helpful to search for its most, rather than its least, favorable conditions. From the fact that plants are able to grow through cracks on the asphalt sometimes, it does not make sense to cover a garden floor of the plants' seeds with asphalt and expect the garden plants to flourish. In contrast, it makes sense to search for types of soil that will be nutritious for the desired garden plants. Similarly, I want to analyze the notion of the Bakhtinian dialogue in Bakhtin's work, primarily his book on Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1999), to abstract its most important features in order to search for an educational regime that promotes such a dialogue.

Some innovative educationalists (see for some of them here: Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019) are highly attracted to the notion of Bakhtinian dialogue. They have realized that for education to be meaningful for its participants, education must be dialogic and ontological. For education to be humanistic, it has to be based on dialogic relationships among the participants. For education to be deep, it must be unfinalizable and critical. These educationalists argue that genuine education must be voiceful, eventful, and full of heteroglossia, heterodiscoursia, pluralism, disagreements (including irreconcilable one), "the final damned questions," and polyphony. However, these dialogic pedagogy educationalists have also noticed that it is often difficult to practice the Bakhtinian dialogism in the context of conventional and even innovative foisted education (Matusov, 2021a; Matusov, et al., 2019). A dialogic educator often has to smuggle the Bakhtinian dialogue into their otherwise monologic institutional setting that forces the educator (and the students) either to accept its monologism, smuggle dialogism in the underground, or to be expelled from the educational practice. This observation begs for an inquiry of searching for the more, if not the most, favorable conditions for practicing Bakhtinian dialogue in education.

The title of my essay summarizing my inquiry, "The educational regime of the Bakhtinian dialogue," is full of apparent contradictions. To start with, the humanistic notion of "Bakhtinian

dialogue" resists the political notion of a "regime." Politics involves the imposition of actions, values, and views on people who disagree with them – the very act that arguably defines the Bakhtinian monologism, not dialogism. Further, as I argued elsewhere (Matusov, 2007), it is not that clear that the notion of "education" is compatible at all with the notion of "Bakhtinian dialogue." As I said above, it is was not by chance that Bakhtin often used examples of education to illustrate his idea about excessive monologism (Bakhtin, 1999). Finally, some radical innovative educationalists may oppose the idea of politics, intrinsically shaping education, in any way (I think that Dutch educators and founders of "sociocracy" and "dynamic governance" Betty Cadbury and Kees Boeke might be a good example of that, see Shread & Osório, 2018). Instead, they would argue that genuine education must be based on Bakhtin's notion of "the internally persuasive discourse" (Bakhtin, 1993) rather than on any "regime" imposing disagreeable actions and ideas on the participants of education. They might argue that education must be free of politics and its regimes – i.e., ways of organization of politics. Yet, although I do not deny these contradictions, I view them unavoidable and even fruitful (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015a).

## The Bakhtinian dialogue

For the purpose of my inquiry, I have abstracted the following five major features of the Bakhtinian dialogue – or how I understand it (i.e., my authorial understanding of this concept). I am aware that it is legitimately possible to have other authorial understandings of the notion of Bakhtinian dialogue different from mine, and also, it is possible to abstract more or different features of the Bakhtinian dialogue within my authorial understanding of it. Yet, these five features not only allow me to define the notion of Bakhtinian dialogue but also help me think about the political conditions of promoting the Bakhtinian dialogue.

### A plurality of unmergeable consciousnesses with equal rights

Bakhtin started his book on Dostoevsky where he was building his philosophy of dialogism grounded in his literary analysis of Dostoevsky's writings with the following note,

> ***A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses****, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels.* What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather **a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights*** *and each with its own world,* combine but are **not merged** in the unity of the event (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6; the italics original, the bold mine).

I could not find Bakhtin's unpacking of what rights he was talking about with regard to consciousnesses, so I try to specify them here in how I understand them:

- **The right to be taken seriously** by the other participants of the dialogue as a person on the whole and as the author of one's own particular ideas expressed in the dialogue, however disagreeable or strange, ignorant or even absurd, these ideas might seem to the others. For the dialogue to be Bakhtinian, the participants must be genuinely interested in both their interlocutors as unique people and as the authors of their particular ideas. This genuine interest, pregnant with a serious reply, constitutes "a community behind" for the interlocutor and, thus, contributes to the strength and the internal unity of the one's voice, taken seriously by relevant others (Matusov, 2009).
- **The right to introduce one's own ontological interests and concerns into the dialogue, and to change, to interrupt, to remain silent, to drop a topic, or to leave the dialogue temporarily or entirely at any time**. In the extreme, the participants' ontological interests constitute "the final damned questions" so central for many characters of Dostoevsky's novels. This right defines the ownership of the dialogue for its participants and promotes heterodiscoursia and heteroglossia in the dialogue. It also makes the above right to be taken seriously possible by focusing on what is interesting for each person in the dialogue.
- **The right to disagree and to remain in disagreement, or to be misunderstood, half-understood, misinterpreted, and/or to remain unknown**. This right is based on the recognition of the unmerged and unmergeable voices and consciousnesses never fully transparent to each other (but never fully opaque either). The genuine and sustained interest in each other in the Bakhtinian dialogue cannot be

> possible when the consciousnesses are viewed as fully transparent (Matusov, 2015). I think that this right is rooted in recognition of the plurality of unmerged consciousnesses mentioned by Bakhtin. Excessive monologism is the postulate of the possibility for fully transparent, finalized, and merged voices and consciousnesses. Excessive monologism is an attempt to either merge the voices or to destroy unmergeable voices, "In the monologic world, *tertium non datur*: a thought is either affirmed or repudiated; otherwise it simply ceases to be a fully valid thought" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 80; the italics original).

It may be interesting to consider other important rights constituting the Bakhtinian dialogue that are not mentioned here.

It is important to note that all these listed rights are NOT recognized in conventional and innovative foisted education based on the Kantian educational paternalism (Kant, 1784). The participants of the classroom discourse are often not only disinterested in each other as holistic persons and in each other's contributions, but usually they are also disinterested in what they are saying themselves. The school curriculum is often imposed on the students by the credential institution, as well as teaching this curriculum is usually imposed on the teachers. At the end of the successful instruction, the consciousnesses of the students and the teachers must merge and be in the agreement with the standardized tests' correct answers in order for the students' education and the teachers' guidance to be institutionally credited.

## Author with the unique and unpredictable voice

The Bakhtinian dialogue is defined by authorial unique and unpredictable subjectivity of how a person authors the world and themselves in dialogue with themselves and others, rather than by objective universal or typified predictable subjectivity, existing independently of observers, that is often studied in social sciences and focused on by institutionalized foisted education.

> … the hero interests Dostoevsky as *a particular point of view on the world and on oneself, as the position enabling a per*son to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality. What is important to Dostoevsky is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 47; the italics original).

The participants of the Bakhtinian dialogue author their own unique and unpredictable perceptions, tastes, judgments, ideas, and values about the world and themselves. Their authorial subjectivities collide in the dialogue, which often produces critical examination and testing of their positions, ideas, and values.

In foisted education, students are often viewed as objects of the teachers' pedagogical and disciplinary actions aiming at the students to arrive at the curricular endpoints preset by the teachers, testing agencies, the credential institution, and/or the society (mediated by the state educational bureaucracies). In conventional foisted education, these pedagogical and disciplinary actions often involve the transmission of knowledge and a system of rewards and punishments. In innovative (progressive) foisted education, these pedagogical actions often involve hijacking students' interests, manipulating the students' consciousnesses, fascinating them with the interests chosen by the teacher, and so on (Matusov, 2021a).

## The transcendence of the participants' social roles, statuses, and identities in the problematic dialogue

Bakhtin contrasted social-psychological (and adventure) novels with Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels. Bakhtin argued that in a social-psychological novel,

> Relationships of family, of life-story and biography, of social status and social class are the stable all-determining basis for all plot connections; contingency has no place here. The hero is assigned to a plot as someone fully embodied and strictly localized in life, as someone dressed in the concrete and impenetrable garb of his class or social station, his family position, his age, his life and biographical goals. His *humanness* is to such an extent made concrete and specific by his place in life that it is in itself denied any decisive influence on plot relationships. It can be revealed only within the strict framework of those relationships (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 104; the italics original).

I argue that both conventional and innovative (progressive) foisted education assigns firm biographical, sociological, and institutional roles to the participants. Students are of certain ages, grades, majors, socio-economic statuses, minority, disability, and immigration statuses, levels of academic performance (e.g., student-at-risk, A-student, failing student, honor student), popular or unpopular, members of cliques, and so on. Teachers are defined by their disciplines, experiences, backgrounds, competence, educational philosophies, and so on. And, yes, students are always students, and teachers are always teachers. Although the participants may transition from one role to another by changing a grade, growing up, changing their major, and so on, they remain defined by these firm peer, institutional, or societal roles.

In contrast, in a Dostoevskian polyphonic novel,

> In Dostoevsky, the adventure plot is combined with the posing of profound and acute problems; and it is, in addition, placed wholly at the service of the idea. It places a person in extraordinary positions that expose and provoke him, it connects him and makes him collide with other people under unusual and unexpected conditions precisely for the purpose of *testing* the idea and the man of the idea, that is, for testing the "man in man." … a combination of adventurism (often of the boulevard-novel sort) with the idea, with the problematic dialogue,… is made meaningful and even surmounted in Dostoevsky, through the consistent polyphonism of his work (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 105; the italics original).

Thus, the Bakhtinian dialogue requires the transcendence of and stripping from the participants' social roles and identities to become naked and fluid in the here-and-now dialogue when their dear ideas and values and, thus, even their being itself – the established relationships with other people, who are relevant, important, and loved – is unrooted and tested. Shatov comes to mind in dialogue with Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's The Possessed, "...we are two beings, and have come together in infinity. . . . for the last time in the world. Drop your tone and speak like a human being! Speak, if only, for once in your life, with the voice of a [unique person, unique human being]" (as cited in Bakhtin, 1999, p. 177).

Bakhtin observed that this testing the person-in-person in a dramatic ontological dialogue where the participants' deep personal truths (*pravdas*, in Russian) collide is often facilitated by an encounter of strangers and a certain degree of alienation. This process often occurs at a marketplace (*agora*) where strangers meet in a public space for diverse reasons and diverse interests, where people are alienated from their communities, especially under the condition of capitalism. Bakhtin called this process of stripping people of their finalized social roles, statuses, backgrounds, and identities as "carnivalization":

> Carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content; it is, rather, an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things. By *relativizing* all that was externally stable, set and ready-made, carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships. It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into "rotten cords" and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human thought was being nakedly exposed. Not only people and their actions but even ideas had broken out of their self-enclosed hierarchical nesting places and had begun to collide in the familiar contact of "absolute" (that is, completely unlimited) dialogue. Capitalism, similar to that "pander" Socrates on the market square of Athens [agora], brings together people and ideas (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 166-167; the italics original).

The Bakhtinian dialogue is not a dialogue of friends; it is not a kin dialogue, not a communal dialogue (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015b). Rather, the Bakhtinian dialogue is a dialogue of encountered strangers – alienated but not entrenched, stripped from their communal identities.

## Deconstructive critical dialogue of spoilsports

Bakhtin argued that like in the genre of the Menippean satire, in Dostoevsky's polyphonic dialogue, ''truth becomes dialogically tested and forever testable'' (Morson, 2004, p. 319) or in Bakhtin's own words,

> The most important characteristic of the menippea as a genre is the fact that its bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure is internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end: the creation of *extraordinary situations* for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a *truth*, embodied in the image of a wise man, the seeker of this truth. We emphasize that the fantastic here serves not for the positive *embodiment* of truth, but as a mode for searching after truth, provoking it, and, most important, *testing* it (p.114).
>
> The testing of a wise man is a test of his philosophical position in the world, not a test of any other features of his character independent of that position. In this sense one can say that the content of the menippea is the adventures of an idea or a truth in the world: either on earth, in the nether regions, or on Olympus. …
>
> The menippea is a genre of "ultimate questions." In it, ultimate philosophical positions are put to the test. The menippea strives to provide, as it were, the ultimate and decisive words and acts of a person, each of which contains the whole man, the whole of his life in its entirety (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 115).

The Bakhtinian dialogue is inherently deconstructive, positioning the participants of the dialogue as spoilsports – of each other's dear and familiar truths, circulating ideological positions, persons' uncritical beliefs, and desires often colonized by the existing culture. In contrast to many other practices that require suspending one's disbeliefs, the Bakhtinian dialogue requires suspending one's beliefs (Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). Challenging beliefs and engaging in the deconstruction of accepted norms, rules, agreements, beliefs are the commitments of spoilsports, but not trolls. A spoilsport is a dissident committing to a search for an alternative vision of goodness, truth, and beauty with other people. A troll commits to destroy the concepts of the person's authorial voice, their sense of goodness, truth, and beauty as such, in order to gain power. In contrast to a spoilsport, a troll is not interested in testing truth, idea, and "the man in man" (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 31, 111): "The dialogic testing of the idea is simultaneously also the testing of the person who represents it" (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 111-112). A troll only camouflages to look like a spoilsport without committing to any idea and thus, not committing to be tested themselves. Thus, the cynicism of a troll is cowardly and manipulative.

Because of this deconstructive nature, the Bakhtinian dialogue is also inherently educational if education is understood along with Socrates' motto, "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato & Riddell, 1973).

## The ethico-ontological nature of dialogue

Bakhtin argued that the nature of dialogue in Dostoevsky's works is not purely epistemological but rather ethical and ontological, "Dostoevsky neither knows, nor perceives, nor represents the 'idea in itself' in the Platonic sense, nor 'ideal existence' as phenomenologists understand it. For Dostoevsky there are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist 'in themselves'" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 31). Rather, the characters of Dostoevsky argue with each other through their pains, deeds, dreams, despairs, worldviews, actions, reputations, life experiences, and fates, some of which are articulated in words by the characters, but some remain raw, perceived by themselves and others. Bakhtin argued that the person's fate is the part of their voice and, thus, the person participates in dialogue with their fate, "The definition of voice. This includes height, range, timbre, aesthetic category (lyric, dramatic, etc.). It also includes a person's worldview and fate. A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts but with his fate and with his entire individuality" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 293).

The Bakhtinian dialogue occurs on the threshold, "in fact Dostoevsky always represents a person on *the threshold* of a final decision, at a moment of *crisis*, at an unfinalizable- and *unpredeterminable*-turning point for his soul" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 61). In this threshold of a final decision, in the personal crisis, the person's ideas, values, dreams, and deeds – the personal truth (*pravda*), to which the person commits – is challenged and tested by alternative *pravdas'* of others. The person's commitment to seek for and reply to challenges of their own *pravda* by themselves and others is the basis of the Bakhtinian ethics as he articulated it in the notion of "responsibility" (Bakhtin, 1993).

> Thus Dostoevsky portrayed not the life of an idea in an isolated consciousness, and not the interrelationship of ideas, but the interaction of consciousnesses in the sphere of ideas (but not of ideas only). And since a consciousness in Dostoevsky's world is presented not on the path of its own evolution and growth, that is, not historically, but rather alongside other consciousnesses, it cannot concentrate on itself and its own idea, on the immanent logical development of that idea; instead, it is pulled into interaction with other consciousnesses. In Dostoevsky, consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness. Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself-but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 32).

## The educational regime of the Bakhtinian dialogue

So, what can the educational regime of the Bakhtinian dialogue look like?

But, what is an educational regime, and why may the Bakhtinian dialogue be involved in it? In a political sense, "regime" is a particular, relatively stable, organization of politics. Politics is an imposition of actions, values, judgments on people who disagree with the imposed actions, values, judgments but accept the imposition because they see the imposition as legitimate. For example, in foisted education, students may accept their classes' curriculum imposed on them because they believe the educational institutional authority knows better than them what they must study. In contrast, in my democratically run classes, students vote on topics to study, and the minority accepts the topic, imposed on them, voted by the majority. Alternatively, when there is a draw, my students may choose to flip a coin, or schedule the competing topics one after another, or ask me to choose. Again, in each case, they see the imposition of a topic that they may not want to study or that was not their own choice as legitimate (a compromise).

On the other hand, my students also have a choice to avoid politics by not coming to the class meetings, focused on a topic that they do not like but, instead, they can study the topic of their own interest alone on their own or with willing peers outside of our class meetings. In one of my classes, students split into two groups to study topics of their choice in the same classroom, calling on me to facilitate their studies or provide guidance on their demands. Assertion of freedom from imposition (i.e., granting rights) is a political act in itself because it imposes non-imposition on those who may otherwise want to impose it. The establishment of legitimacy to stay away from politics – a legitimate imposition – is in itself a political act. My students have the political right not to come to the class meetings – I, their teacher, cannot force them to come (i.e., so-called "free attendance") (Matusov, 2021, in press).

As we can see from the above, the Bakhtinian dialogue is based on the certain rights of the consciousnesses. The right in itself is established by the organization of politics – a part of a political regime. Bakhtin used political language to define dialogue in his philosophy of dialogism. If the Bakhtinian dialogue becomes the core of education, how its educational regime may look like? What are the political principles of the Bakhtinian dialogue in education?

## Self-education

The first political principle of the Bakhtinian dialogue in education is a student's self-education. The student has a legitimate right to be the final authority to define their own education: whether to study or not to study, what to study (i.e., curriculum), how to study (i.e., instruction), with whom to study, when to study, where to study, why to study, and how to define education – its purpose and quality in the first place. This political principle of the right to self-education follows from the Bakhtin's defining his dialogue as "consciousnesses with equal rights." Modern education is predominantly foisted education (except for "democratic education," which is based on self-directed learning). Foisted education is justified by the Kantian educational paternalism that denies students' political right to self-education. According to Kant, ignorant and irrational people cannot make good decisions about their own fate – they need to be educated first, against their will if necessary, before their autonomy and dignity can be recognized by the society (Kant, 1784).

Paternalism, “interference with a person's liberty for his own good” (Dworkin, 1972, p. 67), is a form of monologism, and it contradicts the Bakhtinian dialogue. This does not mean that paternalism is always wrong because humans are not only authors of their perception, beliefs, values, ideas, and deeds, but also physical, biological, psychological, and social objects. For example, my life was saved on several occasions by strangers who pulled me out of an upcoming car because I tried to cross a road by looking in the wrong direction in Pretoria, the Republic of South Africa. At that moment, the last thing I needed was a Bakhtinian dialogue. I appreciated the strangers’ paternalistic interference who forcibly (if not even violently) treated me as a physical object and not as a subject for a dialogue to save my life. However, in education, especially in the Bakhtinian dialogue education, the participants are arguably authorial subjects and not objects. That is why I have argued elsewhere that Kantian educational paternalism is inherently anti-educational (Matusov, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2021, submitted).

Although the political principle of student’s right to self-education can be deduced from Bakhtin’s definition of dialogue, the political principle of self-education is bigger than the Bakhtinian dialogue. Since the student has the right to define their own education, the student’s definition of education may not be based on the Bakhtinian dialogue. Instead, it may involve training – learning self-contained and decontextualized skills and bits of knowledge. Or, it may involve the student’s uncritical but creative socialization in a student-desired practice (e.g., becoming a restaurant chef) and so on (Matusov, 2020b). Since the Bakhtinian dialogue respects and legitimizes non-engagement in the dialogue as a participant’s right, the student’s choice not to define education as the Bakhtinian dialogue is recognized in the Bakhtinian dialogue education. The Bakhtinian dialogue education is inherently pluralistic – it rejects the common tendency of demanding the monopoly on education in its own image (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016).

## Symdidact

Recently, I have abstracted the following five forms of self-education (Matusov, 2021, submitted): autodidact (solo studying), symdidact (studying with peers), advisement (studying with the help of an advisor), odigósdidact (studying with a teacher on the student’s approval), and autopaternalism (a student requiring a teacher to push the student to study). Out of these five forms of self-education, only the symdidact – i.e., studying with more or less equal peers -- fits the format of the Bakhtin dialogue unequivocally, although not any symdidact may involve the Bakhtinian dialogue. Advisement, odigósdidact, and autopaternalism involve stable roles of the participants and particular role orientations of being somebody who is not entirely the whole person (“the person-in-person”) in the moment of the ongoing dialogue (cf., the discussion of "the teacher orientation" in Matusov & Brobst, 2013) – e.g., an advisor, a teacher, an enforcer of the student’s studies (on the student’s own demand), – which violates the principles of the Bakhtinian dialogue listed above. The Bakhtinian dialogue does not know special roles and their orientations.

For example, let’s consider a case of the odigósdidact form of self-education. In Socrates's dialogue with young Meno, Meno came to Socrates, his teacher, to ask for help him to figure out virtues' origin: whether virtues can be taught or they are inborn. This was a highly urgent political question in Athens where democracy was in a crisis at that time. Namely, if virtues could be taught, democracy is a good political regime. Conversely, if virtues were innate, the aristocracy was a sounder political regime. However, Socrates was interested in discussing the definition and nature of virtue. After a back-and-forward struggle, Socrates recognized the priority of Meno’s inquiry over his own: since it was Meno who came to Socrates with a question for help and not the other way around (Plato & Bluck, 1961, pp. 51-52, 85C-86E). Thus, Socrates realized that he had to have a teacher orientation, which he assumed (although not wholeheartedly, if not in an entirely cunning way, see my analysis here: Matusov, 2009; but this is another story). Socrates, Meno’s teacher/mentor, could not fully and legitimately be himself in a dialogue with Meno, his student/mentee.

The teacher serves the student’s self-education. Beyond pedagogical orientation to self-education – how to teach the student better – the teacher’s own self-education is at best peripheral and accidental and at worse interfering with the student’s self-education. By definition, the teacher’s and the student’s consciousnesses do not have equal rights. The teacher must sacrifice their own interests and inquiries in

the pedagogical fiduciary relationship (Matusov, 2021, submitted). The teacher commits to helping to develop the student's unique voice and authorship stronger – this defines the teacher's orientation. The student does not have a similar commitment to their teacher. The student does not have any orientation – they can be themselves in a dialogue with the teacher or peers. The teacher has to fulfill their pedagogical role of providing guidance. In self-education of the Bakhtinian dialogue, a student is not a role but a particular form of the holistic being. The student attends to their own and other people's perceptions, ideas, opinions, values, judgments, inquiries, puzzlements, etc., to make sense of them. In contrast, the teacher attends to the student's blind spots and strengths – i.e., the pedagogical needs of the student. The teacher and the student are not equal-rights partners in a dialogue that violates the Bakhtinian dialogue's main principle insisting on the participating consciousnesses with equal rights. Also, the Bakhtinian dialogue does not know special roles and their orientations for its participants.

As to an autodidact who studies through dialogues with the self and with texts (and multimedia) absent of the alive people, in my view, Socrates correctly challenged "dialogue with a text" as a genuine dialogue:

> According to Socrates (Plato, 1952, pp. 156-162, 274B-277B), print literacy excludes readers from production and negotiation of the text – the dialogue. The print text does not reply differently to the various audiences that engage with it. The print text cannot answer an audience's questions, resulting in the audience considering the printed text to be incomprehensible or even fallacious. Thus, entire responsibility for appropriate understanding the print text lies with the reader. Print literacy deforms speech into dissemination of information from one to many. In contrast, in oral literacy (or more precisely in dialogic practice) speaker and listener have very temporary and interchangeable roles and often are both symmetrically referred to as speakers in a dialogue. In print literacy the roles of writer and reader are stable and asymmetrical. Oral literacy involves embodied and situated production/consumption of the text while in print literacy often production and consumption are disembodied and decontextualized from the immediate life flows of the participants – the printed text remains materially the same and does not respond to new arguments of the readers or new circumstances of the writer (the written text can "bite" the writer back when his or her life circumstances have changed) (Matusov & St. Julien, 2004, p. 203).

Except for the symdidact, all other forms of self-education distort and compromise the Bakhtinian dialogue even if the participants of such self-education may be attracted and committed to the Bakhtinian dialogue education.

## Presencing selves in dialogue

In his doctoral dissertation, David Sabey has introduced the notion of "presencing self in dialogue," meaning "becoming present to others as being addressable" (Sabey, 2021, p. 75), as a way to address Bakhtin's demand for the ethico-ontological nature of dialogue. In his work with high school and college students, Sabey noticed that his students (and, occasionally, he himself) were hiding behind typicality, decontextualization, universality, and abstraction ("theoriticisms" using Bakhtin's term, see Bakhtin, 1993) even when they discussed controversial and super important ontological topics for themselves. Sabey argues that the Bakhtinian dialogue demands presencing self from its participants in the Bakhtinian dialogue.

The following prolonged excerpt and its analysis by David Sabey illustrate both presencing and hiding selves in the dialogue:

> This excerpt comes from one of Group 3's discussions about toxic masculinity, after several students shared ideas and personal stories about how men and women are treated differently in certain situations. Brandin talked about how his grandmother always asks him to take out the trash rather than his female relatives, Aliyah talked about how her mother insists that her brothers carry heavy groceries in from the car, and Carlos talked about how women sometimes got paid less than men for doing the same job. Riffing on this theme, Patience related the following story:

| Transcript 7 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Patience** | Yeah. My mom used to, well she still do make the boys, him [Brandin] and my | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | brother cut the grass. [**David**: Mm-hmm.] And I used to like, go out there and | 2 |
| | wanna help and stuff and she used to be like, nah, nah. And I'm just like, why | 3 |
| | can't I help like [**David**: Mm] just 'cause I'm a girl, don't mean nothing. I'm a | 4 |
| | girl and I do a lot of stuff. [**David**: Mm-hmm.] Like I'm a girl and I lift a lot of | 5 |
| | stuff and it just kinda irritating sometimes 'cause it's like, you don't see the | 6 |
| | value in what girls have. You just see that [**David**: Right] men are supposed to | 7 |
| | be like [**David**: Hm.] more like aggressive or stronger, when that's not the case. | 8 |
| | [**David**: Yeah.] I mean this is not a bad thing but like, I wish they would, they | 9 |
| | would see that in women too. | 10 |
| **David** | Yeah. Yeah so what I hear you saying this, like, I said, you know, it could be a | 11 |
| | good thing to say men are brave and strong or whatever, but you bring up that, | 12 |
| | the danger in that is, if by saying that, you imply that women are not that, | 13 |
| | right? Like if men are brave and strong, what does that mean about women? | 14 |
| | And one thing that people could say is like, that means women are not so much | 15 |
| | those things. Right? | 16 |
| **Patience** | Mm-hmm (affirmative). | 17 |
| **David** | Yeah. So, I've, I think that's a, good point. | 18 |

In her first turn at talk, Patience begins by telling a story about how she, as a girl, was discouraged from mowing the lawn (lines 1-3). This portion is spoken in the habitual past ("used to"). Although it is not entirely clear where the story stops, and if a younger Patience ever explicitly resisted her mother's gendered division of household labor, the verb tense shifts at the end of line 3 to the present tense. Whether or not her self-quotation (starting with "I'm just like" on lines 3-4) is meant to be part of the story or to reflect her current thinking, it represents a response to her mother. Note how the story makes Patience's mother addressable and how Patience addresses her directly, using the second person (lines 6-9) to articulate her frustration and assert herself as a capable woman. As she concludes her comment (lines 9-10), Patience broadens her response to a generic "they," suggesting that the issues she encountered with her mother are prevalent beyond her household—that her mother is part of a vague collective that tends to see certain characteristics in men and not in women.

Following both Patience's lead and my own schooled inclinations toward the abstract, my response addresses this final comment and fails to address anything other than the supposed message of Patience's story. This comment takes what "I hear [Patience] saying" (line 11) and translates it into a generalizable principle—that the danger of having a normative vision of masculinity is that it implies that women do not/should not have the characteristics ascribed to men. Although I believe there is value in this kind of reflective listening, in this case, it cost the presence of Patience's mother. After Patience confirms that this was what she was saying, I characterize the idea as a "good point" (line 18). Indeed, it seems that her story became, in my mind, merely a vehicle for a message, and that, in the end, the message was all I heard her saying. Consequently, I do not address Patience as anything other than someone with a point to make in the discussion, as the owner of a certain idea, nor does it occur to me to address her mother.

In this episode, [I] seem to fail to fully address two interlocutors who became newly addressable: Patience and her mother. Patience's mother was, of course, not physically present, and was represented secondhand, but she is still a person with a particular point of view who could be presenced and rendered addressable in a variety of ways to the group. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we necessarily have the same ethical obligations to narrativized individuals

> as to those with whom we are physically present, but I think we do have some obligations and can mutually benefit from seeking to be in dialogue to the extent possible. In this example, by ventriloquating and addressing her mother, Patience was able to articulate some of her own thoughts and feelings, but her final comment closes off her mother's addressability, suggesting that her story is an example of a broader trend and, relatedly, that her mother need not be addressed as a unique individual—at least, not by anyone else in the group. Perhaps this abstractive closure functions to protect her mother, or perhaps it is simply due to some schoolish sense that a comment should do more than tell stories—that it should have some generalizable message. Whatever the reason, neither Patience nor other members of the group address her mother further. And Patience herself is addressed simply as someone with a "good point" (line 18), not as a young woman who has felt that her gender excludes her from certain activities and makes other people, including her mother, view her as less capable than she considers herself to be. Rather than dealing with any of the emotional or relational complexities of her story, the conversation proceeds based solely on an abstraction. This seems largely due to my response, which treats her story as a vehicle for her final comment, translating it entirely into an abstract plane.
>
> This episode reveals a pattern … namely, a tendency to translate stories into abstractions and to relate to each other as bearers of ideas, and not as embodied, thinking-feeling, storied selves. Patience's abstraction of her mother seems to manifest an emerging form of this pattern, while my response and the following examples show it in its maturity (Sabey, 2021, pp. 101-104).

## Agora

The Classical Athenian Agora, located in the olive gardens at the foot of the Acropolis, was the center of the public life of the Athenian polis. First of all, it was a marketplace where locals and strangers brought their merchandise for sale. It was also the judicial place. Male Athenians came to check if they were chosen to serve on a jury for some case in the Peristyle Court. It was the political place of the polis for political assemblies to discuss public issues, hear arguments, and make decisions. It was the place of worship with several temples. It was the place to ostracize your fellow citizens by dropping a tag with the name of an offender in a special jar. It was the place of public gossiping and public festivity. And, yes, it was a place to eavesdrop, listen to, address, and discuss interesting political and philosophical issues with wise men of the day. This was the place where people came to hear Socrates, his disciples, sophists, and other philosophers and go away from him as they wished. It was the place for serendipity: come for a buy, stay for listening to Socrates.

Agora was the place for encounters and mixing unmixable. It was the place for an encounter of strangers and friends. It was the place for preplanned activities and serendipity, the place for on-task monologues and heterodiscoursia, the place for poiesis and praxis. Agora was the place for the sublime and mundane. Agora was the place for work, duty, and leisure. It was the place that had a strict regimen and frivolous, non-binding participation, eavesdropping, and observation. It was the place of nature and the artifact. It was the place of mixing the public design and the private intent, regulation and improvisation, strict ritual, and unbridled festivity. Agora was ruled by Apollo, the god of the sun, of rational thinking and order, appealing to logic, prudence, and purity. And also, Agora was ruled by Dionysus, the god of wine and dance, of irrationality and chaos, appealing to emotions and instincts. That is why I think Agora is the perfect metaphor of a place where the Bakhtinian dialogue may occur at ease.

I wonder what other aspects of the educational regime should be abstracted from the Bakhtinian dialogue.

## Conclusion

My analysis of the Bakhtinian dialogue and its educational regime raises at least two profound questions in me. First, do Bakhtinian dialogic educators really want to fully commit to the Bakhtinian dialogue with its focus on a plurality of unmergeable consciousnesses with equal rights; testing not only people's ideas but people of ideas themselves; stripping people of their stable roles, identities, and

orientations; focusing on ontologically charged, "final damned" questions; positioning participants of dialogue as strangers; and viewing education as essentially deconstructive? Should this commitment by its participants (students, teachers) be partial and conditional? If the latter, why and what conditions? What other types of dialogue should be included in addition to the Bakhtinian dialogue and why?

Second, do Bakhtinian dialogic educators want to commit to the educational regime emerging from the Bakhtinian dialogue based on the principle of self-education (rather than on the Kantian educational paternalism), on symdidact (rather than on pedagogy), on presencing (rather than on hiding behind typicality and abstraction), and on Agora (rather than on course and classroom)? Will this commitment make educators (teachers, advisors) obsolete by transforming them into students? If not, should the educators' commitment to the Bakhtinian dialogue educational regime be partial and conditional? If the latter, why and what conditions? What other types of educational regimes should be included in addition to the Bakhtinian dialogue educational regime and why?

These questions are important because, as I showed, the Bakhtinian dialogue is pregnant with relational, philosophical, and genre pluralisms. In addition, people's self-determination in dialogue and in education demands the acknowledgment that participants in dialogue and in education should have a legitimate right to define and redefine dialogue, their own (self-)education and their educational regime.


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## Образовательный режим бахтинского диалога

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*Аннотация.* Многих ориентированных на диалог педагогов привлекает бахтинский диалог. В данном теоретическом эссе автор выделил пять основных черт бахтинского диалога и рассмотрел, какой тип образовательного режима вытекает из этих черт. В заключение автор проблематизировал понятие бахтинского диалога и его правил, применимых в области образования.

*Ключевые слова*: М.М. Бахтин, диалог, образование, образовательный режим.