

struction of society, and its proposals for transformed schools emerge from this broader purpose. My own work has grown in the tension between these two progressive traditions. Many of my ideas of how to proceed in classrooms come from the developmentalists. But I read, criticize, and revise these procedures against the background of social reconstructionist commitments.

Bakhtin's article would certainly be recognizable to and affirmed by the developmentalists. But as I read it, I also see openings into social reconstructionist concerns. What, for example, would happen to political and economic systems if we actually succeeded at creating the conditions, in schools, for the birth of students' individual languages? A small distance, then, a healthy tension, between Bakhtin's educational position and mine. Thank you to Eugene Matusov and the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* for this article. It encourages me to keep reading Bakhtin for insight into education, and comforts me to know that, when I use him for progressive purposes, I can do so in good faith.

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Bakhtin's Dialogic Pedagogy

Implications for Critical Pedagogy, Literacy Education, and Teacher Research in the United States

In times of struggle, it is important to look back to those whose intellectual leadership we admire. For critical educators in U.S. contexts, each new day brings a myriad of challenges. The poorest and nonwhite students face overcrowded classrooms in underfunded schools. These students are often dehumanized in classroom spaces, losing connection with their cultures, their communities, and ultimately their ability to participate civically, socially, and economically in society. We also face a barrage of standardized tests that further inhibit the ability of critical teachers to circumvent these draconian measures and use their creativity to interact with students on a human level. In an era of increased literacy demands (Alvermann, 2001), the negative outcomes associated with the gap in academic literacy achievement are even further exacerbated.

These are dark days for critical educators in the United States; but even during these perilous times, we never cease to seek out reasons for hope. The African-American philosopher Cornel West encourages activist intellectuals to hold out hope against overwhelming odds (West, 1993). Philosopher and historian of education Paolo Freire (1970) defines hope as an ontological necessity; part of what makes us human. Bakhtin has always been one of the intellectual leaders to whom I have looked for hope and his article "Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar: Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School" offers inspiration and tools to fuel that hope

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as we struggle in our various contexts to bring humanizing education to those marginalized and dispossessed populations that need it most. In this brief article, I consider what Bakhtin's newly translated study offers to the fields of teacher research, critical pedagogy, and language and literacy education.

In the Bakhtin article, one important contribution to the field is the idea of the teacher-intellectual engaged in formative experiments of novel classroom practice. This type of teacher positionality fits in with the tradition I have been identifying in my work as critical research (Morrell, 2004a), where everyday citizens (including teacher practitioners) are involved in research for social and educational justice. In general this is an excellent model of teachers as public intellectuals in the Gramscian (1971) sense of the term. Too often, teachers, the primary agents of activism and reform in schools, are left out of larger discussions about curriculum and pedagogy. Generally those sanctioned to speak are university-based researchers, curriculum developers, or public officials. Educational theorists such as Giroux (1988) have critiqued the "deskilling" of teachers in calling for a reconsideration of teachers as transformative intellectuals.

What Bakhtin offers, then, is a model of the type of engagement that teachers, as transformative intellectuals, can have in their classrooms. In the following passage, he briefly outlines the scope of his study:

I conducted a special study of all the homework and class essays written during the first semester by students in two parallel sections of the eighth grade, a total of about 300 essays. In all these essays I encountered only three cases of a parataxic sentence (excluding quotations, of course)! With the same purpose I examined approximately 80 essays by tenth-grade students during the same period. I found a total of 7 cases in which such forms were used. Discussion with teachers in other schools confirmed my observations. At the beginning of the second semester, I gave special dictations to the eighth and tenth grades using parataxic sentences. The results of these dictations were completely satisfactory: very few errors of punctuation were made in parataxic sentences. (p. 17 in this issue)

Bakhtin offers seemingly simple, yet rigorous and convincing methods that teachers can employ in their own classrooms where they are ideally situated to do this work. Of course, the school days for the average teacher are packed with bureaucratic responsibilities that prevent this sort of investigation. A far greater problem, however, is that teachers are not getting access to the tools needed to do this kind of work. Nor are teachers valued when they do this kind of work. With rare exception, the scholarship of teachers is not submitted to, or accepted by, peer-reviewed journals. What would the reception be at our major research associations if teachers were to begin to present work conducted in this fashion? Where would it stand beside quasi-experiments, surveys,

ethnographies, and other forms of social science research conducted in schools?

As critical educators in university contexts, it is our responsibility to help teachers gain access to the tools, the spaces, and the audiences that they need in order to conduct classroom-based research of this magnitude. This will mean restructuring teacher education programs, offering more graduate coursework for practicing teachers, changing the evaluation procedures in our peer-reviewed journals, and opening up new spaces in our professional organizations.

An enduring question in our field has concerned the transferability of critical theory or dialogic pedagogy into classroom practice. Bakhtin's work adds a powerful example of a grounded theory of critical praxis with working-class youth. Bakhtin's delineation and critique of monologized pedagogical dialogue (itself an oxymoron) is certainly compatible with Freire's critique of the banking metaphor of education as a problem, and, for both, the method of dialogue that is at the heart of their respective theories of praxis. Each promotes a form of pedagogy that encourages socially constructed meaning, the explicit affirmation of the social worlds of students, explicit critique, and the creation of authentic work products. It goes without saying that such ideas explicitly contradict the messages sent to both teachers and students in schools about the natures of school practices and the measures of student achievement.

This brings to mind another implication of Bakhtin's work: that such pedagogy as he advocates necessarily calls for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to become advocates and activists for diverse modes of instruction, especially in a time as we find ourselves in the United States—a testing craze where all measurable knowledge can be standardized or broken into discrete facts. Bakhtin's work reminds us of the politics of pedagogy. If teaching is a political act, then teaching in the fashion of Bakhtin demands that teachers work as individuals and members of collectives in political and politicized ways within and against institutions that fail to sanction such "radical" pedagogies.

The dialogic pedagogy that Bakhtin presents in this formative experiment also demands different forms of assessment. The formative experiment, as a mode of inquiry, allows us access to classroom discourse and student work as effective measures of student learning and development. The data that Bakhtin draws upon to demonstrate student learning and engagement are completely null and void when one considers the goal of most measures (i.e., standardized tests), which is to find the correct answers. What if the ultimate goal of the pedagogy is to get the students to question the actual tests themselves? How can school systems, and schools, and classrooms produce creative mechanisms for measuring or evaluating these talents? How can activist researchers and theorists in the academy help in this regard? What might these alternate

measures look like? How can they sit alongside our more traditional measures? However we might answer these questions, reading Bakhtin reminds me once again of the importance of continually asking them.

Finally, Bakhtin offers an excellent example of an engaging and empowering pedagogic space for students to talk about grammar that affirms them as competent and thoughtful users of language. In this brief article, Bakhtin encourages a movement from grammar as a set of rules to grammar as a series of choices and conversations about the problems and the power of language as a tool of communication. This attitude toward language and writing does not fit well in educational systems that count on right and wrong answers and a one-way dissemination of knowledge from teacher to student. Bakhtin's approach legitimates students somewhat in their indigenous uses of language as it also implicitly challenges the purposes of language instruction. He begins with a critique of grammar instruction focused on rules to the exclusion of style and use, an approach all too common in American Schools (Hartwell, 1985):

Teaching syntax without providing stylistic elucidation and without attempting to enrich the students' own speech lacks any creative significance and does not help them improve the creativity of their own speech productions, merely teaching them to identify the parts of ready-made language produced by others. But this is precisely the definition of scholasticism. (p. 16 in this issue)

Bakhtin makes an important distinction between schooling (what he terms scholasticism) and creative, empowering education. He makes a bold claim that the purpose of language education should be to develop more creative writers and speakers, not to help students learn rules that they will never consciously apply. And then Bakhtin, after diagnosing a problem with practice and conceptualizing a solution, offers an analysis of an intervention—the use of dialogic pedagogy to teach stylistic grammar—that seeks to engage students, build from their oral language use, and encourage superior writing. This is an important method of grammar instruction, from which we can learn a great deal. Schuster (2003), an American-based grammarian, suggests that any study of great writers will reveal that they break many of the rules that are needlessly taught to students in schools. Analyzing the usage of great writers and having high level discussions of choices between grammatically correct alternatives seems a worthwhile topic of discussion for secondary students as novice writers.

Conceiving of grammar instruction in this way can take us down a new and more affirming road than the ones we have traveled of late. American sociolinguists have had their hands full just convincing the public and educators that all students in our schools have linguistic competence. This is evi-

denced in a statement published by the Linguistics Society of America (LSA, 2002), which responded to negative attitudes toward speakers of African-American Vernacular English with an affirmation of the competence (an implicit understanding of grammar) of all speakers:

The variety known as Ebonics, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), and Vernacular Black English, and by any other name is systematic and rule-governed like all natural speech varieties. In fact, all human linguistic systems—spoken, signed, and written—are fundamentally regular. The systematic and expressive nature of the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the African-American vernacular has been established by numerous scientific studies over the past thirty years. Characteristics of Ebonics as “slang,” “mutant,” “lazy,” “defective,” “ungrammatical,” or “broken English” are incorrect and demeaning. (LSA, 2002, pp. 223–24)

This resolution and the need for it are symptomatic of prevailing attitudes in school toward language. If we take these statements from the LSA for truth, then it opens the door for the shift of language study from making the “incorrect” correct to the discerning ability to talk about choices between correct alternatives. Bakhtin's study is far ahead of the curve in that he offers a compelling example of an engaging approach to developing sensitivity to language and grammar that presumes competence and interest on the part of the students.

As the article culminates, Bakhtin reveals the rationale for his approach to stylistic grammar instruction: it is rather important to him that students are encouraged to be expressive and bold, that they participate in lively discussions, and that they gain an awareness of their ability to be creative as speakers and writers. These would be great goals for teachers in the United States and very consistent with the tenets of a critical dialogic pedagogy in that they aim to help students produce written language that mirrors the expressiveness and liveliness of their actual life as students and also encourages them to become more expressive and lively participants in the social world. On this topic Bakhtin comments:

After all, language has a powerful effect on the thought processes of the person who generates it. Creative, original, exploratory thought that is in contact with the richness and complexity of life can not develop on a substrate consisting of the forms of depersonalized, clichéd, abstract, bookish language. The further fate of a student's creative potential, to a great extent, depends on the language he takes with him out of high school. And this is the instructor's responsibility. (p. 25 in this issue)

In addition to our goals of developing of activists and engaged citizens, it is also essential to consider the interrelationships between a critical ontology

and a creative one. The necessity of this interrelationship becomes obvious if we consider the significance of creativity to the goals of critical education, though this aspect of our beings is rarely emphasized in traditional or critical pedagogy. In my studies I have found that young people employ creativity and artistic expression to send powerful political messages through popular culture, which acts as a form of entertainment and resistance (Morrell, 2004b). Bakhtin's work provides a powerful impetus for critical educators to use their resources to nurture and develop the creative, bold, and expressive capacities of our youth who will use these capacities to enrich their own lives as they also continue our struggle to make the world a more just and habitable place.

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(Re)reading Bakhtin as Poetic Grammarian and Strategic Pedagogue

Bakhtin's recently discovered work on dialogic pedagogy, "Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar," is packed with brilliant insights related to learning and instruction upon which one might comment. Because Bakhtin's arguments are abundantly clear, I have chosen not to reiterate them with close commentary but to use them as springboards for outlining a prolegomena of poetics/stylistics pedagogies based on a conservative interpretation of dialogism. I address each dimension of this prolegomena separately. First, I focus on Bakhtin's insistence that we consider poetics/stylistics as essential to understanding and using grammar. Importantly, this theme is all but absent in most English language arts pedagogies including systemic functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Second, I argue for the fundamental importance of making the delicate and complex form-function relations of language (e.g., grammatical constructions) explicit/transparent with/for students within instructional activities and through strategically organized social and semiotic mediation. In doing so, I reread Bakhtin's dialogism through a lens less like the medieval carnival and more like Vygotsky's (1978) social and semiotic mediation in the "zone of proximal development" or Tharp and Gallimore's (1991) "assisted performance" within "instructional conversations."

Poetics/stylistics as constitutive of syntax/grammar

Whether focused on everyday speech, literature, or grammar, all of Bakhtin's theories foreground the constitutive role of context. We might even say that all

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