

Bakhtinian Pedagogy



*Opportunities and Challenges for Research, Policy
and Practice in Education Across the Globe*

EDITED BY E. JAYNE WHITE *and* MICHAEL A. PETERS

This collection of essays brings Bakhtinian ideas into dialogue with educational practice across cultural and pedagogical boundaries. These encounters offer fresh perspectives on contemporary issues in education, and consider pedagogical responses that are framed within a dialogic imperative. The book also pioneers an important discussion about the place of the Bakhtin Circle in educational philosophy today. Drawing on the historical and contemporary scholarship that has already taken place in education to date, the book emphasizes the living nature of language as intentional acts that take place within learning relationships. Consideration is given to the wider contexts in which pedagogy takes place, and shifts the role of the teacher as expert transmitter of knowledge to dialogic partner in learning. *Bakhtinian Pedagogy* is particularly suitable for undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education courses that focus on pedagogical studies in early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary learning. It is also a suitable text for educational philosophy students at postgraduate level.

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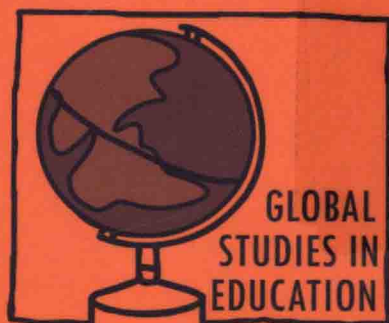
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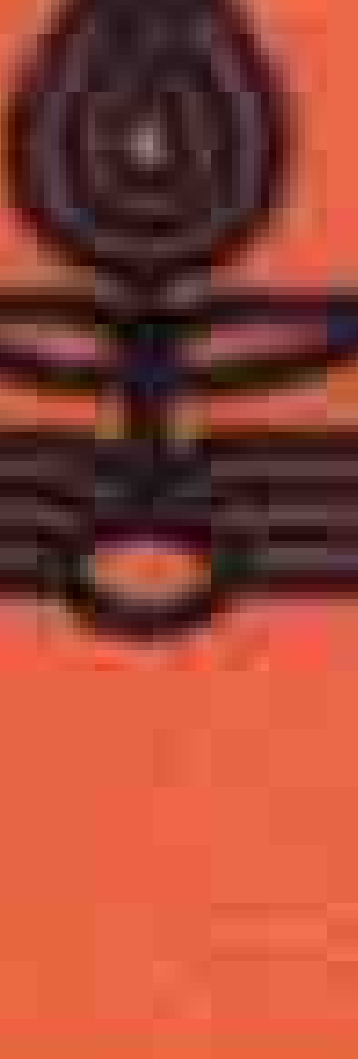
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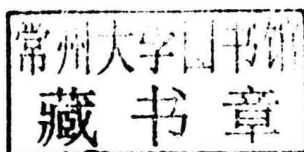
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PETER LANG

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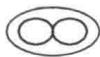
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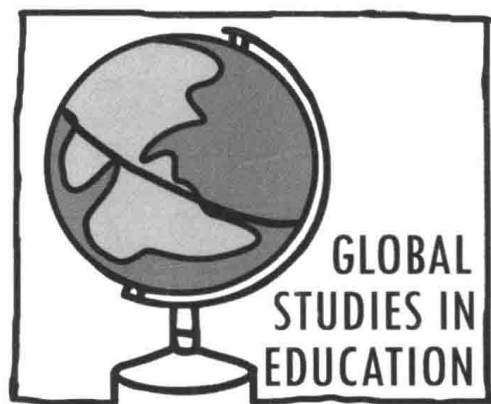
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Bakhtinian Pedagogy



A.C. (Tina) Besley, Michael A. Peters,
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Michael would like to acknowledge Rushika Patel, who first came to the university with an interest to pursue the work of Volosinov. She rekindled his interest in this work and reminded him of the importance of the ideological function of language. Similarly, were it not for the gentle provocations of Joce Nuttall, Jayne may never have ventured so far down a Bakhtinian route. Combined with the tenderness and care offered by Nicholas Powell throughout the conception and development of this project, Jayne would like to devote this book to the most important Bakhtinian principle of all—*aesthetic love*, which lies at the heart of dialogic pedagogy, and all the very best scholarship endeavor.

Bakhtin and Pedagogy

CRAIG BRANDIST

In the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution a group of young scholars found themselves in a provincial town called Nevel, close to the frontline of the developing Civil War. They began teaching in a number of new schools that were being set up to provide general education and eradicate the illiteracy that still blighted the lives of most citizens. Resources were scarce, but ambitions were high, and the schools launched a radically progressive educational policy, with students given a role in governance and replacement of traditional subjects by a combined “polytechnical” curriculum which combined academic and practical learning. Students learned through projects and “complex” studies of nature and society. The ideas of progressive educationalists like John Dewey (1859–1952) were implemented on a scale never seen before, as old techniques of rote learning were swept away to be replaced by active, indeed *interactive* learning. Education was opened up to mass participation and all practices associated with teaching and learning were rethought.

At the same time a young Jewish philosopher called Matvei Kagan returned to Nevel from studying in Germany, and he inaugurated a study and discussion circle portentously called the “Kantian seminar” which these young scholars attended. This “seminar” became the basis of what has retrospectively become known as the Bakhtin Circle. The group soon moved to the Belorussian town of Vitebsk where many radical artists had gathered. They were joined by another literary

scholar, Pavel Medvedev, who was organizing an institute of Arts and Humanities in the city, and they began to combine their research and pedagogical activities on a larger scale. After the Civil War, the group moved to Petrograd, where a much more elaborated intellectual and educational environment awaited them.

Thus, from the beginning of their activities, members of what is now called the “Bakhtin Circle” found themselves in a radically new educational environment and they played formative roles. Most members were to combine research and teaching for the rest of their careers, and Bakhtin himself was to pursue a long career at a provincial pedagogical institute.¹ One particularly important institute was the Institute of the Living Word in Petrograd/Leningrad, at which Kagan and the literary scholar Lev Pumpianskii taught. It aimed to teach the masses to speak publicly, to create a population that could engage actively in a new democratic society rather than sit passively as elected representatives pursued agendas laid down in advance. The key idea was *Isegoria*, the *equality* of speech, which had formed the foundational principle of the Athenian concept of democracy. Such lofty aims were soon stifled by Civil War, bureaucratization, and ultimately the formation of a repressive regime that was the antithesis of these principles. This was, however, the origin of a series of research programmes that were to last for a decade and lead to some pathbreaking work. There can be little doubt that the ideas about language developed by Voloshinov and Bakhtin arose in connection with the debates and discussions around these questions. While it would be rash to assume that the Circle itself was the main crucible in which its members developed their ideas, the Circle undoubtedly became an arena into which participants brought ideas from the various projects in which they were engaged and reflected on them in a dialogic fashion. Archives of early Soviet institutions hold documents about the research projects some members of the Circle were involved in during the 1920s, and which were funded from governmental sources. These followed the early Bolshevik policy to develop new ways to spread literacy, create a new, democratized public discourse and to codify new linguistic standards to facilitate the development of areas that had been impoverished by colonialism. Traces of this can be seen in such ideas as the formation of meaning in social interaction rather than through abstract sign systems, and the dynamic between ruling attempts to “drive inward” the social struggles over meaning and the various strategies through which such “monologic” closure can be subverted and overcome.

Members of the Circle wrote little specifically about pedagogy, but educational principles pervade their work. The Russian term *obrazovanie*, like the German *Bildung*, has the main sense of formation rather than education in the narrow sense, and among these scholars the German tradition of *Bildung* was particularly important. Education now involved the formation of ethos, values, and humanity.

Education became understood as something embedded in general social processes and cultural activities; pedagogy became *social pedagogy*. Such pedagogy has a fairly long history but key stages here are marked by the work of the Swiss education-alist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), who aimed to develop a method of holistic education which educates “head, heart, and hands” as a harmonious unity. This became the point of departure for the Marburg neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp (1854–1924), who combined Pestalozzi’s method with a neo-platon-ic doctrine of ideas and Kant’s categorical imperative of treating people as subjects in their own rights rather than as means to an end. Natorp’s most elaborated treat-ment of this question was to be found in his books *Sozialpädagogik* (1904) and *Sozialidealismus* (1920). Kagan had studied under Natorp in Germany, and he began translating *Sozialidealismus* into Russian soon after its publication.² The interaction of educational processes and society more generally now formed a key consideration, for social atomization needed to be overcome through progressive tax-ation and education in both the school and community. Education should create communion and promote moral development throughout the life of the individual.

Though undoubtedly progressive in design (Natorp was a reformist socialist), such a doctrine inevitably runs the risk of falling over into paternalism, and there is certainly a tendency in this direction in some of Bakhtin’s later work. Paternalism certainly permeated the Soviet education system from the 1930s, and it seems Bakhtin found a certain amount of common cause here. In his only work specifi-cally on pedagogical practice “Problems of Stylistics in Russian Language Lessons at Middle School,” written while he was working in a provincial school during World War Two, Bakhtin advocates the importance of teaching stylistic dimensions of meaning in order to enrich the language of pupils and promote creative under-standing, but then shows how through the “correct use of intonation” and gesture the teacher can “lead the participants towards an original formulation of the con-clusions of our analysis.”³ While Bakhtin’s work from the late 1930s focuses on the way in which ossified forms of poetic language were undermined by the develop-ment of more popular comic, parodic genres, ultimately leading to the development of the novel, literature remains a privileged form of discourse. Bakhtin has nothing at all to say about such popular and dynamic media as radio and cinema, even though these were undergoing a spectacular development at the time he was writ-ing, and affecting the development of literature itself in profound ways. While he writes infectiously about the carnivalesque subversion of official language and ideas in the syncretic pageantry on the public square, closer examination reveals this has value for Bakhtin only to the extent to which it becomes part of “great literature” and in so doing informs the education of society. There is a sense in which Bakhtin remained a traditional intellectual, championing traditional forms of humanistic cul-ture as a way of enlightening the masses, leading them from mythical to critical

forms of consciousness. By the time an elderly Bakhtin was interviewed shortly before his death, he was making distinctly conservative remarks about Soviet history.

Yet in questioning the widespread impression that Bakhtin was a champion of democracy and an egalitarian, this does not mean that the ideas developed in his own works do not transcend the limitations of his own politics. The ideas themselves have a history and currency that, with appropriate critical distance, may prove to be valuable analytical tools in the field of education. For this reason the current collection, which brings “Bakhtinian” ideas into dialogue with other traditions, and with reflection on current educational practice is particularly welcome. It is only through such experimental meetings that the value and the limitations of the ideas themselves can be established, and that the experiences on which the ideas were based can be, in a sense, redeemed. Similarly, such engagements cast a new light on contemporary problems and on the established ways of approaching them. By taking philosophical ideas from the realm of literature, understood as an organ of cultural self-consciousness and progress, and bringing them into contact with formal educational practices, the authors cast a revealing light on philosophy, literature, and the classroom. When considerations of the relationship between author and hero are transferred to teacher and learner, and when modes of analysis developed for dealing with literary genres are applied to the “speech genres” of the classroom, then both areas begin to reverberate in a different key.

Notes

1. Notes taken by students at several of Bakhtin’s lectures in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s have appeared in a number of publications including M. M. Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii t.2*, (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 2000); *Lektsii po istorii zarubezhnoi literatury* (Saransk: Izd. Mordovskogo universiteta, 1999); I. V. Kliueva and L. M. Lisunova (Eds.) M. M. Bakhtin—myslitel’, pedagog, chelovek (Saransk: Krasnyi Oktiabr, 2010).
2. Paul Natorp, “Sotsialnyi idealizm,” *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop* 1 (1995): 55–126.
3. M. M. Bakhtin, “Voprosy stilistiki na urokakh russkogo iazyka v srednei shkole,” *Sobranie sochinenii t.5* (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996), 141–56.

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Introduction

Reading Bakhtin Educationally

E. JAYNE WHITE & MICHAEL A. PETERS

Reading Bakhtin is a literary experience that leaves the reader gasping for air yet wanting more. His ideas are elusive, foreign, and dark, while at the same time alluring, hopeful, and joyous. To read Bakhtin and the work of other members of his circle calls the reader to a place of instability and confusion—not only in reading the seemingly contradictory nature of the text and grappling with translated misunderstandings, but also in grasping the Aesopian style of writing that characterizes his work. For those who attempt to interpret his ideas in a practical sense, there is unnerving appeal and challenge—a mood that is also captured in the work of artist and poet Marc Chagall, explained by Harshav (2004) as “steeped in multicultural allusions and subtexts” (p. 960). Yet despite such dizzying effort, a growing number of educationalists are turning to Bakhtin’s writings as a source of guidance, inspiration, and scholarship. As such, his works are no longer exclusive to their Russian heritage or located in the bowels of literary or linguistic disciplines alone. The effort of reading Bakhtin is therefore not only characterized in the literal “reading” of text but in the painful emergence of his ideas in the West. It is thanks to the concerted efforts of translators such as Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson, and members of the Sheffield University Bakhtin Centre—not least of which includes Craig Brandist—that his work has been accessible across nations, languages, and disciplines. With the insight of writers such as Sidorkin (1999), Matusov (2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Matusov & Smith, 2005), and

Werstch (2000, 2009), the texts of Bakhtin and other members of the Circle have now become accessible to educationalists also. In this edited collection we present some of the contemporary fruits of such effort and bring them to bear on contemporary pedagogical issues facing educationalists across the globe. In doing so we suggest that there is much to be gained from reading Bakhtin educationally and significant potential for his ideas to influence educational practice, pedagogy, and policy today.

Curiously, as yet, there is no Bakhtinian philosophy of education. Despite the fact that Bakhtin was a teacher and teacher educator, he wrote only one paper on pedagogy. While his personal biography indicates the centrality of teaching to Bakhtin and his principles of dialogism can be considered a philosophy of culture, there is still a great deal of work to be done before it is possible to think of a Bakhtinian philosophy of education. We are, that is to say, only at the very early stages of being able to articulate this philosophy and we would argue that like the great philosophers of education—those who took education seriously, from Plato to Gadamer, from Wittgenstein and Marx to Freire and the postmoderns such as Foucault and Rorty—the process is an ongoing one of scholarship and interpretation. What binds these thinkers together is that within the Western tradition they see dialogue as a principle of pedagogy and culture, and their precise contributions to a large extent depend upon the novelistic ways in which they interpret the notion of dialogue and add to this tradition—philosophy, pedagogy, and culture as dialogue, as somehow essentially dialogical.

Although Bakhtin, the man, is often solely credited with the ideas that take his name, his earliest and undeniably influential work is recognized as having developed out of an eclectic group of intellectuals called the “Bakhtin Circle” who met regularly in St Petersburg, Russia, during the early 20th century (Brandist, 2002). Comprised of an eclectic group of men who had been profoundly influenced by their recent and varied experiences with the Marburg School, Marxism and German philosophy, law and philology (to name but a few), the Bakhtin Circle was attended by Medvedev, Voloshinov, Kagan, Zubakin, Pumpianski, Iudina, Sollertinski, and other scholars, artists, and thinkers. However, like most anti-official intellectual endeavors of the era, the dialogues and writings of the Circle were cut short due to political interventions in the late 1920s that saw the demise of several significant members and the temporary exile of Bakhtin himself.

Despite numerous setbacks (including ill health) Bakhtin went on to write during the tumultuous years that followed. Over the remaining years of his life (1936–1975) Bakhtin continued to develop the ideas of the Circle in tandem with his teaching career. His ongoing scholarship is evident in the development of key ideas, particularly those inspired by Dostoevskian polyphonics and Rabelaisian carnivalesque, that provide a route to theories of heteroglossia and genre—both of