Assessment as aesthetic activity: A Bakhtinian approach

E. JAYNE WHITE

Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

Abstract

Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, the aesthetic activity of assessment can be interpreted as a moral encounter where the teacher is called upon to interpret meaning in concert with the student, without speaking for the student in the process of doing so. Such activity presents the teacher of very young children, who does not necessarily share the same linguistic, social or physical experience, with a significant challenge – particularly where assessment practice is a mandatory requirement for early childhood education (1998). It is therefore argued that assessment practice calls for an accountability of authorship on the part of the teacher.

In this paper the author seeks to explore the practice of teaching, as authorship, within aesthetic activity. Two significant Bakhtinian concepts are drawn upon accordingly – excess of seeing; and heteroglossia – as significant considerations in the operationalisation of dialogism. This paper explores the methodological implications of these features within the context of a pilot study which sought to dialogically engage with the aesthetic activity of teaching in the context of assessment.

Introduction

The role of a teacher working with under-three-year-old children in the 'professionalised' early childhood education sector of Aotearoa New Zealand is complex. Contemporary early childhood guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 3) suggest that assessment emphasises "valued learning" in order to "foster ongoing and diverse learning pathways". In order to rise to this challenge, the early childhood education teacher must therefore 'notice' valued learning according to national and local priorities; 'recognise' its significance; and 'respond' accordingly through practices that extend that learning.

This paper focuses specifically on the 'notice' aspect of this assessment practice, in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of aesthetic activity as evaluative experience. Aesthetic activity, within the philosophy of dialogism, suggests that such assessment practices, as an accountability of authorship, are deeply inscribed with the intentions of the teacher as well as the interests of the child. As such, what gets noticed (and as a result, recognised, and responded to) is influential in authoring the child. When seen in conjunction with Bakhtin's view that authorship is a defining element of ideological becoming, the aesthetic activity of the teacher can be described as deeply instrumental, even moral, in its intent, and impact.

As the pilot to a doctoral thesis which drew on Bakhtinian dialogism, a teacher was invited to participate in a hermeneutic dialogic engagement around the authorship experience of assessing the verbal and non-verbal metaphoric activity of an 18 month-old child (hereafter called 'toddler'). The purpose of the pilot was to (tentatively) operationalise Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy in the context of a real-life authorship experience. This process summoned an exploration of dialectical versus dialogic positions; and highlighted the aesthetic nature of subject-subject relationships in dialogic encounters which, in doing so, offer an inherent challenge to traditional forms of inquiry in education.

The paper begins by describing Bakhtinian dialogism in light of the historical and philosophical context of Soviet Russian, and the influence of German philosophy. On the basis of such philosophical influences, the paper explores Bakhtin's resistance to Hegelian and Marxist dialectics as mediated outcome – presenting the notion of dialogism as a dynamic process of ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981; De Man, 1989; M. Holquist, 1990; Michael Holquist, 2002; Todorov, 1984). Dialogism is subsequently discussed in relation to

its role in the assessment practices of an early childhood education teacher in a contemporary pilot study. Two concepts are explored in relation to dialogism – excess of seeing and heteroglossia – which are considered in light of their potential to offer insight into significant authorship issues in any assessment/evaluation/research practice which involves the representation by one of another.

Positioning Bakhtinian dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas exist within the wider historical and political context of Soviet Russia which, over the era of his lifetime, saw Bakhtin living through pre-Marxist and post-Marxist epistemologies and their associated outcomes for the lives of their inhabitants. Influenced highly by 18-19th century German philosophy (in particular Kant, Cassirer, Heidegger and Nietzche), and the Marburg School, Bakhtin's ideas comprise the interplay of neo-Kantian inspired Russian orthodox morality, and Cassirean philosophy of the symbol, in reaction against Marxist-Leninist ideologies of dialectical materialism and earlier Hegelian dialectics (C Brandist, 1999; Cote, 2000a). Bakhtin's central concern was to retain the spirit of pre-Stalinist Russian ideology (and associated emphasis on the moral aspects of humanity) in a society where knowledge was constructed around Hegelian dialectic forms of scientific truth and associated rationalism by creating "an alternative to the imprisoning dialectic, a counter-theory provocatively called dialogism but mostly expressed in other words" (Chamberlain, 2004, pp. 238-239). His work is therefore positioned within the social encounter of [Nietzchean] 'becoming' which suggests that knowledge is "merely an elaborate, double-layered pile of metaphors" (Hoover, 1994, p. 41)

Bakhtin's central concern is to challenge dialectic notions of 'truth' which, according to him, seek to homogenize 'other', in the same way as he experienced political regimes of hegemonic truth(s) in his own lifetime. Emerson (1997, p. 70) suggests that Bakhtin rejected "the binary logic at the base of most successful revolutionary thinking of his time, that is, the Marxist-Lenin model". This model was drawn from Hegelian dialectics and founded a systems approach to education: "It taught its converts that in order to make sense out of change, one must analyse it into a system. Whatever does not fit that system is relegated to the realm of 'spontaneity' or anarchy – to be cast out, brought under control or annihilated" (ibid). As such, for Bakhtin, Hegelian dialectics represents monologic enterprise where authoritative discourses are privileged.

When seen in light of education, Hegelian dialectics seeks to create intersubjectivity between the knower (the teacher, as subject) and the known (the student, as object). The task of the teacher is therefore to work with the student to ensure that they are supported into the valued knowledge that is held by the teacher as representative of society. It is my contention that the contemporary New Zealand early childhood education assessment paradigm (Ministry of Education, 2004) is largely premised on this basis, with the role of the teacher as 'knower' with the ability to notice, recognize and respond to children's learning in partnership with the family of the child – who also possess the 'known'. Whilst the rhetoric of the "child's voice" is espoused as central to the authorship experience of assessment, there is little emphasis placed on the ability of the infant or toddler as 'knower' (or subject in relation with subject). As a result, the teacher must rely on the perspective of the family or their own intuition based on a level of intimacy with the infant or toddler (ibid, Book p. 3).

Dialogism, on the other hand, can be viewed as an ontologic experience in which the teacher (subject) and student (subject) enter into an existential encounter. As such, dialogism is more aligned to negative dialectics (Cote, 2000b) which suggests that such intersubjectivity is neither possible or desirable. Sullivan and McCarthy (2005) state that an alternative task of the teacher is to 'lovingly' linger in the life-world of the student whilst recognizing her authorial position, and associated evaluative role as adult (this is of particular significance with very young children who are likely to bring physiognomic, sensori-motor liminality to the experience). The notion of intersubjectivity, in dialogic philosophy, is therefore less concerned with achieving the same teleologic outcomes (i.e. valued learning) than to strive for a careful balance between understanding of one other, whilst recognizing that understanding can never be fully achieved without one

subject subsuming the other (Bakhtin, 1990). Aesthetic activity can therefore be interpreted as the attempt to understand an idea or artform (as ideology) by evaluating the everyday activity in light of the wider historical, social, and time-bound dimensions in which it is enacted. Hence dialogism is not a simple case of "I'm OK, you're OK", but neither is it a process of sociocultural enculturation. Through aesthetic activity, Bakhtin strives for a balance of mutual interanimation as a moral obligation on the part of all participants.

For Bakhtin, then, interpretation is always an ethical encounter that seeks to retain the uniqueness of 'other' and avoid finalization at all cost. It is therefore based on an aesthetic engagement which is mutually dependent on social partners who offer complementary, and different, visionary and perspectival fields to the encounter. As such, Bakhtin describes aesthetic activity as the transgradient relation(s) that take place between the self and other:

> We open the boundaries when we "identify" ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within: and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without. (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 91)

Operationalising Bakhtinian dialogism

Bakhtin's ideas present an inherent challenge (and opportunity) to early childhood education assessment discourse in New Zealand (White & Nuttall, 2007). In the context of the *Early Childhood Assessment Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004) and associated professional development programmes, the teacher is urged to author the experience of the child as interpreted and valued learning in an attempt to "construct and foster [learning]" (Ministry of Education, 2004, Book 1, p. 3). In alignment with this discourse, the teacher is further asked to develop narrative 'learning stories' which foreground children's learning. This approach is based on an assumption that intersubjective interpretations between the child and the teacher (in sociocultural harmony with the family) can be readily achieved in socially constructed relationships and, in doing so, privilege desirable dispositions as determined by the adults who spend time with children.

In response to Bakhtin's dialogic challenge to contemporary early childhood education assessment discourse, the pilot of a doctoral study which underpins this paper sought to work alongside a teacher in exploring the authorship experience of a toddler. Instead of seeking dispositional characteristics(as endorsed by current early childhood assessment discourse), the teacher was asked to 'notice' metaphoric acts (White, 2007). It was felt that metaphoric acts, as prosaic communicative and symbolic experience, offered potential for a deeper understanding of the unique ways in which the toddler communicated concepts and scope for exploring the interpretation of their codes of communication within a formal early childhood education context. As the acts were interpreted on what was offered in actions and words, it was considered that they were less likely to require speculation or hunch on the part of the teacher (although recognition was also given to the fact that one 'act', or utterance, is constituted of more than one moment in time). Moreover, this approach had hitherto been positioned as beyond the scope of very small children, because of the linguistic privileging of metaphoricity in the research world (Cameron, 1996; Epstein & Gamlin, 1994; Heffner, Greco, & Eifert, 2003; Kȯvecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Low, 2003; Marjanovic-Shane, 1996; Mittelberg, 2006; Painter, 2003; Pramling, 2005; Vosniadou, 1987; Winner, 1979, 1988). This approach was additionally seen by the researcher as in keeping with Bakhtinian philosophy which interprets utterance in context, and as a communicative act far beyond the exclusive linguistic gaze (Voloshinov, 1973).

In operationalising Bakhtinian dialogism for the pilot study, several key areas of emphasis grew out of the wider authorship principles of his work. Oliva (2000, p. 36) suggests that dialogic methodology offers a means of maintaining the interpretation of each participant in order that these may "stay in play" throughout the research process. Matusov (2007, p. 327) further advises that, as a result, several units of analysis may be necessary in dialogic research because the researcher is less concerned with claiming certainty within one study than with "transforming certainty one way or another, making statements more or less likely, more or

less certain, than before based on the findings". Tihanov (2000) similarly advocates for approaches to dialogic inquiry to become more a process of looking for point(s)-of-view rather than the analysis of one discreet unit of analysis. In considering the discourses at play in the interpretive points of view involved in noticing metaphoric acts, it became essential to consider the impact of the wider context of the centre setting; the history; the artefacts that were drawn upon in the analysis as well as the acts themselves. The ways in which these features of the 'chronotype' played a role in either drawing together a perceived intersubjectivity (Bakhtin describes these as centripetal forces) or pulling apart intersubjectivity (centrifugal forces) therefore became a focus of the investigation. Bakhtin (1981, p. 250) describes the chronotype as the place where the "knots of narrative are tied". In the context of this study, this chronotype (coupled with a rigorous evaluation of the act itself) formed the framework for the development of polyphonic narrative (C. Brandist & Tihanov, 2000). Hence the unit(s) of analysis included the performed acts themselves (as an identifiable way of including the perspective of the toddler) but also the interpretations of these by the teacher and researcher.

A fuller exploration of dialogic principles is beyond the scope of this paper, but two significant principles for the pilot study lay in Bakhtin's notion of *excess of seeing* (Bakhtin, 1990) and *heteroglossia* which grew out of his later work (Bakhtin, 1968, 1993; Emerson & Holquist, 1986).

1. Excess of seeing

Excess of seeing is described by Holquist and Liapunov (1990, p. 24) as "a bud in which slumbers form, and whence form unfolds like a blossom". According to Bakhtin, this excess, offered literally through the visual field but also through the unique perspective of the author, offers more to the other because the other cannot see the world as the author does (and vice versa). In recognising this, Bakhtin highlights the evaluative function of authorship:

> For the author to form a soul he or she 'must see more than being'. The author gains an excess of seeing only by being situated outside the soul that is being formed. This architectronic privilege is the same as where my experience ends and my seeing the other's spirit or the outer body of her soul begins. (Bakhtin, 1990, p.135)

Building on this notion of excess, the pilot study sought to capture the visual and authorial fields of both the teacher and the child through the employment of head-cams, that is, small cameras attached to hats which were worn by the child and the teacher. In doing this it was anticipated that the visual field of the teacher would offer a means of interpretation based on recalling and analyzing what was seen. The additional authorial view of the child, which was offered to both the researcher and teacher, provided a further way of understanding and interpreting metaphoric acts with the literal benefit of "hind-sight". The purpose of this method was to attempt to open up the possibility for the child to offer their own contribution to the analysis, based on what was happening for them at the same time through their own visual field.

With this method devised, a new dilemma emerged for the researcher. In seeking to understand more about the metaphoric act of the child, it became increasingly clear that the researcher was equally morally exposed in attempting to draw out interpretive meaning while recognising the impossibility of fusing horizons in doing so. This recognition is especially relevant in research involving very young children whose attempts to co-author the experience may be fraught with limitations in relation to the societal positioning of 18-22 month-old children as 'toddlers' (Lokken, 2006) and the constrained means of shared communication which exists where the child draws on pre-operational means of making sense of their world. Mootz (2003; Tihanov, 2000) draws on Nietzche to suggest that any attempt to fuse horizons (in a Gadamer-like hermeneutic) is not only pointless, but downright immoral:

> It is not the fruitlessness of the fusion of horizon that worries Nietzche, then, but rather the inevitable tendency to be drawn into the temptation to subjugate others to our own horizons,

thereby reinforcing rather than challenging one's perspective from within a prevailing morality. (Mootz, 2003, p.1005)

In attempting to avoid the subjective trap of objectifying experience on behalf of other, Bakhtin offers a loophole for the researcher through the work of Dosteovskian polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1973). Since narrative styles of assessment were already part of the genre of early childhood education assessment documentation (Ministry of Education, 2004), the development of *polyphonic narratives* offered a natural, and moral, progression which enabled authorship to be shared between the participants. Drawing on the visual fields, as seen by the teacher (and her interpretations), the child, and the field notes of the researcher, it became possible to respond to Bakhtin's dialogism through the construction of these narratives. In doing so, the researcher-as-author was able to present the hermeneutic whilst avoiding, as much as possible, the consummation, or monologising of the child, or the teacher. As Bakhtin explains:

> In Dosteosky's works the consciousness is never self-sufficient; it always finds itself in an intense relationship with another consciousness. The hero's every experience and his everyday thought is internally dialogical, polemically colored and filled with opposing forces or, on the other hand, open to inspiration from outside itself, but in any case does not simply concentrate on its own object; it is accompanied by a constant sideward glance at the other person. One might say that Dostoevsky presents, in artistic form, the sociology of the consciousness, albeit only within the plane of coexistence. (Bakhtin, 1973, p. 26)

Far from simplifying the metaphoric acts of the child and the authorship of the teacher (and now, reflexively speaking, the researcher), Bakhtin's dialogism offered increased complexity to the methodology. As a result, the acts as presented and interpreted became the site for polyphonic narrative. Truth was, therefore, recognised as the creative prerogative of the protagonist (both child-as-hero; and teacher-as-author) rather than an intersubjective ideal. Bakhtin (1984 [1929] in Pirog, 1987, p. 605) describes "the truth of the hero's own consciousness" which he or she can choose to reveal or conceal through acts (arguably acts such as metaphoric). In dialogic assessment, therefore, the parties are both seeking to intimately understand one another, yet recognise that complete understanding is both impossible yet desirable. At times, there may even be a deliberate quest on the part of the communicator, to frustrate shared meaning (see the discussion on carnival below). The task of the researcher-as-author therefore, is to ensure that no one voice takes priority over the other; that the voices speak for themselves; and that, as a result, the audience is left free to interpret according to their experience of the narrative.

2. Heteroglossia

A second significant challenge in operationalising Bakhtin was found in his notion of heteroglossia. Heteroglossia refers to the complex life-world that takes place around the act, and which represents the influence of the wider context, as well as the interplay of internally persuasive discourses and authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). Consideration of this heteroglossic arena is therefore likely to influence the way assessment takes place, including what is "noticed" and moreover, what is or can be "valued" as significant learning.

In selecting metaphoric acts as the context for analysis, the everyday experiences of the child were not aligned to current assessment criteria for "valued knowledge'. Metaphoric acts, as embodied performed acts (or 'utterance'), were upheld as potentially offering insight into the experience of the toddler. As a result, both the teacher and the researcher sought to privilege these acts through careful analysis of composition and genre – recognising that the ways in which metaphors might be offered are likely to be different for toddlers. Not only did this require a 'loving linger' in-the-moment; but also an evaluative stance outside-of-the-moment which Bakhtin refers to as aesthetic activity.

Bakhtin's concept of carnival emerges as a significant aspect of what gets (or is able to be) 'noticed' or, conversely, ignored. Lokken (2000), drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1964) phenomenology of the body, describes the ways in which toddlers engage in humorous activities that are frequently outside of the gaze of the teacher, and the ways in which these activities (including dance, movement, sound) shape the social milieu. According to Bakhtin (1968), carnival (in the guise of laughter, theatre, patterns of speech, imagery and embodied expression) takes place when the 'footlights' are turned off, and represents a counter-discourse employed by the subject to avoid becoming swallowed up by authoritative discourse. In the context of this study, however, these footlight-less moments are captured as data, from the perspective of the toddler at least, who despite best intentions on the part of the researcher, may not recognise the consequences of access to their visual surplus through the camera.

A feature of Bakhtin's notion of carnival (with origins in Medieval European society) is that it is seen as necessary resistance in order for the subject to progress as an individual, rather than a consummated member of a sociocultural grouping. Carnival "realizes truth but does not permit it to be torn away from the earth, at the same time preserving the earth's universal and cosmic nature" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.285). The body is therefore depicted in opposition to authority – often mixing animal, vegetable and people images deliberately to play with the idea of transgressing norms. Carnival therefore represents freedom, fun, resistance from rationalism. "Carnival is steeped in the everyday, and the everyday cannot be divorced from its other – carnival" (Wall and Thomson, 1993, in Gardiner, 2000, p. 65). A tentative example of a metaphoric act from the pilot study highlights these dialogic principles. In this utterance, a toddler gestures a fist action which was repeated several times over a series of weeks and in different contexts throughout the day. The toddler (aged 18 months) repetitively knocks down blocks, or ends a task with this action. The teacher responds initially with a similar gesture which attempts to mirror the toddlers fists. However, instead of the fists in front of the body, the teacher raises her arms to the side and says "He man". The toddler repeats his gesture and laughs raucously. In discussing the significance of this action as part of an assessment meeting with the parent present, the teacher says "I thought it was a muscle man 'cos it was when he had done something. It was like "yes…cool, I'm amazing". The act bore no relationship to the identified curriculum goals established by the teacher in preparation for the meeting and would, by the teacher's contention, have passed by un-noticed were it not for the scrutiny offered through the pilot study which foregrounded such detail. The teacher's initial interpretation was significantly broadened when the parent of the toddler responded to the demonstration of the action, saying "he's naughty, its my fault 'cos I really like the movie "Liar Liar" [Jim Carey] and I do that to him from the movie…Its kind of like when we're being cheeky to one another. He'll turn around and do it….it'll be like "it wasn't me" and use that action.". Further analysis of the act, using slow motion video playback, and with access to the toddlers authorial view, revealed this act as an utterance that occurred only with the teacher and only in response to activities where there was some sense of intentional error on the part of the toddler (for example deliberately knocking over blocks or buckets, or throwing himself on the ground) usually accompanied by a growling sound. With this knowledge, the teacher was able to return to this physical cue and engage with the toddler at a deeper level, adding complexity to the act and recognising a meta-level of communication at play. Now, the action could be interpreted as an opportunity to engage in meta-levels of social exchange – with the toddler revealing a much more sophisticated sense of humour which invited the teacher to respond accordingly. A deeper interpretation of the act therefore enabled the teacher to author the toddler as a complex social partner rather than her earlier description of this toddler as someone who "used to say nah to everything". Her conclusions towards the end of the pilot were that she felt this approach to assessment had led to much richer relationships with the toddlers in her care. "We don't really give children of this age much of a chance to share their metaphors, they are mostly from us – we decide what will be offered. I thought about that. We are trying to teach them about our culture, our ways of being, not listening enough to theirs."

In this dialogic investigation, metaphoricity of a toddler and the way that this is interpreted by a teacher, as the hermeneutic space around the act, thus became a prime site for investigation. Whilst emphasizing the visual and interpretive fields of the teacher, it also became necessary to capture the heteroglossic background to this interpretation which, in the example above, included the early childhood curriculum, the family outside of the centre and the activities that the toddler (or his mother) took part in beyond the gaze of the teacher. Interestingly, the likelihood of such acts taking place was seen as more likely, according to the video captured in the pilot study, where opportunities for open-ended engagement with artifacts and activities was offered.

In taking this approach to investigation, a broader data set was required, which sought to capture features of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, and the conflicts between them. This called for the teacher to 'notice' genre of the acts, as "the typical form of the whole work, the whole utterance" ((Medvedev & Bakhtin, 1976, p. 129). As such, the context surrounding the act (including people, places and things – as described in the early childhood education curriculum, Ministry of Education, 1996), as well as the genre of the act itself, were also seen as potential data. The visual surplus offered through multiple subjectivies (that is, the teacher, the child and the researcher) generated a far broader vantage point from which sensitive interpretation could take place. As Bakhtin explains, an aesthetic approach to the interpretation of utterance enables the creative 'voice' of other to take on greater significance and, as a result, generate new understanding for the interpreter:

> Everything that is expressed in the word [or in other signs] collapses into the miniature of each person's own word (words sensed as his own). This and the immense, boundless world of others' words constitute a primary fact of human consciousness and human life that, like all that is primary and taken for granted, has not yet been adequately studied (consciously perceived). (Notes by Bakhtin, 1970-71, in Emerson, 1986, p. 143)

Implications for authorship

Bakhtin's dialogism offers methodological opportunities and challenges for teachers and researchers who seek to author the experience of other. In accepting Bakhtin's stance that the act is only meaningful when it is 'signed' by the person who has offered it, and that the response of other influences the way in which the act will be presented, it becomes possible to 'notice, recognise, and respond' as a moral authorial obligation. Not only does the teacher-as-author recognise their role as influential (and answerable) in the ideological becoming of other, but they are also compelled to enter into the process with a moral stance which gives priority to the complexity and holism (creative and spiritual) of the process through aesthetic activity. Hence in relation to contemporary assessment practice, where narratives have the potential to 'author' the lives of children, there is an urgency about recognizing the power and potential of this process from a dialogic standpoint – for teachers as much as for children:

> Narratives on 'childhood' are only in part about children, and the rest include narratives on those who undertake such studies – their personal and professional lives included – about those who made such studies possible, and about why, where and how such studies take place. Children are or come to be what they are considered to be by others, and how they consider themselves to be in relation to their guiding, protecting and evaluating others. (Bandlamudi, 1999, p. 47).

The significant moral issues surrounding authorship are no less true for research where human subjects are involved. In a dialogic approach to research, Bakhtin's philosophy demands a view of the complexity of social experience at the heart of understanding. Seen in this light, dialogism offers a theoretical framework from which the researcher can begin to explore an existential understanding of themselves and other rather than seeking intersubjectivity as a means of capturing valued knowledge. This approach values creative

potential over proven knowledge and, in doing so, provides the researcher with opportunities to enter into the life of the subject, and exit with an evaluative stance which authentically recognizes the uniqueness of 'other'. Sullivan and McCarthy (2005, p. 633) suggest that this approach allows the researcher to "interrogate(s) the participants, encourage(s) them to hear their own characterization and invite(s) them to respond. As such their loophole is being protected and their creative potential given the space to be released". Therein lies the nature of aesthetic activity in assessment practice.

Summary

This paper has highlighted two central aspects of Bakhtin's work in relation to a pilot study that took place in 2007 seeking to operationalise dialogism in the context of a Hegelian-based, socioculturally constructed approach to teacher assessment. In bringing Bakhtin's philosophy to life in such a theoretically-opposed context, recognition of the complex interplay of heteroglossic discourses, coupled with the mutually interanimating nature of excess of sight (literally and figuratively), provide two central relationships to support a dialogic methodology. Not only do they suggest that dialogic practice (including both assessment and research) can provide insight into the world of other in ways that avoid objectification, but that such an approach yields opportunities for the teacher or researcher themselves to reflexively and morally become part of the authorship experience. In doing so, there is recognition that the task of education is less about 'outcomes' and more about embracing complexity and value.

The last word of this paper is left to Fryodor Dostoevsky from whom Bakhtin drew much of his inspiration. In this excerpt, the "underground man" uses the metaphor of the Russian Crystal Palace to highlight the futility of privileging monologic truth – which I argue is closely aligned to the inherent risks in contemporary education discourse where one philosophical stance has the potential to subsume the lifelong process of ideological becoming:

> At that time – this is still you talking – new economic relations will be set up, completely ready made and also computed with mathematical precision, so that in a flash all the conceivable questions will disappear, simply because all the conceivable answers to them will have been obtained. Then the Crystal Palace will be built. Then…well in a word, those will be the halcyon days. Of course it is utterly impossible to guarantee (this time I am speaking) that it would not be, for instance, terribly dull then (because what can one possibly do, when everything is computed according to a table?)…(Doestoevsky, 1969, p. 24).

In an era where accountability is high, and the quest to objectify other through assessment practices is a central tenet of education, Bakhtin offers the ultimate loophole by suggesting that such finalization can and should be resisted. This pilot study sought to enter into that hermeneutic loophole, by attempting to explore the interpretations of the teacher, the toddler, and the researcher dialogically – as aesthetic activity, rather than consummated, 'intersubjective' reality.

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1968) *Rabelais and His World*, H. Iswolsky, trans. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Bakhtin, M. M. (1973) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* R. W. Rotsel, trans. (United States of America: Ardis).

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press).

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990) *Art and answerability,* K. Brostrom, trans. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas).

Bakhtin, M. M. (1993) *Towards a philosophy of the act* (Austin: University of Texas Press).

Bandlamudi, L. (1999) Developmental discourse as an author/hero relationship, *Culture and Psychology,* 5:1, pp. 41-65.

Brandist, C. (1999) Review article: Bakhtinology and ideology, *Dialogism: An International Journal of Bakhtin Studies*, 2, pp. 87-94.

Brandist, C., & Tihanov, G. E. (2000) *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory* (Great Britain: MacMillan Press Ltd).

Cameron, L. (1996) Discourse context and the development of metaphor in children, *Current Issues in Language and Society,* 3:1, pp. 49-64.

Chamberlain, L. (2004) *Motherland: A philosophical history of Russia* (Great Britain: William Clowes Ltd).

Cote, J. (2000a) Bakhtin's dialogism reconsidered through Hegel's 'monologism': The dialectical foundation of aesthetics and ideology in contemporary human sciences, in: C. Brandist & G. Tihanov (eds.), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin circle and social theory* (London: MacMillan Press).

Cote, J. (2000b) Bakhtin's dialogism reconsidered through Hegel's 'monologism': the dialectical foundation of aesthetics and ideology in contemporary human sciences, in: C. Brandist & G. Tihanov (eds.), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin circle and social theory* (Great Britain: McMillan Press Ltd) pp. 20-42

De Man, P. (1989) Dialogue and dialogism, in: G. S. Morson & C. Emerson (eds.), *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and challenges* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press) pp. 105-114.

Doestoevsky, F. (1969) *Notes from the underground,* S. Shishkoff, trans. (New York, T. Y. Crowell Co).

Emerson, C. (1997) *The first hundred years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

Emerson, C., & Holquist, M. (1986) *Speech genres and other late essays: M.M. Bakhtin*, vol. 8 (Austin, Texas: University of Texas).

Epstein, R. L., & Gamlin, P. J. (1994) Young children's comprehension of simple and complex metaphors presented in pictures and words. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity,* 9:3, pp. 179-191.

Gardiner, M. (2000) *Critiques of everyday life* (London and New York: Routledge).

Heffner, M., Greco, L. A., & Eifert, G. H. (2003) Pretend you are a turtle: Children's responses to metaphorical versus literal relaxation instructions, *Child and Family Behaviour Therapy,* 25:1, pp. 19-31.

Holquist, M. (1990) *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world* (London and New York: Routledge).

Holquist, M. (2002) *Dialogism : Bakhtin and his world* 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge).

Hoover, A. J. (1994) *Friedrich Nietzsche: His life and thought* (United States of America: Praeger).

Kövecses, Z. (2002) *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought* (New York: Basic Books).

Lokken, G. (2000) *Toddler peer culture: The social style of one and two year old body-subjects in everyday interaction* (Trondheim University, Trondheim).

Lokken, G. (2006, 9-11 August 2006) *The toddler as a social construct in early childhood education pedagogy,* paper presented at the The Little Scientist, OMEP Conference, Tromso, Norway.

Low, G. (2003) Validating metaphoric models in applied linguistics, *Metaphor and Symbol,* 18:4, pp. 239-254.

Marjanovic-Shane, A. (1996, September 11-15) *Metaphor - a propositional comment and an invitation to intimacy*, paper presented at the IInd Conference for socio-cultural research, Geneva.

Medvedev, P., & Bakhtin, M. M. (1976) *The formal method in literary scholarship* (Baltimore and London).

Ministry of Education. (1998) *Quality in Action/Te Mahi Whai Hua: Implementing the Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices in New Zealand early childhood services* (Wellington: Learning Media).

Ministry of Education. (2004) *Kei Tua o Te Pae Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media).

Mittelberg, I. (2006) *Metaphor and metonymy in language and gesture: Discourse evidence for multimodal models of grammar* (Cornell University, Cornell).

Mootz, F. J. (2003) Nietzschean critique and philosophical hermeneutics, *Cardazo Law Review,* 24:3, p. 967.

Oliva, M. O. (2000) Shifting landscapes/Shifting langue: Qualitative research from the in-between, *Qualitative Inquiry,* 6:33, pp. 33-54.

Painter, C. (2003) The use of a metaphorical mode of meaning, in: A.M. Simon-Vandenbergen, M. Taverniers & L. Ravelli (eds.), *Grammatical metaphor: Views from systemic functional linguists* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: Benjamins Publishing Company).

Pirog, G. (1987) The Bakhtin Circle's freud: From positivism to hermeneutics, *Poetics Today,* 8:3/4, pp. 591-610.

Pramling, N. (2005) *Learning to represent: The role of metaphor in communicating, reasoning, and understanding* (Unpublished Doctoral, Gotebory University of Sweden, Goteborg).

Sullivan, P., & McCarthy, J. (2005) A dialogical approach to experience-based inquiry, *Theory and Psychology,* 15:5, pp. 621-638.

Tihanov, G. (2000) *The Master and the Slave: Lukacs, Bakhtin, and the ideas of their time* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).

Todorov, T. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle*, W. Godzich, trans. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press).

Voloshinov, V. N. (1973) *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, Ladislav Matejka & T. I.R, trans. Vol. 1 (New York: Seminar Press).

Vosniadou, S. (1987) Children and metaphors, *Child development,* 58:3, pp. 870-885.

White, E. J. (2007) *The consummation of metaphor: A Bakhtinian perspective*, paper presented at the ARECE Conference, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

White, E. J., & Nuttall, J. (2007) Expanding intersubjectivity: The potential of Bakhtinian dialogism to inform narrative assessment in early childhood education, *The First Years: Nga Tau Tuatahi,* 9:1.

Winner, E. (1979) New names for old things: The emergence of metaphoric language, *Journal of Child Language,* 6, pp. 469-491.

Winner, E. (1988) *The point of words: Childrens' understanding of metaphor and irony* (United States of America: Harvard University Press).