

PEDAGOGY AS TENSION: EXPLORING THE RELATIONALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR A POST-STANDARDIZED EDUCATION

Jeffrey King
Texas State University
and Concordia University-Texas

ABSTRACT

Although pedagogy is often defined as a product of teaching and learning, it is perhaps better described as a representation of the radical relationship between the two practices. Pedagogy as a radical relationship is necessarily fraught with tension and uncertainty, which is often problematic for more standardized conceptions of pedagogy based on causal relationships. Standardized attempts at pedagogy favour controlling the learning environment in order to replace uncertainty and tension with certainty and predictability. This paper argues that removing the tension from pedagogy is detrimental to the learning experience. It examines the theoretical, methodological, and practical elements of pedagogy as tension, how they are impacted by the controlling efforts of standardization and how they might serve as a catalyst for imagining a post-standardized education. Bakhtin's frameworks of dialogism and internally persuasive discourse serve as a template for how educators may begin to engage in post-standardized pedagogical practices in their classrooms.

Keywords: Dialogic pedagogy; Internally persuasive discourse; Post-standardized education; Standardization; Teacher-student relationship

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are not separate or distinct educational actions; they exist and operate within the delicate balance of a relational and dialogic understanding of pedagogy. Ellsworth (2005) describes the balance of pedagogical relationality as an exploration of "the embodied experiences that pedagogy elicits and plays host to: experiences of being radically in relation to one's self, to others, and to the world" (p. 2). In short, pedagogy occurs in the midst of a *radical* relationship. The term radical derives from the Latin *radix*, meaning a root or primary source. By choosing this word, Ellsworth indicates that the source of pedagogy is the relationship between its participants. Pedagogy is not a product of teaching or learning, but rather a representation of the necessary and vital relationship between the two. Without this relationship, pedagogy would not exist.

Radical relationality brings with it an uncertainty, or tension, which is often viewed as problematic for current standardized educational efforts. Pedagogies regulated by standardization are based on causal rather than radical relationships, which seek to predict and measure student outcomes by controlling teacher practices (Au, 2007, 2011; Douglass, Thomson & Zhao, 2012; Mitchell, 2002; Taubman, 2009). This push for control has a profound impact on the presence of pedagogical relationality. The authority granted to the products of standardization (namely test scores) to determine what counts as acceptable teaching and learning, as well as evaluating who and what has achieved success, attempts to eliminate radical and relational tension within pedagogy.

Denying pedagogy this tension threatens to limit the possibilities of learning in the educational setting. Ellsworth (2005) cautions that an overreliance on standardization impedes the learning process:

When we look at test scores or curriculum content, we are looking at only one dimension of the reality of learning. That other dimension of the reality of learning – its nondecomposable continuity of movement and sensation, its felt reality of the relation that is experience couched in matter – is as real as test scores or curriculum content. When we overlook this dimension of the reality of teaching and learning, we not only impoverish our understandings of what we do as teachers and students, but we also open ourselves . . . to doing harm. (p. 35)

Ellsworth contends that current accountability practices cannot be solely responsible for success in learning. There is a “nondecomposable” relational element to pedagogy. To ignore or deny it is to risk doing harm to the learning environment.

Although current research validates this claim by its apparent lack of consensus regarding the positive impact standardization has on student achievement (Nichols, Glass & Berliner, 2012), efforts to control pedagogy continue to erode the relational dimensions of learning (Giles, Smythe & Spence, 2012; Lovat, Dally, Clement & Toomey, 2011; O’Malley, 2009). Educators must begin moving teaching and learning beyond the aims of certainty and predictability, toward a post-standardized pedagogy that embraces tension and radical relationality.

I suggest that Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984, 1986) theory of dialogism offers educators a way to explore the relational tension between teaching and learning. Dialogism provides the ontological and epistemological foundation necessary for educators to establish practices that recognize the inherent tension within pedagogy, even in the midst of standardization. To construct a process of learning devoid of this tension is impossible given that its existence, according to Bakhtin, is dialogic (Matusov, 2009). This paper examines the role dialogism plays in the current standardized landscape before suggesting how it might aid in the transition to a post-standardized environment. Theoretical, methodological and participatory elements are considered for each context, before concluding with a discussion on the implications a post-standardized dialogic perspective might have on pedagogical practices in the classroom.

PEDAGOGICAL TENSION IN A STANDARDIZED CONTEXT

Theoretical considerations

An understanding of pedagogy as relational tension is rooted in Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. Bakhtin considers dialogism to be a meditation on how knowledge is constructed, suggesting that this process is never unitary (Holquist, 1990). In short, Bakhtin (1984) suggests that truth and knowledge are relationally constructed, stating that “truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). Bakhtin connects this relational search to the epistemological and ontological nature of truth. Not only is the comprehension of truth a dialogic enterprise, but its existence is relational as well. Through dialogism, Bakhtin argues that “all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as the result of the relation between two bodies occupying *simultaneous but different* space” (Holquist, 1990, p. 2), italics in original). This relational “between-ness” regards truth as “non-self-sufficient,” meaning its existence is necessarily determined through one’s relations with others (Smith, 2010, p. 25).

The dialogic existence of truth allows for pedagogy to become the collective search for it. For Bakhtin (1984), the idea of becoming is crucial to relational pedagogy. He refers to the notion of ideological becoming to describe the process of a person developing a worldview along with an accompanying system of ideas through participation in a discursive community (Freeman & Ball, 2004; Matusov, 2007). Central to this process is that it is never finished; pedagogy becomes a relational act that is always “*in transition and in motion*” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 16, italics in original). Pedagogical participants are never fixed; they are always emerging “as a self and an intelligence that is always in the making,” engaged in a pedagogy “of moving forms and selves that operate through a logic of open-ended relationality” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 57). Because truth, knowledge, meaning, and even reality are not fixed but rather created through dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1984), they remain forever open-ended. This open-ended process of emergence and the self being “in the making” addresses the dialogic relational nature of pedagogy on an ontological level. Rather than insisting that “pedagogy should be dialogic,” ideological becoming “considers that pedagogy is always dialogic” (Mishra, 2015, p.79).

Open-ended expressions of truth, meaning and reality bring a certain amount of unpredictability to the educational setting, which Bakhtin insists is unavoidable. A dialogic pedagogy is uncertain, undetermined and cannot be controlled, largely because they are integral to human nature. Bakhtin (1993) claims that “what constitutes [unforeseen possibility] is the human being; everything in this world acquires significance, meaning, and value only in correlation with . . . that which is human” (p. 61). The fact that significance and meaning are acquired through human dialogue and interaction as a necessary function of human nature means that participants are constantly involved in creating meaning. This act of creating can only be accomplished through the “interconnections between self and other” (Latta, 2005, p. 33). This creativity and innovation make human experience and event in the world and “incomplete and inconclusive place” (Hutson, 2000, p. 126).

Additionally, the presence of multiple participants creates no small amount of tension in pedagogy. Consensus is not the goal of dialogic interactions. The aim is the recognition of another which leads to an understanding of the self (Bakhtin, 1986). As a result, there is a constant pull between to forces generated by a desire to understand the self but only being able to through relationship with another, a tension “between a center and all that is not that center” (Holquist, 1990, p. 20). Bakhtin names these competing tendencies to push away and pull toward the centre centripetal and centrifugal forces (1981). Centripetal forces act as binding agents, holding accepted truths together using grammatical and social norms. Centrifugal forces pull truths away from the centre. They destabilize meanings, allowing for alternative perspectives and new ideas to emerge (Nesari, 2015; Stewart, 2010). These forces present themselves to the dialogic participants engaged in a relationship. They do not belong to any one specific individual as a marker of identity. Rather, they arise from the relationship, and each participant takes on the act of centripetal or centrifugal force in response to another. The result is a dialogic truth that is constantly being rejected, tested, questioned, repurposed, reconfigured, and even accepted.

Tension and incompleteness are part of education, especially within the practice of pedagogy. Both curriculum and instruction are part of a discursive process which creates new meanings through interactions between teachers and students (Mishra, 2015). The instruction may originate from the teacher, but it is mediated by students’ questioning (Matusov, 2009). The process of learning in this sense becomes “genuine information-seeking questions that both the teacher and students ask of each other” (Mishra, 2015, p. 78). Bakhtin (1984) characterizes this tension and uncertainty as an expression of unfinalizability. Unfinalizability recognizes that dialogic interactions, at all times, contain an openness to unpredictability and change, where participants can never “know with certainty who the other

is or can become” (Smith, 2010, p. 26). The interactions between dialogic participants, between the self and the other, are ongoing and, therefore, unfinalizable (Latta, 2005). The nature of dialogue is a continuous, unending process of anticipation and response to the other, always recognizing that one’s voices contains the voice of the other (Frank, 2005). As such, it is an impossibility for one to give the final word about the other (Smith, 2010). Bakhtin (1984) states that “as long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word” (p. 59).

Methodological considerations

The uncertainty inherent within dialogism is regarded as problematic for traditional systems of education, and those responsible for its success often look for ways to bring some semblance of certainty and control to the learning process. Standardization is the most common method used to address issues of pedagogical tension (Douglass, et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2002; Taubman, 2009). Standardized methods of education rely on homogenous pedagogical practices, management strategies, and curriculum frameworks for the purpose of implementing a system of standards for comparison (Liss, 2013; Taubman, 2009). Although standards are based on a defined set of knowledge and skills students need to acquire in order to be college and career ready (National Academy of Education, 2009; Phillips, 2015), they also serve a comparative function designed to improve outcomes through efficiency (Scott, 2004). It is this measure of comparison, functioning as a kind of “pedagogical fundamentalism” through predetermined and efficient applications of knowledge, that encourages certainty and control (O’Malley, 2009, p. 250).

The goal for standardized education practices is to produce results that can be favourably compared to similar results (i.e., test scores that meet state and federal passing rates). In order to maximize results, education processes such as pedagogy are measured for efficiency. The more efficient the system operates, the better the results. While standardized tests facilitate the comparison between students, the efficiency of the system depends upon the ability to compare teachers’ pedagogy. Comparing pedagogy and instruction becomes more important than comparing student performance. Whereas the concept of pedagogy as expressed by Bakhtin is grounded in the dialogic interaction between participants, results-oriented comparative pedagogy is based on the efficient implementation of standards.

The push for efficiency in education impacts pedagogy through the standardized practice of instructional alignment (Polikoff, 2012). Instructional alignment as a pedagogy measures the extent to which students are “being asked to do and doing schoolwork that reflects academic standards,” so that they may increase their “opportunities to master the methods used on high stakes assessments such as their state’s standardized tests” (Early, Rogge & Deci, 2014, p. 223). How well a teacher’s instructional practice is aligned with the state’s expected standards becomes a unit of analysis in this process of compliance with federal mandates. In other words, not only are students expected to show improvement on standardized tests, teachers are also expected to show how their instruction is aligned with the standardized tests as well. Although the evidence suggests that the association between alignment and student achievement is “very weak” (Polikoff & Porter, 2014, p. 16), and that there is approximately a 28% agreement between standards (what is expected to be taught) and assessments (what is tested) (Polikoff, 2012), instructional practices continue to be standardized under the guise of alignment.

Tests and instructional alignment are methods of efficiency educators employ for the purposes of establishing control and eliminating tension. These methods are granted authority over the dialogical interaction of pedagogy because of their evaluative function. Test scores and curricula determine what counts as acceptable teaching and learning, as well as who and

what achieves educational success (Taubman, 2009). In short, standardization places limits on what counts as learning. Defining the parameters of learning affords standardization efforts a measure of control over knowledge production and consumption. Knowledge is determined prior to pedagogical interactions, eliminating dialogic uncertainty. Additionally, evaluating students and teachers on their ability to adhere to these limits reduces the unpredictable impact of human nature (Kim, 2010).

Au (2007) describes these limits in terms of formal and pedagogical control. Formal control refers to changes in the form of the curriculum in an effort to create “a unifying education process, providing the same curriculum and expecting the same outcomes for all students” (Kim, 2010, p. 10). Since the standardized test consists of multiple-choice questions, teachers feel the pressure to structure their curricula to teach according to this format (Au, 2007). Learning is equated with passing a test, resulting in a loss of individuality and creativity on the part of curriculum (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011).

Pedagogical control refers to the change in teaching format, most notably to an increased reliance on standardized teacher-centred instruction, for the purposes of collecting data on test scores. Au (2007) conducted a metasynthesis of 49 previous studies on high-stakes testing, and found that over 80% of the studies contained themes of content change whether by contraction or expansion. Content contraction involves narrowing the curriculum, or what is commonly referred to as teaching to the test (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011). Teachers often standardize the curricular form of how knowledge and concepts are taught in the class in an effort to more closely align their pedagogy to the forms of content contained on the tests (Au, 2011). Examples of these practices include fragmenting knowledge into small, individuated and isolated test pieces, an increase in teacher-centered instruction associated with lecturing, and the direct transmission of test-related facts (Au, 2007).

Participatory considerations

Standardized approaches to pedagogy are the result of successfully restructuring participants’ roles within the dialogic interaction. Bakhtin (1984) insists that a person comes to know himself or herself only through relationship with another. “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another,” he observes, “I cannot become myself without another” (p. 287). Knowledge of one’s self comes through experiences with another and is internal to the relationship. Standardization replaces this experiential and internal knowledge with external, preconceived notions of participant identities. That is, the identities of teachers and students are determined outside of and prior to the relationship. The standardized approach to education is based on defining a thing for the purpose of predicting and controlling it. Therefore, it becomes necessary to predict and control individuals who participate in this process. Bakhtin argues that this particular method “stops addressing people, genuinely seeking unknown but desired information from them, and turns them into things” (Matusov, 2011, p. 27).

The rationale for objectifying pedagogical participants, like standardizing instructional alignment, is rooted in the desire for certainty and control (Bleazby, 2013; Macfarlane, 2015). Assigning external identities to each participant provides this desired control by reconfiguring the function of the pedagogical relationship into a dualism. This move serves to establish an environment of “separation and domination inscribed and naturalized in culture” by characterizing participants as “systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, ruler and ruled, center and periphery” (Plumwood, 2002, p. 23). Rather than perceive pedagogy dialogically, where participants are considered co-labourers, standardized education assigns value to each role. The process of valuation reorganizes the relationship into a hierarchy,

giving one participant control over the other. As a result, the tension inherent in pedagogy is replaced by competition. Participants are now locked in competition with one another for control over pedagogy.

Participants engaged in competition is evident in the debate concerning the most efficient pedagogical practice, teacher-centred versus student-centred learning. These two approaches to pedagogy are often defined in opposition to one another (Neumann, 2013) in order to proclaim one better than the other. Currently, student-centred learning has the upper hand. Student-centred learning is described as “placing students at the center of the learning process and prioritizing their needs as individuals,” while teacher-centred learning is often pejoratively described as being driven by an expert in a “specialist body of knowledge,” transmitting information to students in a manner he or she chooses (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 105). Although multiple meanings exist for student-centred learning (Chung & Walsh, 2000), it is often expressed as students constructing knowledge by themselves in a manner that relegates the teacher to a facilitator of knowledge construction (Mascolo, 2009). By assigning the teacher to the role of facilitator, a moral judgment is conveyed in that the two styles of learning (teacher-centred and student-centred) are distinctly different, with one being labelled good and the other bad (Macfarlane, 2015).

A dualistic interpretation of the teacher-student learning relationship considers knowledge construction as the “source of power and authority in the classroom” rather than a participatory product (Mascolo, 2009, p. 7). By naming knowledge as the source of power in the relationship, the purpose of pedagogy becomes assigning power through the construction of knowledge. Since a hierarchy exists, the more power (or knowledge) that is given to one participant, the less there is for the other. Student-constructed knowledge is often prized over and against the necessary weakening of the role of the teacher. Descriptors are then assigned to highlight the necessary and radical differences between the two learning styles. Teacher-centred approaches are defined as passive acquisition of knowledge through transmission, while student-centred approaches are understood as active knowledge construction that emphasize using and communicating knowledge (Huba & Freed, 2000).

TOWARD A POST-STANDARDIZED EDUCATION OR THE RETURN OF RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY

Theoretical considerations

Dualisms and standardized education are anchored in structuralist notions that claim reality is fixed and invariant. Structuralism seeks to identify invariant structures embedded in the social and cultural foundations that create meaning (Slattery, 2013). Experience and knowledge are grounded outside of the person, which provides a context for an anti-humanist approach to meaning and reality (Marshall, 2004). This approach allows for the perception that structures rather than human interactions constitute reality, undergirding standardization’s efforts to control pedagogy.

Standardized pedagogies place limits on acceptable learning by espousing a representational view of knowledge. Teaching becomes a matter of representing the structures that determine the world outside the classroom (Biesta, 2004). The knowledge contained within approved curricula is representative of these structures, granting it an inherent quality and allowing it to precede any and all educational discourse (Osberg & Biesta, 2008). The end result is a limitation on what counts as legitimate and acceptable knowledge (Kim, 2010), and gives educators the power to control the meanings that emerge from learning environments (Au, 2007).

A post-structural (and post-standardized) understanding of learning views pedagogy as an “experimentation in thought rather than a representation of knowledge” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 27). Learning is experimental because it is considered to be a fluid and not a fixed process; there is no finite definition of knowledge that is simply conveyed from one person to another. Teachers are more than just transmitters of a knowledge that somehow precedes the act of teaching, just as learners are more than empty receptacles waiting to be filled. All participants engaged in pedagogy add something to the curriculum that did not exist prior to their interaction (Biesta, 2004). In post-structural language, pedagogical participants engage with the curriculum to co-create meaning.

This co-construction of meaning can only occur within the pedagogical relationship. Ellsworth (2005) claims that “the limits of our knowledge . . . requires us to put ourselves in relation . . . What we cannot know requires us to constantly traverse the porous boundaries between self and other” (p. 61). Unlike the structural understanding of pedagogy that places limits on what counts as knowledge, Ellsworth suggests that our knowledge is limited because there is only so much one can independently know of one’s self, the other and the world. She continues by saying that:

We cannot know self in absence of separate different others. We cannot know others in absence of self. We cannot know only through distinction, difference, and cutting, and we cannot know only through connecting, integrating, and cohering. We think only in relation. (p. 61)

Meaning, knowledge, and the practices of pedagogy exist only within relationships, within the recognition of difference and the other. Pedagogy cannot be practiced in isolation or be transmitted by one individual to another individual. It cannot exist as a monologic system, adhering to limits imposed on it by external knowledge; it is by nature dialogic (Matusov, 2009).

Furthermore, the content of dialogic interactions is not something that exists separate and apart from or prior to the dialogue, but rather is intricately woven within the process. Bakhtin (1993) states that “content . . . does not fall into my head like a meteor from another world, continuing to exist there as a self-enclosed and impervious fragment, as something that is not woven into the unitary fragment of . . . an essential moment” (p. 33). Content comes to be understood through the event itself, dependent on the interaction of the participants (Latta, 2005). Additionally, Bakhtin (1990) understands form to exist within the dialogic interaction along with content, stating that “form ceases to be outside us as perceived and cognitively ordered material; it becomes an expression of a valued-related activity that penetrates content and transforms it” (p. 305). Neither content nor its form is unaffected by the actors engaged in pedagogical relationships. It is not a predetermined and closed system that forces itself onto the relationship. Rather, because of the dialogic interaction inherent in the relationship, the meaning (value) of form and content resists finality and remains open to transformation.

Content that remains transformable is necessary for a post-standardized understanding of pedagogy influenced by Bakhtin’s concepts of ideological becoming and unfinalizability. If ideological becoming is concerned with pedagogical participants that are never fixed or finalized (Matusov, 2007), then every part of the relationship – the teacher, the learner, the content – remains engaged in the process of becoming. The dialogic nature of the relationship does not permit learning or pedagogy to focus on one specific element to the exclusion of the others. It is not the test scores (student-centred), instructional alignment (teacher-centred), nor the content (transaction-centred) that determines what counts as learning. Instead, it is the recognition that all of these elements are interwoven and entangled together that create the dialogic process necessary for learning. Each element contributes something to the relational interaction and, as a result, is changed by it. The practice of pedagogy becomes “the

embodied experiences . . . of being radically in relation to one's self, to others, and to the world" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 2).

Methodological considerations

Post-standardized education attempts to move the understanding and practice of pedagogy toward this radical relationship. Standardized methods of pedagogy tend to be "thing-centered rather than relation-centered" (Margonis, 2011, p. 434), defining pedagogy using specific objects (i.e., standards for comparison and instructional alignment) that must be present in order for learning to be measured. These objects place limits on what can be considered learning (Taubman, 2009), and eliminate pedagogical tension by establishing certainty and control over the educative process (Au, 2007, 2011; Polikoff, 2012). As a part of the standardized process, the roles of the participants (teacher and learner) are defined before individuals engage in a learning relationship. These definitions and limitations concretize learning as a predetermined and predictable outcome of education, which is the end goal of standardization.

Rather than perceive pedagogy as an assortment of distinct and fixed pieces (i.e., teachers, students, transactions), post-standardized education expresses pedagogy and learning in terms of situated experiences. The methods of pedagogy are fluid and dynamic, focused less on achieving specific fixed outcomes using comparative measures and more on participating in the tension that is necessary for learning in general. This shift in focus does not imply that post-standardized methods are not concerned with outcomes such as test scores. Rather, it asserts that learning cannot be reduced to predictable measures of certainty for the purposes of comparing and controlling outcomes. Pedagogical resources (teachers, students, standards, etc.) from a post-standardized perspective serve to highlight the dynamic, situational, and unending process of learning by focusing "on *how things connect* rather than on *what things are*" (Vagle, 2015, p. 604, italics in original).

Methodologically, the move away from static, fixed and singular representations of knowledge toward dynamic, entangled and multiple ways of learning requires a fundamental change in the perception and function of standards. Standards serve at least two educational purposes: they demonstrate learning in specific disciplines while also providing a basis for comparatively measuring efficiency. The latter purpose has come to dominate the landscape of standards-based reform to the extent that standards and standardization have become indistinguishable from one another (Taubman, 2009).

Equating standards with standardization is based on a faulty *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument. Standards are meant to provide structures aimed at supporting learning (National Academy of Education, 2009). They are descriptions for "the processes for information consumption and production that are important for young people to acquire" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 158). In short, standards specify what students are expected to know and be able to do (Polikoff, 2012). Standardization is an effort to impose market principles of accountability and efficiency onto education (Murphy & Brown, 2012; Scott, 2004). These principles require a unit of measure to be effective, and often rely on educational standards to fulfil this need. Because they end up serving in this capacity, standards are said to be indistinguishable from standardization (Taubman, 2009). While the implementation of standards can influence the practice of standardization (National Academy of Education, 2009; Polikoff, 2012), to assume direct and total causation is logically fallacious. Standards are not the cause of the marketization of educational practices. To suggest as much paints and inaccurate and incomplete picture of the use of standards in pedagogy.

This reductive focus on the role of standards negates any other function standards may serve, including their ability to serve as demonstrations of learning. A post-standardized

pedagogy eschews this myopic view in favour of one that advocates for a more fluid and dynamic space for standards within education. In Bakhtinian (1981) terms, standards comprise the centripetal forces that pull learning together within a relational, tension-filled pedagogy. Centripetal forces are concerned with unity, and impose “specific limits” to language in order to guarantee “a certain maximum of mutual understanding” (p. 270). These forces understand the need to ensure some level of comprehension during communication. When one person speaks, centripetal forces ensure that his or her listeners understand what has been communicated. Presenting a “unitary language” that gives “expression to forces working toward . . . unification and centralization” allows for what has been communicated to develop a “vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization” (p. 271).

In pedagogical terms, this inward pull toward unity and comprehension are expressed through standards. More than simply tools for comparative measure, standards “are about the ways in which we order ourselves, other people, things, processes, numbers, and even language itself. To put it slightly differently, standards are where language and world meet” (Busch, 2011, p. 3). This intersection echoes Bakhtin’s description of centripetal force. In order for pedagogy to function as a place for learning, there needs to be some common ground, a unifying and culturally agreeable definition of what learning looks like. Standards form the backbone of the ways in which pedagogical participants categorize and communicate with each other. They serve as a stabilizing force in education, reminding both teachers and students what learners should be able to know and do when they enter into a dialogic learning relationship.

Participatory considerations

The presence of a centripetal force acting upon learning requires an opposing centrifugal force in order to establish a dialogic context for pedagogy. Unlike standardization, which views opposition to its power as competition and seeks to control it, the presence of centrifugal forces in pedagogy are necessary for learning. For Bakhtin, language cannot exist solely as a centripetal force. The very fact that language is broken into distinct social groupings (e.g., professional, common, educational) is proof that it is dynamic and fluid, pushing against the forces that seek to centre it. The presence of a centrifugal force in the midst of centripetal unification creates this dynamism and movement: “alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

The teacher-student relationship is the centrifugal force which establishes the presence of pedagogical tension in learning. The importance of this relationship has long been a focus of educational research. From the recognition of their contribution to student success (e.g., Fan, 2012; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hattie, 2009; O’Connor & McCartney, 2007; Wang & Holcombe, 2010), to arguing for their increased visibility within the context of accountability (e.g., Giles, 2010; Giles, et al., 2012; Margonis, 2011; Saevi, 2011), educational research suggests that these relationships matter to learning and pedagogy. However, what these efforts have neglected to examine is how teacher-student relationships embody the presence and action of centrifugal forces, which are essential to establishing a dialogical context for learning. Centrifugal forces pull away from the centre, serving to destabilize language and meaning (Bakhtin, 1981). These forces are brought to bear on centralized understandings of meaning. The resulting tension between teacher-student relationships and standards becomes the focus of learning, where new meanings are made possible through the interactions of oppositional forces.

Teacher-student relationships embody these centrifugal forces by rejecting pre-conceived identities dictated to them by standardization. It is not enough that relationships are

present in pedagogy; the relational participants must pull away from attempts to centralize their identities. For Bakhtin (1986), the act of decentralizing pedagogical identities rests on the perspective of another located outside the self. It is necessary for “the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding” (p. 7, italics in original). This need recognizes a fundamental reality of dialogism, that one can never “really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole . . . ; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*” (p. 7, italics in original). In order for a person to come to know and understand himself or herself, he or she must participate in a relationship with another. Pedagogically, a teacher cannot come to understand his or her identity as a teacher without the presence of a student. It is only through dialogue with a student that a teacher gains a sense of his or her identity, and vice versa.

Standardization attempts to impose identities upon pedagogical participants. Through prescriptive identities, teachers and students are placed in dualistic environments where the only available outcome is a hierarchical positioning of one over the other. The educational landscape is rife with examples of these identities, most notably the pedagogical competition between teacher-centred and student-centred learning. Post-standardized participation attempts to resist the centralizing efforts to dominate and control identities. Bakhtin’s (1986) theories suggest that participation in learning is not about determining the boundaries that define and confine identities and meaning. Rather, it focuses on pushing against these boundaries of understanding when they come up against each other. This collision of boundaries refuses the “closedness and one-sidedness of . . . particular meanings,” allowing participants to “raise new questions” for the other, “ones it did not raise itself” (p. 7). Not only do we ask new questions, but we “seek answers to our own questions,” inviting the other to respond to us “by revealing to us its new aspects and new . . . depths” (p. 7). Through question and response, we recognize that neither self nor other are bound entities. Instead, “they intermingle in a body-world relationship yielding an outsidersness, belonging as much to the other as self” (Latta, 2005, p. 34).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

Post-standardized education is committed to upholding Bakhtin’s dialogic principles in teaching and learning, namely that knowledge cannot be known outside of pedagogical relationships. Its content and form take shape in the midst of the self relating to another. Educational standards are reclaimed from the totalizing and controlling measures of standardized comparison, serving instead as a centralizing force anchoring dialogic pedagogy to what students should be able to know and do. Teachers and students engage with the standards and with each other in a relationship that is absent of preconceived identities. By focusing outside the self (i.e., on another), both participants are more aware of who they are becoming as they seek to answer one another’s questions. Through this process of becoming, teachers and students push against the boundaries of standards. What results from this collision is a pedagogical tension from which new meanings of knowledge and truth emerge.

Although Bakhtin’s theories have been applied to classrooms (Dysthe, 2011; Matusov, 2009; Roth, 2009), the question still remains as to whether or not they are practical, or even plausible, in an educational context dominated by accountability. Under these current conditions, dialogic pedagogy is perceived as too ideal and utopic, often alienating teachers from public school settings because it is too far removed from reality (Dysthe, 2011). The goal-oriented structures under which many schools operate are essentially anti-dialogic. To

ask teachers to engage in a style of learning that runs counter to the current system is in many respects irresponsible and impossible (Matusov, 2009).

However, if educators shift the implementation and use of standards away from comparative measures toward participation in relational tension (centrifugal/centripetal forces), dialogic pedagogy can usher in an era of post-standardized education. This transition begins with teachers recognizing the tension created when participants pull and push against one another. Additionally, they consider their responsibility as teachers to encourage tension by focusing on connections rather than objects (Vagle, 2015). Internally persuasive discourse serves as an example of pedagogical practice focused on connections. Internally persuasive discourse seeks out moments when “different ideas that embody diverse voices collide with each other in a dialogue that tests these ideas” (Matusov, 2007, p. 229-230). The goal of internally persuasive discourse is to provide “maximal interaction between another’s word and its context, for the dialogizing influence they have on each other, for the free and creative development of another’s word” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). The focus of the discourse is not on the word itself, but on the interaction between it and the context.

Internally persuasive discourse hinges on the presence of and interaction with (including resistance to and rejection of) authoritative discourse. Any discourse that seeks to “control and direct the discourse and the participants’ action and ideas without the participants’ questioning this control” is seen as authoritative (Sullivan, Smith & Matusov, 2009, p. 330). Bakhtin (1981) claims that authoritative discourse “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own,” by recognizing that “[i]ts authority was already *acknowledged* in the past” (p. 342). In other words, this type of discourse brings an authoritative word from outside the relationship or moment, claiming it has dominion over the dialogue.

Conversely, internally persuasive discourse is “open to entanglements in dialogic relations with other points of view. It resists other voices and is being resisted and simultaneously penetrated by them” (Tsitsipis, 2004, p. 571). This inclusion of other voices pushes against the claims of authoritative discourse, challenging the priority of voices external to the dialogue, demanding that other thoughts and ideas be included. In order for internally persuasive discourse to take place, the authoritative word must be present; it cannot be sustained without authority (Matusov, 2007; Sullivan, et al., 2009). By colliding with a multiplicity of other voices, the authoritative discourse “takes on another character: it is questioned, it is put in a new situation” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 348). Questioning the authoritative discourse negates its presupposed position of authority and power, creating a space for new meanings to emerge (Sullivan, et al., 2009).

This process of creating a space for students to disagree with, challenge, modify, or take up the authoritative voice is the example of dialogic pedagogy put into practice by Bakhtin himself (2004). In his lone essay on education, Bakhtin describes his own teaching to secondary students. He introduces his students to the stylistics of grammar (the authoritative word), and then allows them to challenge his presentation while encouraging them to develop their own voice through writing. Bakhtin employs internally persuasive discourse pedagogies as a means to present the grammatically authoritative word so that his students can challenge it in order to create new styles of writing. The authoritative word is not given to each student to memorize and replicate on a test. It is offered to the students as the centralizing way language is written. As students come to learn grammar, they do so in the context of tension, pushing and pulling against its authoritative meanings by suggesting alternative presentations of it. They do not merely respond to Bakhtin’s delivery of a lesson; they engage with the material in a “tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” in an effort to create new meaning (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

Internally persuasive discourse as a pedagogical practice requires the presence of the authoritative word as “a voice speaking *the one point of view that must be attended to*” (Morson, 2004, p. 320, italics in original). This perspective is granted to the authoritative word primarily because it is the one voice that everyone hears. In education, the content standards delivered by the teacher usually fulfil the requirement of the authoritative word. Once the standards have been communicated, all participants (teachers and students) engage in the process of challenging and testing the authoritative word. Dialogic pedagogy rests on the insistence that all ideas are open to testing through discourse. Teachers’ and students’ voices alike are equally valued, and disagreements are not viewed as threatening or incorrect, but rather as opportunities for learning (Dysthe, 2011). The dialogic goal is not to conform learning to a correct and precise adherence to the standard. It is to encourage participants to pull at its centre, to question its legitimacy as authoritative, and to move it (if necessary) to a new centre of understanding. This entire dialogic process is dependent upon participants understanding the function of the authoritative word and why it has been granted authority. Both teachers and students must come to know the standard as the authoritative context before they may approach it dialogically. In other words, the standards are not rejected in dialogic pedagogy. They are understood so that they may be contested.

Participants challenge the authoritative word by asking questions of it and of each other. Call and response, question and answer, is the basic unit of dialogic analysis. Bakhtin refers to these units as utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). A dialogue is made up of many utterances with each one dependent upon the one immediately preceding and following it, much like links in a continuous chain. At first glance, this pedagogical practice does not seem novel enough to be considered post-anything. It appears to be a repackaging of inquiry-based instructional methods which educational research has focused on for decades. While commonalities exist between these two pedagogical practices, they are fundamentally different in ways that push internally persuasive discourse beyond standardization.

Consider a concise and general statement of student expectations regarding inquiry-based instruction in science education:

During inquiry-based instruction, learners interact with and describe objects and events, ask questions, construct explanations based on evidence, test those explanations against current scientific knowledge, and communicate their ideas to others. They identify their assumptions, use critical and logical thinking, and consider alternative explanations. Ideally, as inquirers, learners assume major responsibility for constructing their own knowledge and understanding. (Contant, Bass & Carin, 2015, p. 89)

This description, although based on students interacting with content using question/answer methods to develop alternative explanations, is not dialogic. The question/answer strategies at the core of inquiry methods are not dialogic. They are not utterances, in the Bakhtinian sense. These units of dialogue require the questions asked of the self to come from an outside source. Inquiry methods encourage students to “answer their own questions through analyzing data they collected independently” (Bell, Smetana & Binns, 2005). The presence of questions obscures the fact that inquiry methods are focused exclusively on the student. This singular focus renders the tension between self and another necessary for dialogic interaction null and void.

Additionally, students are expected to answer questions using data they collected independently. In this pedagogical practice, the teacher’s role is to “facilitate student inquiry,” serving as a guide as students “ask questions, conduct investigations, and use observational evidence and scientific knowledge to develop explanations and answer their questions” (Contant, et al., 2015, p. 89). The teacher is not a co-labourer in the process of creating

knowledge, but rather assists students as they ask questions that they themselves answer. In short, teachers are not a part of the questioning for learning process. This marginalization of participation limits the questions teachers ask during the students' independent construction of meaning. Since they are not actively engaged in the dialogue, teachers are restricted to asking questions *to* the student *about* the content. These questions do not serve a dialogic purpose. Rather, they only serve to assess whether or not the student understands the content, which is actually a practice of standardized measuring.

It is their role in the process of question and answer, the formation of utterances, to which teachers must attend. It is easy to consider pedagogy that is inquiry- or question-based as dialogic when, in fact, it is not. Just because questions are asked does not make the instruction dialogic. In order for dialogism to exist, the questions must uphold the necessary tension of the relationship. Questions that support the relational tension are ones that the asker cannot answer. Since the purpose of questions is to more fully understand the self (i.e., learn), only the self can answer them. Others cannot ask questions they can answer for the self.

In the classroom, teachers must be willing to ask questions only students can answer. When teachers ask questions they already know the answer to (i.e., *to* students *about* content), they are not participating in relational tension. Similarly, when pedagogy is designed to allow students to ask questions of themselves, it is not centred on relational tension. This lack of tension impedes learning, because the interdependent nature of pedagogy rests on a dialogic relationship between question and answer, between teacher question and student response. Through a commitment participating in the tension, teachers can practice a post-standardized pedagogy that allows students to engage in authentic and dialogic learning.

Notes on contributor

Jeffry King is a lecturer in the colleges of education at both Texas State University and Concordia University-Texas. His research focuses primarily on post-structural theories and practices of dialogic pedagogies, specifically within science education. He can be reached at <jking820@gmail.com>.

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