

AN ONTOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION

by

Alexander M. Sidorkin

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Abstract

An Ontological Understanding of Dialogue in Education

by Alexander M. Sidorkin

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Donna H. Kerr
College of Education

This dissertation develops an ontological understanding of dialogue that is then used to reconsider the forms and purposes of schooling. Employing the works of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin, the work departs from the literature on schooling that treats dialogue as merely an instrument in the schooling of children in order for them to become good citizens, to join the work force and the like. Instead it is argued that dialogue needs to be understood as constituting the very essence of human existence. In addition the dissertation offers a critique of monological assumptions of modern and postmodern philosophies and critiques non-ontological theories of dialogue that give it a merely instrumental, as opposed to constitutive value. The notion of a polyphonic self is then introduced, which calls for reconsideration of the notions of identity, integrity, and authenticity. A human self is co-authored by others, and can exist and be known only through dialogue with others. A person of dialogical integrity is defined as being consistently different in different situations; and the authentic self is true to the dialogical situation, rather than one's inner feelings and self-concepts. The dissertation illustrates the ontological notion of dialogue by analyzing types of discourse in classroom communication. Instances of dialogue are not those where students and a teacher take turn in an orderly conversation, according to rules of "dialogical teaching." Rather, dialogue appears in some moments of disruption, talking out of turn, and laughter. The dissertation defines a successful school as one fostering dialogue in its ontological sense. Such a school should possess systemic qualities of complexity, civility, and carnival. These qualities create necessary conditions for the emergence of the dialogical relation.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the women who taught me:

Valentina,

Anna,

Maya,

Svetlana,

Maria,

Nelli,

Ludmila,

Donna,

and others.

INTRODUCTION

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

In this dissertation I treat the notion of dialogue as central for defining human existence. To experience what it means to be human, one needs to engage in dialogical relations. We are human in the fullest sense when we engage in dialogue. This ontological understanding of dialogue has its implications for education. I argue that schools should focus on helping children experience and learn what it means to be human. Therefore, the entire social arrangement called "school" should be designed around this purpose of introducing children to the life of dialogue.

This work is a result of my thinking about the works of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin in the context of educational realities. A few years ago I worked with several groups representing the Communards' educational movement, most remarkably with Laboratory School #825 in Moscow.¹ These experiences made me wonder what it takes to create a good educational institution. Subsequently, I studied other good schools and found that such a school might look nothing like the Communards group, and still have something in common. All those good schools definitely "felt right," which can be a part of what defines a good school.² Later I discovered certain familiar features in the descriptions of good American schools. On the surface, these familiar features seem to be very trivial and disconnected. There was, however, some deeper structure looming beneath the surface of school life for which I did not have the right words, and therefore no adequate means of understanding.

It took me several years to realize that Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and carnival might provide a solution to the puzzle of what makes a good school. As limited as any solution of this sort might be, it provides a useful language for some of those courageous principals and teachers who despite all odds keep trying to change their schools.

The problem I want to address is that of the language of educational change. This dissertation rests upon the conviction that it is the lack of language for describing what works in schools that among other things prevents educators from turning every school into a good place to spend one's childhood. The educational community has fallen into a

¹ The movement started at the end of 50's in Leningrad, and quickly spread across the country in 1960's. It consisted of communes of adults and children, organized on the principles of social activism, creative life, and group self-analysis. They created a variety of organizational and educational forms widely used in Soviet schools. More than that, the Communards created a distinctive subculture. Over 300,000 children were involved in a Communard group at some point of their lives in 1960-80's. The movement reached its crest in the years of Perestroika and then gradually receded in numbers. It is in a process of change now.

² I will return to this theme in chapter Four.

false belief that policy-making is *the* way to change education. Hence, we find educational discourse full of talk about charter schools, uniforms, inclusion, and site-based management. Furthermore, the rhetoric of educational reform in the United States, as represented in public discussions, and official documents bears a whole set of features that I consider to be erroneous. This rhetoric resembles the language of a sales representative; it is organized around a few expressions, and designed to capture a “market share” of educational semantic space. Each of these expressions, e.g., “site-based management,” or “parental involvement,” or “drug abuse prevention,” imports a fairly predictable string of reasoning and prescriptions. “Raising issues” is followed by “addressing problems,” which in turn calls for “educating the public,” and finally “legislative actions.” Words become monopolized by political parties, and soon are very difficult to use because of the thick crust of permanently attached connotations. In sum, the language of educational reforming becomes a set of monologues that do not speak to each other. This language exposes the confusion and pessimism of the American public about the possibility of truly significant changes in education. Many policy makers and scholars tacitly believe that only very limited, narrowly focused problems in education are treatable, one at a time.³

The rhetoric of educational reforming is one side of the problem. The other side of it resides in the language of educational research. Even the best scholarly books, describing truly outstanding educational institutions, show notable difficulties in capturing the nature of a good school. Some rely on stories and individual descriptions, which is an invaluable strategy in understanding a particular school or a character. Yet it is not enough to know a story of somebody else’s success, if one intends to secure one’s own success. Stories are not replicable, by definition. There is a lack of *theoretical* language, I maintain, for understanding a successful educational institution. Theory, unlike a story, represents knowledge applicable in a relatively wide variety of circumstances. However, the existing theoretical languages cannot provide the necessary support for understanding and creating a good school because they implicitly include monological assumptions about the purposes and ways of schooling.

Poor public rhetoric of education and “conceptual shortfall” in educational research together present a problem. It is not merely a political or cultural problem, but also a research one, which I intend to explore in this dissertation. Herein is the problem of creating a philosophical language suitable for a description of a “good” educational institution.

My hypothesis is that an ontological understanding of dialogue may provide such a language. Dialogue, if treated as a central concept for understanding human existence, ceases to be merely a form of communication. Rather, the entire social organization of a school may be described coherently from this position.

³ I am not arguing this language problem to be exclusively American. Contemporary Russian reformers invented their own very eclectic and fragmented lingo of educational reform, that seems to ignore the most important things in education. This problem, however, awaits its special treatise.

The problem area formulated above is fairly large, even if explored within the confines of my hypothesis. I further limit it to several questions.

- What is the role of dialogue in human existence?
- How does the ontological view of dialogue change our perception of the self in the society; and accordingly, the concept of education?
- What are the instances of dialogue in school life? How is it connected to learning?
- What is the “good” school from the dialogical point of view? How does one create such a school?

METHOD

My method is one of philosophical criticism. I understand it here as applying the ontological concept of dialogue against other existing theoretical languages, either explicitly presented in scholarly literature, or implicitly presented in the mass media and educational praxis.

This is a derivative of the social criticism method as described, for instance, in Michael Walzer’s *The Company of Critics*.⁴ The social order and social practice of education are not the *immediate* targets of my analysis. Of course, it is the social concern about the quality of contemporary education that motivates this work. However, I advocate a change in the *minds* of educators rather than a social reform in its conventional sense. Thus, I fight the wind mills of ideas and approaches, in the (naïve?) belief that people would do better if only they knew how. This is no small assumption, but its justification goes well beyond the boundaries of this particular project. There are things, like educational reform, that are better done locally, by small groups of people, according to their circumstances. When large polities, broad policies and high politics become involved, the moral content of such actions may diminish. It is the social change I am after, of course. Yet it is the philosophical assumptions on the way of such change on which I choose to focus.

⁴ Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

In Chapter Three I will draw upon some ethnographic data. However, this work is not ethnographic research, where data confirm or refute a previously constructed theoretical framework. In this case I use data to *construct* the theoretical framework, that is supported subsequently with an argument, rather than with more data.⁵ I use citations from interviews and fieldnotes as illustrations only. The role of this data is very much like that in the imagined little stories philosophers like to tell each other, except for the fact that these are the actual words of a practicing teacher and her students. The criterion for selection of particular pieces of data is very simple. I include only those best able to clarify my theoretical claims, the same way as I cite other theorists to support my points. The difference between grown-up and child philosophers is in the source of their authority: the former belong to an established group of scholars; the latter are closer to the subject of my study. The data do not validate, but explain my theoretical claims. This is not the most common, but certainly a legitimate usage of ethnographic data. I do have a method here—not a method of research, but a method of research presentation. My field is philosophy of education, and if I go beyond the boundaries of this field, it is to come eventually back.

Chapter Four also includes several illustrations from various successful schools that I either take from other researchers, or from my own previous research. These illustrations fall under the same rule as ethnographic data in Chapter Three: they illustrate, rather than prove my points.

SKETCH OF THE ARGUMENT

The ontological concept of dialogue places dialogical relation in the center of human existence. The dialogue is more than a form of communication. It is both a specific mode and an aspect of human existence. The dialogue is a relation. This relation is holistic, direct, and mutual. The dialogue is a primary relation, which means that the fullness of human existence happens *between* individuals, rather than within the singular self. To be is to engage in dialogue. Dialogue is a certain occurrence in ordinary human life. It requires an alternative type of time, space, and causality. Dialogue may arise spontaneously, or be evoked by certain cultural phenomena (carnival, “laughter culture” (*smekhovaya kultura*), “third places”).

The ontological concept of dialogue opposes both the monological languages of social sciences and the non-ontological visions of dialogue. Monologism is a common feature of modern and postmodern social theories. Modernism implies the existence of a singular true meaning. Postmodernism argues for a multitude of isolated monologues, each of them still moving towards a singular meaning. Both concentrate on the best way to arrive at a true single meaning. An ontological concept of dialogue treats all meanings as shared, and all words as half-somebody else’s. There are no meanings out of the context of dialogical relation. The plurality of representation is an indispensable attribute of truth.

⁵ I call this *ethnographically inspired philosophy*.

Non-ontological concepts of dialogue treat dialogue as a form of communication, as a means towards some other end. The ontological concept of dialogue places dialogue at the very center of human existence, which is an end in itself, and cannot be used for something else.

The link between the ontological concept of dialogue and educational theory is a dialogical theory of the self. The self in this world of dialogue is also co-authored by others, it is a locus of multiple dialogues. The dialogical notion of the self challenges interpretations of such widely popular concepts as the authentic self, identity, and integrity. Accordingly, one should cultivate a multitude of different internal voices, and not strive to develop a unified concept of the self. A person of dialogical integrity is consistently different in different situations. One's moral competence is directly linked to one's ability to sustain an internalized dialogue between voices of justice and care, represented by significant others.

If the self is a locus of multiple dialogues, then learning may be understood as fostering an ability to "dialogize" texts of human culture. One of the implications of such model of learning is that classroom discourse should be cyclic. I propose a framework that describes three main phases of classroom discourse: authoritative, dialogical, and diffused. The phases allow children to see the same curriculum in light of three different languages. The authoritative discourse establishes a common text and vocabulary. In the dialogical discourse, students break the common text, retell parts of it in their own words, and add subjective meanings to it in a context of the present classroom event. The diffused discourse is students' chaotic chatter that stores the curriculum knowledge away, making it available for the future. The whole cycle allows the curriculum to acquire a human voice, and to be included in an orbit of dialogical relations in the classroom.

Another implication of the dialogical approach to education affects the overall structure of school life. The dialogical school may be best created by entering an initial relational incident. I define three characteristics of the dialogical school: complexity, civility, and carnival. Complexity is an ability to serve multiple functions, so that students and teachers do not identify fully with their social roles. It allows for a multitude of voices to exist in school. Civility is an ongoing conversation within the school community about itself. Civility is a way to make sure those voices hear each other. Carnival allows for different phases of school life. It produces an image of an alternative social world, fulfills the social criticism function, and creates time and space for the most intense dialogical encounters.

CHAPTER 1. DIALOGUE AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

In this chapter I attempt to establish the notion of dialogue as a central fact of human existence, as an ontological concept. The word *ontological* does not refer to existence of dialogue, it refers to human existence. The ontological concept of dialogue explores the place of dialogue in human existence. One of the reasons for using the adjective “ontological,” is a need to distinguish between what I propose and a number of non-ontological concepts of dialogue. For me the very existence of a human being in his or her human quality is a result of dialogue. In the non-ontological conception of dialogue, this relation between dialogue and human existence are reversed: dialogue is treated as secondary to human existence, mainly as a form of communication.⁶

I will draw on the works of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin because from my point of view they developed the two major ontological theories of dialogue in this century. Specifically, two works will receive most of my attention since they represent the thought of the two authors in the most concentrated form. These are *I and Thou* by Buber and *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo* by Bakhtin. I intentionally leave aside some other thinkers whose work have direct relevance to my topic. For instance, I avoid discussing Gadamer, Habermas, Wittgenstein, Hanna Arendt, and others, because this would complicate the argument enormously, and, in my view, not productively.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

I want to make a few very brief points about specific ways in which the two philosophers presented their thought. Buber wrote *I and Thou* in a quite unusual manner for traditional philosophical language. In fact it is so idiosyncratic that some received the book as poetry rather than philosophy.⁷ It is probably both, but I am only going to touch upon its philosophical aspect, if only because it is inaccessible to me in German. *I and Thou* is an extremely obscure book, if one approaches it as a traditional work of philosophical writing. But it also strikes one as very clear and concise, if only one reads it without presumptions and ready-made expectations.

The basic structure of Buber’s language is defined in his initial claim: “To man the world is twofold.”⁸ *I-Thou* and *I-It* are two pairs of primary words that separate two very different modes of existence. Hence, *I-Thou* or just *Thou* refers to the realm of the dialogical relation, while *I-It* or *It* to the realm of subject-object experiences. In later

⁶ I use a particular book as an example of non-ontological treatment of dialogue: Nicholas C. Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1993).

⁷ Ronald G. Smith, “Translator’s Preface to the Second Edition,” in: Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Collier Books, 1987), vii-viii.

⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Collier Books, 1987), 3.

works Buber developed a notion of the *interhuman*, which from my point of view is synonymous with the dialogical.⁹

Bakhtin did not write poetry, but neither did he state his philosophical views directly. He conveys his philosophy mainly through a literary analysis of Dostoevsky and Rabelais. Following Clark and Holquist,¹⁰ I will assume that Bakhtin invites Dostoevsky to be his interlocutor, and not an authoritative source. For instance, Bakhtin says: “No element of Dostoevsky’s creation is built from the “disengaged third” point of view.”¹¹ For my purposes this should be read as: “The position of the ‘disengaged third’ is inadequate.” I defer until later discussion about whether such a claim is ontological or ethical in its nature. Yet there is no reason to confine Bakhtin’s thought to literary criticism only. He characterized his own work as *philosophical anthropology*,¹² and his works are best understood in this way.

One more preliminary note regards the extent of the influence of Buber (1878 – 1965) on Bakhtin (1895 – 1975). I need to make this point in order to show that neither of the two philosophers derives from another, and that they complement rather than repeat each other. Remarkably little work has been done to compare the two thinkers, and I am not about to do it here. My aim is not a systematic comparison of the two philosophies, but a construction of a framework useful in my further analysis of education. K. Clark and M. Holquist briefly note that young Bakhtin was introduced to Buber’s work by a German tutor sometime between 1910 and 1913. Bakhtin never mentions Buber in his works, which may or may not demonstrate that Bakhtin was not familiar with the mature Buber’s thought.¹³ Nina Perlina attempts to demonstrate “an astonishing similarity of opinions and formulaic renditions between Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber.”¹⁴ She attributes these similarities not as much to direct influence, which is not quite proven yet – although Bakhtin mentioned Buber in his correspondence with Kagan – as to the fact that the two men were contemporaries, and developed as thinkers in similar intellectual milieus. Bakhtin, like most Russian intellectuals, was familiar in detail with German classical philosophy. In particular, he and his circle were interested in the work of the neo-Kantian Marburg school of Hermann Cohen, who also had influenced Buber’s thought.

⁹ Nevertheless, Buber himself considered the interhuman (*das Zwischenmenschliche*) not a true dialogue yet, but a movement towards dialogue. See: Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988), 65.

¹⁰ Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 170.

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel’, 1963), 23.

¹² Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 3.

¹³ Bakhtin could avoid mentioning Buber for consideration of censorship.

¹⁴ Perlina, Nina. Bakhtin and Buber: Problems of Dialogic Imagination In: *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature (STCL)*, 1984, Fall issue: vol. 9 no. 1 Pp. 13-28. P.13.

Until proven otherwise, I will assume the two ontological theories of the dialogue may be considered as evolved independently from one another. In addition, Bakhtin ignores many issues central to Buber, as if he was not aware of Buber's philosophy. For instance, he does not address Buber's idea of a whole being, his analysis of feelings in the *I-It* relations, and the like. And finally, Bakhtin wrote most of his Dostoevsky book in 1922,¹⁵ while Buber's *I and Thou* first appeared in German in 1923. All similarities between the works of the two can be explained by the assumption that the same thing was discovered twice.

In other words, I choose to treat the parallels between Buber and Bakhtin as an extra support for their claims, as if they corroborate each other's claims. Strong argumentation is not to be found in the two philosopher's writings. Martin Buber never bothered to explain exactly why he thinks the world is two-fold. He stated it as a self-evident truth, which is how much of philosophy, and especially that of an ontological kind, is conducted. As I have mentioned, Mikhail Bakhtin disguised philosophy as literary criticism. So, he credits Dostoevsky or Rabelais for much of his claims, which is hardly a true philosophical argument. Nevertheless, both Buber and Bakhtin appeal to ordinary human experience, so their philosophies can hardly be called speculative.

My main reason for drawing on two philosophies rather than on one is not the fact that they corroborate most of each other's claims. Rather, I want them to engage in an imagined dialogue about dialogue.

THOU ART, THEREFORE, I AM: THE NATURE OF DISCOVERY

What did Buber and Bakhtin contribute to philosophy? Bakhtin compared Dostoevsky's invention of the dialogical novel to the Copernican revolution.¹⁶ This metaphor may easily be applied to Bakhtin himself, as well as to Buber. Indeed, Copernicus did not discover any new observable facts: the sun and planets still seem to revolve around the Earth. However, the perception of the universe had completely changed after Copernicus (not right away, though). A different object had become the center of this world. Similarly, neither Buber, nor Bakhtin invented new practices. All they did was to describe the world differently. Bakhtin, for instance, emphasized that "the point is not to discover new characteristics or new human types of some sort or other."¹⁷ It is to discover a new and holistic *aspect of being human*.

Buber and Bakhtin, like Copernicus, discovered the new center of the human universe, *the dialogical*. It is the center in a sense that the very fact of human existence is contingent upon engagement in dialogical relations. An individual may exist as an organism in a physical, or a biological sense. But we are truly human when we are in a dialogical relation with another. The most important things in human lives happen *between* human

¹⁵ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 239.

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 65.

¹⁷ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 77.

beings, rather than within or without them. Buber states unequivocally: “All real living is meeting.”¹⁸ Bakhtin’s formulation is quite similar in its categorical overtones. He said,

[T]he dialogue must lie at the center of Dostoevsky’s artistic world, and the dialogue not as a means, but as an end in itself. Dialogue is for him not the threshold of action, but the action itself. Nor is it a means of revealing, of exposing the already-formed character of a person; no, here the person is not only outwardly manifested, he becomes for the first time that which he is, not only – we repeat – as far as others are concerned, but for himself, as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When the dialogue is finished, all is finished. Therefore the dialogue, in essence, cannot and must not come to an end.

Everything in Dostoevsky’s novels gravitates toward the dialogue, toward dialogical opposition, as the center point. Everything else is the means, the dialogue is the end. One voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing. Two voices is minimum for life, the minimum for existence.¹⁹

Both writers radically shift the weight of significance to the realm of the dialogical. Dialogue is not simply a conversation, a way of communication, a means towards some other goals. Dialogue becomes the goal in itself, the central purpose of human life. This is quite a radical proposition, which I nevertheless intend to take seriously. Contrary to Descartes’ opinion, I would suggest: “Thou art, therefore I am.” The assertion of another’s being is essential for my own being; the process of this assertion *is* my being. Self-awareness is secondary to the dialogical relation with the other. If I do not accept and make sense of your existence, there is no way for me to exist or make sense of my own being. A failure to affirm the being of the other brings myself into non-being.

Buber expressed the idea about dialogue as a fundamental ontological notion by the inclusion of an *eternal Thou* notion in his framework. This is a very important theme for Buber, who thought of dialogue as meeting God through meeting another human being: “In each *Thou* we address eternal *Thou*.”²⁰ Bakhtin, who probably had Christian beliefs, expressed the same or similar idea in a secular form, although he did not elaborate on it. He saw a role for a pure “human being in a human being,” a representative of “all others” for the self. “[The crests of Dostoevsky’s dialogues] ascend above the story, into the abstract sphere of pure relation between human beings.”²¹ It is important to mention, that neither Buber nor Bakhtin talked about some objective human nature. I understand these

¹⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Translated by R.W.Rotsel. (Ardis, 1973), 213. I must note that the translator bears responsibility for gender-specific references. A generic word Bakhtin uses is best translated as human being.

²⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 6.

²¹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 357.

two concepts as representing the very essence of our humanity, which is only available for us through dialogue.

Why does dialogue become the foundation of being? While both thinkers do recognize the importance and omnipresence of the subject-object, or *I-It*, relation, this relation is on the periphery of being; it is something inevitable, but not essential for human existence. “And in all seriousness of truth, hear this: without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man.”²² Similarly, Bakhtin noted that the discovery of the polyphonic novel does not in any way cancel other, monological genres of literature.²³ And yet he writes: “Only *mechanical* relations are not dialogical, and Dostoevsky categorically denied their importance for an understanding and interpretation of human life and actions.”²⁴

The above claim about dialogue as the only truly human sphere of being, is quite strong. Those who never know dialogue are described as only partially existing, as not fully human. One may even suspect an attempt to separate human beings into an “enlightened” caste of those able to enter the dialogical, and another caste of those who are not. Such a charge would not be fair for two reasons. First, the fuller existence in dialogue is defined not by separateness, but by connectedness with others. “Thou art” includes the other in the very core of one’s own being; it is a radically inclusive formula. Second, the dialogical is a universal phenomenon, accessible to everyone equally, and readily available in foundations of every culture and every language. Bakhtin writes that *every* meaning is co-authored; *every* word uttered by an individual belongs in part to somebody else. “[The dialogical relation] – is almost a universal phenomenon, penetrating all of human speech and all the relationships and manifestations of human life; generally, everything that has sense and meaning.”²⁵ Similarly, Buber argues that *I-Thou* is a natural way of life, represented both in the history of primitive men, and in the individual history of a child.²⁶ “There are not two kinds of man, but two poles of humanity... Every man lives in the twofold *I*.”²⁷ “All men have somewhere been aware of the *Thou*.”²⁸

As I understand it, Buber and Bakhtin are saying this: for full existence as a human being, one not only has to enter the dialogical relation, but also to know and value the fact of such an entry. Here we find a line that separates human existence from existence of material world. One may tentatively argue that the material world exists without and

²² Buber, *I and Thou*, 34.

²³ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 360. Again, the polyphonic novel for Bakhtin is not only a new literary genre; it is also a metaphor for a new methodology of humanities he propagates.

²⁴ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 57.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 56.

²⁶ Buber, *I and Thou*, 22-28.

²⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 65.

²⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 53.

independently of human understanding of it.²⁹ However, human existence depends on one's own awareness of the human existence. One of Buber's central claims is just this: primary words bring about existence. That is why there is no clear distinction between Buber's and Bakhtin's ontological and normative claims: one is fully existent only in dialogue, therefore one *must* enter the dialogical to exist fully.

Placing the dialogical at the center of human existence has its consequences for educational theory. Before I talk about my own understanding of these consequences, I would like to critique what I call non-ontological concepts of dialogue in education. The approach which seems to be erroneous to me is to promote dialogue in education as an excellent tool of learning. Using the same Copernicus metaphor, such an approach amounts to suggesting: "Look, the Sun is really an interesting planet, revolving around the Earth. It is much bigger than we thought before, and it has amazing features we did not know existed. Let us pay more attention to the Sun." One can study the Sun a lot, and even benefit from the study, without ever realizing that it is Earth that revolves around the Sun, not the other way around. In this same way, many educators embrace the notion of dialogue without attempting to shift the paradigm that may be associated with it.

One example of a non-ontological treatment of dialogue is an interesting book by Nicholas Burbules, who seems to be right on the verge of accepting dialogue as an end, but never actually crosses the line. He says, following general Buber's line of thought: "Dialogue is not something we *do* or *use*; it is a relation that we *enter into*,"³⁰ and then writes a whole book about how to *use* dialogue in teaching. Burbules does not take the ontological aspect of dialogue seriously enough. For instance, Burbules further defines: "Dialogue is an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight, or sensitivity of its participants."³¹ But dialogue as I understand it, is not an activity, it is not directed toward anything. Dialogue is an end in itself, the very essence of human existence.

My approach would be not to study dialogue in teaching, but teaching in dialogue. Burbules and others³² convincingly show how using dialogical methods can improve teaching and learning. I make a stronger argument. These findings are indeed valuable, but they contain the seeds of self-destruction. Dialogue, which is being *used* for something ceases to be dialogue. This is only a shell of dialogue, a conversation entirely within the *I-It* realm. No rules can guarantee that dialogue really happens, and dialogue may occur despite gravely monological forms of communication. Once dialogue begins, no one can channel it, or manage it, or transform it, even for the noble aims of education.

²⁹ Such a claim has been challenged, though.

³⁰ Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching*, xii.

³¹ Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching*, 8.

³² See, for instance, Hull, R. *The Language Gap: How classroom dialogue fails*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

I contrast the ontological vision of dialogue to a non-ontological one, which sees dialogue as a form of communication, as a means toward some other goal.

I reject the idea that certain forms of dialogical teaching should simply be included in educational practice, along with other useful tools. Education in its entirety should be realigned to create those brief “relational events” of direct, immediate meetings among individuals. This does not mean that the rest of time spent in school does not count or is not important. Quite to the contrary, as it will be evident from my further argument, a dialogical approach to education entails restructuring all aspects of every day school life. And yet it is crucially important to understand the priorities in school life: the occurrences of dialogue, even if brief, should be the end, and the rest of the time should be the means. What kind of learning technique to use, and what kind of schedule to offer, all these questions are important, but do not stand independent from the larger purpose. The criterion here is whether they promote or obstruct dialogue. Nothing in school is significant or insignificant *as such*.

I want to make education revolve around the dialogical. For this purpose, the life of an entire school should be treated as a whole. Paradoxically, when I look at schooling from the dialogical point of view, I talk more about classroom discourse and organizational structures, than about dialogue itself. I will deal mainly with the world of *I-It*, for this world is not indifferent to the dialogical. The life of any school inevitably is monologically structured, but it nonetheless can be more or less accommodating, more or less movable, and more or less *breakable* for dialogue to occur. The secret of dialogue rests not where almost everyone may be looking for it. The secret of dialogue is not in the dialogue itself. It is in the surrounding realities of every day school life. The dialogical is a direct relation, but the road to it may only be indirect.

Once established, my sun is assumed to be stable. The whole problem is to figure out how to make that cumbersome planet called education move around dialogue. But first, let me describe the sun.

LAWS OF THE DIALOGICAL

I will now describe dialogue. The following description will not include many direct references to educational issues, but its implication for educational theory should become evident later in this work. I want first to establish a philosophical notion of dialogue, as a certain defining aspect of human existence, of what is it to be human. The purpose of this description is both to distinguish dialogue from other spheres of existence and show its importance in human life.

Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin remind me of two sailors. They traveled for many years to tell us about a new land they discovered. Both of them tell amazing stories about the new land, filled with a promise of freedom and well-being; stories that are almost too good to be true. They really try to lure us into going there, and even insist that we must do so. But they also have trouble pointing to where this new land is. The dialogical is an

unseen aspect of human life, in part because it does not have a material location. It is neither within, nor without an individual. The *between* has its own strange laws.

For instance, it is beyond regular time and space:

And just as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, sacrifice not in space, but space in sacrifice,... so with the man to whom I say *Thou*. I do meet with him at some time and place or other. I can set him in a particular time and place; I must constantly do it: but I set only a *He* or a *She*, that is an *It*, no longer my *Thou*.³³

The *Thou* appears, to be sure, in space, but in the exclusive situation of what is over against it, where everything else can be only the background out of which it emerges, not its boundary and measured limit. It appears, too, in time, but in that of the event which is fulfilled in itself: it is not lived as part of a continuous and organized sequence, but is lived in a 'duration' whose purely intensive dimension is definable only in terms of itself.³⁴

And from Bakhtin:

Dostoevsky 'leaps over' all that is homey and settled, and stable, and far from the threshold, the inner space of houses, apartments and rooms, because the life which he depicts is not played out in that kind of space... In homey interior space, far from the threshold, people live a biographical time: they are born, they experience childhood and youth, enter into marriage, give birth to children, grow old and die. And Dostoevsky 'leaps over' that kind of biographical time, too. On the threshold, and on the square the only possible time is *crisis time*, in which the *instant* is equal to years, decades, even to a 'billion years.'³⁵

What does this all mean? Does it mean that people who enter the dialogical do not experience time and space as we all do in every day life? Yes, it means this, and also that dialogue is not defined and determined by spatial and temporal location. Dialogue is what Virginia Woolf calls moving from entanglement in the "cotton wool of daily life" to "moments of being."³⁶ Much of my work will be about creating such rips in the fabric of every day life in order to create a possibility for "moments of being." In Chapter Four, I will try to show how time and space in school life may be transformed to make room for dialogical encounters.

Of course, not every time we feel or experience something unusual, like "falling out" of the conventional spatio-temporal relations, do we find our way into the dialogical. One

³³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 9.

³⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 30.

³⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 142.

³⁶ See an analysis of this Woolf's idea of in Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 6.

may use drugs, or excite oneself with violence to break through the “cotton wool of daily life.” But the dialogue is when you suddenly relate to another human being directly and fully. Dialogue is when such a relation takes you completely out of normal life. Now I move to other features of the dialogical.

The dialogue does not know genesis, nor does it know causality. Dostoevsky, writes Bakhtin, did not use such a fundamental category in German classical philosophy as *becoming*. For him, the central philosophical categories were such notions as co-existence and interaction.³⁷ Drawing from Dostoevsky, Bakhtin questioned the relevance of dialectics when it comes to a finalizing synthesis of contradictions and differences. This was not a particularly safe thing to do in a thoroughly Marxist and therefore, “dialectic” country. For Bakhtin differences never fully merge, instead, they co-exist in an engaged interaction. Dostoevsky, an embodiment of dialogical thinking for Bakhtin, saw everything as co-existing in one single moment. He could only understand the world as co-existence of different things.

Buber also writes on causality:

Here [in the world of relation] *I* and *Thou* freely confront one another in mutual effect that is neither connected with nor colored by any causality. Here man is assured of the freedom both of his being and of Being.³⁸

Freedom here is first and foremost the freedom from determination, from the burden of history. Dostoevsky, writes Bakhtin, never appeals to history as such, and treats every social and political issue in light of today.³⁹ This does not mean that the past is forgotten in dialogue. Rather, the past comes into the present, not as a cause, and not as an earlier stage of the present, but as a still existing, burning memory of the past. The memory is as real as the present is, the memory which is an equally important voice in the polyphony of a dialogical moment. This is how Buber puts it:

No systems of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole.⁴⁰

Along the same lines comes another of Buber’s statements: “True beings are lived in the present, the life of objects is the past.”⁴¹ What he means here, is that the past does not cause the present, does not precondition dialogue. *I* and *Thou* of dialogue simply are, with no explanations attached: “We are two *creatures* and we have come together in

³⁷ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 38.

³⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 51.

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 40.

⁴⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

⁴¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 13.

infinity... for the last time in the world. Relinquish your tone, and assume a human one! Speak in human voice for once.”⁴² There are no causes for and in dialogue.

Absence of causality is easier to understand if connected with the fact that there are no objects in the dialogical. Buber consistently contrasted *I-Thou* as a relation to *I-It* as an experience. “When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing.”⁴³ Maurice Friedman, a scholar of Buber’s thought, lends the following description of the *I-Thou* relation. This relation is characterized by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability.⁴⁴ Dialogue is not about objects; it is fully within subject-subject realm. Buber expressed this point rather poetically:

Thus human being is not *He* or *She*... But with no neighbor, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light.⁴⁵

Bakhtin also notes the “disappearance” of objects from the dialogical. Although the world *is* still there, it is seen through relation with the other:

Not only the reality of the character himself, but also the external world and way of life surrounding the character are drawn into a process of self-awareness and are transferred from the author’s field of vision to that of the character. They no longer reside in the same plane as the character, next to him and external to him in the united world of the author. Therefore they cannot be the causal, genetic factors defining the character and cannot explain anything in the [polyphonic novel]. Such self-awareness of the character, which takes all the world of objects inside, can stand only next to another consciousness. Only another horizon can stand next to his horizon; only another vantage point can stand next to his vantage point. *Only one real world – the world of other equal consciousness – can be counterposed by the author to the all-engulfing consciousness of the character.*⁴⁶

This absence of an object in dialogue is not an exclusively negative characteristic. This means, among other things, that ideas, like objects, are thoroughly embedded into the context of a thinking human consciousness. There is no abstract truth, or even an abstract idea without a living human being who expresses it. Every thought needs a living human voice to exist. Bakhtin paid particular attention to this aspect. Truth, he wrote, cannot be

⁴² Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 240.

⁴³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 4.

⁴⁴ Maurice S. Friedman. *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, P. 57.

⁴⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 8.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 66.

neutral in relation to who pronounces it. “The same word in the other’s mouth would take a different meaning, a different tone, and cease to be truth.”⁴⁷

This notion of an idea embedded in an event needs some elaboration.

Thought, involved in an event, becomes event-like and acquires that special quality of ‘idea-feeling’, ‘idea-power’; the quality which creates the unparalleled peculiarity of ‘idea’ in the artistic world of Dostoevsky.⁴⁸

I described earlier how dialogue is not determined by a pre-existing set of factors and causes. One may say that now I am arguing that dialogue is embedded in a particular context, or is determined by this context. How is embeddedness in an event different from determinism? It is worth noting that the Russian word *sobytie*, which means event, can also be understood as co-being. Any idea, any meaning does not reside fully within one individual:

Idea... is not a subjective, individual, and psychological entity that ‘permanently resides’ in a human head. To the contrary, idea is a *living event* occurring in the point of a dialogical meeting of two or several consciousness... Like word, idea wants to be heard, understood, and ‘answered’ by other voices from different stand points.⁴⁹

Again, time, space, and causality exist in dialogue, but they are transformed by it. Dialogue determines other things, like objects and ideas, but is not being determined by them.

Dialogue is about subjects only. More than that, there is no medium between the subjects; it is a direct relation. Yet even the most sophisticated social or psychological account of human being actually puts something between us and makes our relations indirect. I will expand on this point later in this chapter, but for now I just want to make the point that a psychological description involves a set of objectifying characteristics, applied to a human being without his or her direct involvement. Many people believe that this is normal, that there are no relations without some kind of medium or a middle link that is largely responsible for what is happening between us.

Buber addressed the point about directness of dialogue, when he wrote about two essentially different areas or dimensions of human life: the social and the interhuman. This dyad is based on his *I-Thou – I-It* distinction, and I will treat the interhuman here as synonymous with the dialogical. Social phenomena exist, in Buber’s words, “whenever the life of a number of men, lived with one another, bound up together, brings in its train

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 74.

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 11.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 116.

shared experiences and reactions.”⁵⁰ But it does not mean that between one member and another there exists any kind of personal, or existential relation. In the interhuman,

the only thing that matters is that for each of the two men the other happens as the particular other, that each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he doesn't regard him and use him as his object, but as his partner in a living event.⁵¹

Another important characteristic of the interhuman is that it does not include psychological and social structures, or, as Buber calls them, “lasting dispositions.” By the sphere of the interhuman he means “solely actual happenings between men, whether wholly mutual or tending to grow into mutual relations.”⁵² The interhuman consists of elements of every day life that may lead to a genuine dialogue, or, as Buber describes it, “*I – Thou*” relation.

Buber insists that the interhuman phenomena may not be understood as a psychological one. Haim Gordon, who uses Buberian ideas in an attempt to promote trust and understanding between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, illustrates this point well:

Haim: [...] dialogue, as Buber taught it, is not identifying with the Other, but rather accepting him as Other while often rejecting his feeling or thoughts. I attempted to relate dialogically to Muhammed.

Muhammed: I didn't feel that you related to me dialogically.

Haim (forcefully): Muhammed, please stop listening to your feelings and try to listen to me, to Haim who is sitting here facing you. Please, listen carefully and try to believe me. I *am* interested in your feelings, but only as part of your entire way of life and not as a main topic for discussion.⁵³

It took me a while to understand this concept of “listen to me, and not to your feelings.” We often assume that our feelings are an indispensable medium of a discourse. Psychologists have convinced us that what we feel is what we are, and what the other says s/he feels, is what s/he is. We try to relate to each other through our feelings, as an alternative to relating through social roles. In fact it is a trade, as Russians say, “an awl for a soap-bar.” In other words, we trade one petty thing for another. We substitute one indirect relation for another. Our feeling might get in the way of the direct relations as easily as objectified social roles. Neither feelings nor social roles are dialogical.

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988), 63.

⁵¹ Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 64.

⁵² Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 65.

⁵³ Haim Gordon, *Dance, Dialogue, and Despair* (The University of Alabama Press, 1986), 9.

Directness of dialogical relation entails another property of dialogue, namely, its ineffability in the language of monologue. This last feature of the dialogical is important for my argument. The dialogue fundamentally escapes understanding within the language of monologue. This is so, in part, because the dialogical is *created* by language. As Buber states, “Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence.”⁵⁴ This evokes images of incantation: say the magical word, and find yourself in a strange and wonderful place.

Similarly, Bakhtin wrote about the dialogical sphere of thinking human consciousness, which is inaccessible with a monological approach.⁵⁵ Bakhtin examined a number of literary criticism works about Dostoevsky, and found that Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel is impossible to understand from a traditional monological point of view. From a consistently monological point of view, the world of Dostoevsky appears as chaos, and his novel composition looks like a conglomerate of mutually alien elements and incompatible structural principles.⁵⁶ Arguing with V. Ivanov’s reading of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin finds that a simple understanding of Dostoevsky’s principles is not enough without seeing how these principles appear in his artistic method.⁵⁷ Translating this into the world of social relations, I would argue that dialogue looks like chaos from the point of view of the social sciences. If described in terms of social science, dialogue appears meaningless and inconsequential. This means that the dialogical not only needs to be described in a different language, but the dialogical also *is* that different language.

The description of the dialogical that I provided includes a good portion of negative statements: dialogue does not exist in regular time and space; it does not know causality and genesis; it does not include objects; there is no medium between its subjects, etc. One of the reasons for this is that both Buber and Bakhtin wanted to emphasize a certain discontinuity between the conventional world of every-day life and the moments of the dialogical. At first this might seem counterintuitive: if we are fully human only in dialogue, how can it be that dialogue is so distinctive and so short-lived compared to our common experiences? Are we humans only when we are not quite ourselves? This brings me back to the discussion about whether Buber and Bakhtin make normative or ontological claims. As I have mentioned, the notion of dialogue takes the role of an ethical ideal for them. From such a point of view, an ideal must be something other than regular every-day practice. Thus, the discontinuity and distinctness of dialogue is not something out of place there. However, dialogue is not quite an ethical ideal. Bakhtin and Buber do not want us to move completely into the realm of the dialogical. Dialogue is unachievable as a way of life, but it is readily accessible to anyone for short time periods and in some special circumstances. In other words, both Buber and Bakhtin make a remarkable claim.

⁵⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 3.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 360.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 9.

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 13.

They want us not so much to change our lives, as to pay more attention to what we already have, at least potentially have, and what we previously ignored. They do not argue for making our lives a continuous dialogue. Rather, they ask us to live our lives with these moments of full being in mind.

Another reason for the prevalence of negative descriptions of dialogue is the fact that there is no suitable language for the description of the dialogical. The next point I will make is that an absence of dialogical language is not simply an unfortunate peculiarity of our discourse. It is the hegemony of the monological principles in the ideological culture of the modern times,⁵⁸ that makes dialogue inaccessible for theoretical comprehension and difficult to achieve in practice. I will now turn to a critique of the language of monologism.

LANGUAGE OF MONOLOGISM

The first feature of monologism is the separation of ideas from individuals. In the monological world, writes Bakhtin, an idea may serve only two functions: It serves a purpose of illustrating an individual character, thus losing all its direct significance and becoming a simply fact of psychology. Or, an idea may be significant, but in this case it is simply put into a (literary) character's mouth, and remains unattached to him.⁵⁹ This is similar to some educational research: what subjects say is only data that reveals certain characteristics of a subject. A researcher does not have to *answer* to his or her subjects, to engage in discussion, or to relate personally to what they think or say. Data is being collected, reduced, coded, analyzed and presented.⁶⁰ Only *after* all this transformation of data do the ideas of the subjects become really significant for the researcher, but at a price of loosing their authors. Monologism does not necessarily deny another's existence, but objectifies, "explains" the other. It cannot treat other as equally significant. A monological author either depicts a person without taking seriously what that person says and thinks; or, he or she takes ideas seriously without paying attention to who said them and why.

Arguing about the ways an idea is used in monological writing, Bakhtin goes on into one of his very rare openly philosophical discussions. This brings us to the second feature of monologism, the singularity of meanings. Bakhtin states that in idealist philosophy, the singularity of existence is replaced by a singularity of consciousness. Yet the plurality of human opinions and world views is a most obvious fact. Here is how monologism explains this fact.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 106.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 104.

⁶⁰ See for instance, Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1992).

From a 'general consciousness' point of view this plurality of consciousness is accidental, and so to speak, superfluous. Everything that is essential and true in [individual human consciousness] is present in the unified context of 'general consciousness' and is void of particularity. Everything particular, everything that distinguishes one consciousness from another and others, is non-essential for cognition, and belongs to the area of psychical organization and deficiency of a human specimen. From the point of view of Truth there are no individual consciousnesses. The only principle of individualization in cognition known to idealism is – *error*. Every true judgment is not attached to a personality, but gravitates toward some unified systematized monological context. Only error individualizes... Ideally, a single consciousness and a single mouth are perfectly sufficient for a whole fullness of knowledge; there is no need and no basis for a multitude of consciousnesses.⁶¹

Truth for Bakhtin requires a multitude of bearers. Truth fundamentally cannot be contained within a single consciousness. It simply cannot be expressed with "a single mouth;" it needs many voices. Now, Bakhtin does not mean to say that many voices carry partial truth, each in its own way. For instance, if one hears two different opinions on the same subject, the truth is not deducible by "averaging" the two, or by "synthesizing" the opinions. A statement like "the truth is somewhere in the middle," is not at all what Bakhtin had in mind. He apparently had a very different conception of truth. Truth reveals when one can hear and comprehend both voices simultaneously, and more than that, when his or her own voice joins in and creates something similar to a musical chord. In a chord, voices remain different, but they form a different type of music, which is in principle unachievable by a single voice. That is what Bakhtin meant when he said that truth is born "in the point of touching of different consciousnesses."⁶² In the monological world, the conception of truth is different. There exists a singular truth, a singular ownership over meaning there, either by an individual, by a group, or by *no one* (God).

Most of contemporary social sciences are clearly based on the monological principles outlined above. Buber consistently emphasized that social sciences are not able to penetrate into the realm of the dialogical. In this regard his conversation with Carl Rogers is very illustrative. Rogers tries to show that *I-Thou* relations are possible between a therapist and a patient. In response, Buber fully accepts the moral stance of Rogers, and even his genuine intention to enter a mutual relations with a patient. However, he points out that a good will is not enough for a dialogue. The very situation of a helped and a helper closes a possibility for a genuine mutuality.⁶³ The dialogue between them is subordinated to this purpose of helping, and therefore ceases to be a genuine dialogue.

⁶¹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 107.

⁶² Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 107.

⁶³ Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 165-166.

Leaping ahead somewhat, I want to comment that Buber seemed to ignore the possibility of sudden changes in the relation between a therapist and a patient. He did not allow for brief moments of spontaneous openings, when individuals suddenly shed the social roles of therapist and patient, of teacher and student. While this is how Buber envisioned a dialogical happening in general, for some reason he denied such a possibility within the context of psychotherapy. Perhaps, his prejudice against psychology was too strong.⁶⁴

However, Buber is right that as long as one uses the language of social sciences, it is very unlikely to shed the roles of a client and a serving agent and create a space for dialogical encounter. The social sciences define a human life as constituted from the sum of experiences. Accordingly, a scientist experiences his human objects. The following passage reflects the spirit of Buber's criticism:

I experience something.—If we add inner to the outer experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. We are merely following the internal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death. Inner things or outer things, what are they but things and things!

I experience something.—If we add 'secret' to 'open' experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. How self-confident is that wisdom which perceives a closed compartment of things, reserved for the initiate and manipulated only with the key. O secrecy without a secret! O accumulation of information! It, always It!⁶⁵

In short, both Buber and Bakhtin agree that the social sciences essentially are not equipped to see the sphere of dialogical relations. The social sciences inevitably treat human beings as objects of study. This practice is perfectly justifiable for many practical purposes, but it completely blocks the entire realm of the dialogical from the researcher's vision. There is no way to describe the dialogical dimension of an individual without inviting that individual to the conversation. "An author's word about a character is organized in Dostoevsky's novel as if the character is *present*, as if he could *hear* him (the author), and reply to him,"⁶⁶ wrote Bakhtin. He argued against *in absentia* analysis of human souls, against predetermination and prediction of somebody's future behavior. He based his argument on moral grounds, stating that such an analysis is a sign of arrogance and scorn.⁶⁷

Most researchers today pay tribute to the fact that their work represents a limited vision, and only one of many points of view. Every one agrees that a person as an object of research, may have his or her personal opinion about herself or himself. Does this

⁶⁴ A good example of a dialogical relation that grew out of a quite manipulative therapeutic situation may be found in Irvin D. Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

⁶⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 5.

⁶⁶ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 85.

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 80.

demonstrate dialogism yet? It does not, because most research publications are written as monoliths, in a single voice. The plurality of voices may be recognized, but are left outside of a particular research report, or treated as “error” (variance, noise). It is like trying to listen to one note of a chord at a time. This is considered to be an inevitable convention of the social science genre.

Let us look at such a fundamental criterion as internal validity of research, as a way of illustrating the monological assumptions of contemporary research practices.

The internal validity of a study is a judgment that is made concerning the confidence with which plausible rival hypotheses can be ruled out as explanations for the results. It involves a deductive process in which the investigators must systematically examine how each of the threats to internal validity, which constitute rival alternative hypotheses, may have influenced the results. If all the threats can be eliminated reasonably, then the researcher can be confident that an observed relationship is causal, and that the difference in treatment conditions caused the obtained results.⁶⁸

Bakhtin would object to this statement by arguing that two rival hypotheses are the minimum explanatory apparatus for any fact. If the rival hypothesis may be easily ruled out, this would be a sign that results are trivial, or peripheral for human existence. “Two voices is a minimum for life, a minimum of being.”⁶⁹ When one hypothesis wins, truth escapes the researcher.

Research, like any other human encounter, should bring together whole persons with their different world views. There are no fixed truths in either researcher or researched before this encounter; the moments of truth result from this encounter. If this is not done, if a person who is being researched is not taken holistically, if his or her own world view is being ignored or reduced, then he or she did not really participate in the research. Therefore, its results are not valid. One can study human beings partially, all right. The problem is, there are no partial human beings.

I am not fond of a wholesale bashing of social sciences. All I am trying to show is that the social sciences, including educational research, cannot access the dialogical aspect of human existence. They may play some role in obtaining peripheral knowledge about human society. Yet I suggest that no important decision should be made on the grounds of knowledge obtained by social science research, simply because such knowledge is not reliable. I do not know if it is possible to eliminate monologism from the social sciences,

⁶⁸ James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction*, 2 ed. (Cleveland, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1989), 307.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 339.

or if truly dialogical research is possible. I know though of a few exceptions from the rule,⁷⁰ and there are probably many more of which I am not aware.

Buber's and Bakhtin's critique is aimed mainly against the rationalistic languages of modernity. One may suggest that Buber's and Bakhtin's concerns about modern monologism were addressed in the postmodern' critique of the modernity. I would contest this by saying that postmodernism is just another version of a monological world view. I cannot address the issue of postmodernism in its relation to dialogical ontology at length. For this reason my brief criticism of postmodernism will rely on Nicholas Burbules summary of three general issues stressed in postmodern writing, a summary that I find accurate and manageable.⁷¹

(1) Postmodernists concentrate on an analysis of power and hierarchy, not only in economic and political spheres, but also in the larger sphere of "cultural politics." Postmodernists challenge claims to objectivity, impartiality, and universality. They also show how social institution based on such claims serve those in power, and against silenced and disadvantaged groups. (2) Postmodernists emphasize the irreducible plurality of cultural world views. In the moderate versions of postmodern thought, the disadvantaged groups avoid being judged by criteria they had no voice in shaping. In stronger versions of this position they doubt the very possibility of communication across differences. (3) "Postmodernists deny that there can be any one system of thought or value that will comprise the variety of human beliefs, feelings and experiences; and denying this they argue that any attempt to systematize thought inevitable ignores legitimate alternatives and forces disparate groups to account for themselves in terms of monolithic categories that are alien to them."⁷²

I do agree with the postmodern critique of the monological assumptions of modern thought. However, postmodernists themselves simply substituted one monologue with an ever-increasing number of smaller monologues. In this particular regard, Charles Taylor offers a similar postmodern argument in his *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*.⁷³ My critique of Taylor's position is that he equates dialogue with an act of recognition. After an interesting discussion of dialogicality in human life, he goes on to say that whole groups of people should be given recognition as members of these groups. He substitutes one form of "wholesale" recognition through the feudal system of

⁷⁰ See for instance, research where the authors constantly in conversation with the subject of study: Ruth Behar, "A life story to Take across the Border: Notes on an Exchange," in George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochenberg, eds., *Storied Lives: The Cultural politics of Self-Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 108-26. Another example of an intense attention to what the subjects actually say, is Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Merita A. Irby, and Juliet Langman, *Urban Sanctuaries: Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner-city Youth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

⁷¹ Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching*, 2-4.

⁷² Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching*, 3.

⁷³ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

preferences, for another “wholesale” recognition according to a membership in cultural or economic groups. His mistake is in trying to include the concept of dialogue in political systems, which are wholly of the *I-It* world. He looks for a political solution to an existential problem.

My criticism of politically defined recognition is this: Cultures may not be exempt from dialogical treatment. Just like the existence of a human individual depends on dialogical relations with other individuals, the very existence of a culture depends on interaction with other cultures. The highest achievements of my own Russian culture were made in the moments of wide, and shameless borrowing from other cultures. Every time Russia isolated itself, the culture experienced stagnation and degradation. I am suspicious about various projects that involve revitalization of cultures, because cultural survival includes limiting the range of influences from outside. This would limit the possibilities for dialogical interaction. The Quebec example, on which Taylor draws, is among those projects.

The notion of cultural survival contradicts the idea of cultural change. Every change in cultures means death for one little piece of it.⁷⁴ Every word borrowed from English to French corrupts the purity of the former. And yet English itself is a language of almost omnivorous borrowing. English is certainly the most corrupt language in the world, which is why it is so viable. On the other hand, French owes its existence to the death of Latin, and the number of local dialects. “There is nothing absolutely dead; everything will have its feast of resurrection.”⁷⁵ This is why the persistent attempts to keep a culture intact, or even to bring it back from where it was many years ago are not only futile, but also harmful for the protected culture. Most nationalists see death where there is also a birth; their glass is always half-empty.

Charles Taylor may object to my comment by saying that I have no right to tell French speaking Canadians what to do with their culture. If the project of protection is important to them, it becomes part of their identity or of the authentic self of many people. I have to respect their right. I want to invite Bakhtin to help me with my defense:

A culture discovers itself deeper and fuller only through the eyes of another culture (but it does so not in all the fullness, because other cultures will come along, they will see and understand even more). A meaning unveils its depths while meeting and touching another alien meaning: as if a *dialogue* begins between them, which overcomes isolation and lopsidedness of these meanings, these cultures.⁷⁶

My respect for other cultures stops when I am shut out of the conversation. Cultures, like individuals, exist on a boundary with other cultures. The demand for recognition works

⁷⁴ See an interesting discussion of ambivalent images of death-birth in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986), 393.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, 354.

only as a two-way communication. If you want me to recognize you as a member of a group, there is a price attached to that: you have to allow me to talk to you about anything, including your membership in the group. The recognition of formerly oppressed groups should involve dialogue with the rest of society, including former oppressors.

The postmodernist idea that every disadvantaged group should be given a monopoly of self-definition, and be recognized on self-defined terms, is thoroughly monological. No group can define itself without other groups' participation. There has been a swing of a pendulum in some Western democracies from defining the oppressed group by colonizers, to giving the group a full monopoly to define itself. Let us assume a certain ethnic minority was defined by the oppressive majority for long time. Then suddenly the majority gives the minority full rights to define itself. This is still an *exclusionary* practice, because the outsiders are excluded from this discussion. The definition of a group should come from interactions with other groups.⁷⁷

This swing does not change the monological type of identity. A former oppressor should not withdraw from the dialogue with the oppressed, even if the dialogue is about the very essence of the oppressed group's self-understanding. Taylor's notion of recognition does not seem to sufficiently reflect this mutual, and continuing aspect of intergroup dialogue.

The postmodernists doubt the possibility of true understanding between different groups, and between individuals as well. This doubt implies the existence of a "real" meaning to be understood. "You would never understand what I really mean," a postmodern theorist says. "Your words do not mean anything *before* you share them with me, and receive my answer," I could reply. Postmodernists are pessimistic about the same goal as modernists are optimistic about: the goal of true, finalized, solitary meanings. From my point of view, this goal is neither achievable nor unachievable, it is simply false.

The dialogical approach insists on the universality of dialogue. No other absolutes can be accepted. There is no need for set terms before a dialogue can begin, which is what postmodernists are afraid of. The very language of dialogue, let alone the content of it is subject to reciprocal shaping by the participants. The recognition of one group by another is a result of their "shared production" of meanings, never attainable by the recognized group alone. And the most important distinction: a dialogical approach acknowledges the possibility of understanding and of finding the truth, providing that both understanding and truth are momentary, or event-like occurrences. Truth is a very volatile substance, it is not stable over time, and does not survive transportation to a different location. Truth is a moment when a multi-voiced chorus of voices suddenly makes a chord, while every voice still keeps its distinctness. The plurality of world views only makes sense if used for bringing these world views into contact, testing them against each other in the ever-changing context of our common lives. Both modernists and postmodernists do disservice

⁷⁷ Furthermore, each group could be split into subgroups, and further down into an immeasurable number of different voices. Thus, no group, advantaged or disadvantaged can ever achieve a unified self-definition.

to this plurality: the former do so by dismissing it as misunderstanding, the latter by absolutization of this same plurality.

I have shown that both modern and postmodern thought remain in the monological framework. Monologism is a belief that truth can be said in a single voice, be it a voice of God, of objective reason, or of the oppressor, or the oppressed, or of an individual. Next I will try to outline how this monological philosophical assumption makes its way into the world of policy making.

In reality, social science findings strongly influence policy-making in education and elsewhere. Of course, the social sciences are not the only source of monologism, which is a prominent fixture of the whole culture of thought in contemporary society. Among other things, the language of monologism perpetuates a very subtle form of domination, a domination of “serving” agencies over those they serve.

Andrew Gordon et. al, portray the grotesque form of such domination.⁷⁸ They start with an image of a toy commonly found in toy stores. The toy is a little box with a lid and a switch. If someone flips the switch on, a hand emerges from beneath the lid, and turns the switch to “off” again. The authors compare this toy with a “serving” type of bureaucracy that is only concerned with its own continuous smooth operation. Such a bureaucracy appears to serve not itself, but society. It defines a “needy class,” and creates a group of people personally powerless. The bureaucracy establishes certain means of control over the clientele, first by the power of a selecting process. The bureaucracy decides which services are to be provided without much inconvenience and convinces the clientele that their perception of their own needs is fallible, that they cannot adequately judge the services they are receiving. The clients essentially have no control over the services, neither do they have any access to information regarding their personal affairs, or the whole system. The bureaucracy produces the appearance of accountability, but is mostly being controlled by itself. Once some evidence of the bureaucracy’s inadequacy surfaces, it is turned into an advantage. The bureaucracy can always blame lack of funds, low salaries, poor technology, etc. for its own shortcomings.

This obviously describes a welfare bureaucracy. But essentially, the same type of domination exists in the educational sphere. It is not necessarily as obvious or pure as what Gordon et al., have described, yet every one familiar with the educational rhetoric of today can recognize similar features. Educators and policy-makers use the same techniques to keep students and in part their parents in a position of clients not quite capable of determining what is good for themselves. A quite remarkable system of seemingly benign and subtle domination exists in the juvenile justice system, as described by Aaron Cicourel.⁷⁹ He depicts how the very right to describe “what happened” gives officials enormous power over juveniles.

⁷⁸ Andrew Gordon, et.al, “Big Brother in a Box,” *New Ecologist*, Sept., 1978, 158-160.

⁷⁹ Aaron V. Cicourel, *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968).

The monologism hurts regardless of individual intentions. But monologism also serves the interest of bureaucratic bodies. It is not merely a philosophical position, but a selfishly motivated way of thinking.

One example: There is a policy in many public school districts against bringing weapons to school. Let us say a child who brings a gun to school should be automatically expelled for a month from school. When a real child John brings a gun to school and is caught, there is no need for hearing his side of the story because the policy does not allow exceptions, on the grounds that exceptions can be used as precedents for future exceptions, and will ultimately devalue the policy. Moreover, the school's principal does not even want to hear John's story because there is a chance that John may convince the principal, and the latter will be tempted to show leniency. He may even come to the conclusion that this case must be treated as an exception, for expelling John is too dangerous for the child's own safety. So, why take a risk? It is better not to hear what John has to say, or only hear it superficially, such as, "Thank you for sharing, but there is nothing I can do. I have a policy to follow." Thus, policy allows one to avoid risk and responsibility.

Any policy is fundamentally monological. There is no way to bring multiple voices into a policy, there is no way to make a policy sound like a living human voice. It is just a different genre, and I am not about to argue here against rules of this genre. As Donna Kerr argues, a policy is roughly, an obligation to do something in particular, whenever, without exceptions, a specified condition occurs. Besides that, a policy should be purposeful, and may be revised.⁸⁰ Policies are made before an actual event where certain policy is implemented, occurs. Policies can neither be multivoiced, nor spontaneous, by definition. Even policies made rationally, with full consideration, have clear limitations. Kerr describes a *magic fallacy* as that when policy makers do not realize that "*not every problem has a policy solution.*"⁸¹ I would further argue, that most important problems in education do not have a policy solution. Policies may very well be useful for 99% of school life, but incidentally it is during the remaining 1% when crucial educational moments occur.

What I am arguing against is the belief that policies are of primary importance. Policies do not respond to the dialogical, which is a fundamental aspect of being human, and they are not suitable for the task of changing human conditions. It is direct, mutual dialogical relations, which takes courage, creativity, and spontaneity, that constitute the center of education. Without such dialogical relations, nothing works.

Monologism exists in both theory and social practice. A simple assumption that one single truth is achievable, leads to a situation where meanings are assigned for you by somebody else, somewhere else, and some time ago.

⁸⁰ Donna H. Kerr, *Educational Policy: Analysis, Structure, and Justification* (New York, David McKay Company, 1976), 39.

⁸¹ Kerr, *Educational Policy*, 199.

The ontological understanding of dialogue may be able to begin redeeming the shortcomings of monologism in education. The most natural way to make a transition from an ontological concept of dialogue to educational theory is to address an issue of the self. My next chapter will do just that.

CHAPTER 2. HOMO DIALOGICUS

Ontology is interested in answering the question: What does it mean (for a human being, in this case) to exist? Educational theory, in turn, needs a theory of the human individual. I will argue that understanding the self as dialogical in nature is critical in the context of educational theory.

This chapter's design follows: Very briefly I outline my own understanding of the dialogical self. Then I treat this notion in three consequent contexts in order both to answer possible challenges and to explicate in detail what I mean by the dialogical, or polyphonic self. First, I ground this notion in the context of moral theory. Second, the notion of the dialogical self will be juxtaposed with Buber's idea of a whole character. And finally, I will examine notions of identity, integrity, and authenticity as they change in connection with the idea of a dialogical self.

THE POLYPHONIC SELF

According to Bakhtin, the Copernican revolution undertaken by Dostoevsky in literature involved the following: in the polyphonic novel every major character is, so to speak, a novelist, an author, who describes the whole world from his or her own perspective. Dostoevsky shows those multiple "novels" in their interaction within a context of an event, and without judging or organizing them from a single authoritative point of view; he treats those voices as equal to his own. I would like to extend this metaphor to the theory of self.

Every self has a multitude of inner voices, some of which represent to differing degrees, voices of other individuals. Most contemporary theories of the self require one either to find one's true voice (authenticity), or to build some hierarchical structure, so the voices keep their peculiarities, but still merge into organized unity (integrity). The mechanism of holding the self together is called identity, according to those theories. What I propose is that an individual should treat his or her internal universe the same way as Dostoevsky treated his characters.

Every voice within me has its own position, and can develop a convincing world view, if only allowed to express itself. All these voices should be treated with respect, all of them are equally authentic. Just as any other truth, the truth about myself needs a multitude of representations. The plurality of simultaneous representations is the condition for understanding the self. Remember Bakhtin's maxim: truth requires a multiplicity of bearers. The truth about myself requires an alterity of inner and outer voices.

When I live my life I should never make a final decision about which part of me is right and which part is wrong. I must keep my many voices alive and ready for interactions in the context of a unique occurrence. In different situations one or another of my voices may be the most convincing, but this does not hold it in a privileged position forever. No

person is always right or always wrong; there are no absolutely good and absolutely evil people. The same holds true for the parts of myself I call the voices. Making a moral decision is the point of such a dialogical encounter that involves a mixture of the inner voices of myself, and the outer voices of other individuals. I need the multiplicity of strong internal voices capable of disagreeing with each other. In fact, I have to cherish my contradictions and inconsistencies, for they are necessary for maintaining my internal dialogues.

Such is, roughly, my vision of the self from the dialogical point of view. I want now to illustrate and develop further that notion from the point of view of moral theory.

DIALOGICAL MORALITY

As a starting point I will refer to Eli Sagan's theory of morality, which in turn starts with a critique of Freud's teaching on morality. Superego, according to Freud, has three basic functions: self-observation, conscience, and maintaining the ego ideal that demands greater and greater perfection. But Sagan insists on a sharp distinction between conscience and superego.

The superego is essentially amoral and can be as easily immoral as moral. Within a slave society, the superego legitimates slavery. Within a racist or sexist society, the superego demands racism and sexism. And in a Nazi society, the superego commands to live up to genocidal ideals.⁸²

When we call a sadistic superego pathological or corrupt, by what standards are we judging it? Is there an instrument in the psyche that can differentiate between the moral and immoral attributes of the superego? It is the argument of this book that *conscience* is such an instrument; conscience, unlike the superego, knows clearly which actions are moral and which immoral; that conscience, unlike the superego, is incapable of corruption and pathology. It may be silenced or paralyzed, but one can never accurately speak of a deceased conscience. Here we come upon a crucial distinction: *the superego always collaborates with its own corruption*. The relative health or pathology of the superego is dependent on how much or how little of conscience is operative in its functioning.⁸³

According to Sagan, the conscience, unlike the superego, does not have to wait until the child's fourth or fifth year to make its presence felt. Conscience has its origins in the basic nurturing situation, and identification with the nurturer plays the essential role in its composition. It is the mother, not the father, writes Sagan, who presides over birth of conscience, over the beginning of morality. Morality according to Sagan is universal,

⁸² Eli Sagan, *Freud, Women and Morality* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 9.

⁸³ Sagan, *Freud, women and morality*, 14.

because it is based on the same experience of being nurtured by a mother that every infant experiences.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development springs from an entirely different source than the Freudian tradition, and yet his understanding of morality has much in common with the Freudian one. Kohlberg defines morality as justice and fairness, and he presents moral development as the rational, cognitive construction of ethical premises, rules, and conclusions that motivate moral judgments.⁸⁴ Neither Freud nor Kohlberg deeply examine the role of love and kindness in morality. Both can be criticized from Sagan's standpoint. Indeed, Kohlberg's theory would not explain why Nazism and Stalinism had happened in the first half of this century. Both Nazis and Communists had built elaborate systems of justifications for their deeds; and at least part of them acted out of a certain understanding of justice. Obviously, the problem was not with cognitive deficiency on the part of Germans and Russians.

Gilligan⁸⁵ criticizes Kohlberg in a way similar to how Sagan criticizes Freud. She notes that Kohlberg overlooked love while concentrating on justice. She words her concern, for example, by mentioning Shakespeare who "...goes through an extraordinary complication of sexual identity ...in order to bring into the masculine citadel of justice the feminine plea for mercy."⁸⁶ Gilligan however mistakes the gender-related origins of justice and love (which also agrees with Sagan's theory) for two distinctive paths of moral development for men and women. Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg has strange logic: rational reasoning does not define morality, therefore women should demonstrate a different type of moral reasoning. It is an attempt to defy a theory by assuming that the theory is accurate.

Gilligan's predictions are not supported by subsequent studies,⁸⁷ which does not negate her claim about the existence of two different elements of morality: mercy and justice; conscience and superego. Both Gilligan and Kohlberg erroneously consider these two elements to be different types of moral orientations, when they are actually inseparable components of *every* moral judgment.

If Kohlberg and Freud overlook the "feminine plea for mercy" as the core of conscience in their understanding of morality, Sagan simplifies a connection between the conscience and superego. According to him factors such as love and affection among family members, and humane child rearing practices are most important for the moral progress of humanity. For instance, he links the rise of Nazism in Germany with the fact that German mothers practiced tight swaddling of infants. He is saying that we should love and nurture our children, and it will help to hold their superego in check later on.

⁸⁴ Michael Green, *Theories of Human Development: A comparative Approach*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989).

⁸⁵ Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 1977: 481-517.

⁸⁶ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 515.

⁸⁷ Lawrence J. Walker, "A Longitudinal Study of Moral Reasoning," *Child development* 60 (1989): 157-166.

Sagan seems to treat the superego as being directly determined by the level of conscience development. Humane upbringing and warm relations within a family would, from his point of view, determine a healthy superego and the moral progress of society. In his view the domination of the superego should give its place to the domination of the conscience. But I think that the relation between these two phenomena is somewhat different. A functioning, active conscience is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a healthy superego. The superego still develops in and by a society, and is a relatively independent factor affecting human behavior. What happens if a child who has grown up in a loving and caring family suddenly finds her or himself in a totalitarian society? Or, to put it another way, were there any once morally sound children among Nazis? I assume that more than one was. How many potential Nazis who never got a chance to actually become one, are among our friends and neighbors now? I am arguing, that conscience alone is not enough for a morally sound society. One argument in support of this claim is that the general level of morality in any given society is degradable. The Weimar republic and Czarist Russia were morally superior to Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Russia. Did something terrible happen in the family life of these two nation's citizens at the beginning of this century? I doubt it very much. Schools and families that are based on love and care only, without considerations of justice, will not guarantee a moral society. The superego while being limited and shaped by the conscience, is still another important component of morality.

Not only Freud and Kohlberg, but also Sagan and Gilligan remain entirely within the monological framework. They do not admit a vision of human self which contains both conscience and superego without a hierarchical subordination to one another. I will try now to sketch out a relationship between conscience and superego from the dialogical perspective.

Morality is two-fold. One examines each moral dilemma from at least two distinctive positions. One does it in accordance with whatever principles or moral rules one possesses. This side of a moral judgment is very well described by Kohlberg. On the other hand, a person also would judge any possible solution from the point of view of conscience (love, mercy), trying not to inflict harm on other people involved. In the latter case, it is not a theoretical, abstract examination; and it is not an abstract human being in front of us; we deal here with a specific situation and with concrete people. We have these two distinctive voices within our moral self; two voices that make real sense only together, although they never fully merge. The two-foldness brings a depth into moral experience, and strips it of easy solutions. The two produce a dialogue. Where do those two moral voices come from? Using metaphorical Freudian language, one might answer that it is our mother and father who speak within us, representing mercy and justice.

The moral self has a dialogical nature. Our ability to make moral choices relies on a multitude of perspectives available to us through the internalization of views and voices that belong to 'significant others'. By internalization I do not mean a mechanical type of

“recordings,” described in a transactional analysis approach.⁸⁸ Those “recordings” certainly take place, but they have very little to do with the moral dimension of the self. The voice of a significant other, once internalized, is capable of intelligent reasoning, and passionate persuasion. Only individuals whom we know superficially, unidimensionally, can wither to a set of clichés once they populate our internal landscape. An internal voice is not reducible to an ideology, since it is imbedded in the life context of the individual who gave it birth. An internal voice remains complex. An internal voice may also originate from a composed personality of a group, or a philosophy, or a literary character. The multitude of internal voices need not come to a logically consistent, unified whole.

But what about Nazis and Communists? What went wrong in their socialization? Did they not have enough opportunities to take other people’s perspectives? With the exception of sociopaths, whose conscience has been severely distorted for some reason, most people have some exposure to both good and bad. And yet individuals make the opposite choices under similar circumstances. I want to show how it is possible for dialogical morality not to develop.

Buber sharply distinguishes dialogue from a simple conversation. Two or more people exchanging information do not necessarily constitute a dialogue, from his point of view. On the other hand, silence can be a dialogue. Cognitively normal but immoral people are those whose inner dialogue is not *really* a dialogue, but a simple conversation. The realms of conscience and superego are separated for them. For example, Lenin was described as a warm and caring person with his relatives and comrades. In political life, however, he never hesitated to wage violence at any scale. His parents, by the way, were loving and caring too, which was also true for many Nazis. We can be quite sure that his metaphorical father and mother had some conversations within Lenin’s head. They probably just never got to the point of a dialogue. So, in some situations he acted out of justice (the Communist’s version of it), and in others, out of love. I will call this phenomenon *the split morality*.

The elemental cell of moral development is an act of choice involving conflict between considerations of justice and mercy. Kohlberg suggests that cognitive conflict is the motor of moral development. He implies that there is a the conflict between the conceptual or moral systems of two individuals who differ by only one stage.⁸⁹ I would argue that the conflict is existential rather than cognitive. The situation of moral development is not of any moral choice, but a specific type of moral choice where the demands of justice and the desire to do good for the people, clearly contradicts the demands of mercy and the compassion towards a particular individual. I call this *a dissociation of morality*, after electrolytic dissociation. Just like positive and negative ions sort themselves out by the passage of electrical current through the solution, the two elements of morality separate under the influence of the situation. What I am arguing is that the internal voices of justice

⁸⁸ Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK, you're OK* (New York: Avon, 1973, (c) 1969).

⁸⁹ Green, *Theories of Development: A Comparative Approach*.

and mercy within the self should be given a chance to clearly separate themselves from each other. The naïve integrity of a moral agent must be shattered to pieces before it can be reassembled again to meet the demands of complex live situation. The dissociation of morality should not be a trivial situation of every day life. I will describe such a situation from the internal point of view a little later, drawing on Buber's idea of spontaneity. From the external, social point of view, such a situation of moral growth may occur more likely within the context of a democratic social structure, where an individual has a share of responsibility for the common good.

The last claim may be clarified with an example. Let us imagine little Vladimir (soon to be Lenin), who witnesses the suffering of a fellow human being, of a humiliated peasant child, for instance. Vladimir feels compassion, just like everybody else. But he has no control of, and therefore no responsibility for the social world he lives in. He has no real knowledge of justice. Justice is only a negative concept for him (something opposite of injustice). Vladimir never had a chance to participate in, or closely observe the work of governing bodies, never learned the complexity of being just. For his morality to dissociate, he must find himself in circumstances, where there is no clear-cut division between just and unjust, good and bad. No wonder, his compassion has no depth, because the suffering is always somebody else's fault (and it really is). The conflict is between *injustice* and mercy. Such a conflict is external to him. The situation brings about rage, and the urge to change the entire social order. Vladimir develops socially, but not morally. More than that, his morality ends up being split, and he sees no immediate connections between justice and compassion. This is so if such is the only or dominating kind of moral experience he has. The simple presence of two or more voices within one's consciousness is not enough for a dialogical morality to form. These two voices must communicate with each other.

I take the dissociation of morality as very important for moral development, and yet educators have very little direct influence over such situations. If a teacher directly influences a child to be moral, then the student's choice is not free. The role of educator is to make sure that the conditions needed for such a situation are created. I leave the discussion about how exactly it can be done until Chapter Four. What is important for me right now is to make the point about the dialogical nature of morality and moral development.

The idea of two voices is a necessary simplification. Reality gives us more than two internal voices, not easily identified as "father's" and "mother's" voices of justice and mercy. I am convinced, however, that the underlying principle of internal dialogue is the essence of the moral self.

ON WHOLENESS AND SPONTANEITY

My insistence on cultivating separate, although communicating voices within the self can be challenged in several ways. The first challenge comes from Buber. The idea of

wholeness is very important to him: “The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being.”⁹⁰ One may suggest that the wholeness of a character as understood by Buber is what I am arguing against. I want to address the issue of wholeness together with his idea of spontaneity, which can clarify his position. Buber wrote in *The Education of Character*,

Man can either be perceived as a personality, that is, as a unique spiritual-physical form with all the forces dormant in it, or as character, that is, as the link between what this individual is and the sequence of his action and attitudes.⁹¹

Buber’s use of the notion of character gives a somewhat enriched understanding of human beings that includes their actions along with these internal characteristics. This idea may be traced back to an Aristotelian view of virtue, which, as N. Sherman witnesses, meant “a mode of affect and conduct” for Aristotle.⁹² An interesting concept in its own merit, it raises some questions I want to examine: the wholeness of a great character and the spontaneity of his or her reactions.

The great character can be conceived neither as a system of maxims nor as a system of habits. It is peculiar to him to act from the whole of his substance. That is, it is peculiar to him to react in accordance with the uniqueness of every situation which challenges him as an active person. [...] In spite all the similarities every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction which cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you. I call a great character one who by his actions and attitudes satisfies the claim of situations out of deep readiness to respond with his whole life, and in such a way that the sum of his actions and attitudes expresses at the same time the unity of his being in its willingness to accept responsibility. As his being is the unity of accepted responsibility, his active life, too, coheres into unity. And one might perhaps say that for him there rises a unity out of situations he has responded to in responsibility, the undefinable unity of moral destiny.⁹³

Buber clearly regards great character as a moral notion. But why exactly does the spontaneity of responses take on a moral meaning? Buber himself offers a rather utilitarian explanation: since every new situation is truly new, one may not prepare for it beforehand. This does not explain, however, why a spontaneous improvisation is necessarily better. From a simply consequential point of view, it is not. Norms or maxims, as Buber calls them, may be crude tools for making moral decisions, but isn’t improvising

⁹⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 3.

⁹¹ Martin Buber, *Between Man And Man* (N New York : Collier Books, 1985), 104.

⁹² Nancy Sherman *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 166.

⁹³ Buber, *Between Man And Man*, 113-114.

an even less reliable tool? The consequences of unprepared actions may be much worse than of those thought through ahead of time. If this is true for any other form of human praxis, why should that be different in the moral domain? My intuition tells me that Buber is right, that there is something genuine in spontaneous reactions. I think it is worth trying to find out, what.

Another question arises from the first reading of Buber's essay. The notion of spontaneity seems to contradict his idea of wholeness (unity) of a great character. Wholeness, unity, integrity—these related phenomena seem to be products of the conscious work of a human mind, and of the deliberate and informed choices we make. We all are assumed to have worked on our identities, on keeping our beliefs organized, our actions and thoughts together. If this is true, how does spontaneity fit into the picture? The situation of moral choice “demands nothing of what is past,” Buber maintains. But how can one respond “with his whole life” without reference to the past? How can we choose spontaneously? Is a spontaneous choice a conscious choice at all? Again, my intuition wants to agree with this contradictory proposition of Buber. What remains to be done is understanding how it is possible.

I will argue that the spontaneity Buber talks about is an act of obtaining a particular form of freedom, freedom from the confinements of the self. Human beings obviously do not live only in the outer world. We also live in our inner worlds, which turn out to be as complex and unpredictable as the external world. Since Freud has discovered hidden depths of the self, the assumption of an integrated personality may never be taken without a grain of doubt. A quote from James M. Glass' *Psychosis and Power* illustrates this point:

To understand the constitution of the self, we must give thought to these very unpleasant and dangerous aspects of what and who we are—dangerous in their regressive and explosive potential. And it is a myth or a mistake to think the self can become whole, that we can somehow purge out of ourselves these messy and mess-making parts by positing an idealized wholeness or otherness based on good-enough mother.⁹⁴

Glass differs from Freud and some other theorists who emphasize a possibility for the conscious part of the self to contain the “uncanny other” within the self. Drawing on Julia Kristeva, Glass suggests that one may only acknowledge the intrinsic division and conflict within the self. “Division enhances identity by pushing awareness to grasp the divided, yet communicable parts of the self.”⁹⁵ Glass argues that an important role of democratic institutions is just that: to represent and maintain human aggression and conflict. Glass wants predictability and stability for our inner worlds, all the same, but suggests a more balanced way of achieving it.

⁹⁴ James M. Glass, *Psychosis and Power* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 201.

⁹⁵ Glass, *Psychosis and Power*, 202.

Yet the predictable and conscious self sets its own limits to human freedom, and in this sense, it is a cage. It may be designed better or worse, it may be large as Glass suggests, or be a smaller one, as Freud originally thought. Human identity, and other characteristics of the conscious self are so essential to our ability to function, and to remain sane, that we want more and more of it. But it also sets very definite limits to our freedom. Moral norms, beliefs, and concepts of the self simplify the internal world of an individual by selecting the most acceptable parts of personality from the less acceptable ones. I think this is exactly the kind of unfreedom Buber warns against when he wanted us to be spontaneous.

Spontaneous reaction implies the shattering of the conscious self by temporary destruction of the organized structures of the self. Spontaneous reactions constitute what I would call “inner carnival,” although the metaphor has its clear limits. The “loosing of self” is not an end in itself. It frees the internal voices within an individual from all the hierarchies that inevitably build up during normal, every day life. The willingness to respond with one’s whole being means allowing all parts of the self, including the “uncanny other” to come forward on equal terms with the neat and organized parts of one’s inner world. I do not think Buber meant a “logically organized whole” when he wrote “whole” about human being. The side of freedom I talk about requires unpredictability: if I have my moral principles ready, and always know what I would do in certain situations, this diminishes moral significance of my choice, since it eliminates the choice itself. Only when the chaotic whole of myself is awakened, may an act of choice happen. As Montaigne noticed, writing in his old age, “My temptations are so crippled and enfeebled that they are not worth opposing.”⁹⁶ Paradoxically, a moral response to life’s challenges includes the risk of making immoral choices by bringing out some immoral parts of ourselves.

Christopher Bollas writes about dreams:

Winnicott believed that each of us begins life unintegrated, scattered islands of organized potentials coming into being. Perhaps we return to unintegration when we dream, loosing this self into an archipelago of many beings, acting various roles by the ego in the theater of the night.⁹⁷

Bollas continues that not only in dream can we fall into the “simple experiencing self” (as opposed to the “complex reflecting self”). He describes falling in love at a party as a similar, dream-like experience. “No longer objective, I plunge into powerful state of affairs, devolved into that lessened awareness necessary to deep play in the ambient fields of love.”⁹⁸ Bollas denies the self being phenomenologically unified. “It cannot be,” he writes, “because , in the first place, the true self is not an integrated phenomenon but only

⁹⁶ Michel Montaigne *The Essays: A Selection* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 919.

⁹⁷ Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character*. New York: Hill and Wang, 15.

⁹⁸ Bollas, *Being a Character*, 16.

dynamic sets of idiomatic dispositions that come into being through problematic encounters with the object world.”⁹⁹

“Loosing the self” is important not only for one’s mental health, and not only in the fields of love and artistic expression, but also in moral life. Let me explain. Maxine Greene writes about imagination as the only way to make empathy possible, and more broadly about social imagination.¹⁰⁰ I think that the parallel between acts of artistic creation and acts of moral decision might be a very productive way of thinking about the role of spontaneity in moral character. Moral decision is a creative act, an act of rare insight, connected with a particular state of mind, and not a routine and measured operation. This is a moment of full being, the moment of dialogue, where not only one’s internal voices participate, but also the external voices of individuals involved in a given moral dilemma take their part.

Perhaps the “total freedom” that Greene describes for artists is only possible because an artist is free from responsibility. Yet by definition, a moral decision involves other people, and therefore one must be precise and careful as a surgeon, and not spontaneous as a dancer. Such a position would maintain that creativity is a nice thing, but it does not have anything to do with moral actions. True enough. For a surgeon the best bet would be to follow well-known procedures, unless some unexpected situation forces her or him to improvise on the spot. To be prepared as much as possible would be the most responsible thing to do. Why should that change for a person making some moral decision? I will try to answer this question with an example.

After many years of successful work in school, and several brilliant books on her teaching experience, Vivian Paley talks with a former student, who is African-American. The young woman admits that she felt an outsider in her classroom, and that she would have done better in all-black school. Moved by this conversation, Paley starts asking many people all sorts of questions about race relations in school. She also tries to include more black characters in a story she tells her kindergarten class. Paley is very straight-forward in her questions and actions. This may be in part attributed to the fact that she is a kindergarten teacher who always has to keep things clear. But she also is the kind of great character that Buber was writing about: direct and courageous in her relations with the world. And she takes full responsibility for her previous and present actions.

Responsibility, when applied to moral decision-making, is *not* a synonym for extreme caution. Paley is not overly cautious or careful in her questioning. If she wants to ask or tell something, she just does it, even at risk of offending someone. “Did you really feel dumb and ugly?” she asks the young woman, her former student.¹⁰¹ This is not a surgically delicate question; it may easily offend. Yet her search for answers has an

⁹⁹ Bollas, *Being a Character*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 3-5.

¹⁰¹ Vivian G. Paley, *Kwanzaa and Me*. (Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

unmistakable moral quality to it. Paley is direct and spontaneous because she strives to relate to another person directly and fully.

We seldom can anticipate the consequences of our actions. The trick is to recognize an action as our own even when done by mistake, or with completely different intentions. Now, by plunging ourselves into a state of spontaneity we may increase the risk of a mistake, because the chaotic whole of our inner world may bring forward the least likable parts of our personalities, and because being spontaneous does not provide for careful planning. Yet this is what it means “to be wholly alive” as Buber puts it. The great character stirs up her or his entire inner world with all its contradictions, with all good and evil, passions and illusions. A person of great character thrusts this inner world into the outer world as it appears at the moment. The two worlds collide, and out of the chaos of this collision the character appears anew. This is more like act of artistic creation, and to improvise in moral relations is both a responsive and responsible thing to do.

A critic may suggest that the multiplicity of inner voices in the self is fine, unless it includes the dangerous and aggressive voices, and the evil thoughts and intentions. These voices should be kept securely under control. I would disagree. The secret of moral life is not to keep one’s demons locked up inside all the time, but to challenge and beat them again and again. The great achievement of psychoanalysis is just this, I think: to let the unspeakable be spoken, to open the suppressed, to hear what has been silenced. Silenced demons will find their way out, but demons which are admitted into the moral conversation, restore the wholeness of the self.

I do not preach any form of self-indulgence or a lack of responsibility here. Quite to the contrary, this is a higher, and much more difficult responsibility for a moral individual to hear all the internal voices simultaneously. This does not relieve one from the responsibility of making a moral decision. We are confronted with a physically singular world that allows only one course of action to be taken. The nature of our responsibility is in the fact that we all remain physically singular individuals. Whatever my hands and my mouth did, belongs to me—me as a location, where the conversation goes on. Thus, I alone am responsible for my actions. The fact that the self is different in different times does not change that.

At the same time, if one excommunicates some parts of one's self, this will lead to self-indulgence. If my subconscious desires, evil thoughts, and deeds are not really parts of my true self, then I am not responsible for what these parts of myself did. This would constitute avoidance of responsibility.

If I only stick to my principles, and always do the right thing, always knowing beforehand, what the right thing is, nothing spontaneous can happen. My partial, confined, self-controlled self can only attempt to control the small portion of the outer world (most likely, another person) with which I come into contact. This happens simply because the partial self that enters relations is specifically designed to control other parts of the inner world. So, it is only capable of controlling the outer world. Using Buberian language, the

“*I-It*” relation is being established. The moral relation is not born. The cage of the self can be locked, with no way to escape into the spontaneity of a whole being.

What I am trying to show is that the idea of a whole being, or a whole character, does not contradict my concept of the polyphonic self. On the contrary, wholeness, if understood in connection with the notion of spontaneity, means freeing the self from false internal hierarchies. Wholeness does not amount to choosing one part of the self as one’s “true” voice, at the expense of shutting off other voices. To the contrary, wholeness of the self means keeping alive all the internal polyphony one can produce, even if some voices are less than acceptable. I will further argue that the notion of integrity as it is understood in much of philosophy and cognitive psychology misrepresents the self and its development in a number of ways.

INTEGRITY, IDENTITY, AUTHENTICITY.

“Personal identity is a key construct in both philosophy and psychology,” accurately assess Hart and Damon.¹⁰² The main-stream cognitive developmental approach emphasizes identity attainment, integrity, internal consistency of the self-concept as the main direction of the self’s development. I choose to focus on the cognitive developmental approach in psychology simply because I think it is the most serious opponent within the context of my discussion about the dialogical notion of self.

The cognitivists see the self as a social construct. Damon and Hart offer an interesting discussion about how much, and in which way exactly the self is being shaped by communication with the other. Recognizing the crucial importance of the social environment on the development of the self, one has to recognize the multitude of influences that constitute this environment. Uncertainty, complexity, and conflict do not escape the attention of cognitive psychologists. For instance, investigating the identity development of adolescents, Susan Harter asserts that “*In Search of Self*” defines a major drama that unfolds on center stage during adolescence, with a complicated cast of characters who do not always speak with a single voice.¹⁰³ Erikson, who comes out of the Freudian tradition, but whose ideas are widely used and referred to in cognitive-oriented research, essentially builds his elaborate conceptual framework on a progression from one set of conflicts to another.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Kohlberg viewed moral development as a series of cognitive conflicts, arising from the interaction of individuals on different stages of moral reasoning.¹⁰⁵ Serious attention is given in the literature to adolescent anguish, confusion

¹⁰² William Damon and Daniel Hart, *Self-Understanding in Childhood and Adolescence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 124.

¹⁰³ Susan Harter, “Self and Identity Development,” in *At the Threshold*, eds. S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 353.

¹⁰⁴ Erik Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*. (New York: Norton, 1982).

¹⁰⁵ F. Clark Power, Ann Higgins, Lawrence Kohlberg. *Lawrence Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Education* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1989).

over identity, and other notions related to complexity of the self. Again, I want to emphasize that the complexity of the self is given full recognition and very serious attention in a cognitive-developmental approach. I take issue with this approach only regarding what to do with the complexity of the self.

Without providing a detailed analysis of each particular theory, I will focus on what those theories consider to be progress, and the development of the self. Erikson's famous "Stages of Man" lead an individual towards making definite professional, moral and ideological commitments, and towards achieving firm identity and an optimistic outlook.¹⁰⁶ Identity confusion and role diffusion are portrayed as dangerous outcomes to be avoided. According to Erikson, the mature identity is attainable when an adolescent frees himself from dependency on peers, just like he earlier freed himself from dependency on parents. Similarly, Kohlberg's post-conventional stages of moral development are associated with having definite moral principles. The Kohlbergian scheme admits that morality occasionally conflicts with legality. Using Bakhtin's expression, such a conflict is still "superfluous" in Kohlbergian theory. It certainly is not necessary. Damon and Hart offer us a concept which gravitates towards "systematic beliefs and plans" as the ends of the development of the self.¹⁰⁷ Susan Harter states that "A major theme in the literature on the adult self is the need to integrate one's multiple attributes into a theory of self or personality that is coherent and unified."¹⁰⁸ She approvingly quotes Epstein, who argues that the self-theory, like any formal scientific theory, must meet certain criteria, one of which is *internal consistency*.¹⁰⁹

In other words, a cognitive-developmental orientation wants to *overcome* the complexity of the self, to achieve the consistency of a single voice representing the self. The main point is that in order to achieve integrity, one's multiple identities should be "integrated" into a whole.

I can think of three main arguments in support of this position. First, psychology was greatly influenced by psychiatry,¹¹⁰ so a consideration of mental health plays an important role in theoretical work. "Interest in normality is far overshadowed by interest in pathology, the latter seemingly more easily defined," writes Mark Blotsky about research

¹⁰⁶ An important extension of Erikson's theory by Marcia speaks about "foreclosure", that is making premature commitments, when adolescent has not really chosen them. Marcia, however, does not challenge Erikson's assumption about eventual "closure" of the self, he just argues against "premature" closure. James E. Marcia, "Identity and Intervention. (Adolescent Identity: An Appraisal of Health and Intervention)," *Journal of Adolescence*. Dec, 1989. v12(n4): 401(10).

¹⁰⁷ Damon and Hart, *Self-Understanding in Childhood and Adolescence*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Harter, "Self and Identity Development," 357

¹⁰⁹ S.Epstein, "The Self-Concept Revisited, or A Theory of a Theory," *American Psychologist*, 28 (1973): 405-416.

¹¹⁰ Physiology is another origin of psychology. It also emphasizes the integrity of an organism, and mutual compatibility of its functions.

on adolescent development.¹¹¹ It is obvious that many psychiatric disorders come from an insufficient unity of the self. The most dramatic example would be the multiple personalities disorder. Some psychoses and even neuroses may also be associated with confusion over identity. Profound confusion about one's gender, ethnicity, or other form of identity may be a serious impediment to human well-being, even if this confusion does not result in mental disorder. This is a valid argument I do not wish to challenge directly.

The second argument might be represented in a following way: "this is what happens naturally, anyway." The empirical research on child development, for instance on gender identity, shows that children first learn their gender, then achieve gender constancy, as they are able to acquire needed schemata.¹¹² The same is true for the development of ethnic identity that moves from absence of ethnic identity, to confused and contradictory ideas about it, and then to definite identity. So, the natural way of socialization, studied empirically, shows that children and adolescents move from confusion, and inconsistencies towards more integrated concepts of the self.

The third argument in support of a cognitive-developmental view of self is more of a philosophical one. As Damon and Hart note, neither human agency, nor continuity and self-awareness is possible without an integrated self. An undecided person may never come to act, and a person who does not know whether s/he is the same at different times, may not take responsibility for his or her actions. This would go against the most fundamental social conventions.

I agree that the contradictions and complexity of the self, and the multitude of voices within the self need to be dealt with for many reasons. One of the valid ways is to encourage a person to work out a more or less unified concept of the self, which is what cognitivists have in mind. A defensible alternative is to promote the dialogical dimension of the self. I maintain that the process of integration through identity achievement is a real and a vital developmental process. The phenomena described in psychology as "separation," and "individuation process" are real, but they are not solely important in the development of self.

I would further argue that the search for internally consistent identity, and pain over this confusion are essentially temporary things associated with adolescence. An adolescent notices, as his self-awareness grows, that his or her "internal world" is full of contradictory voices. Not knowing how to handle the chaos, s/he uses the device that is also urgently advised by the society: s/he chooses a single image of self, sometimes even chooses a hero, writes down his or her principles in a diary, makes philosophical, political and professional commitments, etc. Well, this is a good device, but quite a crude one. It

¹¹¹ Mark J. Blotsky, John G. Looney, "Adolescent Psychological Development Revisited," in *International Annals of Adolescent Psychiatry*, ed. A. H. Esman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 25-43.

¹¹² See for instance, Charles Stangor and Diane N. Ruble "Development of Gender Role Knowledge and Gender constancy," in: L. S. Lieben, M. I. Singorella, eds. *Children's Gender Schemata. New Directions for Child Development*, no. 38 (San Francisco: Jessey-Bass, Winter 1987): 5-73.

may lead one through a few years of adolescence, but not through adulthood. Because for an adult there are more important things than having a clear picture of the self. A well-functioning adult does not shut off the internal and external dialogue. Rather, she or he knows how to develop and sustain it.

Jeffrey Blustein offers an interesting discussion of integrity. He notes, among other things, that the strong desire to be a person of integrity may overshadow commitments to real people.¹¹³ Such individuals are prone to put their own integrity above the well-being of others. Yet Blustein is not discouraged by his own observations, and maintains that integrity is one of the most important moral qualities. He describes integrity as being a unified person in terms of commitments. This means that all the particular commitments are to be unified as tight as possible.¹¹⁴ He also gives the following definition:

Persons of integrity are not wanton, nor are they seriously weak-willed, self-deceived, or hypocritical. They have their commitments or principles and normally hold firm to them in the face of dangers or enticements to do otherwise, and there is no systematic discrepancy between the principles or commitments they profess (to themselves or others) to live by and the desires and interests that actually motivate them to act as they do.¹¹⁵

Blustein starts his book with a list of common themes of feminist thought, with which he agrees. Among those are attunement to particular others in actual contexts, and the limited usefulness of principles in the resolution of moral problems.¹¹⁶ He also points out later in the book that we all have a variety of individual commitments, that may contradict each other. From my point of view this means that a moral person is one who is different in different situations with different people.

Blustein's notion of integrity contradicts his adherence to feminist moral theory. If one claims the value of "attunement to particular others," then one cannot defend a value of stock response to others? For me, a person of integrity is one who is consistently, and sincerely *different* in different situations. It is so precisely because such a person is attuned to others, and because every other is different. This is simple: one's convictions, ideals, and principles do not exist independently of with whom and why we are talking. One must understand the particulars of a situation, and be attuned to a particular other. But what for? Just so one can better apply one's unchangeable principles? I do not believe so. Principles and convictions should be reevaluated and reformulated anew from every new encounter with another human being. If I meet you, and after that nothing in

¹¹³ Jeffrey Blustein, *Care and Commitment: Taking the Personal Point of View* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 85.

¹¹⁴ Blustein, *Care and Commitment*, 92.

¹¹⁵ Blustein, *Care and Commitment*, 130.

¹¹⁶ Blustein, *Care and Commitment*, 3.

me changes, this means we have not really met. The truth does not exist apart from living human voices that express it, and there must be more than one voice to express it.

Now I will outline the dialogical concept of the self as opposed to the “internal consistency” approach I sketched above. Bakhtin conveyed his theory of the self through description of Dostoevsky’s characters:

In Dostoevsky the self-consciousness of the hero is completely dialogized: its every aspect is turned outward, it is intensively addressed to itself, to another person, to a third person. Outside this living directedness towards itself and toward the other person it does not exist, even for itself. In this sense one could say that in Dostoevsky the person is the subject of address (*sub’ekt obrashcheniia*). One cannot speak about him, one can only address oneself to him. Those depths of the human soul, whose representation Dostoevsky considered the main task of his realism in a higher sense, are revealed only through the intense address. It is impossible to master the inner man, to see and understand him, by making him the object of an impersonal neutral analysis, nor is it possible to master him by merging with him or by feeling one’s way into him. No, he can be approached and revealed, or, rather, he can be caused to reveal himself, only dialogically, by means of communication with him. And it is possible to represent the inner man, as Dostoevsky understood him, only by representing his communication with another person. The man in man is revealed, both for himself and for others, only in communication of one person with another.¹¹⁷

Bakhtin is saying that a person exists and may be known only through communication with another person. One cannot “study” another human being as an object, even with best intentions. In the polyphonic novel, there may not be a “disengaged third,” such as the author observing his characters from high above, writes Bakhtin.¹¹⁸ Another point is this: all the Dostoevsky’s characters “acutely feel their internal incompleteness, their ability, so to speak, to overgrow from inside, to prove *untrue* any superficializing and finalizing definition of them. A human being lives as long as he is not completed and has not said his last word.”¹¹⁹ This is an important feature of the Bakhtinian understanding of self. Many people state that of course, an individual is always in progress, always unfinished. But Bakhtin places this fact in the very definition of what it means to be human. In other words, the theories of the self I criticize, while taking notice of the open-endedness of the self, nevertheless consider what is stable in the self to be the most important aspect of the self. Bakhtin shifts values: what is most important is exactly this open-endedness. It is important for my argument, because knowledge of what is most important about the self will affect the purpose of education.

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 213.

¹¹⁸ Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 24.

¹¹⁹ Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 78.

A human being never coincides with himself. The formula of identity “A is A” is not applicable to him. According to Dostoevsky’s artistic thought, the authentic life of personality happens, so to speak, in this point of non-coinciding of a person with himself; in the point of his egress beyond the limits of what he is as objective being, which could be pried on, defined, and predicted apart from his will, in absentia. The authentic life of personality is accessible only to dialogical penetration, to which it opens reciprocally and freely.¹²⁰

I would like to continue this line of thought by suggesting that one also cannot study one’s own self as an object, from the estranged position of reflecting super-ego. If I should treat the other as fundamentally open, then I should also treat myself the same way. Of course, I must make some order in my internal house from time to time, sorting out my beliefs and qualities. Yet the tidiness of my house is immeasurably less significant task than the task of surviving. And surviving as a human being means nurturing this ability to remain unfinished. Integrity, if understood as a need for total consistency is the death of my human soul.

I do not reject the notion of integrity as such but integrity for me means something different. It is the integrity of Michel de Montaigne: “I may happen to contradict myself but... I never contradict truth.”¹²¹ This is truth in the Bakhtinian sense. That is truth which depends on a multiplicity of different voices for its very existence. The adherence to truth (integrity) has a moral meaning for me. This is not the same as scientific truth about objects. This kind of truth emerges from different words being spoken about the same object; truth is not in the object, but in our simultaneous and mutually addressed speaking. Integrity, then, is a constant pattern of continuous change. A person of integrity is deeply committed to truth, and truth is being born between us. This requires a commitment to dialogue, a commitment to ascertain the other (Thou art, therefore I am), to discover the human dimension of this world. Thus, the truth is different depending on with whom you are speaking.

Truth is also a function of an event, so it is different depending on the whole range of factors comprising the particular context of a conversation. Hence, a person of integrity not only tells different things to different people, but also tells different things to the same person, but at different times.

One may object that some individuals behave differently in various situations out of self-interest, or out of weakness of will power, or out of desire to please every one, none of which may be called integrity. I would agree that the constant shifting of one’s position alone does not constitute dialogical integrity. Indeed, a sophisticated manipulating behavior may look on its surface very much like a dialogical relation. One who manipulates is, in a way, finely attuned to his or her partner in a conversation. A person of

¹²⁰ Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 79.

¹²¹ Montaigne, *The Essays*, 908.

dialogical integrity is different from one who manipulates by virtue of their motivation. For a manipulator, neither the ideas discussed, nor partner in discussion mean much; all that matters is self-interest. For a person of *monological* identity, it is the ideas being discussed that take foremost importance.

Unlike the previous two, a person of dialogical identity values his or her partner in dialogue above all. For instance, if we talk about democracy, you, as my partner in dialogue, will be of the most interest to me; you, speaking about democracy, rather than the democracy described by you, is my primary interest. No matter how important my beliefs about democracy are to me, my commitment to the dialogical relation with you takes precedence over them. I am not trying to discover a true concept of democracy as such, but only a true one in the context of our given dialogical conversation. I take a concept of democracy and search for a multiplicity of human voices in it. And this is the reason I bother to examine the concept itself.

This does not mean that a person of dialogical integrity is not interested in ideas. Ideas implicitly contain human voices, that can be extracted from them. I will illustrate this with an example of Dostoevsky's thought as described by Bakhtin:

His ability [to see everything in co-existence and interaction] sharpened to the utmost his perception in the cross-section of a given moment and allowed him to see the many and the diverse where others only saw the single and the same. Where others saw a single thought, he could find and probe two thoughts, a bifurcation. Where others saw one quality, he uncovered the presence of another, opposite quality. All that seemed to be simple has become complex and heterogeneous in his world. In every voice he could hear two disagreeing voices, in every expression—a crack and a predisposition to turn into another, antipodal expression; in every gesture he detected confidence and uncertainty simultaneously; he perceived the deep ambivalence and polysemy of every phenomenon.¹²²

This will to split every idea into two, to see the complexity in an idea is not a manifestation of a philosophical fascination with complexity. This is not hair-splitting for the fun of it. Dostoevsky's writings have very little in common with the analytic tradition in philosophy. Rather, Bakhtin is pointing to an example of a moral commitment, similar to what Montaigne expressed in his maxim. This is the commitment to enter in a dialogical relation wherever it is possible. Ideas are only the medium of dialogue, and they should be "dialogized" in the way I just described in order to serve their purpose.

The ideal of internal consistency of the self-concept may help destroy our dialogical potential. Buber thinks that *seeming* versus *being* is the essential problem of the interhuman.¹²³ It is the effort to *seem* that prevents us from entering the dialogical. I am

¹²² Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 41-42.

¹²³ Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 65-68.

inclined to believe that a search for our “consistent, true selves” is likely to lead us to the path of seeming. I haven’t always believed this. Up to a certain point in my life, I thought that there was a deficiency in my own judgment. I could relate to two completely opposite opinions and agree with both. I could talk to two mortal enemies blaming each other at different times, and feel solidarity with both. On the other hand, when somebody argues for a position that I share, I have this urge to question it and find an argument against this very position. At the time, I believed this happened due to the lack of my own personal integrity. Then it came to my attention that not only Dostoevsky, but any good novelist cannot credit himself or herself with much integrity either. Even if an author’s voice can be carefully separated from the voices of his or her characters, it is always contradictory. For example, in the *Red Wheel*, A. I. Solzhenitsyn portrays the Russian Czar, the government, and various wings of the revolutionaries critically but also with compassion and understanding.¹²⁴ Without this multiplicity, the novel just could not happen.

I was not alone in my inconsistency, and that was good news. The bad news was that every time in the past I have tried to pull together my integrity, to formulate a creed, to finalize my beliefs, it was a laughable effort of seeming, not being. I learned after that discovery often not to have an opinion, and to agree shamelessly with disagreeable things, and to disagree with the most obviously plausible theories. I have also come to see that all of those people with whom I carelessly entered dialogue, do not go away; they keep existing within my head. They are all there, Communists and Hippies, Jews and anti-Semites, self-motivated capitalists and angry youngsters, dummies and smarty pants. They simply will not go away, placing me sometimes in an awkward position. For instance, at times I felt an obligation to describe to a person of a prosecuted minority how it might be inside of a bigot who prosecutes him. While I intensely dislike the bigot, and feel real solidarity with my minority friend, yet I feel that my higher obligation is to communicate that bigot’s world view to my friend. This is critical because no truth about bigotry and discrimination may be spoken without the bigot’s participation.¹²⁵

There is a certain discrepancy between the democratic organization of American society and something I can only call the cult of integrity. The type of personality being promoted in American society comes from some previous epoch; it is a moral hero, a savior, a lone knight. On one hand, democracy implies lengthy discussions, ability to listen, compromise, see things through the eyes of the other. More than that, a modern industrial society requires people to change careers, places, and occupations. On the other hand, one is expected to have firm commitments to moral principles, career, etc. For example, the current US President is constantly under attack for his ability to change his mind under

¹²⁴ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Red Wheel : A Narrative in Discrete Period of Time* (London : Bodley Head, 1989).

¹²⁵ I use the first person form for clarity only. I am not a person of great dialogical integrity. Most of my dialogues fail, in part because I confront a person with an abstract opposing idea, void of personal context. Sometimes the failure is due to the very false integrity I argue against, but still demonstrate on occasion.

changing circumstances yet these are the qualities most of us would like to see in our children.¹²⁶ A legislator proudly states that he says the same things now that he was saying twenty years ago. This is something of which one should be ashamed. One hears about making choices as if it was the most important manifestation of freedom and responsibility. In fact, the dialogical person should learn how to avoid unnecessary choices. A choice always cut out other options, and therefore makes life more plain and poor. Actually, making a choice can be a sad experience of life, very often necessary, but never pleasant. I believe teachers should caution children against premature commitments, especially of a political sort, and discourage making unnecessary choices.

Dialogical integrity needs a special care. One must develop many fully significant voices within oneself, in order to sustain his or her dialogical moral life. Some psychological disorders in individuals, whose childhood was entirely dominated by a single adult, may be explained by the lack of internal polyphony. Freud described one such disorder, when a father becomes a singular dominating voice of the superego in a child's psyche. But there surely are others variations of such a disorder, when for example it is a dominating mother or a teacher that play the same role. Never mind, if the individual whose voice dominates the internal scenery of a child's mind, is a moral being or not. The singularity of influence is harmful in its own merit.¹²⁷ This lack can only be compensated if the single most influential adult in child's life is a complex, multi-voiced individual himself. A good teacher is not one whose integrity is iron-like. A good teacher is what is sometimes called "very human," a person whose internal complexity is not suppressed, but expressed. Dialogical integrity should be nourished in educational institutions by cherishing plurality and not hurrying students to make up their minds. I will elaborate on this in chapter Four.

The notion of integrity is closely linked with identity achievement. Identity is knowing who one is. The normal cultural expectation is that one is able to identify oneself with a set of social roles (I am a man, a father, an American, a professional, etc.), as well as with a set of internal characteristics of the self (I am a quiet, resolute, confident individual able to communicate with other people, but having trouble asserting my leadership, etc.).

Charles Taylor offers a strong concept of the authentic self that defines a particular understanding of identity achievement.¹²⁸ He counterposes this notion to the medieval practice when a person was simply assigned an identity by the social position that she or he occupied. The ideal of authenticity relates to an understanding of one's identity as an individualized one. "Being in touch with our inner feelings," writes Taylor, takes on independent and crucial moral significance. "Before the late eighteenth century, no one thought that the difference between human beings had this kind of moral significance."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ I have borrowed this comment from Jaylyne Hutchinson.

¹²⁷ From my point of view the idea of role model vigorously promoted in American education is fundamentally wrong, because it invites the formation of dominating internal voice.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*.

¹²⁹ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* 30.

Since then the idea that everyone should independently discover his or her originality and be true to it, took roots in European culture.

Taylor draws on Bakhtin's ideas to develop a dialogical view of identity. Our identity is a product of a continuing conversation with a group of "significant others" as Charles Taylor argues. "People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us."¹³⁰ But even later in life the significant others keep forming our identity, because they are included in our personal life experiences and our ongoing internal dialogues. "If some of the things I value most are accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she becomes part of my identity."¹³¹ Taylor uses Bakhtin's notion of dialogicality to make the point that identity depends on recognition by others, thus recognition is a vital human need. So, if a member of a disadvantaged group is denied recognition as a member of a group, this may cause him or her to internalize a demeaning image of the self.

I will argue that Taylor's idea of the authentic self may be easily interpreted as monological in nature. I do not necessarily attribute the monological assumptions to Taylor, and yet those assumptions can be found in his texts at a close scrutiny. Taylor is right when he argues against the medieval practice of defining one's identity exclusively by society, and according to one's social position. Taylor defines authenticity as being in touch with one's inner feelings. He acknowledges that our significant others make a major impact on those "inner feelings." Yet it looks as if only when the voices of others are transferred within the self, only after the voices of others become inner voices, can they become authentic. I fail to see how else one can reconcile the multitude of voices that make up the self with Taylor's understanding of authenticity. How does one know which part of the self is authentic? According to Taylor, one must listen to one's inner voices, and not let others simply define one's identity.

My position would be that the voices of others, both internalized and real voices of living individuals, must be given some part in defining the self. The internal voice within exists, as does identity, but it constitutes only part of the voices in a dialogue about the self, among the other, equally important voices. I cannot accept a definition of authenticity tied to internal-external opposition. An individual who is completely in touch with his or her inner feelings, may also develop a false sense of self. Inner feelings may be deceitful, just like social roles often are. The criteria of authenticity is found in the way different voices, inner and outer, interact in defining the self. It is not to be found in which voices are given priority. I will explain this with Bakhtin's idea of authentic self:

In general, the conciliation and merging of voices even within one consciousness—by Dostoevsky's design and according to his fundamental ideological premises—may not be a monological act, but presumes a joining of a character's voice in a

¹³⁰ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* 32.

¹³¹ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* 34.

chorus. But for this to take place one has to overwhelm and silence one's fictive voices.¹³²

Following Bakhtin, I admit that there are authentic voice of the self, and fictive ones. The authentic voice is one that is a part of a chorus in the fullest sense. It is born on the boundary of the self with the outside world. The fictive voices are those born outside of a genuine dialogue, either from the outer realm of the social world, or from the solitude of a disengaged self. Authenticity is a function of dialogue. It is not "being in touch with inner feelings," but being open to the world of other human beings. Authenticity is being truly and permanently open towards the possibility that I am not what I thought I was. My authentic self does not belong to me in a sense, but is always shared by others. I have no more authority to say some deeper truths about myself, than other people who know me. Or, in other words, I cannot describe myself if I do not know who listens. There is no authentic self without another, engaged self.

Now, I reject being categorized by others according to my social position, just like Taylor suggests. However, I also reject the idea that my authentic self begins where others' voices interfere no more. The truth about myself (which is what authentic self really means), as any other truth, is born at the point where different voices meet. This truth also requires a multiplicity of bearers. As have argued earlier, the self is not a logically consistent and organized entity. Charles Taylor would probably reply: Yes, but still I can choose my controversial and complex self as uniquely mine, as defined by me. I would disagree again by saying that to be true to my authentic self is to be open to what others may have to say to me about me. Authenticity is what is unfinished in me, it is what still remains to be said.

Concluding my argument on identity, integrity and authenticity, I want to suggest that the metaphor of a "core" self is misleading. What is important about a human individual is not his or her deeply situated, internal structures. The authentic self exists and manifests itself on the boundary of the self with the outside world. The multitude of identities that we all acquire are only viable *as multitude*, and lose their vitality as identities become logically unified, hierarchically built, and finalized. I argue for an integrity that includes bringing the whole of the self into every new situation, whole in a sense of not leaving anything aside, not ignoring the parts of the self that do not "fit" into any acceptable self-concept. Integrity for me also means possessing an honest desire to be different in different situations, a persistent will to find a dialogical aspect in every idea or object.

There are micro-implications and macro-implications of the dialogical concept of the self for educational theory. The former include, among others, the "fine fabric" of classroom discourse. It should provide for situations where curriculum might enter the dialogue of human beings in a context of their particular encounter. The latter change our view of a

¹³² Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 335.

school or other educational institutions. Such an institution should somehow provide time and space for a larger dialogue about the values of communal life. Hence, both need to be addressed. It is to the micro-level that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3. THREE DRINKS THEORY: TYPES OF DISCOURSE IN THE CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

This chapter examines the implications of the dialogical approach for classroom discourse. This is a continuation of my disagreement with non-ontological theories of dialogue. As I have stated earlier, dialogue is not simply a form of communication. This does not mean that dialogue does not appear in the context of communication. On contrary, I will argue that dialogue is essential for learning in the classroom environment. However, my general position is not to evaluate the benefits of dialogue for learning, but to see the role of learning for fostering dialogue.

What I have said about the dialogical self prompts me to examine the learning process in light of the dialogical self. What I am trying to reason about and illustrate by this chapter, is that dialogue in classroom discourse is not what it is thought by many. It is not when students are asked “Socratic” questions, and encouraged to participate in an orderly discussion. Rather, dialogue happens when a holistic text of curriculum is broken down, challenged, re-told in one’s own words, made one’s own, and “stored away,” that is dismissed from immediate conversation and put in memory. Moments of unruly talk, commotion, and laughter may be dialogical in nature, and should be planned for and welcomed by teachers. The growth of dialogical capacity of students should be attended by their teachers.

THEORY

I will develop a metaphor that will highlight the various aspects of this process of understanding. Consider a typical dinner party; it consists of three major phases. The first phase is when people make toasts, and conduct a polite, turn-taking conversation. The conversation might be worthless, or meaningful, funny or stupid, but in any case it has the attention of an entire group, and proceeds upon a clearly defined topic. The second phase roughly coincides with the second drink, when people start talking over each other, to stray from the original topic and tone, but still aim their utterances towards the whole group. They become more excited, often, but not always ironical and humorous towards the ideas expressed earlier. Finally, around the third drink or so, the conversation falls apart into a disarray of smaller conversations, loosely if at all connected to the original topics. People usually talk nonsense in pairs or smaller groups, or sometimes listen to some nonsense offered by one person. Not all parties go through all three phases in a neat sequence, but the best of them do. In a cocktail party, or at a buffet, people try to jump-start the conversation through bypassing the first, and even the second phases, which always seems artificial. On other occasions, diners never go beyond the first phase, which creates boredom of enormous proportions.

The best of scholarly conferences generally run the same way. A session starts with a presentation, followed by more or less focused comments and questions. The first drink conversation is overextended and overvalued in academic settings. Then it turns into fundamentally more challenging, far-reaching, and confused replies. Finally, moderately agitated professors and overly excited graduate students are dismissed for a relieving break, creating a wonderfully chaotic buzz. Those trying to carry on a serious conversation, find it difficult, or are discouraged from doing so.

The three phases of a good conversation have very little to do with our habits of alcohol consumption, so I will call them simply “first, second, and third discourse.” They represent some common means of making sense. This is often the process of how we understand and how we learn. The first discourse provides a common text, a shared experience, an initial conversational event. We do need a group to make sense of the world, and this type of monological, non-ambiguous discourse really makes a group. It establishes a common set of references, a shared language for the following conversations. This could be a toast, a presentation, a story, a curriculum; this very well may be an event, or an act we all witness or participate in as a group, and acquire a communal semiotic ownership over.

But there is nothing more torturous than listening without talking back. Some messages, like a theater show, or a church mass can capture our attention for hours, and yet we cannot escape the need to talk back—if not personally, then delegating someone to pronounce our reply; if not literally, then in our imagination; if not directly to the talker, then redirecting the back-talk to somebody else. As common ground is established, the second discourse comes into being. Individuals bring themselves to that common text. They challenge, deconstruct, actively agree or disagree with it, they commend and ridicule. The second drink discourse is somewhat dialogical in nature, even if it does not appear to be a dialogue at all. We understand things by breaking them, turning them upside down, taking a bite, or dissolving with saliva—literally with edible objects, figuratively with texts. The idea is to enmesh the self into the text, to break down the whole, to salvage whatever is left from a common meaning for individual sense-making. We understand by trying to co-author the text, to interpret it, and to offer our interpretations to those with whom we listened together. And again, this second drink exercise does not exist if not witnessed by the group. Since the group is the holder of common experience, it would be senseless to challenge without anyone listening. So, opinions arise, clash, and diverge. Over the second drink we find ourselves in disagreement, ever surprised. Sometimes a genuine dialogue emerges and carries us into another dimension of the dialogical. But even if this does not happen, which is usually the case, we begin understanding the initial text only in an attempt of dialogical relation.

The conversation then dissipates, dies into the next phase, the pseudo-conversation, the anti-talk. People take things lightly, they give up on convincing each other, they talk with their emotions, while often pretending to make sense of each other. The third drink discourse is a final, but also a primordial discourse. It resembles the way little children

talk to each other. Talking nonsense, and having a good laugh about it is obviously better than endless discussions and polarization of opinions. When people miss the third drink phase, their conversation ceases to be a source of happiness, and becomes a beginning of their misery. For different opinions to coexist, there needs to be a nurturing broth of a carnival, where all things seem to be possible, and all become laughable. In fact, slipping into nonsense, breaking logical connections is the only way to end any good conversation with dignity. The knowledge and understanding of the initial text is stored away into the back room of our memory. People almost say to each other: “Let us change the topic. We all know what we all know. We have our disagreements, but let us have a small talk as a token of our mutual understanding beyond the subjects that divide us.”

BACKGROUND

A significant body of research on classroom discourse is concerned with the cultural barriers between teachers and students that impair mutual understanding and ultimately cause academic failure among minority students.¹³³ Yet others¹³⁴ show many instances when dialogue fails in classrooms, for reasons apparently not related to cultural differences. From my point of view, treatment of dialogue as a merely form of communication is unproductive, because it focuses on linguistic properties of dialogue at the expense of its more fundamental ontological understanding.

Bakhtin has done significant work in analysis of language, although he never reduced language simply to a linguistic phenomenon. He viewed language as just one area where dialogue may be examined. I will rely on Bakhtin’s distinction between “authoritative” and “internally persuasive” (or “retelling in one’s words”) types of discourse. Authoritative is what I call the first discourse, and internally persuasive is the second discourse.

[The authoritative discourse] enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands or falls together with that authority. One cannot divide it up—agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part.¹³⁵

In the internally persuasive discourse, a word is half-ours and half-someone else’s.

¹³³ Shirley B. Heath, “Questioning at Home and School: A comparative Study,” in Spindler, G., Ed., *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982); Cazden, C.B., John, V.P., Hymes, D., eds., *Functions of Language in the Classroom*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972).

¹³⁴ Robert Hull, *The Language Gap: How Classroom Dialogue Fails*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1985); Nicholas C. Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1993).

¹³⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M.Bakhtin*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342-6.

Its creativity and productiveness consists precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and doesn't remain in an isolated and static condition ...The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not *finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new *ways to mean*.¹³⁶

Presumably, the latter type of discourse is more adequate in education. Such a claim might be grounded in L.Vygotsky's notion of the "zone of proximal development," which states that dialogical engagement between adult and child advances the child's development. For Vygotsky, the "engine" of children's mental development is in a distance between what they can do alone, and what they can do in collaboration with adults and peers. I borrow a good explanation of what Vygotsky meant from J.Wertsch's book.¹³⁷ The example actually belongs to Tharp and Gallimore:

A 6-year old child has lost a toy and asks her father for help. The father asks where she last saw the toy; the child says 'I can't remember.' He asks a series of questions—did you have it in your room? Outside? Next door? To each question, the child answers 'no.' When he says 'in the car?', she says 'I think so' and goes to retrieve the toy.¹³⁸

In this example it is impossible to tell who did the remembering. Vygotsky claimed that the notion of higher mental functions can be applied to social as well as individual forms of activity. The practice of teaching should be oriented not towards the actual capabilities of children, but that higher level of mental functioning that is available to them through collaboration with adults and with more capable peers. This means for me that learning, and any understanding, are intrinsically collective activities, and even more so, they are entirely dialogical in nature.

I am trying to show that both first and second types of discourse are needed for learning, and that there is at least one more type. Successful learning needs to be conducted according to the cycle of three discourses. And if one or more of the phases are fundamentally missing, the classroom conversation may not be educationally effective. In order to argue these points, I will use some data from a research study I did in winter and spring of 1995. The illustrations that I include in this dissertation allow me to show what I mean by the three types of discourse in the classroom environment, and what significance they may have for successful learning. It seems important to me to know what meaning

¹³⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M.Bakhtin*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342-6.

¹³⁷ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: HUP, 1993), 28.

¹³⁸ Tharp, Roland G., and Roland Galimore, *Rousing Minds to Life: Teaching, Learning and Schooling in Social Context*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.

students and a teacher make out of their own classroom talk, and to see whether my metaphorical speculations are indeed connected to reality. I will show how the dialogical aspect of classroom discourse may go unnoticed, even though it should be moved to the very center of educational practice.

RESEARCH

This research involved about thirty hours of classroom observations, and seven interviews with students and a teacher in a fifth grade class, Parkview Elementary school,¹³⁹ located in one of the major West Coast cities. Observations were recorded in the field notes. Interviews were transcribed and coded. In both observations and interviews I was trying to identify different types of classroom discourse, and understand the meanings participants attached to various communicative situations. The basic scheme of my interview consisted of going through a typical school day, and asking students and the teacher, about what, how and with whom do kids and Ms. D., the teacher, talk in different portions of the day.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ms. D.'s classroom is on the top floor of an old school building. Thirty-one fifth-graders seem like a lot of people in this room, although they sit in double rows, facing each other along the walls, with some open space in the middle.

The school day starts with the set-up time, a few minutes when kids pull out their books, and take back packs to lockers. It is indeed a third discourse full of a the general multivoiced buzz that seems to be a default kind of conversation. The day starts and ends with it. But for reasons of simplicity I will begin with the first discourse.

First Discourse

I begin with the first, authoritative type of discourse. Edvards and Furlong¹⁴⁰ call it a centralized communication. For them this actually is proper classroom talk. "What this means is that everybody else listens (or gives appearance of listening) to a single speaker."¹⁴¹ The very nature of a classroom as a crowded place dictates the necessity of an orderly interaction, they maintain, and therefore the main communicative role of the classroom audience is to listen. I will take this definition with two provisions. First, centralized communication is not the only, and even not the most important type of classroom discourse, and the above definition certainly does not provide space to consider

¹³⁹ All names are changed.

¹⁴⁰ Anthony D. Edvards and V. J. Furlong, *The Language of Teaching: Meaning in Classroom Interaction*. (London: Henemann, 1978).

¹⁴¹ Edvards and Furlong, *The Language of Teaching*, 11.

other types of discourse. Second, it is not only the sheer numbers of people in a classroom that make it necessary to concentrate on listening, but the need to hear the message also prompts people to remain silent and listen.

The group of situations that I cover under the first discourse umbrella encompasses quite a variety. First, it includes direct instruction by Ms. D. This type of interaction does not involve much of a response. “Basically, we listen,” as Li summarizes it. Another example involves didactic question and answer types of interaction. Oral presentations by students, read-alouds, and watching movies together; all of these situations fall under the first discourse because it is a centralized communication, where everyone is attending to a single source of information. A simple opportunity to raise one’s hand and ask a question does not, in my view, constitute a different kind of a discourse. For instance:

JESSIE: Normally people can make questions and comments, but sometimes she just says I am gonna talk, for this time no questions or comments.

Ms. D. has various ways to keep the class from slipping prematurely into the second discourse. But the wholeness of the first discourse is also supported by very nature of understanding in a group. Beyond usual “discipline management” techniques, Ms. D ignores attempts to initiate second discourse:

FIELDNOTES: Ms. D. poses a question to the class, but she ignores students talking out. She calls on somebody else, just to hear same thing being said legally. Although it is waste of time from a point of view of getting an answer, it may be a necessary step to secure order.

The first feature of first discourse is the totality of the message. The discourse of a speaker is monological, simply because listeners want to know an end to the story. Even if interruptions occur, listeners want to go on with it. That is why stories are more successful in grabbing attention: people do not know the end of it, so they have a stake in preserving its wholeness. But the same mechanism should work for any speech, where listeners see some development. For instance, Monica wants to hear the story, even if it’s not her favorite:

INV:¹⁴² What about a similar situation when she [Ms. D.] reads the book. Did you like the book?

MONICA: It was OK, but ...she was reading the book from beginning to an end, so we know what’s going on. Even if I didn’t really liked the book, like there was another book she was reading that I really didn’t care for. But it’s just sort of like, oh, I know what’s the beginning, and it’ll sort of leave me in suspense for the rest of my life, if don’t hear the end.

¹⁴² Investigator.

On the other hand, if students already know the end of story, it is very difficult for them to restrain from uninvited comments. Monica talks about the FLASH (Family Life, And Sexual Health program) she already took last year:

MONICA: We didn't finish yet, but I did it. This is my second year, because I was in a four/five split last year. The fifth graders had to take it, so we had to take it. So, Clayton, Matt, Mike, Charley, Luis and me, this is our second time. So, every time she does an activity that we did last year, so we sort of crack up, because we know something that happened during it last year. So, I haven't really been listening to it.

A prominent theme that emerges from the interviews is the importance of being together in listening. The process of individual sense-making needs some other people with whom to verify one's reactions. Jessie thinks it important to know there are others like you:

INV: Was that an embarrassing movie? [About human sexuality].

JESSIE: I guess, it was pretty much embarrassing to everybody.

INV: Would you rather watch it alone or in a classroom?

JESSIE: [Long pause] Probably in the classroom, I guess. I don't know why. Because there a lot of people who feel the same way as I do.

Ms. D. knows this, too:

Ms. D.: So, yeah, there is something about the group dynamics, getting together and talking about it.

Rissa hints, that it is the aftermath of watching a movie together that matters:

RISSA: I'd rather watch it in class. Seems like more of a class thing. [This is a different movie].

INV: Why is it? What's the difference between watching it with the class, and ...

RISSA: Well, watching it in class seems more like ...that kind of movie, because it's telling all of us, that you can make your dreams come through, instead just watching it at home and returning it to the video store, or something.

These comments suggest that the first discourse is never completely monological. The very fact of being together while listening adds something to it. Yet the dialogicality of the first discourse is directed towards the perception of the text, and not towards the text itself.

In order to communicate, a group needs a subject of conversation which the common text provides. Li appreciates common knowledge for its role in a conversation:

LI: Normally, during the read-aloud everybody heard the same stuff that you did. So, sometimes you talk about the book, because everybody else heard it, and so, everybody else knows about it.

But this sharing of a common text provides students an opportunity to “compare notes,” to juxtapose one’s reading of it with others’, and to grasp some cultural archetypes. One person might not have read enough books to figure out “how books normally go,” but the group may:

INV: Do you talk about the book [with your friends in school]?

LI: Sometimes.

INV: Like what kind of things would you say?

LI: Matters about the book, or what is happening. When, like after that girl, Kate, after she read a book, and was discussion, people would say, no matter what the kids are gonna tell, they are gonna get in trouble about it.

INV: Why did you think so?

LI: It’s just the way books normally go.

Shared listening multiplies the power of understanding, because a groups collective experience is larger than any individual one. However, some students might prefer to experience the same text outside of the classroom. Jessie would rather watch the movie alone precisely for the same reason Rissa wants to do it in class, namely, because of the experience after the movie:

JESSIE: I don’t know. ...I think it would be better to watch that movie Walking on the Air at home, because I used to cry at the end of the movie either because it’s good or it’s bad, and it’s nice to be at home, because I can do whatever I feel like. Besides just walking over to my next class or something.

Jessie needs privacy, but Li simply prefers a group other than class with which to share this particular text. She chooses her family over the classmates:

LI: I guess, I’d rather watch it [the movie] with my family, because normally it’s quieter, and movies in class, sometimes you can’t hear it. And it’s not so much fun when you are on your own.

INV: It’s not as much fun? Why not?

LI: I don’t know. It just isn’t.

Second Discourse

The second discourse passes largely unnoticed in psycho-linguistic literature. Common knowledge categorizes it as a disruption of the learning process. It is talking out, a disruption in a formal sense, but I would argue that it plays a crucial role in students' understanding. It should not be seen as always making a negative impact on learning.

My informants have different theories of why people talk without raising their hands, and without waiting their turn. Ned names boredom, desire to argue, or lack of consistency in the original text.

NED: You just get bored, or they say something that doesn't make sense. Or they don't say something and you are wondering about it.

Rich offers similar explanation, but adds the desire to be funny to the list:

RICH: Yeah, when people kind of get bored, or they see something funny. Like one time in the movie. There is like a spaceship, and you can see a finger outside moving the spaceship. Everybody saw, but I was the first one to recognize it's a finger. And that was really funny, because it was just a model of a spaceship moving.

INV: So, people say things when they see something funny ...

RICH: Yeah. Usually when they try to be funny, or they want to make a point.

Monica believes that students talk out every time circumstances permit. So, talking out is a natural state of mind for her.

MONICA: Once everybody realizes they are not going to get in trouble for talking. Like one person here starts to talk, then somebody overheard and realize: well, they are not getting in trouble for talking, so I might talk, then another person over here ...

For Chad all the second discourse phenomenon is nothing but people's stupidity or lack of attention:

INV: What about when people ask questions out of order?

CHAD: Are you talking about things like Ned?

INV: Yeah.

CHAD: He just doesn't understand... Normally they're just holding their personal conversation with somebody else, and they are not with the teacher.

Jessie, as always, seeks deeper explanations. It is the general attitude towards school that prompts people to talk out:

INV: Do people still ask questions even if she says, "don't talk"?

JESSIE: [Giggle] Yeah.

INV: Why do people speak out? What kind of people still ask questions and make comments when she says 'don't talk'?

JESSIE: Some people really don't care about school and they think it's really a big joke. Some people are actually serious about it, and want to get things done.

But later she offers more a prosaic, and a more convincing theory, too:

JESSIE: I think it's usually they just forget to raise their hands, they are really excited about something. So, they just got to say it.

Ms. D. suggests the physiological theory, although she admits, there is a mystery here. What good is the "attention span" concept, if it does not withstand the reality check?

Ms. D.: ...You find that the kids in this age have about fifteen-to twenty minutes attention span. An so, you know, you could have them to listen to the directed lesson for fifteen to twenty minutes. Or you can have them to do a quiet activity, and then you will notice, that there is a sort of a change of pace. But this group, I haven't noticed. I have students that can work far longer than that. You know, Radek, who we were just talking about? I saw him working for an hour and a half. No joke, when there is all kind of stuff going around him. Totally absorbed in what he was doing, lost to the world.

While I agree that there is some merit in a theory of "attention span," I do not think such a factor plays an important role in classroom conversation. I've observed an entire class sitting for hour and a half with undivided attention, and in other occasion the same class not being able to concentrate for five minutes, no matter what. The most plausible theory, in my view, is that people talk out when they have something to say, or as Jessie puts it, when "they just forget to raise their hands, they are really excited about something." What I mean is that there is a fundamental need to speak, and it is related to the classroom learning situation.

In addition to Ned's brilliant explanation, Jessie calls attention to the relationship between the original text and second discourse:

JESSIE: Sometimes it's just a subject ...we have more ideas, sometimes it's really boring...

Later she clarifies, that a really boring text does not invite a reply:

JESSIE: I don't know. Usually when ...uhm the class subject is interesting and we have some ideas, we have usually a lot more to talk. So, we want to share with other people our ideas. But when it's really boring, we don't want to, because we don't like the class. So, we don't really have any opinions on that.

“To have something to say” actually means the need to share one's opinion with the whole group. So, the second discourse may not be viewed as an attempt to enter a dialogue with the teacher alone, but is directed to classmates as well. This is an attempt to enter in dialogue with one's peers. To have something to say also may mean voicing a disagreement.

As one can see from students' comments, the question of why people talk out is not a very simple one. The common theme in all of their theories is the need to challenge, to question, to participate, to agree or disagree with something. However, the dialogicality of the second discourse may be directed to different aspects of the classroom conversation. A student may want to enter a dialogue with a curricular text (a movie, a teacher's presentation, etc.), or with the teacher herself. Sometimes a student may challenge not what the teacher is saying, but how the lesson is run, or the way the whole school functions. A student may pick on how another student responds, or on his or her own thoughts on the subject. Again, this is a very complex type of conversation. But its essence stays the same in different variations: it is a dialogical challenge, an attempt to enter the dialogical relation with somebody.

Voicing one's own reaction is making second half of the meaning. We can only understand when we respond. It may be really frustrating for a person to have something to say and not be able to say it; it is often so for me, as for Jessie. Jessie suffers from being shy—not a typical child in Ms. D.'s classroom:

INV: So, sometimes you feel you really have to say something, because you have something to say. So, do you raise your hand, or just speak up?

JESSIE: I raise my hand.

INV: What if Ms. D. doesn't call on you?

JESSIE: Then I sort of ...I get really, really, really, really, really, really mad at Ms. D. because it usually is, when I want to say something, she doesn't call on me, and when I don't want to say, she calls on me.

An unspoken response has no status, its real value and meaning are unknown. The unspoken word dies inside. But with this unspoken word dies the original word of a teacher, which goes unanswered.

The essence of the second discourse becomes most clear when we look at examples that involve material sensitive to children such as FLASH. Most of the kids seem to handle it well:

FIELDNOTES: Ms. D. reads aloud a book, in which one of the episodes relates to sex. Linda, pretending to be a little kid, talks out in a small voice: How do you mate, mommy? Can I watch sometimes?

Six out of seven interviewed students say in agreement that when people are embarrassed, they tend to make a joke, which is hardly a surprise. These are some examples of it:

NED: ...When you are a little nervous you like, huh-huh, feel like laughing.

Jessie adds the theme of fear:

JESSIE: ...It's usually the people who are really embarrassed who make all the remarks and stuff. Because just like hide their embarrassment, I thinkSometimes people make fun of it, because they like just don't know enough about it, so they're sort of scared of it. They make negative remarks about it.

Li thinks it is being serious that really scares people:

LI: Sometimes we get embarrassed, but sometimes they are just trying to be funny.

INV: Why would you make a joke, if you are embarrassed?

LI: To ease the tenseness. To make it funny, instead of being serious. You don't have to deal with people thinking it's really serious.

Rissa points out that joking about a certain topic creates an impression (and maybe feeling?) of expertise:

RISSA: Uhm, they just don't ...they feel embarrassed about that, and ...they'll try to seem like they know everything about it, and so, they can make jokes about it.

Laughter brings something frightening down to earth, it is a celebration of a victory over fear and powerlessness. But humor is not only a psychological defense mechanism; it is also a tool of understanding. As Bakhtin has shown, laughter may be ambivalent. Laughter brings down and elevates; it criticizes and praises.

Laughing about something is not a sign of rejection. Rather, it is an embrace of the whole. Bakhtin, for instance, quotes Goethe, who noticed that seriousness and fear are the feelings of a part, while the whole is always humorous.¹⁴³ Classroom laughter may be the mechanism of sense-making that brings back a sense of wholeness to a student. Laughter

¹⁴³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 280.

can be a reaction of acceptance, and inclusion. An unfortunate alternative to this kind of reaction is what Kohl calls “not-learning”, or a purposeful disengagement from learning.¹⁴⁴ Laughter not only helps to overcome tension and anxiety about sensitive materials. It can make any curriculum familiar, close, and eliminate estrangement from knowledge that is not necessarily connected to a child’s every day experience.

Ned offers both an elaborated explanation and example of an ambivalent humor. Unfortunately, I did not ask similar questions to other students. He talks about lessons he learned from the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program that was completed in his room a few weeks ago:

NED: You shouldn’t be passive, like, you are not sure; and you shouldn’t be aggressive, like punching him, because he maybe on drugs, he may have a gun. And then like Pkh [sound of a gun shot]. You should say like no, screw you, and just walk away. And we learned all about Shelly goes to school with a friend, and she has a wonderful life, she helps mom with the dishes, she does her homework, teacher loves her, and everything is great for her. And then there is this other girl. And she has a sucky life, she argues all the time, the teacher doesn’t like her very much, she doesn’t help her mom with the dishes, she doesn’t do her homework, and she sees these kids smoking, and they are like older then her. And she like Boy, they’re cool, I want to be like them. And that was it. And then we talked about why she was not too popular, why she has sucky life...

INV: If you laugh at something, does it mean you don’t believe in it?

NED: No ...Like DARE, sometimes you make jokes about DARE, which doesn’t mean you don’t believe in it. ...Sometimes you don’t laugh at DARE, and ...you either decide to make fun of it, or you don’t. It has nothing to do with, you know, not liking it. You just decide to make fun of it.

Laughter represents a particular case of second discourse. In general, second discourse includes dialogical engagement with a topic, or a manner of conversation. It is most often a challenge, sometimes a joking rebellion, when the challenge is directed not towards the particular curriculum, but towards the whole conventional social world. For example, Monica tells about her friend:

MONICA: ...Today when Ms. D. had us doing the Megatrends, she didn’t write down a single thing, and she was saying that we were slaves, and we should start a rebellion, and we should start a national chain-letter, that everybody sends to everybody they know. And that kids would start to rule the country.

Rich just takes delight in simple adults bashing:

¹⁴⁴ Herbert R. Kohl, *I Won't Learn from You*, (New York: The New Press, 1993).

RICH: Well, like yesterday Nik, not yesterday, two days ago, Nik said that adults aren't hip.

INV: They are what?

RICH: Aren't hip.. they just don't know what's going on. They are kind of still back in 50's, and 60's. So, it was funny, and everybody started laughing.

Here is one more example of how laughter is connected to disagreement.

RISSA: The moment that we start talking during the movie was when, like he [the main character] did the magic thing. We usually talk when it's humor, or we don't agree with the thing, and we want to say that to our neighbors.

INV: Hm, like what you don't agree with?

RISSA: Uhm, well, we might not agree with the way they treated the person in the movie, just because he was a handicap, using a wheelchair. That he could go to space. So we felt that it wasn't real true.

Sometimes the second discourse may communicate a doubt, but sometimes an agreement, or an active support for other's ideas. In any case it includes breaking down the totality of other's speech. In this way, it is an end of a monologue. Although Rich's behavior is a disruption, it shows no negative attitude towards the teacher's word.

FIELDNOTES: Rich is very active: he tells other students to be quiet, tells his neighbor to close the door, reminds the whole class what to turn in for a particular assignment.

Talking out is in fact almost always (except when a student genuinely forgets where s/he is) an attempt to change the terms of a conversation. The "classic" form of discipline problems arise when a student challenges not what the teacher says, but the teacher's power itself, or fundamental norms of classroom behavior. Rick seems to question the sensibility of sending someone out in the hall as a means of punishment:

RICH: Some people don't want to be sent out, but like Radek, he goes out of the door, and he walks back in. And last time he did that Ms. D. sent him out again. When he does that it's obviously not on task, because he is just goofing off, going out, then coming back.

INV: So, he kind of challenges her?

RICH: He tests her to see what she'll do. Most of the time he gets away with it.

Tyson avoids Ms. D.'s directions:

RICH: Yeah. The other day Tyson in our class, considered a big slacker, he, during the Megatrends, when we take notes, he hasn't been taking notes, three days a week. And she got really angry at him, kicked him out of classroom for about fifteen minutes.

But in essence it is the same thing: critical thinking in action, so to speak. There is no way to make sense of classroom rules if they are never broken.

Not all disruptive behavior may be considered second discourse. Some actions probably have no further messages behind them, especially those of individual aggression. Here is how a school tale goes:

MONICA: Once he [never mind, who] ripped off all the days of July out of calendars, and then he kicked somebody and shoved somebody into a locker, once he stubbed somebody in the arm with a pencil.

There are good disruptions and bad disruptions, although group members could never come to an agreement about which is which. All agree on the fact that some disruptions are good, and some are bad. Ned is one of the most talkative students in the class, one who does a lot of talking out. He comments,

NED: ...Some people just don't comprehend when to stop, like Radek. He gets in trouble more than anyone.

On other occasion he tries to elaborate how his interruptions (of a good kind) are different from those of a bad kind:

NED: When I ask her [the teacher] some question she goes (mocking voice): this is nothing new [not clear]. Just like shut up! She just like say stupid things.

INV: What if you were a teacher?

NED: I wouldn't care if somebody asks in class. I don't give a freak. I would just answer them.

INV: All of them?

NED: Well, it depends. If it were a completely irrelevant question like was there any blood?, like Radek, I'd say oh, shut up, go in the hall. I'd just say: Radek, it's irrelevant, and go on to the next question.

But here is what another classmate says about Ned himself:

MONICA: There is people like Ned, who never really listens. So he asks question Ms. D. just talked about. Or he doesn't listen but he kind of listens, and then when Ms. D. was talking about that band playing, he said, you mean, there is going to be a play, too? So he just sort of doesn't really completely listen.

Chad thinks that good disruptions are funny, while bad ones are not.

INV: So, also, in a classroom, people start talking in the middle of the movie, make jokes ...does that disturb you?

CHAD: Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. It depends. Oftentimes when the movie is serious, I really would like it better if they didn't talk about it. But the more fun movie, like *The Body Snatchers*, I don't mind if they comment.

A boring lesson rarely produces good disruptions, because students are more likely to challenge the form that curriculum is presented in rather than the content of curriculum. This does not mean that a boring lesson is less disturbed. But an engaging conversation such as a business meeting (regular class meeting, run by student officials) brings about a lot of heated discussions, precisely because kids are so much into it. All other interviews and my fieldnotes confirm Rissa's account:

INV: Does it happen sometimes that your class gets exceptionally noisy?

RISSA: Yeah.

INV: Why does it happen?

RISSA: It happens usually—why?—there is a lot of differences of opinion, and it usually happens during the class discussions. We can get noisy at a class business meeting, but it does seem to be that way. Because even if we are not screaming before, like in second quarter or third quarter., we got really noisy. Especially in third quarter, when we want to get called on by the president, people would yell, Ms. Chairperson, Mister chairperson, and they believe it can get attention. Some people believed that, others just did it. Uhm it happens maybe during ...yeah, usually during class discussions.

In case of good disruptions the group sort of delegates its powers to make jokes to a few people. Not only do the kids, but Ms. D. recognizes it as well. While avoiding public speaking, Jessie nevertheless enjoys other people's comments and jokes.

JESSIE: I don't know. If they say something actually funny, that wasn't just making fun of something, I think I would probably be laughing. If they made actually decent joke or something.

Students appreciate Ms. D.'s love for jokes, too:

INV: So, if you were a teacher, would you allow this kind of good jokes?

JESSIE: Yeah, I know Ms. D. does, because she often makes jokes in class.

Ned agrees:

NED: Yeah. She doesn't mind if we talk a little bit. Like if something happens, and you say: that's stupid, that shouldn't happen. If you do it like a lot, she minds.

The comments said within the second discourse become sort of public property of the class, and everyone feels some rights to control what everyone else says. Some teachers may fear that students might get addicted to the second discourse, but this fear does not seem to be well grounded. Li fully understands the implications of unlimited disruptions:

INV: Do you think it helps? [To joke, when people are tense]

LI: Sometimes it does. Sometimes people just get mad.

INV: Why?

LI: Because it's really annoying, and a lot of times the joke is sick, and people don't really want to hear them.

The transition towards second discourse is a matter of negotiation, and it is a somewhat shared group decision, and a premature switch is perceived to be inappropriate. But an arbitrary cutting off of the second discourse is not accepted by at least part of the group as justified. Comments and jokes are irritating if the timing is bad:

MONICA: Whenever Ned doesn't understand the story, he'll just go Huh? or something like that. Or somebody like Radek will go, cool! blood!

INV: So, they start making jokes as they feel like doing it. Is there any particular moment in the story when they are doing it?

MONICA: No, just any time. Anytime when they feel like making some rude comments.

Students initiate the second discourse most of the time. But Ms. D. also does that by bringing her own personal voice and experience into the first discourse. The "smut" example surfaced several times in different interviews. It must have made an impression on students:

MONICA: Yeah, like when we were reading the book, and it was about smut, and she goes: Oh, I know all about smut, because I used to live on a farm in Indiana...

INV: Was it good, I mean, does it help to understand?

MONICA: Yeah, I guess.

The group goes back and forth from the first to the second discourse. It is usually the function of Ms. D. to lead back from the second to the first, but students do that as well.

Interestingly, Ned prescribes this function of order maintenance to some “dumb, stupid girl,” but then admits doing it himself:

INV: If she weren't there, would people still get quiet after a while?

NED: Well, eventually someone says: shut up you, guys, and people get quiet.

INV: Somebody has to be Ms. D.?

NED: Yeah, some stupid, dumb girl.

INV: Who usually takes this role?

NED: Either Nicole would say: Be quiet! Blah-blah ...I hate her. Who else would do that? I'm trying to think.

INV: How about Rich?

NED: Rich? Possibly. He might ...yeah, he would, probably.

INV: How about Walt?

NED: No, not Walt, he is the one who is talking. I might say, be quiet. I usually am more talking, but I only say things I have to say. And when we start watching that movie, I came here, and I said be quiet.

But in general, attempts to channel an entire second discourse into an organized discussion are only moderately successful. I rarely saw an appreciable period of time when at least some students did not talk out.

The second discourse may be hurtful to some students, and laughter is not always as benign as it seems. Jessie feels threatened by the way laughter may turn out.

JESSIE: I am sort of choose not to speak up, because I am afraid that if I have something serious to say, people would just laugh at me, or something.

INV: Does this happen sometimes?

JESSIE: Yeah. A person was giving an oral presentation, and you know, we are supposed to say what we are gonna talk about. And he didn't mean to be funny. He was supposed to say I am gonna tell about anatomy and so on. And he said: Well, I'm gonna tell you about a barnacle, but he didn't mean to be funny, but everybody laughed at him. And so ...I'm sure I'm afraid of something like that, when I'm actually meaning to be serious, and everybody laughs at me. I don't normally speak too much in class.

Making sense can be a pushy business, because it involves rejection of nonsense, of some parts of an initial text. But one's own nonsense may be somebody's sense. When the second discourse is dominated by a certain group of students, it turns into its opposite—into the first discourse. The total rejection of an initial text destroys the dialogicality of the second discourse. This is a case when an individual meaning is made against, rather than with other individual meanings. Peer pressure, for instance, has nothing dialogical about it:

JESSIE: That one [movie] I would like rather to watch at home. I sort of like actually liked the movie, but a lot of people around me were saying it's stupid, and everything. Then sort of ...when everybody around you thinks that ...you sort of start thinking that way. I don't really like that. I thought it was sort of a good movie. And you're sort of afraid to say well, I thought it was a good movie. Once again, you are afraid that everybody is gonna laugh at you, or say things at you like stupid or something.

I do not want to idealize the second discourse. It certainly contains some destructive elements in it. I would only suggest that these destructive elements are necessary for understanding, and must be welcomed and appreciated. The second discourse, being an essential component of learning, still needs other types of discourse to limit it and to fill it with a worthwhile content.

Third Discourse

All classroom conversations eventually come back to the third discourse. There is never a finalizing point in a conversation. Such a point would not be efficient from the point of view of group decision making. For instance, a real conflict that arose during a business meeting never got resolved. Here is Rich's account of that. Although the rest of the students may report the same facts, they all have different stories of what happened. As one can see, things got really confusing:

RICH: Well, the class officers had a meeting by themselves, and they made some ideas, and we go by Robert's rules of order. And they've changed the rules of order without the class decision. And they made a bunch of rules that weren't fair about the sergeant of arms. A lot of people thought they were unfair, some of them. And what they were doing was, as Ms. D. says, they were taking it on my friend Nik. And one of the ways was getting Nik sent out in the hall because he is a sergeant of arms for two quarters, and he does talk out a lot, and it was the first time in two quarters when he was sent out. So, my teacher Ms. D. got an impression that everybody have kind of ganged up on Nik for the rules that we made about the sergeant of arms. ...And there is a lot of irrelevant things going on. Because class officers made an idea of a motion, that you have to write down your motion, and put it inside of our motion bear, which is used to be the DARE bear. And Ms. D. said it was against Robert's rules of order. And class got to

vote on it, and we never got around to voting on it. And I don't know, it's just like nothing happened. Well, mainly the business meeting we had yesterday was really chaotic, and a lot of people getting mad at Nabib, and some other things had happened. And mostly people were getting mad at Nik because he kept talking out more than he should be able to. People kind of considered him abusing his power. Ms. D. didn't realize ...we think that most of class was abusing their power by making the rules that would fit them a lot better. ...

In this case the confusion itself may be useful for ultimate group cohesion. If the group could not put their differences aside and chat, that probably would mean the end of this group. The ability to leave conflicts unresolved is a major social asset, perhaps more important than the ability to solve conflicts. This also relates to my earlier point that dialogue is an end in itself. If this is so, then any utilitarian end or purpose of dialogue is secondary. Therefore, there should be a mechanism of ending a particular round of dialogue, without tying its end to some final solution.

It is interesting to mention that the second discourse never appears immediately to follow the third. My fieldnotes do not record a single occasion of this. Also, Jessie and Ms. D. witnessed the same. For the second discourse to begin, there needs to be something to challenge or accept, and the third discourse does not provide such material.

JESSIE: ...sometimes I like to be able to talk. But like after recess I don't really want to talk, like right after playing on playground or something.

INV: Because you are just tired physically, or you just had enough talk?

JESSIE: Had enough talk.

Third discourse may tend to continue, but if there is no common text, there is nothing to challenge, and the second discourse cannot begin. So, there is a certain stability in the three discourses sequence.

Jones¹⁴⁵ finds, that even so-called on-task chatter, that is conversation among students during their work in small groups, differs very little from regular non-purposeful chatter, as it occurs during recess and lunch. And she does not see any educational value in the latter. Citing a typical exchange among boys, she writes: "The whole exchange is amusing because of its unbearably trivial content"¹⁴⁶ While my data is consistent with hers, and kids really talk gibberish most of their free time, my conclusions differ. This chatter plays an important role in learning.

¹⁴⁵ Pat Jones, *Lipservice: The Story of Talk in Schools*. (Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *Lipservice: The Story of Talk in Schools*, 64.

All my informants recognize the confusing, and highly unorganized character of their chatter (unlike Jones,¹⁴⁷ who does not realize that adult every day talk is just as trivial as children's). These are two typical characteristics:

LI: I basically talk to everyone around me, and I talk about whatever there is.

RISSA: Uhm, you can talk about anything, really. Just you have to get ready, pay attention to what Ms. D. says, may I have your attention, please, but you can talk about anything during that time [set-up time in the morning].

Topics of the conversation are multiple, and they change rapidly. Multiplicity and fluidity of topics may be illustrated with the following examples:

INV: So, what do they talk about, what kind of talk is there?

RICH: Just anything that comes into somebody's mind You just kind of switch around, whatever somebody mentions.

INV: When you come to the school, and have a set-up time, what kind of conversation would people hold? What would they talk about?

JESSIE: Well, pretty much everything. Sometimes about the classes we are going to have.

INV: So, what do you talk about?

LI: Well, I just talk about what there is, or there is something new, or something happened to someone, or stuff like that

INV: Something new, you mean, in school, or home?

LI: Anything.

INV: Does it stay on one topic, or you switch around?

LI: Some we switch, sometimes we stay.

INV: Does one person set topic, or whoever wants to say something says it?

LI: Whoever wants to say something says it.

INV: How frequent does the topic of a conversation change?

LI: Changes all the time.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *Lipservice: The Story of Talk in Schools*.

INV: Like every second?

LI: I guess, every few minutes.

Ms. D. tends to single out the predominant theme of the kids' chatter, although none of the students was able to do the same. I think she simply has to navigate through the children's chatter, so she pulls out some themes:

INV: And when you have these periods of more or less unstructured time, like writers workshop, or future studies, they also talk. What kind of talk is going on? What kind of conversation?

Ms. D.: Everything from the ridiculous to the sublime. You know, a month ago, all day long, for two or three weeks, they debated which was better, cats or dogs, and every time you listen to a conversation, it was about somebody's cat or dog, and trying to prove a point. I am not sure whether it was ridiculous or sublime, by the way. Uhm, right now they are really into what's happening on playground, and what's happening with girls and boy's chase kind of things. They are interested in some taunting kinds of things, to see what people will do, and so and so, and did this when I did this. It's been a lot of it in the last weeks, especially.

Two of my informants spend their chatter time seemingly on one topic (the Dungeons and Dragons game and baseball). I also observed students engaged in a lengthy exchange about Magic cards, a current strategy card playing game. Yet of this type of conversation does not seem to have any particular issue to discuss, nor do the participants have to take particular positions.

Children engage in this kind of activity time and again despite the threat of possible teacher sanctions. All of my student informants pointed out that this kind of talk reoccurs during the day. Morning recess, for those not involved in sport games, lunch, movement between classes, some of the unstructured time within the classroom, all resemble each other in regards to the conversational structures. We have to assume that there is a strong need to chatter. Although this kind of talk does not include curricula related matters in a direct way, it is, in fact, part of learning. Let me explain. Ned sharply distinguishes school talk from recess talk.

NED: Well, it's like ...Recess, you talk about things you want to talk about, but in school you are talking about school, and it's not really the most exciting topic.

Third discourse is clearly and openly in opposition to the first discourse. It is not about school stuff and is not organized like a school-related conversation. The third discourse seems to avoid the very attempt of mutual understanding. One does not have to agree nor disagree with one's partner. One does not even have to follow what the partner is saying. On its surface, the third discourse is as far from a dialogical relation as possible: it is an anti-conversation. At the same time it reiterates, time and again, a powerful, if primitive

message: "I like talking with you, and everything else is not important." The third discourse is not dialogue, but a mutual statement about dialogicality.

Students need to maintain ownership over their learning, and not let the school material take too big of a place in their lives. Imagine children talking all day about the stuff they learned in school; there would be something unnatural there. Chatter brings multiple voices into the school day, and does not allow the first discourse to dominate all of school life. Avoiding the curriculum allows more direct, broader relations among students as human beings who have lives beyond their roles as students.

Jones speculates that chatter probably makes a classroom a more pleasant place to be, but denies its educational value. I believe that getting comfortable with curricular materials constitutes, in part, the process of understanding. A group that stays on task all the time, and never brings the group conversation to a casual level, misses something in its central task, too. Without small talk we remain strangers, unrelated bearers of strange ideas. Chatter makes a classroom a familiar place where casual relations are possible, too. Making sense of things requires the presence of others, and the chatter allows those others to be fully human. The first communicative function of non-purposeful chatter is to make a classroom a sociable and friendly place.

In a classroom, the third discourse is the private domain of children, and adults, especially teachers, are not allowed there. All seven interviewees flatly deny that they chat with Ms. D.

INV: Do you talk to Ms. D. sometimes? Do you have the same type of conversations with her as with kids?

JESSIE: No.

INV: So, you have this small talk with your friends. But do you have same talk with Ms. D.? Do you sometimes chat with her?

LI: No. No.

INV: Why not?

LI: She is older, and she is not very much like a kid. And her opinions are very much different.

Jones states the same, and also suggests that this is a function of being a teacher, rather than being an adult that prevents one from entering a chatter conversation. A teacher has too much power, and chatter is a kingdom of equality and freedom. Jessie believes that a person who is going to give you grades is not suitable partner for small talk.

INV: May I ask, why is it that different? ...is it because she is an adult, or because she is your teacher?

JESSIE: Because she is an adult, and she's my teacher. I mean, she is going to give me grades.

Although my field notes and Ms. D.'s interview both show that students do engage in small talk with the teacher, it is more accurate to say that there are two kinds of third discourse in a classroom: one with the inclusion of a teacher, and one without. Ms. D. does not seem to be lacking opportunities to chat with students:

INV: How often do kids come to you and try to strike some kind of a small talk?

Ms. D.: Some kids—constantly throughout the day. I bet I have ten conversations a day with Larry.

INV: Do you have time for all of them?.

Ms. D.: No. You know, I just try to have time for as many as I can, so whenever I'm walking places ...I never walk in this building anywhere without a kid by me. You just have to find theseI try to get on the playground a few minutes early. The boys, we teach our boys to be aggressive, so boys will come and seek me out, girls don't. So, I get to go a few minutes early on recess to get girls around, so they are able to talk to me. You just have to squeeze it in, because it's really important.

But small talk with the teacher is usually a one-on-one affair, while classroom buzz is essentially a conversation in public. One of the reasons why a teacher might not be able to fully enter students' conversation might be a lack of expertise and knowledge. Ms. D. acknowledges that she just does not know about a lot of things her students discuss. But the main reason, I believe, is that third discourse does not allow hierarchy.

INV: Can you keep up with all the little stories?

Ms. D.: I don't even try to. Kids deserve a private life. You know, the teacher doesn't have to know everything; parents don't have to know everything. There is a bunch of those I just tune out ...in this particular boys' groups, in this age, they are in the fantasy kind of talk, it's you know, in planning their magic cards. And they are in the fantasy game kind of things?

INV: D&D?¹⁴⁸

Ms. D.: Right. And in fact, it's hard to get some of them out of that, and get them so they talk real English to human beings. ...And plus, all these codes for levels and for powers ...It's like if you don't know the code, you don't get any of it.

¹⁴⁸ *Dungeons and Dragons*, a popular fantasy game.

INV: Did they try to explain it to you? Do you know about it?

Ms. D.: Sometimes they do, but then they sort of give up on me, “she is beyond hope.”

Third discourse promotes a counter-culture, the peer-culture, which defines itself as in opposition towards official school structures. This is especially notable on the playground, where third discourse occurs with the least amount of adult supervision. One of the features of it is swearing.

INV: How is it [playground talk] different from talking in the classroom?

RICH: People can cuss. You can cuss outside of the classroom, where there is no teacher near you.

This is no surprise for the teacher:

INV: Are they really different on playground?

Ms. D.: Yes.

INV: What’s different in their behavior and talk?

Ms. D.: The controls aren’t there. Things escalate a little further. I don’t know about the talk. Although I hear from other kids, that girls swear.

INV: Girls swear?

Ms. D.: Yes, some of my sweet, most timid girls have very bad mouths. So, I hear. I don’t know, it’s like because we keep the controls on pretty close, and I think, parents do at home, too, then the controls aren’t there on the playground. They have hard time putting the brakes out.

Li feels “freer,” just as Ms. D. suspected:

INV: Is it different kind of joke that you make, say, on the playground as opposed to the one that you make in the classroom?

LI: I guess, they are a little bit different, but not much. Because the ones on the playground are more insulting than ones in class.

INV: Oh, yeah? Why? Because there is no teacher around?

LI: Because you are freer on the playground. And they are not exactly in a closed space. And there is lots of room. There are less people and more room, and less teachers and more room. So, they can’t really get you in trouble.

Bakhtin analyzed the function of foul language, and linked it with the same process of bringing the world close to a person. The third discourse therefore, not only makes school a familiar place, but also gives students a sense of ownership over part of it. It is, in a sense, a claiming of some territory just for students. This is a very important role of the third discourse: where kids have legitimate privileges for play and chatter, they do not reject school as a whole; and therefore, do not reject learning.

The third function consists of what I call “A secondary chewing of knowledge.” Just like cows store grass pulp in their stomachs, and then chew it again, students need additional opportunities to talk about what was learned in a low-key way.

Ms. D. thinks that school topics are less than thirty percent of students’ unstructured conversations. I would estimate much less than thirty. But Ned is wrong, too, and little bits and pieces of school talk do sink in, and this is one way to make strange things familiar. Actually, there are many instances of what I call a “mixed talk,” when students mostly stay on task, but intersperse other matters. For instance, math time in Ms. D.’ s classroom is mostly like that. This is a common account of math:

INV: What about the math time, which is also kind of an independent work, right?
Do you talk to other people when you do math?

JESSIE: Uhm ...sometimes.

INV: What about?

JESSIE: Mostly about math, when I don’t get something.

Third discourse also is a place where casualness may act as a prompt for strange, weird, or creative ideas. One cannot be an eggplant during a work period; it is only the recess that allows such a transformation:

JESSIE: ...I sort of talk about very strange things with my friends. Like uhm.
Once I was going around recess, and I was an eggplant

INV: So, whom did you tell that you are an eggplant? Just one friend, or a few people?

JESSIE: A couple of my friends.

INV: What did they say, how did they react?

JESSIE: Like, now Jessie is going to take a walk into an insane asylum. Then my friend started taking me to the insane asylum, and I didn’t want to go to the insane asylum ...

Rich and friends contemplated homicide:

RICH: Today during the lunch recess we just talked about who we're gonna push off [the merry-go-around].

Within the third discourse, some stuffed animals can be weird, too:

RISSA: One time when we had during Chinese new year, we had, we were making ...what's it called, some kind of patterns, we suddenly, my row, started talking about Sesame street, and then a little group of us at the end, started talking about stuffed animals, and we were just talking about stuffed animals.

INV: So, was it something unexpected?

RISSA: Something unexpected, because the rest of the row was talking about puppets, and then we started to get into stuffed animals. It was weird.

Perhaps, another function of third discourse is to breed weird ideas and to broaden students creative abilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Monologues have their place in a classroom. They allow for shared knowledge to begin, for shared experience to occur. But disruptions are not bad for learning, too. These disruptions provide real instances of dialogical attempts to relate to the curricular text or to the manner of learning. I tried to show that the dialogical in classroom discourse is not what is traditionally considered to be a dialogue. It is not rule governed, nor is it structured, turn-taking conversations between teacher and students. In order to create dialogue in a classroom, teachers should be well-advised to plan for the moment when her class will erupt into unruly talk, with kids not taking turns, talking over each other, being funny and over-critical. Classroom activities should be structured around such possible points of breaking. The *breakability* of classroom discourse is one of its most important characteristics. This is the way we all make sense of things. Curriculum material simply cannot be incorporated into the child's world uncorrupted. It is impossible without interpretation, and any interpretation is also a *mis*interpretation. Every understanding includes misunderstanding, because meanings are born between a speaker and a listener, and not only within either head.

The regular, monological classroom discourse is the crucial tool for arranging a dialogue. This is something I hope to be my contribution: the secret of dialogue lies outside of the dialogue proper. In the framework of this chapter I have discussed how the dialogical discourse is very hard, if not impossible, to guide and manage when you are already in it. The reason for this is that the very basic nature of the dialogical goes against monological guidance and management. Dialogue is not only alien to management, but it also excludes self-reflection. When you are in dialogue, you do not reflect upon it from a disengaged position of an observer and self-observer. The dialogue carries you away and completely

absorbs you. Now, one can only create some necessary conditions for a dialogical breakthrough. The conditions of the first discourse breakability include the moments of inviting others to enter a dialogue. What I mean here is a specific code-switching, i.e. when a teacher gives a sign that it is now okay to take the text and actively challenge it, either in agreement or disagreement. This is a condition of procedural fragility.

The second condition is that of internal fragility. The teacher's and textbooks' monological texts should have some elements of self-destruction, self-doubt, self-irony, or should I add, of self-deconstruction. In other words, a teacher who gives his arguments about ecologically sound practices, should mention that ecological concerns are not the only important concerns. Any monological texts should include hints and glimpses of possible dialogues.

Seemingly pointless chatter plays its role in learning, too. Learning in its broadest context is getting closer to the world, overcoming fear and distance. Understanding certain information includes partial forgetting it. Ownership of knowledge is best manifested when knowledge is cramped, stuffed into one's back pocket, and perhaps sometimes thrown into small talk by little pieces. What I call ownership over knowledge is when a person owns the knowledge, rather than the knowledge owning the person. If I know something, it means I can use it or discard it, at will; I can interpret it in any way I like, pull it apart, or misrepresent it. On the other hand, when certain knowledge possesses power over me, I become governed by it. Not only religious texts, or political dogmas, but also scientific knowledge may behave this way if only I allow it to. Therefore, I need a special device to prevent such an occurrence. The third discourse is just such a device. A school must be a place where kids have time and space to chatter.

CHAPTER 4. DIALOGICAL SCHOOLS: COMPLEXITY, CIVILITY, CARNIVAL

This chapter explores the macro-implications of the dialogical approach for a school as an organization. It describes a good school from the dialogical point of view. Again, I will not describe situations of dialogical encounters as such, but the qualities of an organization that make these situations possible. Dialogue does not happen through organization, and yet is intimately connected to the world of regular social relations. In regard to school as a social organization, this means that situations of school life which are hospitable to dialogical relations can be created through specific provisions. Along with the regular needs for stability, manageability and effectiveness, the organization of a school should also be designed and run keeping dialogical break-throughs in mind.

This chapter consists of five parts. First, I address some issues of standard of excellence for schools. This is not among the main objectives of my dissertation, but I cannot avoid discussing it briefly for the reasons described later. My next step is to show the process of becoming a dialogical school. The central notion of such a process is an original relational incident that I will define and illustrate. Parts three, four and five are to define and justify three characteristics of a good school: complexity, civility, and carnival.

GOOD SCHOOL

In this chapter I describe my vision of a good school. I cannot simply deduce it from the initial axiomatic statement about the centrality of dialogue for human existence. This would be a very thin statement indeed without some examples from real-life schools. However, I should justify using my examples. I can say, a school is good when it is dialogical, but I cannot say the same thing with a definitive article: the school is good because it is dialogical. How do I know it is really dialogical? Well, because it is good. Apparently, there is a possibility for a circular definition here.

To break from this circle, I will use another definition of a good school, different from mine, but still consistent with it. John Goodlad offers an interesting discussion on criteria of excellence for schools. He states that despite contradicting criteria of goodness, quite a few schools have become good places for boys and girls to be.¹⁴⁹ These schools “have come to our attention because of the good things said about them.”¹⁵⁰ Goodlad proposes to take seriously what he calls “the oldest and most powerful of all standards of judgment – that composite of many things known as *satisfaction*.”

When a school “just feels right,” it seems too easy for many people to accept such a feeling as a serious assessment. And yet one must assume that in every human being there

¹⁴⁹ John Goodlad, *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 203.

¹⁵⁰ Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*, 209.

is a built-in gauge which measures his or her satisfaction with life. Without such an assumption one may be tempted to impose on others one's own understanding of well-being. Thus, possessing an individual ability to judge the degree of one's own satisfaction is a fundamental assumption of democratic society. One important stipulation is required from the dialogical point of view: When these devices within different individuals resonate in a such way as to producing a *shared and inclusive* sense of satisfaction, we can claim that the social institutions they live in are good. Goodlad would probably agree with such a stipulation, for he warns against using the criterion of satisfaction to create little enclaves of schooling in exclusive homogeneous communities.¹⁵¹ Satisfaction is not a trivial criterion, if one takes it solemnly. It is connected to the most essential human conditions. A good school is that with which students, parents and teachers are sincerely satisfied, and which does not serve one group or class exclusively, at the expense of others.

Goodlad is amazed at the degree to which this criterion of satisfaction is not used in judging the quality of schools. He does not explain why the criterion used in almost every other sphere of life is not being applied to schools, although the answer can be found in his general view of the purpose of schooling.

I think school is viewed as an institution similar to a production plant, in other words, something with relatively simple and measurable outcome. It is not perceived as similar to a neighborhood or a community, where satisfaction of its members with the quality of life is the most important criterion. In other words, schools are thought to exist for something other than giving a satisfying life to those who live in it. An army should be able to defend its country, and only then, and only as a means towards this goal, can it bring satisfaction to the enlisted personnel and officers. The same is true for a shoe factory: it should produce good shoes and be profitable, and only then and because of that, it make its workers happy. But a family, a village, and a school should in the first place create favorable conditions for human beings to live in a full, and most satisfying way. And only then, and as a means to this goal, should schools perform some other partial functions. Schools have been placed in the wrong cell of our social matrix, with specialized organizations, and apart from communities.

This line of argument brings me to a more general question of the purpose of schooling. I will not repeat the criticisms of narrowly a defined, functional view of schools. John Dewey laid the foundations for such criticism that has been continued in recent times in connection with contemporary political realities.¹⁵² I will point out where such criticism does not go far enough, namely at the relations between school and democracy. This discussion is directly related to the question of standards for schools.

What role, if any, does education play in the maintaining of democracy? The question itself makes me uncomfortable. I am convinced that education does not owe anything to society, does not have either to improve or ruin democracy of the society at large. What I

¹⁵¹ Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*, 211.

¹⁵² Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*.

am really concerned with is an issue of democracy in education, rather than democracy and education.

Dewey thought that education should be viewed as an engine for social progress.¹⁵³ Robert Westbrook uses Robert Grunden's expression to characterize Dewey's attitude towards school: "For Dewey the school replaced the church in the 1890's as 'the key institution in the saving of souls for democracy.'"¹⁵⁴ Such an ideology is vulnerable to criticism on moral grounds: it is immoral to use children for anything, including the noble goals of democracy. However, using Dewey's notion of organic democracy, one could view the life of the nation's schools as an organic part of democracy's social matrix. Happy and learning children in schools are not a means to anything, including the promoting of democracy. Hence, they indicate that democracy really works. It is not appropriate to ask, what education can do for democracy. Rather, the question should be reversed: what can democracy do to sustain democratic education?

I am not insisting that there is not an influence of education on society. I am merely saying that such an influence should not be of concern to educators. One may object by saying that, after all, education *by definition* is at least in part a preparation for future life. At the same time the very question of a connection between the purposes of education and democracy implies that education *serves* some function. But education is about, with and for children, and they may not be used for the well-being of society at large. They even may not be used for the sake of their own future. With all my respect to Dewey, I do not believe he sensed the moral fib in his thesis about the role of schools in social progress. Speaking of children as the future working force is repulsive, is it not? Speaking of children as future saviors of democracy is quite a similar statement. I think Dewey would agree with my last statement, while pointing out that the conventions of the public discourse of his time required such kind of argumentation.

All educators should think more about the *quality of childhood* they help to attain and less about the quality of adulthood their students will have. I am not saying anything new here, but yet this idea has never been really taken seriously. A school should invent forms of life and forms of democracy that bring children as close as possible to the full existence in dialogue, without a second thought about "teaching them democracy."

Returning to the beginning of this section, I want to state again that the satisfaction of students, educators, and parents with the quality of schooling may serve as an indicator of a school's success. I will also state that such success is possible if a school possesses certain qualities that make dialogical relations possible and more likely to occur. In other words, people are happy in a school if it is a dialogical one. This follows from my earlier

¹⁵³ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education : An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. (New York : The Free Press; London : Collier-Macmillan,1966).

¹⁵⁴ Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 184.

argument that dialogue constitutes the fullest mode of human existence. Now, the question remains, how does a school become dialogical?

Dialogue, as I have shown in Chapter One, occurs in special situations, rather than in our regular every day mode of life. Now, the life of a school is fundamentally collective, which means that educators can only create certain situations for whole groups of children. Hence, I will assume that dialogicality is a property of a whole school. The dialogical relation is between two or a few individuals for limited periods of time. Yet the only way to create favorable conditions for dialogue is to involve the whole school. This is why I will pay special attention to the point in a school's history when dialogicality becomes a systemic quality of an entire school community. Buber called such an event an *original relational incident*, and I will explicate this notion later.

What kind of social environment is hospitable to dialogue? Or, to put it differently, what kind of school is favorable for the dialogical self? Utterly simplified, my claim is this: there must be a multitude of distinctive voices, these voices must hear each other, and there must be some moments when these voices become "purely human" (or loose their social attachments). I hope the logic by which I derived these three conditions from my previous argument is quite transparent. Again, nothing will guarantee dialogue, but it is more likely to happen if individuals are exposed to many voices, without a domineering single one; when these voices are in constant interaction with each other; and when the social structure of a school regularly breaks down in order for the human voices to free themselves from the limitations of the social world. I derive three characteristics of a dialogical school from these conditions: complexity, civility, and carnival. However, I will begin with the birth of a dialogical school.

ORIGINAL RELATIONAL INCIDENT

Every great culture that comprehends nations rests on an original relational incident, on a response to the Thou made at its source, on an act of being made by the spirit. This act, strengthened by the similarly directed power of succeeding generations, creates in the spirit a special conception of the cosmos; only through this act is cosmos, an apprehended world, a world that is homely and houselike, man's dwelling in the world, made possible again and again... But [man] is free and consequently creative only so long as he possesses, in action and suffering in his own life, that act of the being – so long as he himself enters into relation. If a culture ceases to be centered in the living and continually renewed relational event, then it hardens into the world of It...¹⁵⁵

Buber is saying here that every culture begins with a special event, dialogical in its nature. Something should happen with a group of people before they can form a culture. This is

¹⁵⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

something like a spiritual “Big Bang” of a culture. I realize this is not the clearest explanation, but hope to clarify the meaning of the original relational event later.

I choose to interpret Buber’s passage as relevant to school as a culture, not only to the great cultures of nations. I am not sure Buber himself would endorse such an interpretation. My claim is based however not only on a reading of Buber, but also on some descriptions of good schools with which I am familiar. Good schools¹⁵⁶ begin with an “original relational incident.” This is a notion which is not easy to define. Perhaps but some examples may illuminate its meaning.

It must be noted that substantial descriptions of histories of successful schools are extremely rare genre in educational literature. For instance, McLaughlin, et al.¹⁵⁷ say very little about how successful youth organizations come to be successful. I could probably find dozens of other good descriptions of good schools that ignore the process of growth that brought about the described school. A.S.Neil’s *Summerhill* is definitely among them.¹⁵⁸ It portrays *Summerhill* as complete, finalized, and never having been any less or any more than it was at the moment of description. In some other books, like in Lightfoot’s,¹⁵⁹ the schools’ history is included, but in a very shallow way, as if all the development of a school culture consisted of a new leader coming into an old school, and struggling against the inertia of old ways. And of course, almost every description leaves a school at its peak, without a discussion of necessary changes ahead to sustain its development. This demonstrates a quite primitive understanding of very complex processes accompanying school formation and transformation. Such schema would never survive scholarly scrutiny, if presented on pages of “real” historical research. Changes in large societies would have to be explained better than by pointing at another king or a president coming into power. On the other hand, historians of education are interested in the history of educational systems larger than a single school and in the history of a single school as a case of larger socio-economic changes. The unique history of a unique school and its educational significance is a no-man’s land in educational research.¹⁶⁰ If such research exists, I am not aware of it. This may be explained in part by the lack of a specific research tradition, or in part by an erroneous assumption that there is nothing special in the micro-history of a single school. It is often assumed that one could just go in and create anything out of any school.

¹⁵⁶ By school I mean “school and other educational institutions.”

¹⁵⁷ McLaughlin et. al., *Urban Sanctuaries*.

¹⁵⁸ Alexander S. Neil, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Hart Publishing, 1961).

¹⁵⁹ Sara L. Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

¹⁶⁰ My early experiments in this field resulted in a dissertation: “Razvitie vospitatel’noi sistemy shkoly kak zakonomernyi protsess” (Holistic School Development: Driving Forces and Contradictions) (Kand. diss., Moscow: Research Institute for Theory and History of Education, 1990). I would not defend all of its claims and methods today.

And yet I think there is enough material to show that a particular kind of relational incident may lead to the birth of a successful school. I do not believe such an incident may be planned ahead, or deliberately constructed, or repeated in another school. Yet one could actively seek it and make the best use of it when it happens.

Fedor Briukhovetskii remembers the first days of school #12 in Krasnodar, Southern Russia, where he was a principal for over thirty years:

When I took over that school in February 1943, amidst an almost completely destroyed city, there was nothing in it. Kids, parents and teachers began to bring whatever they could. We cooked ink out of some local grass... And most important, kids were malnourished – skinny, with red eyes. We were given four hectares of dirt covered with thorny bushes. Teachers, kids and parents went there to uproot those bushes. Teachers and students both had bloody blisters on their palms. All the crops went to Railroad Supplies Department, and they had opened a cafeteria in our school. Every kid could buy a bowl of soup for four kopecks: this is how we fought malnutrition... As for relations between students and teachers, these were relations of a single impulse, of a single breath. Precisely there, on the fields of the supplementary farm, our collective came to life, a friendly competition between working teams began... This very attitude towards shared work we always remembered, and tried to preserve in the future.¹⁶¹

I am willing to claim that the secret of Briukhovetski's school is impossible to understand without that initial, and emotionally overwhelming struggle for survival, for dignity and decent life. Nothing in the school organization, or range of its activities would have explained the unusually humane spirit of the school. Even though many generations of students came and went, the memory of the original relations persisted. Anatolii Mudrik, who visited this school in the early seventies, reported that there was a certain mystery about that school. The central event of this school's year cycle was the so-called "the School's Honor Festival." Not only the name, but the whole ritual itself strikes visitors as being somewhat dull and repetitive: a big part of it consisted of reading aloud letters and wired messages from the school's alumni/ae. Only one thing did not fit into such a negative assessment: hundreds of students and teachers seemed to enjoy the show immensely. There was a feeling of spiritual uplift about it, which might be noticed only by a very attentive visitor.

One may argue that the difficult conditions of war and destruction automatically created the spirit of cooperation among teachers and students. This is not so. Vladimir A. Karakovskii commented that many schools found themselves in a similar situation during those years, but very few were able to turn their experience into a definite, precise, and

¹⁶¹ Alexander Sidorkin, "Razvitie vospitatel'noi sistemy shkoly kak zakonomernyi protsess," 119. I have to use self-quotations because there is neither space nor occasion to state objectives and procedures of that research, which had very little in common with the subject of my present study.

viable educational system.¹⁶² Part of what he means by educational system relates to Buber's "living and continually renewed relational event." Again, a successful school is born out of some actual event that involves a direct dialogical encounter among people. But this event should be kept alive through a system of traditions in order to sustain a viable social organization.

All these speculations may appear to be quite opaque. In simple terms, this means that every successful school begins not with a concept of innovation, not with plans and policies. Rather, a successful school begins with a critical situation, when all previously existing social conventions come into question, and a genuine dialogue occurs.

Another example of an original relational event comes from Sharon Quint's *Schooling Homeless Children*. She describes how Carole Williams, a principal of an elementary school in Seattle, came to terms with her role as a principal. Carole remembers a particular day, when she was looking up from the main floor at a small boy on the third floor, who was ready to jump down in a suicidal attempt:

At this moment, I was jolted into the social reality of a small child's life. Had he been neglected or abused? Was his family life in a state of chaos and turmoil? Did he live with his mother, his grandmother, a foster parent? Did he have a home? I couldn't answer any of these questions.... In this chilling moment of desperation, I knew I needed help....

This was the culmination of too many past moments in which I critically questioned my role, my sense of direction, my purpose as a principal. This was the moment that I questioned the role of this school, of any school. No longer could I think of Benjamin Franklin Day as an island unaffected by the mainland just a few miles away. I could no longer think of the school as solely an educational agency. Nor could I continue to play the role of a bureaucratic administrator....¹⁶³

The described experience did not constitute the whole original relational incident, as I understand it, but it was a beginning. The simple fact is that the formation or transformation of a school requires nothing less than a personal transformation of its leader. This is not to say that the personal transformation of a leader makes a *sufficient* condition for school transformation. Briukhovetskii never mentioned such personal changes directly, but the tone of his voice when he talked about the bloody blisters on teachers' and students' hands betrayed a very deep emotional involvement, as well, as well as a very special place that memory played in his personal, as well as professional life. The nature of such a personal transformation does not yield to analytic definition. I would

¹⁶² Vladimir A. Karakovskii, "Systema Vospitatel'noi Raboty s Kollektivom Uchashchikhsia Srednei Obsheobrazovatel'noi Shkoly" (Educational System of Working with Primary and Secondary School Students) (Kand. Diss., Moscow: NII OPV APN SSSR, 1977), 53.

¹⁶³ Sharon Quint *Schooling Homeless Children: A Working Model for America's Public Schools*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 5.

argue only that it has a dialogical component to it. One has to confront the world afresh, without assumptions and presuppositions, through and with others. The novelty of this experience is very important. A successful school may be born out of a creative act that is impossible to substitute for good educational theory or careful planning.

Yet this personal experience should be answered by other players within a school drama: teachers, students, all those involved in the life of school. In the case of B.F. Day school, I do not know exactly what happened similar to working together in the fields of the Russian school. Perhaps this teacher's account may help us to understand:

I recall one particular occasion when I was down and out. I just did not know what to do anymore. Carole took both my hands in hers and said, I am not concerned what other teachers and administrators are going to say when they hear me shout, 'I don't know what to do! I need help!' So, don't you be concerned either. Because you know what? The truth is that we all need help at one time or another whether we are courageous enough to admit it or not. From that day on, I didn't think twice about saying the H word – Help!¹⁶⁴

Somehow Carole Williams was able to communicate her honest and open confrontation with the reality of the school to other teachers there. She gave the teachers her dialogical ability to hear a multitude of voices that make up the social phenomena called "school." The original relational event has been completed; the successful school has begun.

The initial transformational event is not necessarily as dramatic as a child's suicide attempt or war-time destruction. In 1977, Vladimir Karakovskii accepted the principalship of Moscow school #825, which was quite normal by Soviet standards. In fact the school was doing quite well according to a bureaucratic means of assessment. Yet in Karakovskii's eyes, the school was in the deepest crisis imaginable. He saw it as incredibly rigid, authoritative, void of care and imagination. All the attempts by Karakovskii to explain the kind of school he envisioned, failed, since they were not connected to teachers' and students life experiences. I would not interpret this as a sign of failure on the teachers' part only. Karakovskii himself was at fault since he brought in an established vision of a successful school that he had implemented in his previous years of principalship in Cheliabinsk. He attempted to repeat the same original relational incident twice, and failed. Only mutual frustration, and a very obvious organizational crisis made it possible for an original relational incident to happen. Somewhere during his first year, monthly Sunday meetings of student activists began. These meetings attempted to model relationships and experiences of the future school. These meetings were new for students and teachers; they were also new for Karakovskii. It was a genuine response to the unique and difficult situation, and it was the beginning of that school. Again, nothing in what that school is

¹⁶⁴ Quint, *Schooling Homeless Children*, 24.

today could be properly understood without taking into account the experiences of the first year of the "Karakovkii era."¹⁶⁵

Sara Lightfoot gives another example of the original relational event, when describing Brookline High School. The new principal McCarthy was shocked by the amount of violence in the school. But most shocking, was the indifference of most teachers.

McCarthy challenged their pretense of complacency. 'I would not accept breaking up fights as part of my job. I would show these kids how angry I was.' Soon the 'crackdown' began. Students were not allowed to congregate in ominous groups or bully fellow students who wanted to pass through blocked doorways. When there were incidents of violence parents were brought in immediately, and teachers expressed their outrage to the student and his parents. The new expression of anger seemed to have an effect. Many students were shocked by the expression of feelings and the seriousness and intensity of their teachers, who had seemed not to care so much before. Parents may have been embarrassed by the public outrage, but seemed comforted by the attempts to bring a new order and safety to the school. Since the opening of school a month ago, there have been no fights this year...¹⁶⁶

There is nothing especially creative in that "crackdown" from the point of view of "discipline management." The crucial part here is the expression of outrage by the teachers. McCarthy looked at the reality anew, responded to it with his whole being. Students and teachers then had recognized this and responded to McCarthy's response.

In fact, the original relational event could be anything, simple or sophisticated, dramatic or inconspicuous. The event presents some sense of a crisis, although as in Karakovskii case, the crisis may be not so obvious to everyone. It involves a dialogical meeting embedded in the context of a certain event or an action. Somebody has to have this moment of courage, to see and confront reality as it is. In most of the cases I know it was a school principal, although this does not mean that only top-down revolutions work. One exception was Karakovskii's first school in Chelyabinsk. Two students returned from the All-Russian Summer camp Orlenok, and brought with them experiences and ways of thinking that gradually changed the school. Of course, the principal again was among the first to respond to the kids' explanations.

The original relational incident starts a "big dialogue" that is, a continuous theme of renewed conversation within the school's community. The memory of the original relational incident does not wither away in a dialogical school, and is present like a point of reference regarding the origins of the unique community. The initial relational event sets a covenant among the members of the community that should be renewed by every generation, but stays essentially the same.

¹⁶⁵ Sidorkin, "Razvitie vospitatel'noi sistemy shkoly kak zakonomernyi protsess", 60-66.

¹⁶⁶ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 171.

There are two main dangers for any social organization: the first is to build a system of traditions and rituals on a meaningless void, without the foundation of the original relational event. And the second is to let the traditions and rituals take up a life of their own that obscures and substitutes the reality of the initial dialogical relation. Many obsolete social practices are in fact distant and dead memories of some events from the past. There exists a belief that social systems have some meaning in them regardless of their history. I do not share such belief. The American Constitution is a meaningless document without the knowledge of the American revolution. In the same way, scores of educational concepts are meaningless without the experiential context that brought them to life. Any given good school's experience may not be repeated again in a different school. This is so not because it is impossible due to different circumstances. It is not even so because such an event is rare and difficult to notice. The non-replicability of educational innovations has a deeper meaning. Just like one cannot live another's life, a school must not try to repeat another school's success. Such non-replicability is the very essence of genuine educational transformation. A school changes when and if individuals form a new community.

The original relational incident starts, but does not sustain a dialogical school community. There are at least three characteristics that define a school that can sustain a dialogical school community. These are complexity, civility, and carnival.

COMPLEXITY

Complexity is understood here as a feature of school culture that allows a multitude of human voices to co-exist without ever merging, or coming to an agreement on anything at all. Complexity is an institutionalized polyphony. In a dialogical school, polyphony is not something one has to tolerate. Rather, it is a necessity to maintain a polyphony.

I will try to translate this definition into the language of organization. Most importantly, complexity means that a school may never be successful while remaining just a school in a narrow academic sense. The dialogical school's community is sufficiently complex for sustaining polyphony. This means that a school's ideology that inevitably emerges, becomes the only and domineering set of ideas. It also means that individuals within the school are not being labeled in one rigid way. The members constantly shift their roles and modes of communication. Complexity means that a school is a multi-purpose community, where an informal network of relations overlaps with formal organizational relations.

The social world of school should be sufficiently complex for a human life to flourish. This claim may need some elaboration, which is even more important, as there is a definitive pressure from outside for school to be simple. As John Goodlad comments: "Much of so-called effective schools movement that grew out of some solid research on factors characteristics of good schools floundered on efforts to reduce complexity to a few

simple concepts.”¹⁶⁷ A school that wants to get recognition is pressured to come up with a simple explanation of its success. And yet most successful schools are very complex and not fully explicable.

A brief example from Sharon Quint’s book shows why complexity is important in real life terms. The following quotation is from an interview with one of the teachers that seems to capture the essence of that transformation:

When you see the world through Carole’s [the school’s principal -- A.S.] eyes, the word teacher takes on a whole new meaning. Children need to know that their teachers care about them, and I am not talking about their reading and math grades. Those things fall into place when children have a sense of being nurtured and valued as whole human beings with needs that extend far beyond the acquisition of academic skills¹⁶⁸

A simplistic interpretation of schooling that reduces education to acquiring academic skills, leads to factual neglect of children’s needs by the school. I also suggest that many public schools, regardless of whether they include large portions of disadvantaged students are in need of a fundamental transformation based on a similar change in the schools’ philosophies. Today’s schools are just too simple for human beings to flourish in.

The idea of a school being more than just a school is almost common place in educational literature. It has been said in many different ways, for instance J. Goodlad’s metaphor of a school as a small village.¹⁶⁹ C. Hurn calls for restoring communities within schools.¹⁷⁰ In Soviet education the same idea took roots from the Marxist ideal of a harmoniously developed human being, which was subsequently turned into an axiom that a holistic education must include certain variety of activities, not only academic learning. L.I. Novikova and her group started their research of the best K-10 schools in the Soviet Union in the 1960’s.¹⁷¹ This research continues now within a new framework of the “educational systems theory.” They were trying to understand the nature of the collectives that constitute such schools. Among other things they discovered that the effective educational collective may be described both as an organization and as a community.¹⁷² Neither of the two descriptions can be reduced to the other. And in reality each collective led two intermingled and intimately interdependent, but still distinctive lives: the school itself and a moral community. A school functions as a school, with its

¹⁶⁷ Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*, 204.

¹⁶⁸ Quint, *Schooling Homeless Children*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ John Goodlad, *A Place Called School*. (McGraw-Hill book company, 1983).

¹⁷⁰ Christopher J. Hurn, *The Limits and Possibilities of Schooling*. (Allyn and Bacon, 1993).

¹⁷¹ Ludmila I. Novikova, *Pedagogika Detskogo Kollektiva. Voprosy Teorii*. [The pedagogy of the Children’s Collective. Theory Issues.] (Moscow: Znanie, 1978).

¹⁷² The notion actually used was “a socio-psychological unity,” which does not sound right being literally translated. Frankly, it does not sound right even in Russian. I rename it, hoping to save the content.

policies, schedules, rules and roles. At the same time some subtle network of interpersonal relations flourishes, constituting very elusive, but real phenomena.

Another discovery of Novikova and her colleagues was that successful collectives were not monoliths, but rather loose conglomerates of differentiated smaller groups with intersecting memberships. These “best schools” invariably provided the students with a broad variety of organized and spontaneous activities, that constantly shifted and reshaped the organizational and communal structures. It seemed the very variety of personal involvements guarded the collective from becoming too rigid and authoritarian. Similarly, Robert Putnam reports that “strong” personal ties (like kinship and intimate friendship) are less important than “weak ties” (like acquaintanceship and shared membership in secondary associations) in sustaining community cohesion and collective action.¹⁷³ Precisely because such groups are not based on strong ties, they do not suppress stronger attachments like friendship and love when such arise spontaneously, I think. I am trying to show that school communities must not be “tightly knit,” rather they should be loose and flexible.

Here is just one more fresh example showing the omnipresence of the same idea regarding the complexity of school, although drawn from an educational experience outside of formal schooling. While looking for the common traits of successful neighborhood organizations, McLaughlin et al. point to the fact that all of them are “full-service agencies,” meaning that kids are involved not in a single activity, but in a variety of activities and interactions.¹⁷⁴ I see the appeal for educators to broaden their definition of schooling beyond academic learning as a derivative of a more general idea of complexity.

One might argue that schools are already incredibly complex organizations, judging by how hard they are to manage. I would say in reply that this is the wrong kind of complexity. I argue for a complexity of multiple relations, while bureaucratic complexity simply reiterates the simple, “flat” relations among people via their social roles.

John Dewey makes a strong case against simplicity in the social world, both in education and at large. His concept of “organic” democracy quite sharply deviates from main stream liberalism. For Dewey, abandoning the participatory ideal for a merely procedural form of democracy was a treachery.¹⁷⁵ The idea of democracy, according to Dewey, must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, and religion. The treachery was and is being committed in the name of political “realism,” one more name for the simplicity. The metaphor that Dewey used to describe the differences between his view of democracy and those he opposed, is quite illuminating.

¹⁷³ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 175.

¹⁷⁴ McLaughlin et al., *Urban Sanctuaries*.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 9

To say that a democracy is only a form of government is like saying home is more or less a geometrical arrangement of bricks and mortar: that the church is a building with pews, pulpit, and spire. It is true; they certainly are so much. But it's false; they are so infinitely more.¹⁷⁶

The metaphor itself is important, because it shows what kind of complexity Dewey had in mind when he protested the treacherous simplicity of main-stream liberalism. It is a complexity of meanings that humans attach to things, and not the complexity of analytical constructions employed. In other words, a description of a home is not simplistic because it does not provide enough details about bricks, mortar, shape of windows, or color of rain gutters. The complexity of description Dewey calls for regards the realm of meanings. Now, the complex description of a home also does not have to include an indefinite number of details about the meanings attached, all the memories of one's childhood, and all the vague feelings that the smell of home evokes in one's soul. In this sense, such a description would also be a simplification, but surely it is a different kind of simplicity.

I can try to clarify the distinction of thoroughgoing complexity from the erroneous, bureaucratic one. For example, C. Williams, the principal of B.F. Day school has discovered in the midst of her frustration, that children in her school have many needs that are not met. All of them want to be loved and cared for before they can learn. Some of them, especially homeless kids, needed to be fed, clothed, and bathed, too. Now, in theory, she could assign different people to solve different problems. But what she did was the opposite: she had sent the teachers into shelters to see the other side of students' lives. Her secretary works as a counselor, her counselors drive kids to schools, her school provides jobs and housing for the students' families, and her students get some sleep in school, if they need it. This is a picture of profound confusion from the bureaucratic point of view. In fact, it describes the restored complexity of human relations. The key factor is to invite every individual to make concurrent meanings of the same things within her head; to be a counselor, a teacher, and a social worker at the same time.

Complexity is a device that allows cultivation of the dialogical self. When individuals are constantly asked to bring forward different sides of their personalities, none of their roles can dominate the self. A teacher who also acts as counselor, a friend, and a care taker, is less likely to develop a rigid monological identity as a teacher. Similarly, students are not labeled and sorted on the basis of their academic success because there may be a variety of different positions in which they interact with adults and with each other.

What needs to be done so that schools maintain sufficient complexity in the sense that I outlined? In terms of an organizational change, I do not advocate here any particular educational policies. In fact, I want fewer policies, and those that are necessarily in place to be taken less literally. For the multitude of voices to arise and to engage in a dialogue, school folks should take part in a multitude of activities, play various roles, meet in

¹⁷⁶ Quote from: Westbrook, 41.

different situations. For example, a concentration of various services in and around the school, as in B.F. Day, might be a step towards this goal. In other schools it might be bringing in a variety of extracurricular activities. School life should be especially flighty, full of loose groups with overlapping membership, filled with big events and small happenings, with enough celebrations to break the routine. There must be a place, time, and opportunity for small talk, silly chat, and serious discussion.

Learning itself is an exposure to complexity. School may teach evolutionism and creationism; many different religions and atheism, “Rainbow curriculum” and “family values.” Double message is in fact the only type of a truly educational message, although it is sometimes portrayed as an educational scarecrow. There are no truths, simple and plain; every truth has its variations of human meanings, every truth was once disputed, and will be disputed again. One needs several non-coinciding perspectives to perceive certain facts as real. I do not mean just exposing children to different opinions, and encouraging them to come up with their own. Often dialogue goes nowhere after differences are voiced. “You think so – well, you are entitled to your opinion.” This evasion of complexity is often done in the name of neutrality. The only way out of it is for teachers to bring their humanity fully into the conversation with the students. The situation when a teacher is afraid to speak her or his mind out of fear of being politically or ideologically biased is but forceful simplification. Personal convictions, passion, and ideologies are to be brought in, providing that it is a two-way conversation. There are some dangers here, since the power relations between teachers and students are inherently unequal. And yet the danger of abusing a teacher’s power seems to be smaller than the danger of foregoing a chance for dialogue.

Schooling is not a presentation of ideas; ideas are nothing without actual people who carry them. I see a school as a meeting ground, as a place where students can meet their friends and teachers in person, and many other people through books and other media. Both kinds of encounters amounts to touching the personal universes of those involved. Even school math may be represented as people talking about the world in this particular language of mathematics.

Another suggestion I make is that schools should relax their semiotic environment. This amounts to involving children (and teachers, too) in the business of naming things. As it is now, children are handed the complete school language as they enter the school. Who are the counselors? What is the home room? What do all the abbreviations stand for? Some more elaborated concepts are laid out, too: what are the rules? how is tardiness reprimanded? and what is expected of a good student? The most important things are named and defined for you. One may accept it, or reject it. However, a good school is somewhat unstable. There is a rich verbal life in it: students and adults alike keep coming up with new jokes, new nicknames for each other, new names for parts of the school. Titles, mottoes, catch-words are being constantly created, ridiculed, transformed, and recycled. It is a world of fluid meanings, where everyone is welcome to throw his or her

own word into circulation. One is allowed here to name things around for oneself, as long as others can understand what it is.

The school of Karakovskii is an example of such a lax semiotic environment. Children, as any children in any school in the world are busy collecting and inventing slang words: some are universal Russian slang words, some are peculiar for Moscow, or even for the neighborhood of Kuzminki, where the school is situated. I also noticed quite a few words and expressions unique for this particular school. The most interesting thing is that teachers and even the principal enjoyed collecting and using all those slang expressions; some in their conversation with students, some only among the teachers. Also, this school is full of rumors at any given time, and interestingly, kids' rumors freely cross into teachers' chat, and, to a lesser degree, vice versa. This really complicates the communication process. An outsider has a very hard time deciphering all the subtle references and all the layers of meanings that are present in every-day conversations. There are no stable or simple meanings being exchanged in this school. Also, the yearly cycle of school life is designed so that regular festivals prompt concentrated outbursts of verbal and other forms of creativity. Students and teachers quote from each other's stage performances, tell jokes and stories from the latest festival, etc. Group and individual status in the Karakovskii school depends significantly on how creative, imaginative and funny one can be. Such a system invites students to challenge, re-think and tease every day realities, rather than to accept them as they are. Perhaps there are other ways to relax and make movable the semiotic structures of a school culture. What I am trying to argue for is the need for a special arrangements for children to do so.

All the successful schools I came to know directly or through descriptions possess some form of complexity. The main argument against complexity is that schools must concentrate on teaching. Summerhill's experience may be interpreted as one big revolt against this claim. A.S. Neil stated his radical position: "Parents are slow in realizing how unimportant the learning side of school is... Books are the least important apparatus in a school... Most of the school work that adolescents do is simply a waste of time, of energy, of patience."¹⁷⁷ I would rather endorse a less radical way to formulate the same idea, offered by Karakovskii in one of his presentations. He said that school is like a genre; in opera you sing, in school you teach and learn. One can choose which statement is more accurate; whether traditional classroom learning should be generously supplemented by a multitude of other activities, or this learning should be treated as merely a form of conversation, an occasion to get together for really important things. In any case, school should not be looked upon and treated as only and mainly a place for organized curriculum consumption.

CIVILITY

¹⁷⁷ Neil, *Summerhill*, 25.

The multitude of voices, brought about by complexity, needs to be supported by another cultural device that I call civility. In most general terms, civility is a feature of a dialogical school that assures that the many voices do hear each other. Complexity must not become an absurd theater of broken conversations, dislocated phrases, and meaningless encounters.

Civility is a force that holds a dialogical school together. It is a unifying component of a school community. I define civility as institutionalized dialogue. Such a definition may seem paradoxical in light of my earlier claims that dialogue may never be formalized and institutionalized. Yet this reflects the paradoxical nature of civility. I still do agree with Buber that the worlds of I-It and I-Thou are two different worlds, and one cannot be in both of them at the same time. But there is an enormous difference between the types of social organization that belong to I-It realm. A civic society reflects the world of the dialogical in its social structure. Civility is not the dialogical relation proper, but its representation. Just like my image in a mirror is not me, but an important, and for all practical purposes, very accurate representation of me.

Civility represents dialogue, but in a way is also antithetical to it. Dialogue alone cannot sustain human society. Why? Because civility is a way to confine the polyphony of human existence. As any other form of social organization, civil society tends to contain difference. I will try to illuminate these ambivalent relations between dialogue and civility with the help of Robert Putnam's study of democracy in Northern and Southern Italy. He convincingly shows that the fundamental difference between the less civic South and the more-civic North is that civic communities exist in the latter and are lacking in the former.

Some regions of Italy have many choral societies and soccer teams and bird-watching clubs and Rotary clubs. Most citizens in those regions read eagerly about community affairs in the daily press. They are engaged by public issues, but not by personalistic or patron-client politics. Inhabitants trust one another to act fairly and to obey the law. Leaders in these regions are relatively honest. They believe in popular government, and they are predisposed to compromise with their political adversaries. Both citizens and leaders find equality congenial. Social and political networks are organized horizontally, not hierarchically. The community values solidarity, civic engagement, cooperation and honesty. Government works. Small wonder that people in these regions are content!

At the other pole are the uncivic regions... Public life in these regions is organized hierarchically, rather than horizontally. The very concept of citizen here is stunted. From the point of view of the individual inhabitant, public affairs is the business of somebody else—*i notabili*, the bosses, the politicians—but not me. Few people aspire to partake in deliberations about the commonwealth, and few such opportunities present themselves. Political participation is triggered by personal dependency or private greed, not by collective purpose. Engagement in social and cultural associations is meager. Private piety stands in for public purpose. Corruption is widely regarded as the norm, even by politicians themselves, and

they are cynical about democratic principles. Compromise has only negative overtones. Laws (almost everyone agrees) are made to be broken, but fearing others' lawlessness, people demand sterner discipline. Trapped in these interlocking vicious circles, nearly everyone feels powerless, exploited, and unhappy. All things considered, it is hardly surprising that representative government here is less effective than in more civic communities¹⁷⁸

These are not definitions, but study-based descriptions of social organization, that provide a general idea of what civic society means (which is why I was compelled to cite so extensively). Putnam argues that the extent of civic life is not determined by the level of economic development, ideology of a ruling party, level of education or other factors. In fact, differences between northern and southern Italy are determined by distinctive historical heritages, and go as far back in the past as the eleventh century. (This runs parallel to my suggestion about the role of the original relational incident in school formation.)

What is the role of civility in society? Civility is a way to limit dialogue and to contain difference through channeling dialogue into moral issues of community life. It implies a certain ideology, or a concept of a good life. Civility is a moral self-assessment of a community with such a concept. It creates conditions for an ongoing public conversation that needs to be present within the community. Many voices should be provided the opportunity to engage in a conversation with each other; in other words, many should be asked the same set of questions about what is good and what is bad for the community.

In a school, such a conversation may take very different forms, but it should implicitly or explicitly contain a moral self-reflection about the school community. People should have a way to reconfirm their communal identity, to ask themselves from time to time: are we still the same community? What does it mean for us today? As I stated earlier, a good school begins with an original relational event that starts a "big dialogue" within the school community. Civility is a set of habits, organizational arrangements, situations and spaces which make the "big dialogue" possible.

I can see two sides of civility. The first component of civility is a strong *ideology*. I do not take all the negative connotations this word bears seriously. Ideology for me is a culturally defined set of ideas about good life. Sara Lightfoot who studied very different schools, come to the following observation: "Yet despite the extreme material contrasts, there are ways in which each institution searches for control and coherence. Gaining control seems to be linked to the development of visible and explicit ideology."¹⁷⁹ I think by "control" she simply means some stability of school organization. Then she goes on examining what ideologies different schools have developed. She also makes a comment about one of the schools:

¹⁷⁸ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 115.

¹⁷⁹ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 320.

Highland Park lacks this clear and resounding ideological stance... Although the superb record of college admissions provides institutional pride, it does not replace the need for a strong ideological vision. Rather than creating institutional cohesion, the quest for success engenders harsh competition among students. The persistent complaints from many students that they feel lost and alone is in part a statement about the missing ideological roots without a common bond, without a clear purpose, the school fails to encompass them and does not take psychological hold on their energies.¹⁸⁰

Lightfoot's results are consistent with my own research. All four schools I studied developed strong and common visions of their own mission.¹⁸¹ Of course, teachers and students have different means of expression, but one cannot help noticing common words, phrases, and images that the entire community shares while reflecting on itself.

What does ideology have to do with dialogue? Ideology is, if I may allude to my notion from Chapter Three, the first discourse of school organization. It is a monological text that is absolutely needed for any conversation to begin. It is a text, the main purpose of which is to be subjected to interpretations, to be challenged in many ways, used as a point of reference, deconstructed and rewritten again.

One important qualifier is that what Lightfoot calls an ideology is not necessarily represented in words and concepts. And further, the words and slogans a principal uses to describe his or her school are not necessarily part of an ideology. For instance, Polianskii, who is one of the most able principals I ever met, has a weakness for various schemes and graphs explaining how his school works. The problem is, he is a very mediocre analyst, and his schemes have very little explanatory power. Very few of his teachers, and none of his students pay any attention to the theories he fancies. Yet there is a clear positive self-image within the school community. They all perceive the school as unique and even exceptional.

This leads me to the second element of civility, *public conversation*. A moral vision or an ideology in school matters only when it exists as a shared vision, i.e. when there is an opportunity for all to talk about it. The "big dialogue," that is in a way similar to the second discourse, creates such an opportunity. The public conversation creates disruptions in the settled framework of a school's ideology, its habits and organizational ways. It is a type of situation where students and teachers actively engage in conversation, while still keeping the fundamentals of school ideology in mind. It is a public talk about the most important community issues.

The forms of the public conversation may be different. A civic school may employ a straight-forward form of democratic government. A.S. Neil who had the luxury of a very small school, could afford to run general meetings that held the supreme power of decision

¹⁸⁰ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 321.

¹⁸¹ Alexander Sidorkin, "Razvitie Vospitatel'noi Sistemy Shkoly kak Zakonomernyi Protsess," 58-142.

making, and where teachers and students had equal vote. Only some essential provisions for safety were beyond the general meeting's power.¹⁸² Another famous example of full-blown democracy in an educational setting would be L. Kohlberg's "just communities."¹⁸³ Neil saw the democratic form as "practical civics," that is an exercise in democratic discussion, as well as the fulfillment of children's right to govern themselves. Kohlberg argued that just community meetings may serve as vehicles of moral education. Very similar ideas of self-management were tried, if only inconsistently, in Russian education of the 20's, and then resurfaced in the 60's. I certainly endorse these experiments of democratic government in schools, with two reservations.

My first reservation is about the purposes of self-government. Neither "learning democracy," nor implementing more effective management should become the priorities of self-government. The main purpose of democratic institutions in schools is a symbolic one, and I do not use the word "symbolic" lightly. A democratic assembly is important because it evokes images of democracy, which is a particular normative vision of good life. Now, this image is very much consistent with the main stream liberal ideology of the larger society, which makes it more plausible to defend. Yet I would state that the purpose of self-government in schools is mainly a symbolic one. This means that self-government should be supplemented by other forms of public conversation.

In general, one of the forms of ideology is ritual. In an explicitly democratic school, like Kohlberg's "Just Communities," the ritual representation of the shared ideology works through democratic institutions. The community meeting includes such rituals (e.g. agenda, minutes, motions, etc.). In other schools, rituals may be almost completely separated from public conversation. St. Paul school expects all students and faculty to attend regular chapel services as well as formal dinners.¹⁸⁴ Briukhovetskii's school engaged in a strange ritual that I described earlier, called the "School's Honor Festival." While ritual may be a universal attribute of any culture, there are many non-civil schools that torture themselves with senseless and outdated rituals. Ritual is alive only when it invokes images of the initial relational incident; when it "re-plays" and continues the initial dialogue. The role of ritual is to abstractly represent the most important school community values.

My second reservation about explicitly democratic schools is that the semblance of political democracy does not guarantee civility, and that the absence of democracy in schools does not prevent the formation of civil community.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Neil, *Summerhill*, 45-55.

¹⁸³ Ann Higgins, "The Just Community Approach to Moral Education: Evolution of the Idea and Recent Findings," in *Applications*, vol. 3 of *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, eds. W.M.Kurtines and J.L. Gewit (Hillside, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991), 111-139.

¹⁸⁴ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 224-225.

¹⁸⁵ There exists different understandings of democracy that distinguish between a merely political, or "thin" democracy, and a more thoroughgoing "thick" democracy. Within such a framework the "thick" democracy approximates my understanding of civility. However the "thick" democracy concept holds political democracy to

I have witnessed numerous attempts to introduce democratic forms of student government in Russian schools during the early years of perestroika. Most of these attempts ended in a spectacular failure precisely because there was nothing underneath the new democratic forms.¹⁸⁶ Even Deborah Meier, who considers developing democratic communities to be a purpose of schooling, notes: “Representative bodies are surely a legitimate form of democracy, just not very effective for the kind of school culture we are trying to create.”¹⁸⁷ Civic communities do not evolve from the elections. I do not think this thesis requires extensive argumentation for support. Everyone has come across examples of democracy without civility. The reversed case, of civility without democracy, is worth illustrating, though.

Sara Lightfoot describes Bill Oates, rector of St. Paul school, who wields great power. There is nothing like a formal democracy in St. Paul. For example, even decisions made by the admissions committee are subject to final approval by the rector, “but he is wise enough to recognize when an overturned decision would greatly violate a difficult and consuming selection process or offend an important constituency.”¹⁸⁸

Faculty rarely disagree with the rector, or even dare to disagree strongly. No one risks being late to meetings with him. People who normally seem strong and sturdy in their roles appear strangely submissive and accommodating in his presence...

Even though his dominance is without question, his style is not dominating. Rather he appears supremely civilized and benign in manner. He takes on the demeanor of the rectors who were his predecessors... As a matter of fact, many students describe him as friendly and approachable... Every Saturday night, he and his wife host an open house with punch and their famous chocolate chip cookies.¹⁸⁹

This description of “enlightened authoritarianism” strikes me as very familiar. It is exactly the style of leadership exercised by Boris Polianskii, a principal of a school that is as different from the privileged world of St. Paul as it is possible to imagine. Polianskii rules in the small rural school of Zorino village, Kursk region in Southern Russia. This is a school that combines a family-like atmosphere with very high learning achievements. This is how Alexander Pashkov, who closely studied this school for a number of years, describes the role of its principal:

be insufficient, but still a necessary part of “thick” democracy. From my point of view, democratic political forms, at least on a single school scale, are neither necessary nor sufficient to constitute civil community.

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Sidorkin, *Posobie dlia nachinaishchikh robespierov* (Moscow : Znanie, 1990).

¹⁸⁷ Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 24.

¹⁸⁸ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 238.

¹⁸⁹ Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, 237-238.

He is not only a generator of ideas, and organizer of these ideas' fulfillment; he is also a mediator, a tuner of relations in the collective, a communication expert. Most of his time (according to our timing, up to 80%) is spent on support, adjustment, and correction of relations among teachers, counselors, coaches from sports department, leaders of clubs, students and support staff. This allows him to know everything that happens in the school, to keep his finger on the school's pulse, to regulate quickly all the components of organization.¹⁹⁰

Both Polianskii and Oates are leaders of schools where civility does not entail democracy. Yet I would insist both schools fall under my definition of a good school. First, they do satisfy students, teachers, and parents. As I have argued earlier, this seems to me to be a true and effective criterion of a good school. And second, these schools create dialogical situations, if in different forms than more conventionally democratic schools. In both schools there exists some space and occasion for public conversation, even though this conversation may be mediated by one person, or occur mainly through informal channels.

In some schools, like in that of Karakovskii in Moscow, there exists a peculiar mixture of democratic and non-democratic forms of public conversation. The school has a so-called Big Council, which includes faculty, administration, and student representatives, with the last group making a clear majority. This body assembles two or three times a year, making some important decisions. But the regular life of the school is run through channels very similar to those Oates and Polianskii use. Yet I found that everybody in the school knows what everybody else's position is on any given issue. It always escaped me how such information gets exchanged. Autocracy does not necessarily mean that certain voices are not heard. Informal consultations may very well play the role of a public conversation. I think, the notion of a public conversation means that information about different opinions is freely distributed, not censored, and is available on demand. It also means that anybody is able to make their opinion known to all any time. There is not an absolute need for the physical presence of the conversant at the same time in the same place.

The difference between these non-democratic – yet civic – schools on one hand, and others that are both authoritarian and non-civic is the existence of a public conversation. There should be channels for every voice to be heard, and for every ear to listen. In non-civic schools such channels are absent or not functional. There is no assurance that what you think can be known to everyone, especially those individuals in authority. In such schools, authorities are not interested, nor have they established any effective ways to find out, who thinks what and why. This defines the absence of public conversation.

The model of “enlightened authoritarianism” does not seem to be functional at the level of large societies. The procedural aspect of democracy has proven to be a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for a large-scale democracy. It is not so in smaller

¹⁹⁰ Natalia Selivanova, ed., *Vospitatel'naiia sistema shkoly: problemy i poiski*, (Moscow: Znanie, 1989), 51.

social entities like schools. Formal democratic procedures of decision making are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for initiating what I call the public conversation.

Civility is a holistic characterization of a school community. I must emphasize here that forms of civility are multiple, and each school in fact should find and define its own version of it. As long as some moral idea is at the foundation of a school community, and this idea is publicly discussed, a school possesses civility. And civility is a condition of a dialogical school.

CARNIVAL

Both complexity and civility are qualities of a dialogical school. These are qualities of a social organization that creates hospitable conditions for dialogical relations. Carnival is another device that actually occasions dialogical encounters. Just like classroom discourse, the life of school should be breakable; not too soft, for soft things do not break, but not too hard, for very hard things are hard to break. In other words, if one wants to invite some instances of dialogue into school life, one should not concentrate as much on putting kids into circles, teaching them how to take turns in speaking, and argue intelligently. All those things are important of course, but they neither constitute nor do they necessarily invite the dialogical relation. School should be a social system that combines safety and stability with a relatively low “melting point.” By melting point I mean the state of school’s system where barriers to dialogue give way, creating situations especially hospitable to direct dialogical relations.

The dialogue, according to Buber, arises only spontaneously: “The Thou meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking.”¹⁹¹ For Buber entering the dialogue is a fundamentally spontaneous endeavor. He gives very little indication that anything could be done in the regular every day life of I-It to facilitate the emergence of a mutual relation. In contrast, Bakhtin finds that something may be done to induce dialogue. This is a very important difference, and I side with Bakhtin on the issue.

Bakhtin analyzes Dostoevsky’s novels and finds that the situations of dialogue, where “human as a human” meets the other, always happens in particular circumstances. These are scandals, which I mentioned earlier while discussing the specifics of time and space in the dialogical. Bakhtin also noted that the scandals are remarkably similar to carnival. He made a rather lengthy digression to examine the history of carnivals in Europe, and their influence on literature and other spheres of culture. Later, he wrote a separate book about Rabelais, where many of the same themes of carnival were further developed, and connected to the notion of the laughter culture.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

¹⁹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekovia I Rennansa*. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1990).

The European civilization came up with a unique response to the limitations of our social world: if the reality does not cooperate, one can create another reality to counteract its force. A carnival, as presented by M. Bakhtin, is a thousand year-old tradition of a utopian approach to the world. He wrote that cultural forms of laughter in effect created a second world and a second life where all medieval people took some part.¹⁹³ Carnival did not mean a total refusal to change reality, but just an understanding of how far reality can be changed. The carnival creates a parallel reality of a folk festivity, a utopian human community without hunger, hatred, oppression, social hierarchy, and rigid cultural taboos. The only limitation of this wonderful world was that it was short-lived. The carnival is a break from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom.

Carnival implies a certain fading of individuality in favor of a chaotic, but united, multivoiced body of a carnival. Carnival means among other things, a utopian bounty, a care-free world. There is no future, no commitments, no worries in the carnival.

It is very important to note that the carnival culture needs, so to speak, “the first world” of social realities at which to laugh. This is why a certain stability of social institutions is important in schools. Carnival is antithetical to civility, and yet it depends on civility on its existence. Some rituals should exist if only to be laughed at from carnival perspective. Carnival is not a rebellion; it does not call for an immediate abolishment of social conventions, but it demonstrates that those conventions are cumbersome and ridiculous, and do not constitute essential human relations.

One does not watch carnival, according to Bakhtin, but lives it. Carnival is life taken from its regular rut. Any distance among people is canceled. Free and familiar contact among all people is a unique category in the carnival. A person frees her or himself from any social role, or conventions of regular world.¹⁹⁴

What is the function of the carnival in the ontological concept of dialogue? I see it as a cultural device specifically aimed at creating some rips in the fabric of the *I-It* world. Carnival is the mechanism that creates the possibility for the genuine dialogue to happen. It may not guarantee it, but it can occasion dialogical meetings by creating an appropriate time and space. Being born from the world of *I-It*, and against that world, carnival opens the door into *I-Thou*.

Carnival and laughter are not the only ways to incite dialogue. I suggest that what C. Lasch calls “third places” represents essentially the same utopian project, although limited within space, not time. The term actually belongs to R. Oldenburg, who coined it to distinguish informal hangouts from large, highly structured organizations on the one hand, and from families and other small groups on the other.¹⁹⁵ The third places (neither home

¹⁹³ Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekovia I Renessansa*, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 165.

¹⁹⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*. (New York-London: W.W.Norton & Co, 1995), 119.

nor workplace) are taverns, coffeehouses, beer gardens and pubs of a particular kind, where one is known in an informal way. Their primary function is not alcohol consumption, but conversation, the essence of civic life, as Lasch puts it. He claims that the third places sustain democracy; they sort of prepare a person for political life. While this might be true to a certain degree, the main purpose of the third places from my point of view is to create an alternative, utopian reality; to take people's lives out of the singularity of their jobs, families, and politics into a world of fantasies, loitering, and blathering. It just makes people happier, and happy people eventually make better citizens. But most important, strangers may enter the realm of the dialogical in this provoking atmosphere of the third place. McLaughlin et al.¹⁹⁶ portray how "third places" can function as substitutes for carnival in educational institutions. All six successful youth organizations they studied, have special time and sometimes special places for "just hanging out." This is not a trivial matter of having some fun time. The "third places" in schools may play an important role in conditioning dialogue. In fact, some forms of extra-curricular activities of drama, music, sports, journalism, etc., may be successful because they share some traits of "third places."

Let us return to the notion of carnival. Bakhtin pointed out a very important feature of medieval laughter that does not apply to most of modern humor. An ancient laughter was ambivalent. It included rejection and acceptance, praise and cursing, bringing down and elevating. The carnival made fun of official institutions, even of God and saints, while it manifested acceptance of authority and sanctity. In the same way the third places do not only provide social engagement, but also disengagement, retreat into a utopian world. A democracy, as any other society needs people not to take it too seriously. A society needs a utopian outlet that can provide people with what real social world cannot provide—freedom. Any kind of social organization, democratic or not, restrains our freedom by assigning roles, conventions, and rules. Obviously, carnival is not a fully functioning society with worries over economical and social stability. Hence, it gives us freedom.

A school needs laughter not only to sustain its social order, but learning itself includes laughter as an integral part of understanding, which I tried to show in Chapter Three. We cannot make sense of things, unless we challenge, deconstruct, and ridicule them. Bakhtin noted that from Classic times academia always had its own strong stream of a laughter culture, where not only Latin grammar, but also the Holy Scriptures were objects of parody. Carnival is a place of dialogue, where human beings can meet as human beings, and make sense of things anew without the conventions of previous generations. Its powers go to many forms of human freedom, including a freedom to learn.

It is quite difficult sometimes to track down carnival-like situations in school descriptions, because most researchers ignore them as too volatile, too unusual and too unrepresentative for a school. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that every good

¹⁹⁶ McLaughlin et al., *Urban Sanctuaries*.

school engages in some form of carnival, or maintains its “third places,” or both. One example comes from a school I have spent considerable time studying.

Laboratory School #825 in Moscow, a.k.a. Karakovskii School, has its traditional Spring *sbor*. The word means just a gathering, something between a retreat and an assembly. Up to two hundred children and adults go out of town, or isolate themselves some other way. They have three or so very intense days (with very little sleep, which seems to boost creativity) filled with skit-making, fun, far too-serious discussions, some physical work and sports, and games. KTD, an abbreviation for a collective creative action (*kollektivnoe tvorcheskoe delo*) generally describes a primary kind of activity. On its surface, it is skit-making, quite elaborated in some cases. But the educators and elder students attach a specific meaning to it, a meaning sharply different from simply having fun. In fact, they perceive it as a work, as a duty, as a demanding service. For an individual, *sbor* is a spiritual experience more than anything else. Being a part of some greater whole, a communion, if you please, is the goal; skits, arts, planning, doing dishes, and even helping the neediest are the means to achieve that goal. *Sbor* is an independent non-utilitarian cultural phenomenon, as for instance, a theater is. In Karakovskii’s school they say “to *make sbor*,” meaning that there are really different degrees of success, and everyone could feel it.

Just like in the carnival described by Bakhtin, *sbor*’s essence is a universal, all-engulfing laughter. This type of laughter appears sometimes in a city crowd, at a market place, on the city square. It is the laughter of the masses, but not a satire, not the modern understanding of laughter. The carnival laughter defies fear by ridiculing gods and authorities, and in such a way makes the world closer and more familiar. It is an ambivalent laughter, embracing the new and the old, the death and the birth, beginning and end.

As Dmitry S. Likhachev et al. commented,

The laughter breaks established connections and meanings. The laughter shows a senselessness and absurdity of relationships existing in the social world. But the laughter has also some contemplative constituent, though it is in the imaginary world only. The laughter breaks but also builds something: it is a world of mixed up and illogical relationships, a world of absurdity, a world of freedom from conventions and therefore desirable and careless one... The laughter in its sphere restores the destroyed in other spheres contacts between human beings, because a laughing people is a group of ‘conspirators’, that see and understand something invisible or incomprehensible for others or for themselves before.¹⁹⁷

This characteristic can be fully applied to *sbor*. Its language is the language of laughter, and laughter possesses destructive power. *Sbor* profoundly shakes all conventions of social life. For example, the heretofore all-powerful principal acts as a little kid; teachers

¹⁹⁷Dmitrii S. Likhachev, N.Ponyrko, A.Panchenko, *Smekh v Drevney Rusi* (Moscow: "Nauka", 1984).

completely give up their responsibilities letting students run their own affairs. General excitement and exhaustion bring adults and students alike to the most unusual and direct encounters among themselves. One can sense sparkles of dialogical relations in the happy crowd.

I think that the whole school organization, its culture and activities exist for these brief moments of dialogical relations through which every kid is given an opportunity to live. However, carnival has a profound impact on the social organization of the school. Karakovskii's *sbor* takes less than one per cent of the year, but is undeniably the most important event of the school year. It energizes the whole school community, brings about a peculiar feeling of liberation and connectedness. The *sbor* symbolizes everything dear to the school community; it has a power to cancel troubles, smooth conflicts, and put everything into some perspective.

The concept of carnival applied towards school describes a particular rhythm of school life: an everyday phase is followed by a carnival phase. Again, the utopia should be kept limited in time or/and space. My ideal is a school that lives two distinctive modes of life: one is moderately conservative, with a complex web of traditions, rules, and roles, the life of everyday learning; and second is the life of a carnival, where traditions, rules and roles are broken, reversed, and laughed at. In addition such a school would include some hangout places with no or minimal adult supervision, but still within the orbit of the school culture.

Carnival and third places are situations that deliberately bring the social fabric of a school onto the verge of collapse. They introduce special times and spaces that invite instances of dialogical relation, but do not guarantee such instances. Carnival and third places may take a relatively short time, and organizationally be on the periphery of educational thinking. I believe this is a mistake. If one takes seriously a proposition that dialogue is at the center of human existence, then carnival and third places should be at the center of attention of school organization.

CONCLUSION

I have completed my journey from the dialogical ontology of humans to the dialogical notion of self, and then to dialogue in the classroom and dialogical school. It was my intention to take seriously Buber and Bakhtin in their claim that dialogue is the center of human existence, that dialogue is an end, and everything else is a means. I tried to explore what such an assumption would mean if applied in philosophy and social sciences, particularly, in the theory of self. It became clear to me that some fundamental notions about the self, such as integrity, identity and authenticity should be revised to allow for the existence of many internal voices that constitute the self.

After this quite theoretical discussion I plunged into every day classroom talk, in an attempt to understand exactly what dialogue means within the realities of education. What I found is that dialogue perhaps is not where many people are looking for it. For instance, some phenomena usually labeled as “discipline problems” are in fact, students’ attempts to relate to the curriculum dialogically.

And finally, I tried to look at some successful schools in connection with the ontological concept of dialogue. My conclusions are, in short, that schools should recreate themselves in a way that short and unsupervised moments of true dialogical encounters are among the main educational goals; and the rest of school life should play into the possibility of such encounters. A particular type of school, which, of course, I call dialogical, presents the most hospitable conditions for dialogical relations. Such a school possesses qualities of complexity, civility, and carnival.

Was my journey worth the trouble? Why should anyone care if schools are dialogical or not? I think one should care. All human societies have self-imposed special responsibilities for their young. And the place where children live a very important part of their lives is school. It is time now to start looking at educational institutions in a most fundamentally philosophical way. School is a place for children to discover something very important in the business of being human.

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ALEXANDER M. SIDORKIN

1992

MA in Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, IN, Institute for International Peace Studies.

1991

Kandidat Pedagogicheskikh Nauk, Research Institute for Theory and History of Education, Moscow, Russia.

1985

Diplom, Novosibirsk State Teachers College, Novosibirsk, Russia.