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Who Sets the Limits of Educational Freedom?
Exploring Bakhtin's Architectonic Self as a Response to Matusov's "A Student's Right to Freedom of Education"

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Abstract
This article is a response to Matusov's argument for a student's right to define the limits of their own education. While I agree with Matusov's premise, I argue that his solution is framed as a dualism, which may undermine the dialogic principles of his call to students' educational freedoms. I propose that viewing students' educational freedoms through Bakhtin's arhcitectonic self removes the dualism of Matusov's argument, and close by providing an example of the architectonic self in practice within the teacher-student relationship.

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If the thesis of Matusov's commentary "A Student's Right to Freedom of Education" were restated in question form, it might read: who sets the limits of education? Matusov's position is that "education requires a student to define their own education—i.e., freedom of education" (Matusov, 2020, p. SF3). His insistence that students must be the principal authors, owners, and definers of their education rejects the techniques of "foisted education, imposed curriculum, and thrust instruction" that serve to further the goals and aims of external entities (p. SF2). These goals and aims are, in most cases, predetermined and serve instrumental purposes, which focus on the product as a means to an end (Matusov, 2009). Consequently, they set the limits of education and deny students the right to define their own education. Matusov calls for education to become disentangled from these external "non-educational" practices and goals so that educators may "recognize that education is the primary business of the student and . . . promote the student's right to freedom of education" (p. SF23).

Matusov frames his call around Bakhtin's (1984) notion of a "*plurality of consciousnesses with equal rights*" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6, italics in original) as the starting point for dialogic education, which is essential in order to for students to define their own educational limits. Participants must have equal rights to choose how they engage in, respond to, and value educational dialogue. They try to avoid instrumental approaches to education that favor treating others as objects of their actions. This position means they reject pedagogical techniques that attempt to force or thrust curricula and predetermined goals onto another, choosing instead to engage in practices that support ontological dialogue. These Bakhtinian approaches to

education are, according to Matusov, "unthinkable without a student's right to define their own education" (p. SF10).

While I agree with many elements of Matusov's proposal, I am not convinced that it adequately addresses the central issue of concern. It appears to me that he addresses a symptom of a larger problem, the pervasive construction of false dichotomies at the root of nearly every educational system and relationship. False dichotomies are detrimental to educational freedoms because they prevent participants from engaging in ontological dialogue (King, 2017). Rather than contradict it, Matusov actually frames his argument as a false dichotomy, which confuses his dialogical intentions and lessens the potential impact of his suggested solutions. For example, he presents his definition of freedom of education in dichotomous terms, as a shifting of "the locus of control and ownership of education *to a* student *from the* society, state, local ethnic community, or parents" (p. SF2, emphasis added). Not only is educational freedom dichotomously defined, the dyad is also couched in dualistic terms which creates a false sense conflict within the relationship (Plumwood, 2002). Freedom is the object over which two subjects struggle. One subject has it, but the argument suggests that it rightfully belongs to the other. In this synthetic layer of conflict, it appears the reader/observer must make a choice between the two subjects. But the function of the dualism makes this a false choice, since only one of the choices is perceived to be the correct one.

Structuring relationships as dualisms are "fundamentally shaped by a desire for certainty," often resulting in "the notion of an ultimate, eternal, fixed reality" (Bleazby, 2013, p. 9). Given that Matusov grounds students' right to freedom in a Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy, I do not think certainties and fixed realities are what he intends for his argument. I think Matusov intends for the ontological elements of surprise, creative authorship, and internally persuasive discourse (p. SF10) to provide a space for Bakhtin's plurality of consciousnesses, as exemplified by his call for the appreciation of both the instrumental and intrinsic values of education in a "leisure-dominated hybrid" approach to education (p. SF23). By presenting a dialogic solution for a dualistic problem, however, Matusov has introduced a logical inconsistency into his argument that threatens to undermine his call for a dialogic approach to education. His proposed solution of students as the sole definers of educational freedom strengthens the presence of dualisms in education rather than dismantle them. Since Bakhtinian pedagogies favor both/and choices rather than either/ choices, Matusov's suggested solution does not enhance the dialogic nature of educational relationships.

The Architectonic Self and Educational Freedom

One alternative suggestion that avoids the inconsistencies within Matusov's argument is to frame the solution around Bakhtin's (1990, 1993) concept of the architectonic self. This approach removes the possibility of the false dichotomy by structuring the educational relationship as a triad rather than as a dyad. Additionally, it considers the relational interdependency between participants vital to the construction of reality and meaning. In the context of freedom in education, the architectonic self suggests that students' rights are dependent on the participation of others. Although this statement appears to run counter to Matusov's argument, understanding how the architectonic self structures the relationship in dialogical terms will show that this is not in fact the case.

Architectonics, in general terms, is the study of relationships, of how individual parts relate to one another (Holquist, 2002). For Bakhtin (1993), the architectonic self is a description of how the "actual world of the performed act . . . the world of a unitary and once-occurrent act or deed" is constructed from its "basic concrete moments:" the "I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other" (p. 54). Three key elements in this description are immediately relevant to the issue at hand. First, the definition of the self and the other in relational terms creates no fewer than three basic moments: the self, the other, and the relationship between them. It is impossible to structure a dualism, much less a dichotomy, around three elements

without ignoring or rejecting one of the elements. Second, Bakhtin insists that, of the three, the relationship is the most important element (Holquist, 2002). The position of the self is necessarily one of relation, because reality is both given to it and created by it. Bakhtin (1993) states that "I *come upon* this world, inasmuch as I *come forth* or issue from within myself in my performed act or deed" (p. 57, italics in original). These two acts are not linear; one does not come before or assume precedence over the other. They occur simultaneously. Thus, what is of utmost importance is how these two expressions of reality relate to one another to form a complete whole.

Third, the architectonic self is intended to describe an activity or deed rather than a specific object. This focus highlights the dynamic tension within each relationship. Things are never in static relationships with each other; they are constantly moving (Emerson, 1995). This movement comes, in large part, from the impermanent "once-occurrent" quality of the activity. Each relationship exists within and is defined within a specific activity. But this activity only occurs once. The next activity involving the relationship is another unique event, and thus the definition of the relationship must define itself again. Being, for Bakhtin, is eternally and essentially active, and the architectonic self is a way for him to describe the "body of techniques by which its sheer flux may be erected into a meaningful *event*" (Holquist, 1990, p. xxiv, italics in original).

Just as the architectonic self is Bakhtin's explanation of how reality is relationally constructed, the process of outsideness is his description of how the self and the other actively come to understanding through relationship. Outsideness, is primarily concerned with position, where the self stands in relation to the other (and vice versa), and why this position is essential for understanding (Emerson, 1995). "In order to understand," Bakhtin writes, "it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her understanding" (1986, p. 7, italics in original). What this position means for the self is, in order to understand myself, I must take up a position outside myself. How do I accomplish this seeming physical impossibility? Bakhtin's answer is through relationship with the other. Other people see me more fully than I see myself because they are located outside me. They have what Bakhtin (1990) describes as an "excess of . . . seeing in relation to another" (p. 24). This outside perspective is bestowed upon me, and gives me a more whole picture of myself than I could ever achieve without it (Emerson, 1997). It is the active representation of the "other for me." I can now stand outside myself and see myself as another sees me. The other's excess of seeing helps me overcome my lack of sight, and I do the same for them. Because both I and another have an excess of seeing in relation to each other, the function of outsideness becomes a cooperative effort to overcome a lack of seeing by sharing with each other the things we can see that the other cannot see (Holquist, 1990).

Once another has presented me with a more whole picture of myself, I am obligated to "issue from within myself" a response to it. "After looking at ourselves through the eyes of another," Bakhtin insists that "we always return—in life—into ourselves again, and the final, or, as it were, recapitulative event takes place within ourselves" (1990, p. 17). He refers to this inward turn as the non-alibi, "the utterly irreplaceable uniqueness of being, in relation to every constituent moment of being" (1993, p. 57). Irreplaceability is an immense burden and responsibility; there are no alibis for it. No one, no other, can make my response for me. What has been seen by another and presented to me may change me, may be changed by me, or may be rejected by me (Emerson, 1995). But, essential to Bakhtin's architectonic self, is that it is my response to make. I am the only person who can provide a response to the whole picture of myself presented in another's excess of seeing. I alone am responsible to the transformation of "every manifestation of myself . . . into my own actively answerable deed" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 57).

Students' Freedom in the Pedagogical Relationship

If a student's right to freedom is necessary for dialogic education, then it must be viewed in terms of the architectonic self rather than from a dichotomous perspective (false or otherwise). False dichotomies are constructed by separating the product from its initial relationship, an act that Bakhtin explicitly warns against (1993, p. 54). This separation bestows a specific value to the product that can then be imposed upon any other relationship by positioning the participants according to its purposes (Plumwood, 2002), thereby denying the value or necessity of the relationship. In the context of educational freedoms, Matusov appears to view them as detached products that allow whomever owns them to control the pedagogical relationship. Since his argument presents education as a dichotomy between students and non-educational external entities, the one who owns the freedom has control over the other. Shifting the locus of control would only serve to alter the balance of power and do nothing to dismantle the false dichotomy, allowing the product to remain separated from the relationship.

Bakhtin (1993) asserts that this separation is an ontological impossibility, that the product cannot survive outside its relationship. When the product is "severed from its ontological roots" and removed from the actual performed world of the dialogic act, "it is deprived of its weight with respect to value, it loses its emotional-volitional completeness, and becomes an empty, abstractly universal possibility" (pp. 54, 59). The product on its own is meaningless, and the only way to restore meaning to it is to restore it to the dialogic act (p. 54). The only way for students' rights to freedom to mean anything, then, is for them to be restored to the architectonic self as it exists within the pedagogical relationship. To again paraphrase Matusov's thesis, perhaps the question is not "how can we promote students' rights to freedom," but rather "how do we promote the architectonic self in education?"

Since Bakhtin refers to the architectonic self as the basic concrete moments that comprise the actual world, perhaps the best place to examine its place in education is within the most basic pedagogical moment, the teacher-student relationship. To maintain the focus on Matusov's original query, we might ask where students' right to freedom exists in this basic concrete moment. Examining how students and teachers participate in the process of outsideness might provide some insight into how students' education freedoms can be perceived and practiced dialogically.

I suggest that educational freedom is realized through the responsibility and actions of both the student and the teacher to position the other so that they may participate in outsideness. When a teacher shares her/his excess of seeing with students, she/he allows them to stand outside themselves and see themselves more fully. They are then free to respond from this unique position and create a new, more complete meaning for themselves. Conversely, students freely share their excess of seeing with teachers. The teachers are then free to stand outside themselves and uniquely construct their own new meanings. Thus, freedom to act becomes an essential part of the dialogical relationship. Students are free to construct their own meanings, insofar as teachers help them achieve a position of outsideness, and vice versa.

From this perspective, students' rights to freedoms are limited when they are denied the opportunity to participate in outsideness. One such limiting factor (although certainly not the only one) concerns the denial of students' rights to issue a response in a way that communicates their non-alibi, or irreplaceable uniqueness when confronted with a teacher's excess of seeing. One of the most common practices teachers use to share their excess of seeing is feedback. Pedagogical feedback is defined as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). This information is generally intended to describe the level of success of a pedagogical action relative to a predetermined reference point like a standard or goal (Sadler, 1989). The purpose of feedback is to communicate how the successfully the

action "fills a gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood" (Hattie & Clarke, 2018, p. 3).

This definition of feedback is non-dialogic because it conflates evaluation with feedback. Along with providing information about a particular action, the presenter also evaluates the worth of the action relative to a predetermined goal or standard. There is a level of success that is desired, and the expectation is that the actions taken will eventually meet this level. In the pedagogical relationship, teachers provide conflated feedback through various forms to their students (e.g., tests, discussions, essay revisions, homework corrections). These feedback opportunities contain an evaluative quality to them, because they inform students how close or far away they are to meeting a goal. They determine for the students the worth of their specific pedagogical actions. In many cases, the conflation between feedback and evaluation is so subtle, the two are viewed synonymously (e.g., Waring, 2009).

Dialogically, teachers cannot provide both feedback and evaluation. To do so denies the students' freedoms because it denies the dialogic necessity of the relationship. Teachers cannot provide information intended to allow students to see themselves more fully while simultaneously defining their value. By defining the roles of feedback and evaluation from the perspective of the architectonic self, these pedagogical practices can exist in a dialogical relationship that promotes rather than denies students' freedoms to determine their own value. Architectonically, feedback serves as the excess of seeing. Its sole purpose is to position others outside themselves, so that they may freely respond. Evaluation functions as the non-alibi, the unique response from others that conveys new meanings and value about themselves. Conversely, students must also be free to provide feedback devoid of evaluation to their teachers, so that the teachers may construct new meanings for themselves. Both sides of the dialogic relationship are necessary so that both participants may learn about each other (Bakhtin, 1986).

In this way, students' rights to freedoms are limited only by the presence of the architectonic self and the relationship outsideness that emanates from it. Focusing on dichotomous views of students' freedoms in relation to the other limits the opportunities for teachers and students to engage in dialogic relationships. As a result, students' educational freedoms suffer. By structuring educational practices that exemplify dialogical understandings of relationships (as exemplified through the relationship of feedback to evaluation), both students and teachers can work toward maximizing all participants' rights to educational freedom.

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