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A dialogic and democratic journey throughout editing a (very) special journal issue

Eliane Fernandes Azzari
Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Brazil

Abstract
This introductory article to the special issue "Dialogic pedagogy and democratic education" aims to reflect upon the process of putting this special issue together and to pinpoint some of the most relevant aspects of the articles collected within the issue. Therefore, reverberating one of the editors' perspectives, not only is this paper meant to introduce the DPJ readers to the texts compiled in the volume, as well as it is dedicated to giving you, dear reader, a glimpse of the journey taken by the editors and authors. It also tries and situates the issue in its social and historic chronotope to justify the ever-so-present appeal to reinforce, advocate and share theoretical discussions as well as practical accounts which focus on dialogic and democratic educational efforts – both distant and more recent events – that took place in different contexts, and different parts in the world. It's claimed that the several accounts and discussions highlighted in the papers in this special issue provide DPJ readers with both hints and strong, factual proposals which might foster new ideas and further actions by those who want to consider dialogic/democratic education either as an end or/and as an act of/for social transformation.

Keywords: *Dialogic pedagogy, Democracy, Dialogism, Heteroglossia, Social transformation.*

Eliane Fernandes Azzari has a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics (language and education). She is a full professor and researcher at the Postgraduate Program in Languages, Media, and Art at the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Brazil.

Opening words

As I embrace the task of writing an introductory paper to our special issue, I feel compelled to warn the DPJ readers that I do not mean to render a stereotypical editorial text *per se*. Instead, my editorial is meant to be a particular version that aims to portray a dialogued "reading" of the whole process of coediting this issue with my dear colleague, Ana Marjanovic-Shane, both a co-editor and an author of several articles in this issue[1].

The first steps towards preparing a special issue on Dialogic pedagogy and Democratic education were taken late in 2018, and the first proposals for developing papers started coming in February 2019. It has been a four-year-long journey throughout a bumpy path. Some proposals had to be turned down along the way, and accepted manuscripts were often (re)written and revised several times. Nonetheless, the journey was filled with many honest discussions and rewarding exchanges, which resulted in meaningful

[1] I want to express my gratitude to Ana who has been a great colleague, a mentor of sorts, and a good sport who put up with the difficult times I faced in the past three years. Without her partnership, experience, and patience, this paper wouldn't have come to terms.

learning for all of us who took part in it. A chronotopic experience of sorts in which dialogic relations unbridled genuine meaning-making processes.

Since the very beginning of 2019, Ana and I have tried to pragmatically work through the ins and outs of organizing this issue. Indeed, it has been a conjoint effort to keep the whole process as democratic as the education we advocate.

From the initial readings of the proposed papers to the blind peer-review stage – and the consequent feedback it was designated to provide the contributing authors with – Ana and I have made extra efforts to give writers plenty of opportunities to revise and rewrite their manuscripts by keeping up a truthful and constant interlocution with authors and reviewers. As editors who were directly responsible for leading those stages, Ana and I have made a conscious decision to favor quality in lieu of quantity, which has (fortunately) resulted in the compilation we are finally ready to present you with. Accordingly, I'd like to register Ana Marjanovic-Shane's words:

> <<Ana, 2022-12-03: For me, this was both an authorial decision and an editorial decision. In other words, I was looking to make my own manuscripts more critical and more grounded, standing up to my peers' real and potential critical comments and taking the reviews as serious challenges to be clearer, more precise, and base my views on carefully considered evidence.>>

During such processes, we opted to put a premium on the relevance and possible contributions of each paper submitted to this call. For starters, we took into consideration each submission which provided us with a proposal that was conducive to good discussions, as we offered the authors an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with the editors and the reviewers. Therefore, it took us a bit longer to reach the point where each manuscript was finally prepared to be edited, as the contributing authors were given plenty of time (within a reasonable frame) to rework their papers according to each insightful feedback they received from our dedicated reviewers. In some cases, it took more than two review rounds for papers to be fully revised and finally considered ready.

On a personal level, I must confess that getting involved with the whole editing process of this issue was a rewarding experience and that I am truly grateful I could be a part of it. I honestly believe that one must "do as they preach," so it does make much sense to me that we carried on a democratic reviewing and editing process to publish an issue that has democracy at the core of the discussions we want to incite.

On that note, I'm confident that, over the several years I've been a part of the DPJ reviewing and editing team, I've felt really blessed to share professional experiences with reputable scholars from different parts of the world who truly engage in a decent, dialogically driven way of working in the Academy. For those who have been in the academic career route for a while, it is no secret that it might be a cruel world and that getting your paper published by a serious non-profitable journal can be a rough task. My experience as a volunteer member of the DPJ's team has proved to me that, in fact, it is possible for us scholars to build up a new kind of academy where excellent work, high-level scientific research, collegiality, and empathy can coexist. All it takes is for us to try and keep genuine dialogue amongst the participants involved in it, while we also bear in mind that reviewers and editors are not gods who are sat on a throne at the Olympus from which they produce their reviews.

Having said that, I wish to express how grateful Ana and I are for those who bore with us during such a long journey; the esteemed authors who contributed with their articles to this volume, as well as the kind colleagues, members of the DPJ, who dedicated their time to present us all with thoughtful, well-informed, and insightful reviews. My sincere gratitude to all of them who kept their faith in our editing ways. Indeed, after the whole prospecting, selecting, assembling, and deeply reviewing processes we've driven,

I can affirm that we were able to build a trust circle permeated by polite and genuinely respectful collaborative work with results we are finally glad to share with all the DPJ community.

In the following paragraphs, I present my attempt at situating this special volume in (some of) its sociocultural and historical contexts.

Situating the Special issue in contemporary sociocultural and historical contexts

As a Brazilian educator and scholar editing this issue, I could not exempt myself from mentioning Paulo Freire's contributions to the makings of democratic education, one he proposed as central to building up social transformation, critically oriented citizenship, agency, and autonomy. In fact, as he so well put it many decades ago, our struggles for the democratization (of both society and education) might rest on a sort of shared "democratic inexperience" (Freire, 1998b, pp. 29-30). I think such inexperience has been sustained as a dark product of the (neo)capitalist world, in which schools (as many other social institutions and practices) have somehow hindered students' creativity and agency. From my point of view, democratic and dialogic approaches to education hold a key role in moving society from such a lack of experience, that is, in providing kids with opportunities to "become" in the world. Correspondingly, in an interview with Ana Marjanovic-Shane, presented in "Freedom, dialogue, and education in a democratic school" (this issue), Jim Rietmulder comments on his experience with democratic education and affirms that "it's (…) also healthy for kids to have plenty of experience out in the world. And the school's job, as we saw it then and still do now, is to help with that latter piece, giving kids experience being apart from home and family" (Rietmulder & Marjanovic-Shane, 2023, p. A24)

Bearing those ideas in mind, I deem it crucial to establish the sociocultural standpoint I speak from. On the verge of coming to the last legs of the year 2022, I must acknowledge that attempts at instilling democratic education are still few and sparse in my country, which then again might reinforce Freire's claims of our democratic inexperience. The thing is, although I've been teaching since 1986, working with the ins and outs of democratic education is a first for me. As a matter of fact, back in the late 80s, when I started working in a school, Brazil was riding the last years of a military dictatorship.

I remember holding the first conversation about democratic education with my colleague Ana Marjanovic-Shane in 2019. She was drawing a scholarship proposal and searching for democratic schools around the world to visit. I told her, "Ana, I'd love to have you over here, but unfortunately, democratic education is not really 'on point' nowadays in my country." Later in 2022, Ana kindly reminded me that

> <<Ana, 2022-12-03: (…) democratic schooling is also rare in the rest of the world. Although there are democratic schools in many countries, their numbers are so small that they are practically unknown not only to the public in general but to most educators, too.>>

After my experience editing this issue, I feel I must agree with Ana's words. However, no matter how global the problem is, I am still more comfortable tackling it by taking into consideration my own local context. What I mean is that although a lack of democratic educational programs is a global fact, I can better speak about it from my local point of view. Having said that, let me state my point: how can one advocate (truly) democratic education in a country where the very concept of "democracy" still seems to be a blur?

To build my case, I'm going to refer to recent developments following the presidential elections in Brazil. As I see it, they are proof that, as a society, we might really be toddlers who still have a long way to learn what living in a democracy entail. The "developments" I'm referring to concern a group of Brazilians, who are usually self-addressed as "patriots and good citizens," that have played the lead in feeble acts

against the election results. Such acts are stunted attempts to put our democracy at risk. They are a group of supporters of the far-right candidate who recently lost the election for a second run at the presidential office. Those self-proclaimed "patriots" started riots in which they stood in front of military bases in the main capital cities all over the country, holding posters in which they called for "military intervention" in the name of defending "democracy and freedom." Without any legal or fair complaints concerning the election results whatsoever, they built up a ploy that has also been fed by them on social media. They use their personal profiles to post their unacceptance of a legitimate and notarized election result marking their position by simultaneously using the hashtags: "*intervenção"* ([military] intervention), "*democracia*" (democracy), "*pela liberdade*" (in the name of freedom) and "*todo o poder emana do povo*" (all power comes from the people).

I believe that one does not need to be a scholar who has been dealing with language matters for decades to conclude that, besides the ultraconservative and far-right discourses underlining the aforementioned utterances, the words categorized by such hashtags blur the difference between "military intervention" and "freedom and people's power," in the name of "democracy." From my point of view, it materializes a clear paradoxical understanding of what democracy (and thus, a democratic society) might mean[2] –especially if we take into consideration that getting direct elections for presidency was a huge democratic step taken by our society after years of military governance. It's also possible to denote such acts in Brazil as (political) copycats of the aftermaths of the last presidential elections in the United States of America, in 2020.

All in all, in the last decade or so, a worldwide spread of far-right ideas has weakened democracy in educational contexts in several countries, thus hindering attempts at democratic education. Unfortunately, it has had some of its nefarious effects bestowed upon Brazil as well, where the conservative turn was (sadly) noted for detrimental choices in governmental decisions that have severely affected education in general – and opportunities for democratic and dialogic education by default. Let me try and explain. Firstly, it's important to notice that the liberal ideology underpinning far-right economic decisions that led to reduced investments (or a lack thereof) in Brazilian education in the past four years has been sustained by the idea that public schools should become private matters.

One of the nefarious results of some of the many destructive federal governments' (in)decisions taken in terms of budgeting education, for instance, left kids with little or no food supply for the preparation of meals (which were meant to be distributed during school hours), in several public schools around the country. Sadly enough, many of those students live in extremely poor social contexts. Thus, they're used to counting on school meals as their daily nutritional source. Dialogically and democratically speaking, those kids who were affected by such actions have been pried from what Jim Rietmulder (in this issue), established as a role of schools: to have a "healthy experience out in the world." Conversely, a hungry kid at school would hardly ever be assigned the right to have access to "the democratic education paradigm," as Eugene Matusov defines it in the manuscript "Democracy, dialogism, therapy, progressivism, anarchism, and other values in Martin Duberman's innovative pedagogy" (this issue). According to Matusov, democratic education "requires an educator's full faith that their students are the final authority for and authorial agency of their own education and life" (Matusov, 2023a, p. A57) Quite a hard task to achieve with empty bellies, right?

To add injury to insult, amidst the consequences of the far-right political turn, Brazilian educators have been subjected to a bizarre undertaking: the wide (and wild) spread of retrograde ideas advocated by ultraconservative groups that tag schools/universities as places where students are submitted to

[2] To learn more about the political ploys that underlie current manifestations against the legitimate presidential election results in Brazil, you might want to check out the following news articles: https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/protesters-shut-brazil-highways-police-1.6638703, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-63739057.

"ideological brainwashing," and that deem teachers as "lazy" and "improper leftists." Sadly, in the early days of 2019, the powers-to-be did use (digital) media broadcasts to instigate learners to "videorecord" any teacher's attempts at "indoctrination"[3] if they'd felt submitted to it. From my point of view, it certainly poses a hard challenge for democratic education practitioners to work with: the paradox of dealing with such ultraconservative notions that stimulate contemporary versions of witch hunts in schools, while also advocating an education that "requires an educator's full faith that their students are the final authority for and the authorial agency of their own education and life," as Matusov states. The bottom question might be how to deal/break with whatever local political discourses are underpinning narratives in social ecologies when voicing for or against certain pedagogies.

Driving from Allan Luke's proposals about narratives and the educational policy (Luke, 2019, p. 96), I find it important to discuss the matter because "as narratives, all policies state or imply specific problems, anomalies or challenges." In the face of the aforementioned events, as a Higher education professor (acting in both undergraduate and graduate programs during such a daring period) myself, I must say that I felt highly insecure in dealing with the challenge of keeping up a critical and dialogic pedagogy approach, whilst being scared of the potential threat posed by each students' mobile phones and their cameras, and the flimsy possibility of being "exposed" by something I might have said in my lessons – which could have been taken as "indoctrination" (whatever ultraconservative citizens might mean by it).

In such a turmoil, while Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy proposals are still highly appraised and referred to by several reputable academic researchers all over the world, in Brazil, his work and ideas have been counterposed, "canceled," negated, and disregarded in the last four years by supporters of a movement entitled "*escola sem partido*" – usually translated as "nonpartisan schools" (see Knijnik, 2021). Roughly speaking, it's a conservative movement supported by people who are driven by the concept of a "neutral" type of education – as if language, discourse (and, therefore, any sociocultural artifacts and events) could ever be non-ideological. As I see it, such a highly unrealistic and idealized way of portraying educational practices deeply contradicts the inherited plural and diverse nature of languages and cultures.

Grounded on Bakhtinian discussions, I assume that we are all social subjects who – whether we are aware of it or not – share a consciousness of our own class and of our social location that permeate our self-consciousness. Therefore, instead of undertaking normalizing, homogenized, and parameterized epistemologies like the one advertised by the followers of nonpartisan schools, I believe that democratic education allows students to operate under premises that provide them with plenty of opportunities to become aware of what Bakhtin called "heteroglossia" – i.e., the existence of the plurality of views, the plurality of topics, the plurality of values and aims – given that,

> (…) oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia [pluralism], surface manifestations of those elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with a more fundamental speech diversity (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 326).

From my point of view, the origins of a successful democracy lie in how ready (a certain) society is to face and deal with diversity and plurality, as well as to allow citizens to exercise their agency. As I mentioned before, far from being a "walk in the park," adopting such a perspective on education demands a lot from all the actors involved in it. For instance, a student who's being brought up under the wings of an ultraconservative family might find it hard to engage in "discursive interactions" (Bakhtin, 1986) with

[3] To know more about, you might want to check the articles available from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/03/brazil-schools-teachers-indoctrination-jair-bolsonaro.

someone who comes from a progressive upbringing and vice-versa. In the end, it all comes down to how willing the teachers are to deal with such challenges in dialogue within school boundaries. All in all, I believe that the key to the implementation of heteroglossia-friendly schooling might rest in the idea that we should not merely try to standardize and homogenize educational practices. Much on the contrary, it is important to prioritize local classroom ecologies as well as to vouch for educational processes in which "(…) comparison, repetition, observation, indomitable doubt, and curiosity [are] not easily satisfied," i.e., ones that promote "autonomy" – in the critical sense it was proposed by (Freire, 1998a, p. 32).

When confronted by the self-other interactions, and when one truly engages in dialogue (i.e., openness to difference), alterity is experienced. Here, I address alterity from a Bakhtinian perspective, considering Bakhtin and his Circle's ideas about "exotopy" as a much-needed exercise from crossing cultural boundaries that has the potential to expand teachers', learners,' and parents' views by leading them to assume an "extra-position" (Bakhtin, 1986). Alterity stems from the encounter of/with a myriad of different opinions and ideas – which does not mean those involved in it have necessarily to change their minds and agree with the other as a result of dialogue (in or outside school limits). Otherwise, instead of letting us go into the deep of plurality, the whole purpose of dialogue would be reduced to some sort of argumentation practice destined to "convince" people, turn heads, and homogenize social contexts from a certain dominant point of view.

Therefore, dialogue is essentially an exercise in which we deal with different, plural, ambiguous perspectives, and – provided that no illegal, personal or collective ill-meaning/harmful acts result from it – we do not need to "agree to disagree," but we can just disagree and live (healthily) with it. I trust that it is by assuming positions in discursive interactions that students, teachers, and any other actors involved in education might engage in real dialogue – given that each part engrossed in it respects the right of other people to do so – so that we are moved to exercise exotopy, i.e., looking at ourselves from the eyes of the others, from a place that, while only settled in our own shoes, we will otherwise never be able to occupy. Then, it is all intrinsically related to (living in) heteroglossia.

Consequently, alterity surfaces when one acknowledges that there are several (diverse and not always congruent) ways of making meaning(s) out of what it is "to be" and "to be located" in the world. Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 414) pinpoints the "languages of heteroglossia" to compare them to "mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its way a piece, a tiny corner of the world." Resembling a mosaic rather than a full reflected picture, each part is necessary as

> They force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language mirror (Bakhtin, 1991, pp. 414-415).

Therefore, not only do we need to acknowledge heteroglossia in educational environments but also, we must fight for our rights to live (in) it. But why is it a core notion? Drawing from Bakhtin's assumptions towards dialogic relations (1999), Azzari, Amarante, and Andrade (2020) affirm that subjects "become" when they engage in sociocultural practices, thus generating "acts" in which they answer to the word of others. In those instances, dialogic relations "[...] must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become the positions of various subjects expressed in discourse [...]" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 183). This is a fundamental idea deeply acknowledged in dialogic and democratic approaches to education that is more extensively discussed in the other manuscripts in this special issue (e.g., see Kullenberg & Marjanovic-Shane, 2023; Rietmulder & Marjanovic-Shane, 2023).

A dialogued and dialogic pedagogy might also shed light on educational contexts permeated by violence/violent acts, as Armando Marino discusses in "Overcoming Violence through a Democratic and Dialogical Process" (2023, this issue). Marino reports his experience with dialogic and democratic education as a powerful means to deal with group relations in a project conducted with a non-governmental organization that meant to "(…) transform the power and individualistic domination of the NGO's teachers, coordinators or founders into shared power relationships established through democratic and dialogical processes" (Marino Filho, 2023, p. A261). However, in his paper, Marino offers an important critical analysis of his experience. He affirms that "to work with a dialectical and dialogical process is not to inhabit a world of security, certainty, and stability" (Marino Filho, 2023, p. A282). Adding to the idea of the importance of experiencing otherness, Marino acknowledges that transformations rarely occur as planned and that rather than being connected to the type of knowledge the teachers intend to guide students through, it "(…) happens because values emanate from personally constituted and changeable conditions. Thus, consciousness arises through the transformation of one's own identity and otherness since people do not only get to know themselves but also get to re-know each other" (Marino Filho, 2023, p. A282).

However, and undoubtfully, it's also a huge challenge for the teachers inclined to deal with it. In "Promoting a culture of democratic dialogic education in a conventional university: Teacher as a benevolent dictator," (Matusov, 2023b, this issue) poses the "problem of a teacher as a benevolent dictator in democratic dialogic education." The scholar draws his idea from his own shot at running democratic classes in which he fostered students' engagement in decision-making processes about their own education. One important conclusion Matusov draws from his experience is that students who often come from authoritarian, conventional education struggle with concepts such as "democracy," "dialogue," and "self-education." As the scholar affirms, it's also a matter of being "culturally unfamiliar" with a less centralized and "defensive culture."

Therefore, dialogue is essential for education. As Freire states, it is a "human phenomenon" of which "the *word*" is the essence (Freire, 2005, pp. 87-88). It is also the way in which we transform the world because "to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it." To perform such change, educators, students, families, and the government need to take sides (to acknowledge their "party"), i.e., to become aware of their own responsibility and answerability that are inherent in each utterance in every single "act" in which we "become" in the world (Bakhtin, 1993). Praxis oriented by a dialogic pedagogy and dedicated to democratic education can promote safe and healthy environments for those "acts" to happen within educational contexts.

Accordingly, dialogue is also portrayed as a central construct in the discussion presented by Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg & Gradovski in their paper "Scandinavian experiments in democratic education" (Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Gradovski, 2023, this issue). The manuscript is the first in a series of four[4] destined to explore the "first democratic schools founded by teenage students in Norway and Sweden" and is dedicated to expanding the discussion about the "complex between democracy in education and educational dialogism." The authors focus on "ethical-ontological dialogues" to explore how the students evaluated "their relationships with the world, with others, and their selves." After facing such a challenge, the authors conclude that there was a clash between collective and individual rights concerning a democratic (equal rights) decision-making process and the assurance of students' personal academic rights. According to the researchers, teachers' and students' academic ownerships were at stake, and several issues concerning it were raised by assuring "ethical-ontological dialogues," i.e., "dialogue that

[4] See also the other three papers by Ana Marjanovic-Shane in the series: "A soul-searching assembling – a vignette," "Four person-ideas in a soul-searching internally persuasive discourse" and "A paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: a conceptual analysis of a soul-searching assembly meeting," this issue.

critically and creatively deliberates and deconstructs topics of its focus" (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2023, p. A99, this issue).

Finally, I'd like to emphasize that, as I already mentioned before, dealing with a dialogic and democratic education is neither easy nor simple. As Matusov (previously mentioned in this paper) addresses it, there are cultural aspects at stake, such as academic and educational inherited cultures that might foster a sense of unfamiliarity with the concepts of dialogue and democracy to students participating in educational processes dedicated to promoting their ownership of their own education. Accordingly, in "From a school rebellion to a rebel school – its people and their initial struggles with democracy in education," Mosse Jørgensen (Jørgensen, 2023, translated, this issue) asserts that "freedom is a lonely state of mind" and that when first involved in democratic education students had "to find their own way from an imposed discipline where others decided everything to self-discipline that is born in interpersonal relations and communication" (Jørgensen, 2023, p. A136) Consequently, it's clear that dialogue, living in heteroglossia, and otherness are key elements for a dialogic and democratic education.

Conclusions

In the current paper, I've tried to weave some of the main concepts, ideas, and constructs that permeate the discussions presented in the other eleven manuscripts collected in this volume. The papers gathered in this special issue offer theoretic insights and highlights of events from both a distant and a more recent past in which subjects engage in "acts" concerning dialogic pedagogy and/or democratic education, as I've briefly mentioned here.

First and foremost, I made a point to say that I was not writing this introduction to merely inform you about the main topics focused on each paper of this issue, as it would usually be done, although I've (hopefully) managed to include some teasers. Anyway, I'd like to advise you to keep an eye (and your mind) open for the several opportunities in which you, as a reader, might be incited by the different authors to reflect upon your own experiences – especially when you read about the educational practices that they describe as their own and by the ways in which they reported that they engaged (or not) in dialogue with their own students.

As editors, Ana and I have organized this issue by establishing what we thought would be a solid reading sequence for our readers to follow, so I'd like to invite you to give it a try. The rationale for organizing the sequence in our Special Issue was based on starting with in-depth descriptions and interpretations of democratic education, then moving toward examining various issues and tensions in establishing a public democratic school in an educational system that otherwise promotes conventional authoritarian education, and finally dealing with particular issues of ethical, ontological relationships in democracy and dialogue. Therefore, we've devised the following reading flow. After going through this foreword, the insightful interview Jim Rietmulder gave to Ana about his experiences with opportunities for dialogic pedagogy in a democratic school. Then, you might want to read Matusov's discussion about Duberman's innovative pedagogy. After that, we believe it could be a good idea to get through the discussion about "Scandinavian experiments in democratic education." Moving on, you might want to dedicate some time to reading the translation of Jørgensen's "From a school rebellion to a rebel school – its people and their initial struggles with democracy in education." Then, you might read Tina Kullenberg's take on democratic education and dialogic pedagogy. After that, we recommend you get comfortable and embark on a trip down memory lane in a sequence of three papers written by Ana Marjanovic-Shane concerning a soul-searching assembly that ends up with a conceptual analysis of the assembly meeting. In his paper on the teacher as a benevolent dictator in democratic education, Matusov returns to the tensions between the cultures of autocratic and democratic education in the relationships between the teacher and the students in higher education. Next,

you should guarantee some time to check Armando Marino's reflective account of his experience dealing with dialogic pedagogy in a violent context. Last but certainly not least, make sure you read Eugene Matusov's concluding chapter, which deals with deeper analytic insights about the relationships between dialogic pedagogy and democratic education.

Please note that although I've just mapped a (possible) reading route for you, based on Ana's and my editorial point of view, you could obviously simply embark on a journey of your own. Having said that, I've opted to keep this introductory paper as spoiler-free as possible, so whatever way you choose to read the manuscripts gathered in this issue, I sincerely hope you enjoy it!

All in all, you are about to be touched by the experiences driven by selected accounts from educational experiences pinpointed and analyzed by those scholars. They recall, describe, and examine events and discourses in which they participated. They write from different educational contexts in South America, North America, and Western Europe as well. Their reports span periods from the late 1960s to the 2020s, which provides a valuable historical dimension to their topics.

The way I see it, the ideas assembled in this special issue are potentially strong enough to move us ahead in the direction of the makings of democratic education. Amidst other aspects peculiar to such an educational perspective, I would like to think that it might help us promote social justice and beyond. As I see it

> For many of us, a commitment to social justice has meant that education is not just about the equalization of opportunity in classical liberal social theory, about a hypothetical freedom to compete for unequal outcomes and differential successes, but potentially about the opening up of access to valued forms of cultural practice and knowledge to students from communities that historically had been excluded from capital, status and power (Luke, 2019, p. 103).

I also tend to agree with Luke (2019, p. 50) Luke that "(…) the politics of representation and interpretation are complex and local, and classrooms and living rooms are the very sites where contestation and the kind of play that Bakhtinians make great stock of are most visibly at work. However, having engaged in a dialogue with Ana about it, she posed a different perspective I believe you might want to consider.

> <<Ana, 2022-12-23: I tend to think that all alternative views and perspectives should have a right to be represented and examined in true dialogues, even those with which we deeply disagree. That would include the views and perspectives on what "social justice" can mean. In that sense, I think that true dialogue can't "promote" or "stand for," nor "stand against" any predetermined value, including "social justice." This is a specifically touchy topic for many people. Still, according to Isaiah Berlin (Berlin, 2006), true freedom also means appreciation of the pluralism of the values and its inevitable implication that there will always exist controversial and conflicting values. For instance, defining "social justice" in terms of "equalizing" and "equality" may be in contradiction to the acknowledgment of the "uniqueness" of every person and their individual rights to differ.
> This is especially important in education. However, although we can disagree politically and ideologically to the point of wanting to "shut" disagreeable others, for a true dialogue, we have to accept the right of the disagreeable points of view to exist and be taken into consideration. In other words, there should be no taboo for dialogue. What do you think?>>

I think that the experiences recalled in/by each manuscript in this issue remain singular and unique acts (Bakhtin, 1999). However, I'm also certain that, by reading those narratives, we are led to an exotopic drill of sorts as they urge us, the interlocutors, to reexamine our own contextual realities while we take part in the construction of a chain of past and future utterances (Bakhtin, 1991).

Finally, with the best wishes for a joyful ride, I'm delighted to leave you with this rich selection of papers, with hopes that they might be as rewarding for you to read as it was for Ana and me to put them together.

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