

# Monologism versus Dialogism: A Bakhtinian Approach to Teaching

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## Abstract

Dialogic education is a teaching method which is in stark contrast with monologic teaching methods. Nowadays, the educational systems all around the world characterize monologic education in which the ideas and voices of the teachers are the first and last ones uttered in the classrooms, textbooks are aimed so that students learn how to speak and write “correctly” and the time extent of the class is so short that teachers are struggling to cover all the “important” points mandated in the textbooks and by educational authorities. In contrast in dialogic education, the teacher shares his or her authority with the students; the voices of the students are heard and their opinions are valuable. In a dialogic class, the students are divided into groups to practice “exploratory talk” and “think reasonably”. The aim in discussing different opinions is just that; discussing different opinions not winning or losing. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the process; he or she is not a judge or referee, he or she is simply a guide. A dialogic environment is like a carnival; to borrow from Bakhtin. There are no omnipresent powers. The current study shows that different components of Bakhtin’s dialogism concept including heteroglossia, carnival, and polyphony and so on can be a very good starting point for a modern and effective theoretical framework for learning and teaching processes.

**Keywords:** Bakhtin. Monologism, Dialogism, Heteroglossia, Carnival, Polyphony.

## Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin was born on November 16, 1985

in a little town called Orel in the southern parts of Moscow. His father was a bank manager. He studied German and Russian languages at home. In 1913, Bakhtin entered the University of Odessa and a year later transferred to St. Petersburg University. In the latter university, he got involved in literary discussion with other intellectuals. So these debates led him to think through some of the literary complications for himself including ethical responsibilities, art, and the existence of other people.

According to Holquist:

“Mikhail Bakhtin made important contributions to several different areas of thought, each with its own history, its own language, and its own shared assumptions. As a result, literary scholars have perceived him as doing one sort of thing, linguists another, and anthropologists yet another. We lack a comprehensive term that is able to encompass Bakhtin’s activity in all its variety, a shortcoming he himself remarked when as an old man he sought to bring together the various strands of his life’s work.” (Holquist, 2002 p.13)

At that time he wrote:

“Our analysis must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary or any other particular kind of analysis....On the other hand, a positive feature of our study is this: [it moves] in spheres that are liminal, i.e., on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersection.” (Holquist et al, 1990 p.281)

Yuksel in a research entitled “A Bakhtinian Understanding of Social Constructivism in Language Teaching” discusses the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue and monologue in teaching. He believes that classroom activities can be studied based on the

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Bakhtinian concepts such as dialogue and monologue.

Broeckeman (2004) in “Bakhtin speaking: A Dialogic Approach to Teaching” argues that the dialogic process of teaching is basically a mutual communication between the students and the teacher. He comes to the conclusion that it should be considered in the future because it can have a remarkable impact on student’s learning.

Marchenkova (2005) in her study entitled “Bakhtinian Theory and Second Language Learning” believes that Bakhtin’s theory can change the concept of second language research and foreign language learning. In this research, she points to the universal equality of participants in the dialogue and addresses the problem of language and culture in their context. She argues that dialogue is one of the important criteria in second and foreign language teaching in the classroom. In this study she particularly explains the relation present between Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue and the concept of SLA with an emphasis on three main areas: language, culture, and identity.

Hennessey et.al (2006) in their study “Developing an Effective Classroom Dialogue” believe that “dialogic teaching is used in three cases: (a) to engage students in articulating, (b) to involve teachers in open ending questioning, and (c) to offer opportunities for learners to become experts”

Alexander (2005) in “Culture, Dialogue and Learning” points out that dialogic teaching in the classroom is administered both by teachers and the students.

Sullivan et.al (2009) in their study entitled “Bakhtin’s Scrapes and Carnavalesque in Education”, investigate the effect of Bakhtin’s literary work on education in order to explore the concept of carnival. They discuss Bakhtin’s dialogue as an agent that combines authority and carnival together in education and consider some tensions of authority and carnival for education.

In a study done by Steadman (2006) entitled “Using Classroom Assessment to Change both Teaching and Learning”, it is pointed out that an active dialogic classroom provides strategies for students’ comprehension and it engages students in an active mental process.

Tell et al (1998) in their research, “Developing Dialogic Communication and Technology” believe that the concept of dialogue has different meanings and each philosopher has a different interpretation

of it, but in this study the concepts of dialogue and dialogism are related to communication culture and considered as inherently cultural. They believe that implicitness and explicitness are important in the construction of dialogism. In this study, Tell et al argue that dialogue can lead to the creation of new infrastructures for learning and teaching, as dialogue can be an alternative approach to produce action among collectives. They divide dialogue into three parts:

1. Dialogue as the basis of human communication.
2. Dialogue as a main concept in pedagogy.
3. Dialogue as indivisible from thinking.

In a study by Wells et al (2006) entitled “Dialogue in the Classroom”, the writers believe that language has a key role in classroom as a tool for system communication. It is used to develop the student’s skills. They point out that dialogue concentrates on meaning formation and teachers will witness a more fruitful class if they succeed in creating a dialogic environment in the classroom.

In an article entitled “The Theory of Verbal Communication in the Works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Vygotsky” Akhutina compares and contrasts Bakhtin and Vygotsky. He asserts that “unlike Bakhtin, Vygotsky elaborates on the functional structure of the transition to words as well as the role of inner speech in this transition” (Akhutina, 2003 p. 8).

Waghmare (2011) in his article “Mikhail Bakhtin’s Dialogism and Intertextuality”, investigates Bakhtinian literary works in an attempt to define dialogue and some of Bakhtinian’s other concepts such as heteroglossia and polyphony in relation to intertextuality.

## Research Question

This study is an attempt to answer questions concerning dialogism and teaching which include the following:

- 1- Is Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism applicable to teaching? How?
- 2- How does dialogism bear upon the process of teaching in general, and teaching language in particular and how can the process of teaching benefit from Bakhtin’s concepts?
- 3- How can teaching challenge or support and enrich the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism?
- 4- Can Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism be used as a tool in teaching and learning?

## Monologism

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In the Problems of Dostoevsky Bakhtin states that “a monologically understood world is an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness” (Hays, 2005 p.9).

The dictionary meaning of monology is a single voice. According to Hays “monologic discourse is a discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation” (Hays, 2005p.7). According to Mikhail Bakhtin, monologism indicates turning off the process of dialogue as well as its potentials. For Bakhtin, and his followers, Monologism emerges wherever and whenever universal truth statements, called truth-istina, do not allow any other sort of truth, as truth-pravada, to appear. Bakhtin links this situation to the time of Renaissance Europe with its great focus on a view of aesthetics as beauty and truth as opposed to the carnivalesque state of medieval society. Bakhtin (influenced by Rabelais) argues that in this medieval era truth was put off and even condemned by popular culture when they used satiric dialogue characterized by laughter, parody and satire (Bakhtin, 1968 p.68).

Bakhtin was very much aware of the adverse consequences of Monologism because he was living in Stalinist Russia in which he saw that freedom was at a loss and whatever the government said was construed as pure truth and nobody could say anything against it. His solution for this perilous situation was to cherish the great characteristics of dialogue and dialogism since it had the capability for allowing different people to speak their minds and get out of the box in which they were trapped. We now know this because he practiced this kind of approach with his secret group, called Bakhtin Circle (Brandist, 2002:56). This in turn shows us that he believed that despite all the constraints, people would always find a way to express their individual frames of thoughts.

A monologic approach is probably the dominant approach in modern-looking educational situations which promote a shared and universal meaning and ignore the differences that may be present among distinct individuals. While Matusov (2009) argues that teaching can never be purely monologic because there is always another perspective present in a classroom, but the attention which governments give to education is an evident indication of monologism.

Based on the belief that monologism can lead to the demise of dialogue and freedom, Bakhtin

proposes a different approach for solving this issue, namely dialogism.

## Dialogism

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In language teaching, according to the definition of dialogue in Longman Dictionary of Language teaching and Applied Linguistic, dialogue is defined as:

“A model of conversation, used to practice speaking and to provide examples of language usage. Dialogues are often specially written to practice language items, contain simplified grammar and vocabulary, and so may be rather different from real life conversation”.

(Richards and Schmidt, 2002 p.167)

Bakhtin proposes different distinct meanings for dialogism, according to him “any utterance, whether spoken or written, that people use in communication with each other is internally dialogic” (Bakhtin, 1986 as cited in Marchenkova, 2005 p.72). He also mentions that dialogue is a kind of speech which leads to the competition of voices.

He mentions that dialogue is:

“The nature of human life itself, in dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body “(Bakhtin, 1984 p.293).

We can say that, the dialogue intended by Bakhtin is formally a kind of discourse as well as a model of consciousness which is focused on communication and based in language learning.

Bakhtin also says that:

“Dialogism continues towards an answer. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answers direction” (Bakhtin, 1935 p.280)

In dialogism there is always room for arguing since questions show everybody’s point of view rather than the universal truth. According to Bakhtin every human being likes to resist, confront and make personal meaning out of social interactions. So Bakhtin emphasizes the individual personality inside every cultural group instead of searching for unanimous agreement.

## Heteroglossia

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Bakhtin thought of heteroglossia as a combination of world views forged through language which create multilateral unity using different expressions of

thought. The writer (author), the readers (audience) and the stakeholders (characters) create a reality (a novel) together.

James P. Zappen (2006) noted that Bakhtin distinguished monoglossia from heteroglossia by distinguished to “Socratic dialogue from Platonic monologue—the early and middle from the late Platonic dialogues—and (with obvious hostility) from the monologic single-voicedness of the rhetorical tradition” (Zappen, 2006 as quoted in Moran and Baillif: 7-20), also Bakhtin stated that language in any point of history is “heteroglot representing the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions of both present and past...” (Zappen, 2006 as quoted in Moran and Baillif: 7-20).

Bakhtin believed that language possesses multiple layers and he called this phenomenon heteroglossia. These layers include not only social dialects, jargons, turns of phrase characteristic of the various professions, industries, commerce, of passing fashions, etc.

Language is not neutral in any way; it is actually full of the intentions put forward by other people during different time periods. We can see this fact easily through understanding that each word in any language has got a full history of different contexts in which it was made. Bakhtin’s beliefs extend to a point that he has confidence that words are living entities which carry opinions, beliefs, emotions and intentions of other people. All kinds of speech are dialogic and this can be fully seen in novels, in particular the modern novel.

## Polyphony

Polyphony’s dictionary meaning is multiple voices but here it also refers to the combined quality of an individual expression of language. In other words, when someone speaks or utters a statement, there are always traces of other voices in it. This in turn leads to a dialogic relationship between these voices. For instance, when a person quotes a sentence from someone else the dialogue between these two voices happens. We change a person’s speech into sentences appropriate enough to be uttered by us and by doing this we will associate ourselves with the community or ideology of that person. These are obvious examples but Bakhtin goes further by saying that all words or forms of speech possess a state of polyphony:

“Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words

and forms are populated by intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 293)

Again for Bakhtin these different classes of voices are more obvious in novels. He believes that the novel form allows the author to put different voices inside other voices (e.g., character speech within narrator speech, narrator speech within authorial speech, etc.), and thereby he or she creates a dialogue between these different voices.

Hence the concept of polyphony proves to be a universal state and if we believe what Bakhtin says, every act of speech includes polyphony the implication of this fact for educational situations is very grave. Every word or utterance inherently contains polyphony and this should be exploited by the educational system to promote communication among students as well as interaction between the teacher and his or her students.

## Carnival

Bakhtin’s idea of dialogue is present in medieval carnivals. These were unusual in the sense that they defied the usual process of life in the community. In these carnivals the concept of social and political status was changed. The power gap between different classes of people was ignored:

“Authority is decrowned, we become aware of the laughing side of things, apart from fear, and there is a profound and collective engagement with alternative truths’ to the officious, the convention, and the tradition – e.g. to see such monolithic concepts as death or religion as serious as well as humorous and open to parody”. (Sullivan, et al., 2009 p.329)

This concept or more accurately this point in the history can be used in classrooms when we consider closing the gap between the powers of the teacher and those of her or his students. In this case the students are allowed to assume the control of the classroom as well as the learning process and they will be able to not only collect and extract information from each other, they also will be able to criticize each other in a welcomed environment. The implications of this status will be covered in more details in the following chapter.

## Discussion

Dialogic education means teaching for dialogue and teaching through dialogue. Dialogic education involves the fact that students engage effectively in dialogue. They not only change the way that they use

words but also they change the way in which they relate and build relationships with the teacher and with each other. But the point here is that becoming more “open to the other” does not mean becoming the same as the other. Dialogism is about holding different and sometimes contradictory perspectives together and inevitably this contradiction leads to the challenge and competition between ideas which is called critical thinking as well as to the impulsive creation of new ideas and insights which is called creative thinking.

Hence dialogic education means teaching in a way that makes students think through putting them in dialogues. Anything can be taught in a way that frees children to think at the same time as they learn.

In a dialogic classroom and education process, the students acquire the skills and confidence to actively think and learn together with others. In the dialogic teaching approach, dialogue is used to find out what children think, engage with their developing ideas and help them to talk through misunderstandings.

When children are given opportunities to contribute to the wider classroom dialogue, they can explore the limits of their own understanding. At the same time they can practice new ways of using language as a tool for thinking and learning.

This dialogic atmosphere ends the era in which the teacher was the only voice in the classroom. It opens new windows for students to have a voice of their own and express their opinions and views as viable nuggets of knowledge to be shared with the classroom, so that all the participants can think about them and provide feedback. In this way, new ideas, even if not compatible with the ideas and opinions of the teacher, are freely expressed and accepted as valuable input for the discussions taking place inside the classroom. Building such an environment needs prerequisite measures to be taken by the educational authorities as well as the teachers to pave the way for discussion and dialogue in the classroom. Some of these measures and concepts are discussed in this chapter.

### ***A Dialogic Educational System***

Dialogic education means teaching for dialogue as well as teaching through dialogue. This notion seems very simple and of course it is very simple, on the other hand it implies a required change in our understanding of education and educational system.

A simple way that seems to be helpful in generating a dialogic atmosphere in the classroom is

to encourage students to work in groups. However, previous research showed that often group work really did not work very well at all. Often, teachers claim that one important reason why they put children together in twos and threes is to help them develop communication skills. However, after grouping children in two or three, teachers usually have no time to observe their interaction since they have to pay attention to all the other children in the class.

It is common for one dominant child to take charge of everything while the others sit back and just watch. This kind of group work often leads to fighting among the group without any kind of constructive dialogue. Constructive dialogue, in case it actually happens, is more likely to be about television programs or about social relationships than about anything related to the educational goals of the activity at hand.

This problem is likely because of the fact that students do not yet know how to start working together effectively. In order to solve this problem, the teachers should develop a brief session to teach the students how to talk together better. This session should include a series of lessons on raising their awareness of the effects of the ways in which they talk together and also developing some ground rules such as listening to each other with respect and answering challenging questions with reasons instead of getting angry or ignoring the questions all together.

If a group is successful in acquiring these skills, the individuals will be able to change their minds, to question their own positions and to ask for help when they do not know the answer. Hence, the primary goal of a dialogic education system should be to improve better thinking. In the next section, we will discuss the fact that how dialogic education can lead to improved thinking.

### ***Dialogic Education and Improved Thinking***

A dialogic education should teach children how to learn and think through dialogue as well as the language skills required to achieve this. But how dialogic education works to improve better group thinking? The best way to describe the mechanism is to consider it in terms of shifting in identity or identification.

Identity often refers to things that do not change a lot such as being a student, male or a teacher. But identifications can change a little more such as the way we identify with being one person in the family and another person in the classroom. The “disputation talk” in which children try to defeat one an-

other and be the only winner depends on their identification with a limited self-image in which “self” is defined against others.

People engaged in Dispositional Talk are trying to beat each other; they are not trying to learn from each other. Cumulative Talk, by contrast, depends on the fact that all the members in the group identify with the group identity more than with their individual identity. They do not want to challenge each other since that might upset the harmony of the group. In cumulative thinking there is no motivation to challenge ideas or explore reasoning; instead people try to agree with each other to maintain the feeling of belonging to the group.

In the cumulative groups different opinions may be expressed but they are often just ignored by everyone in order to maintain the unity of the group. There is another type of talk inside groups which can be called “Exploratory Talk”.

When students engage in the dialogue, they can challenge the group and even question their own positions. The characteristics of this kind of group shows a different type of identification which is not identification with a limited phenomenon such as self or the group but identification with the space of dialogue.

The “space of dialogue” can be an answer to the question: from what standpoint are you able to challenge your own thinking? How is it possible for us to change our minds because of what we hear in a discussion? If we are thinking then we are not simply identifying with our initial position or our self-interest, nor are we simply identifying with the other speakers position, although we are clearly listening carefully. If we are able to change our minds it must be because we are identifying in some way with the process of the dialogue itself and the ideal of truth which it generates (Wegerif, 2010, p.6).

When the students are engaged more effectively in dialogue, they not only change the way that they use words, but also the way in which they relate to each other. Of course becoming more open to the others does not mean becoming the same as the other person. As we stated before, dialogic is about holding different perspectives and points of views together in tension and in turn this tension leads to a challenge and competition between ideas which is called “critical thinking” as well as creating new ideas and opinions which is called “creative thinking”.

Based on the above-mentioned different talks which can be present in different classroom, we can

identify some methods for the teachers to encourage dialogue among the students. The teachers can inspire dialogic talk by engaging students in long sequences of questions and answers. In this kind of teaching:

1- Questions are carefully framed to encourage reflection and good answers.

2- Answers are not end points but a stimulus for further questions in a long chain of dialogue.

3- The teacher’s role is to weave contributions into a coherent whole, leading children to find meaning and helping them think of further questions (Alexander, 2013).

This approach focuses on engaging children in live online dialogue as a way of drawing them into thinking and learning.

### *Applying Dialogic Education in the Classroom*

Dialogic education entails the fact that teachers teach in a way that encourage students to think by drawing them into dialogue. Any kind of material can be taught in a way that allows students to think at the same time that they are learning new subjects.

In order to do this, first of all, we should help students learn the skills and the confidence to think and learn together with the other students. In order to realize this objective, the teacher should create a talking and thinking atmosphere in the classroom.

There are some “ground rules” that can help promote such positive atmosphere in the classroom:

- All relevant information is shared.
- The group seeks to reach agreement.
- The group takes responsibility for decisions.
- Reasons are expected.
- Challenges are acceptable.
- Alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken.
- All in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members.

Based on the presented information above, there are two key points to be considered if we want to create a dialogic environment inside the classroom; namely exploratory talk and critical thinking.

### *The Dialogic Class*

Dialogic teaching is and has been a subject of increasing discussion in the recent years and several researchers and practitioners suggest that it has a great cognitive potential for students and also, that it requires a great effort on the part of teachers.

Nowadays, the term “dialogic teaching” appears in many different papers and studies carried out by the educational communities all around the world. This means that dialogic teaching is a con-

cept which is becoming more and more important regarding the issues related to teaching and learning processes.

Dialogic approaches to classroom activities are in clear contrast to the monologic approaches which are usually at work in many parts of the world. In this section some theoretical background is again viewed from the viewpoint of contemporary approaches to implementation of dialogic activities inside the classroom environment.

Discussions on the dialogic approaches to learning and teaching necessarily lead to the works of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) who emphasized the social and cultural influences on child development.

Vygotsky believed that language is a driving force behind cognitive development. He (1978) stated that all learning is located in a social, cultural and historical context. He was working on the relationship between children and others including their families, classmates and teachers.

He looked at what children could do with some assistance rather than on their own. His works led to the idea that “lives are only understandable through cultural systems of interpretation mediated through language; it is culture, and not biology, that shapes human life and the human mind” (Bruner, 1990).

As a result of Vygotsky’s influence, there are several researches and studies that support the idea that talking is the key to learning.

This interest in children’s language has led to many researches regarding the student’s talking in shared interaction with others. In turn Jerome Bruner uses the ideas of Vygotsky and claims that “most learning in most settings is a communal (shared) activity, a sharing of the culture” (Vygotsky, 1978 P.56).

Bruner’s research into the interactional framework of children’s lives focuses on the child as a member of a family, a social group and a community, hence adding culture and history as well as biology to the study of child development.

As different research courses shifted from abstract, individual student towards the social student whose abilities and language competencies are interrelated with the capabilities of others, the works of Mikhail Bakhtin gained utmost attention.

Like Vygotsky, Bakhtin sees language as a social practice; all language, indeed all thought, is dialogic. Bakhtin’s concepts allow the learner to play an active role in developing a personally constructed understanding of the educational course through

a process of dialogic interchange.

Dialogism assumes that knowledge is something people do together rather than an individual possession. Bakhtin (1981) made a distinction between dialogic and monologic discourse. He uses the example of teacher–pupil discourse to illustrate the concept of monologic talk and argues that it prevents genuine dialogue.

A monologic teacher is mainly concerned with the transmission of knowledge to students and remains mainly in control of the goals of talk. In contrast, dialogic talk is to promote communication through authentic and genuine exchanges. In a dialogic atmosphere, effort is made to help different participants share and build meaning together.

Monologic talk focuses power on the teacher; it prevents dialogue and interaction between students and their ideas. Dialogic talk, on the other hand, creates a space for multiple voices and discourses that challenge the asymmetrical power relations constructed by monologic approaches.

Since the 1970s, different educational studies have proved that the schools and classrooms are full of talk but not collaborative talk among the students and learners. It is generally accepted that “what is now seen as a monologic style of discourse structure between teacher and pupils known as the IRF (Initiation/Response/Feedback) is a fundamental feature of all official talk in classrooms.

There is evidence based on several different studies that the IRF provides the basis of teaching by direct instruction and enables teachers to stay in control of events and ideas in lessons. Its effect is to emphasize the unequal nature of relationships between teachers and students as well as the dominance of the teacher in the classroom.

The idea to encourage dialogic discourse styles has to compete against this leading form of classroom interaction. It is thus obvious that turning a monologic classroom into a dialogic interactive one is not that easy.

Different methods for implementing the dialogic approach to teaching are proposed by different researchers and practitioners, however the most extensive one of them is proposed by Alexander (2008). In the following sections, different ingredients of a dialogic classroom are briefly discussed from his point of view.

### ***Interaction***

Communicative or interactive activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with, and listen to, other learners, as well as

with people in the course as well as the surrounding community.

Interactive activities have real purposes: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture. Research on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that more learning takes place when students are engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than in traditional teacher-led classes (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003).

In order to make the interactive activities work more efficiently the following two points should be kept in mind: a- Keeping teacher talk to a minimum (one way to measure the success of a class for English language learners is to observe how much the students are depending on the teacher.

The more learners are working independently, in pairs, or in small groups, the more successful is the class); b-having fun (communicative activities are designed to be lively, interactive, and fun... When people are comfortable, they are likely to learn more. An active, cooperative class is a class where a great deal of learning; namely social, cultural, and linguistic, is seen).

### **Questions**

A question is literally a sentence which has an interrogative form to show the students what contents they should learn and what to do as well as how to do it. The purposes of questions in a classroom setting include:

- To develop interest and motivate students to become actively involved in lessons
  - To evaluate students' preparation and check on homework or seatwork completion
  - To develop critical thinking skills and inquiring attitudes
    - To review and summarize previous lessons
    - To nurture insights by exposing new relationships
  - To assess achievement of instructional goals and objectives
    - To stimulate students to pursue knowledge on their own

It should be noted that instruction, which includes asking questions during lessons, is more effective in producing achievement success than instruction carried out without questioning students.

Moreover oral questions posed during classroom presentations are more effective in developing learning than are written questions.

And finally, questions which focus student attention on significant elements in the lesson result

in better comprehension than questions which do not. Hence teachers should learn more about the effective ways to ask questions in the classroom environment in order to create a more interactive atmosphere.

### **Feedback**

Students in a dialogic classroom need to be aware of the views of the other students regarding their input. This is a good opportunity to help students experience the power of dialogue. The teacher should help the process by asking other students what they think about a particular input by a specific student. In this way students will be encouraged to engage more effectively in dialogic conversation as well as interaction with each other. This kind of feedback informs the students and leads them to correct courses of thinking as well as encourages them to contribute in the classroom.

### **Contributions**

In order to illicit contribution from the students the teachers should be collaborative instructors. Collaborative teachers value and build upon the knowledge, personal experiences, language, strategies, and culture that students bring to the learning situation.

In order to get contribution from the students, the teacher should bring up those subjects regarding whom the students have some background knowledge or schema as well as those general subjects that many people have opinions about such as world peace or hunger.

Moreover, in collaborative classrooms teachers share authority with students in very specific ways; in traditional classrooms, teachers are largely responsible for setting the learning objectives, designing learning tasks and assessing the learning success.

However, collaborative teachers invite students to set specific goals within the framework of what is being taught, provide options for activities and assignments that capture different students interests and goals, and encourage students to assess what they learn conversation as well as interaction with each other. This kind of feedback informs the students and leads them to correct courses of thinking as well as encourages them to contribute in the classroom.

### **Exchanges**

The aim of all the interactive and communicative activities in a classroom is to help students exchange different information with each other as well as with the teacher. These exchanges help the students to



focus more on what they are saying rather than on how they are saying it, which in turn helps the students to improve their self-confidence and dismiss any self-consciousness or inhibitions they might have about speaking a foreign language.

On the other hand, repetition is vital to learning and retaining language but it can be boring. During information exchange activities key language elements are repeated in an interesting and natural way to communicate the required information.

Moreover when students use language to exchange meaningful information they definitely retain the vocabulary and language elements more easily. Ultimately the main objective of a dialogic class is to promote information exchange carried out by students.

The more students feel free to engage in information exchange, the more easily they will be encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue. This way the language barrier is gradually lifted, so that building a dialogic environment become possible.

## Discussion and Argumentation

The main point of a dialogic classroom is that all the questions, answers, and contribution as well as information exchanges among the students and the teacher are to promote the atmosphere of discussion and argumentation in the classroom.

These discussions and argumentations are meaningful ways for students to express their own opinions, defend their ideas and talk against the ideas of the teacher.

In a dialogic classroom the students should be able to gain some authority. In order to promote the atmosphere of discussion and argumentation, the collaborative teacher should divide the students into groups and ask each group to think and discuss a specific subject matter and then present their ideas to the classroom.

In this stage, students should be encouraged to question each group's ideas and on the other hand, the group should argue around their opinions; defend them or revise them. This promotes meaningful and genuine dialogue in the classroom.

### *Professional Engagement with Subject Matter*

This criterion is very important in developing effective dialogic classroom activities; however this component mainly involves the teachers. The teachers should consider their profession as a very important matter. If the teacher does not care for his or her role in the classroom, (and hence on the lives of the

students) he or she will fail in creating a dialogic environment.

The teachers should train themselves in teaching professionally by reading different books regarding the new dialogical methods of teaching (here English language teaching) as well as consulting with other teachers. In order to do this, there should be groups or committees devoted to promoting new methods of teaching the subject matter.

On the other hand, with the introduction of information technology different new approaches to teaching are also proposed, and in order to use these new tools and instruments the teachers should familiarize themselves with computers, the internet and other components of the information age. This concept is too expensive to be completely dealt with in the current study; however the teachers should be informed of different studies and researches to be able to keep up with the advancement of teaching methods.

### *Classroom Organization, Climate and Relationships*

The organization of the classroom, its climate and different relationships present in it are the fundamental infrastructure in building a dialogic environment.

The professional engagement of the teacher with his or her teaching career is the ingredient that can positively influence the organization, climate and relationships in a classroom.

Classroom environment encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, including the physical setting, the psychological environment created through social contexts, and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviors.

Hence the behavior and professionalism of the teacher can promote an effective climate in the classroom as well as positive relationships between the teacher and his or her students.

The more the teacher understands about the teaching profession and dialogic methods and activities, the easier it is to attract contribution from the students and exchange meaningful information with them and hence build a genuine dialogue with them.

### *Dialogic Testing and the Question of Authority*

Dialogic testing would be very different from the current assessment and evaluation methods which are used widely across English teaching classrooms and systems all over the world.

In order to define a dialogic testing method, some fundamental changes in our view of compe-

tency should be made first. In a dialogic educational system, the goal is not to determine whether the students can utter or write words and sentences as grammatically correct statements, rather that they can express their views about different subjects in a way that other students can understand and relate to their input and in turn offer their own opinions regarding the subject matter.

This implies that, there is a fundamental need and necessity to change the way that textbooks are prepared for English language teaching classrooms.

The main focus of the textbooks should switch from grammar and structural characteristics of a language and the “correct” way to talk and communicate to a broader view in which the aim of the textbooks is to provide appropriate context for the students to ponder upon and express their opinions about.

This way, there is no correct and unique answer to any question. There are only opinions and views on subject matters that are being discussed. However, the presence of a National Curriculum in many countries or simply the schedules and plans of language institutions force teachers to be more concerned about covering the curriculum rather than letting the students reach the higher goals of reasoning and discussing. So we cannot ignore the fact that, there are forces beyond the ability of the teacher which dictate how teachers and students should behave in the classroom.

Dialogic teaching favors a different pattern of interaction which is characterized by the use of authentic questions on the part of the teacher and the students, where answers are not pre-specified but incorporated into subsequent dialogue so that student responses change the topic of discourse (Nystrom et al., 1997).

Furthermore, this dialogic conception of teaching and learning challenges the power-relationships of the classroom and is therefore potentially threatening to teachers and bring more freedom for their students.

Hence, when considering dialogic evaluations of the students, the question of passing and failing becomes a bit of a problem. Since, dialogic education is in its infancy, there is not much we can do to change the dominant monologic teaching practices unless radical changes were to happen in education as a whole, with this perspective being a bit far-fetched.

We can consider different ways to resolve this issue. On one hand, we can jump into the big

change and forget about traditional evaluations and assessment completely and assess the students based on their capability to come up with new reasonable ideas regarding the subject matters. This kind of evaluations would be fundamentally subjective which does not have the capability to be considered as a viable method for determining the students’ competency.

However, it should be considered as a development for educational system on the whole which needs the corroboration from plethora of authorities. On the other hand, there is the possibility to use traditional evaluations for the students at the same time that we use dialogic methods in the classrooms.

This method too, needs a lot of contribution and understanding from different authorities and policy makers and it will make everything more and more complex.

Hence, the best method at the current time seems to be a tradeoff between the monologic and dialogic teaching methods which is outside the scope of the current study and needs a lot of experimental researches to be done in order to determine the right combination.

The only thing that we can say at the moment is that the authorities and concerned teachers should come up with a way to implement dialogic teaching methods in order to train students on how to think critically and how to use exploratory talk in the classroom.

To sum up we now know that in a dialogic educational system, the teacher shares his authority with his or her students and that there are no “correct” answers to any particular question; all the answers are partially correct and all of them need to be evaluated by the student’s peers in the classroom.

## Findings

To implement a dialogical education system, first we need to change the way students interact with each other. We should make them aware that they are not in a competition and that there is no winning or losing. So before even thinking about implementing the dialogic system and giving students authority, we should train them on how to use that authority.

In order to do this, we should design a comprehensive course on group talk and teamwork to teach students how to behave in a group; how to interact with each other; how to express their disagreement;

how to defend their opinions with reason instead of force; how to listen to their peers; how to evaluate other people's opinions and so on.

After establishing a friendly atmosphere in a classroom and after we made sure that the students know how to behave as a group member and a viable critical thinker; we should make use of those subjects and topics about which the students have some background so that they are not just thrown into a conversation rather than they have some previous knowledge about the subject which they can share with others.

After choosing the topics, the teacher as a guide can use methods such as "consequential questioning" to draw students into the talk and encourage them to express their opinions and defend them too.

The teacher can direct the students to give feedbacks about the other students' opinions, in a way that they are further encouraged to engage in the class or group conversation and dialogue.

In this point the teacher should understand that there is a difference between "dialogue" and "dialogic", in the sense that dialogic means using logic as a means to express our opinion. It is not enough for the students to just talk to each other; the important point is that they use critical thinking and reasoning to interact with each other.

In considering the implementation of the dialogic education some complexities will rise. The first one is the question of textbooks. The textbooks now in use in most classes all over the world are based on a monologic view. They want the students to memorize rather than think and they do not value the inputs of the students.

Changing this will need the cooperation among different authorities and policy makers. Since it is a radical change, it needs to be considered by those who have the power to change them. Fortunately, there are some EFL textbooks that incorporate some dialogic components such as asking the opinions of the students. But using these books in a truly dialogic way requires the willingness of the teacher as well as changing some limitations of the classrooms including the time extent.

Another important point that rises when considering the dialogic education is the question of testing the students for competency. At the present moment, there is no consensus on how to deal with this problem.

One way which is the ideal method is to eliminate the current passing and failing criteria and replace them with more subjective methods which are

more compatible with the dialogic teaching.

This needs a fundamental move on the part of authorities and policy makers and seems a little far-fetched. The other way is to leave the current methods of evaluation be and just try to implement dialogic teaching methods anyway.

This method seems viable, yet a little problematic since the students still need to be ready and prepared for those tests. It seems the best way to approach this problem is that those teachers, who wish to implement dialogic teaching methods, try to find a tradeoff between the two evaluation methods.

This further indicates the need for more comprehensive experimental studies in order to come up with a pragmatic method for evaluating the students in a dialogical education system in which students have authority much like their teachers and their opinions are considered as valuable as the teacher's.

## Conclusion

Based on the material presented in the previous chapters and sections, we can state some summarizing conclusions regarding the research questions. The first question of the study was if Bakhtin's concept of dialogism applicable to teaching and how. Regarding this question we should state that the Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and its related concepts are all applicable to teaching and even some studies as well as institutions and language learning and teaching centers have used the concept and its components effectively in English teaching classroom environments.

In order to effectively and successfully implement these concepts and ideas in modern teaching situations, the traditional concepts of classroom, the four skills of language teaching and the roles of the teachers as well as the students should be revisited and restructured. An estimated framework for implementing the above-mentioned concepts in English classrooms has been proposed in chapter four of the current study. Interested readers are referred to this chapter in order to obtain more information regarding the shape and structure of a dialogic teaching and learning environment.

The second question of the study was how the teaching and learning process can benefit from dialogic concepts. This aspect of dialogic framework is very interesting since by studying the previous literature on the subject it becomes clear that in modern world and novel teaching and learning environments considering the usage of tradition-

al monologic methods of teaching and learning is somewhat impossible.

The modern day student is presented with a lot of information and communication tools which can be used for learning any and all material. Hence, regarding the benefits of dialogic concepts for learning and teaching environments it can be said that the learning process cannot simply go on using traditional methods since these bore the students rapidly and decrease the efficiency of the teaching process. Teaching can be transformed into a fun and open atmosphere in which learning happens involuntarily and while the students participate eagerly in the teaching and learning process. There is no more need for hard chairs and black and white boards in order to realize the learning process.

Nowadays, students can eagerly participate in the learning process and view themselves and their classmates as equal people with the teacher, which helps them go about the learning tasks more freely and without any boredom or negligence. In a nutshell, the learning process benefits from dialogic concepts enormously.

The third question was whether the teaching process can challenge or support dialogism. Regarding this question and based upon the concepts presented in the previous chapters, it can be said that the teacher and the concept of dialogism can have a mutual relationship; namely the teacher can implement these concepts in his or her classroom and facilitate the learning process and on the other hand his or her experiences regarding the utilization of these concepts can enhance and improve the concepts and integrate them with the context of modern learning environments.

Hence it is recommended that teachers use these concepts and at the same time record their experiences in order to better understand and implement these concepts by the other teachers and learning institutions.

The fourth and last question was if the dialogism can be used as a tool in teaching and learning. It is worth mentioning that the current study has shown exactly that; namely the dialogism and its components are undoubtedly the most appropriate method of teaching in the modern world. After reviewing the concept of dialogism, it can be very difficult to imagine a classroom using monologic methods to be successful as an effective and efficient learning environment. In the following section we will discuss the implications of the current study for the implementation of dialogic concepts

as teaching tools and methods in modern day classrooms.

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