

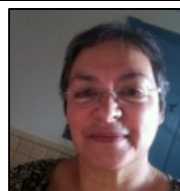


## Promoting students' ownership of their own education through critical dialogue and democratic self-governance



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### Abstract

We define genuine education as students' active leisurely pursuit of critical examination of the self, life, society and the world. It is driven by the person's interests, inquiries, needs, tensions, and puzzlements. Thus, it is based on the students' ownership of their own education, rather than on the society's needs and impositions on the students. Hence, genuine education cannot be forced on the students, but rather the students need to be supported and guided to find and pursue their own education as their existential need. We view genuine education as students' authorship based on the students' learning activism. In our opinion, the primary condition for the students' ownership of their education is the students' freedom to participate in making decisions about their education. In our paper, we discuss pedagogical experimentation aimed at promoting learning activism and ownership of their own education through critical dialogue and democratic self-governance.

However, to our surprise, we found out that merely engaging students in decision making about their own education does not work for many students. After several years of practicing the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime in our undergraduate and graduate classes, we have experienced and abstracted two major mutually related problems: a problem of "culture" and a problem of "self-failure." The issue of "culture" involved a tension between building a new democratic educational culture while practicing it. We also found that our undergraduate and graduate education students do not follow their own freely chosen educational commitments, and thus they feel betrayed by themselves. Analyzing students' reflections on the self-failures, we found that they felt pressured by life and institutional survival and necessities. Because of that, they did not have the luxury of prioritizing their own educational self-commitments. In response to this and other concerns, we developed a hybrid pedagogical regime, called Opening Syllabus. We focus on tensions within this new, hybrid pedagogical regime, by analyzing students' reflections and contributions in class.

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### Acknowledgements

We want to thank Tina Kullenberg, Robert L. Hampel, Marisa Koffke, Mark Smith, and Angela Kost for their critical feedback and suggestions on the previous drafts of the paper



## Introduction

### *Problem: Robbing students of authorial agency in education*

Conventional institutionalized education is probably the last institution in a democratic society that remains authoritarian by design<sup>1</sup>. Even such traditionally authoritarian institutions as medicine, military, and police have been democratized recently. For example, it is not appropriate for a doctor to dictate a treatment for his/her patient any more, but rather to inform the patient about possible treatments and their probable outcomes and side effects for the patient to make his or her informed decision about his or her health (and define what health means for the patient). Conventional schools arguably remain the last bastion of authoritarianism in the name of education. All or almost all decisions about education are made for the student: whether to have education or not have it, what to study, how to study, with whom to study (i.e., the professor and peers), what the success of education is, what the purpose of education is, when and how to communicate, and so on. Paradoxically, a democratic society suspends democratic practices and relationships for the eventual mastery of participation in a democratic society. Ironically, it is true not only for children but also for adults in conventional institutionalized education.

This authoritarian pedagogical regime creates the biggest educational problem, namely that the very people that are in the center of educational practice are excluded from having a legitimate right to make decisions about its meaning and purpose. This leaves the students often alienated, disinterested, learning shallowly and without deep critical reflection, treating education as an imposed chore and not something that is important and relevant for themselves. The students, in other words, do not readily develop ownership of their own education, do not take educational responsibilities, do not accept educational commitments, and avoid educational activism. The authoritarian makeup of the conventional educational institutions is, actually, robbing the students of authorial agency in education (Matusov, 2011).

In our paper, we discuss pedagogical experimentation aimed at promoting students' ownership of their own education through critical dialogue and democratic self-governance. To our surprise, we found out that merely engaging students in decision making about their own education does not work for many students. We found that our undergraduate and graduate education students do not follow their own freely chosen educational commitments and, thus, feel betrayed by themselves. Analyzing students' reflections on the self-failures, we found that they felt pressured by life and institutional survival and necessities. Because of that, they did not have the luxury of prioritizing their own educational self-commitments. In response to this and other concerns, we developed a hybrid pedagogical regime, called

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<sup>1</sup> This oppression is common not only for conventional educational institutions but for some innovative ones, including homeschooling.

Opening Syllabus. We focus on tensions within this new, hybrid pedagogical regime, by analyzing students' reflections and contributions in the class.

### *Democratization of higher education - Open Syllabus pedagogical regime*

We think that it is long overdue finally to democratize institutionalized education in order to promote students' learning activism and ownership of their own education. This democratization of education will serve at least three major purposes. First, it deepens democracy. Students are socialized for 13 (K-12), 17(+undergraduate), or even 22 or more (+graduate) years in authoritarian institutions where negotiation, authorial judgment, and democratic decision making about one's own fate are not legitimate. After that, people are expected to unlearn this socialization and socialize within a full-blown democratic society. This unlearning of authoritarian socialization is not always easy – leaving many people as either passive participants, poor participants, or even non-participants in a democratic society. Students' socialization in democratic educational institutions should arguably strengthen a democratic society and people's participation in democracy (Dewey, 1966; Rietmulder, 2009).

Second, student's socialization in democratic practices deepens education. In our view, the inherent, non-instrumental, sphere of education involves critical examination of the self, life, society, and the world (cf. Plato, 1997). Education in itself is a part of the self, life, society, and the world and, thus, it has to be critically examined by the learners. Also, making informed authorial judgments and decisions about the learner's own education promotes learning activism. Genuine education requires freedom for decision making about education itself.

Finally, third, democratic education promotes the learner's authorial agency (Matusov, von Duyke, & Kayumova, 2016) and ownership of his/her own life. Self-determination is a universal human right, currently robbed from the students by conventional institutionalized education (Macfarlane, 2013). Interestingly enough, from a survey of 299 undergraduate students in a University in Hong Kong, Macfarlane found that the large majority want free attendance and no grades (Macfarlane, 2016). Macfarlane argues that academic freedoms should be expanded from the academic faculty to university students as it used to be in many European universities until the end of the nineteenth century (Macfarlane, 2013).

These considerations have led us to the development of the concept of "Open Syllabus Education," where all decisions about the organization of education are made by and with the students where the teacher is a facilitator and consultant of the process (but not an enforcer of it) (Shor, 1996). Analyzing conventional "Closed Syllabus" pedagogical regime, where all decisions are made unilaterally by educational authorities (e.g., teachers, school administrators, ministries of education), we abstracted four major areas of the teacher's and institution's unilateral decision making about the organization of the educational process. These areas include:

1. Curriculum: What students are expected to learn and in what sequence;
2. Learning commitments: A set of learning activities in which the student must engage (commonly known as assignments);
3. Educational policies: A set of regulations and deadlines to enforce the learning commitments, rule the participants' engagement in class, and create sanctions for their breaking and/or rewards for their achievements;
4. Summative assessment: Definition and operationalization of the institutional educational success and failure.

We added fifth and sixth elements of our organizational decision making that are never a part of the Closed Syllabus because they are not needed there:

5. Organization of democratic decision making: How the participants make decisions in the face of their disagreements;
6. Type of pedagogical regime: What type of pedagogical regime the students want to have in our class: Open or Closed Syllabus (later we added "Opening Syllabus" see below).

Interestingly enough, the issue of how to organize the teacher's guidance has so far not been defined and recognized as a separate area of the organizational decision making in either Closed or Open Syllabus (Decision#7). Probably because in both cases the teacher's guidance is left to the teacher's professionalism and practical wisdom in the moment (i.e., *phronêsis*, using Aristotelian terminology). Another important decision that is left out of both Open and Closed Syllabus is whether the student should have education or not at all (Decision #8). This decision is taken away from the students in the conventional credentialed institutions.

In our first efforts to democratize our undergraduate and graduate university classes all 6 areas of the organizational decision making, listed above, were open for our students. In a group of professors, before we began our Open Syllabus classroom experiments, we engaged in a deep analysis of the book "When students have power: Negotiating authority in a critical pedagogy" by Ira Shor (1996). In our analysis, Shor limited democratic pedagogical regime to Learning commitments (#2), Educational Policies (#3) and Organization of democratic decision making (#5). He left his unilateral power intact to define the class curriculum (#1) and unilateral institutional power to define Summative assessment (#4). Although he did not have an in-depth discussion of these limitations of his democratic pedagogy in his book, it seems to us that his curricular unilateralism was justified for him by his epistemological authority (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015) – as an expert in the subject focus of the class he knew what should be learned, while his students did not. Also, it seemed that he accepted his university regulations of and needs for the summative assessment. Our approach to democratization of institutional education was different regarding these matters.

We accept Shor's tacit argument about the teacher's epistemological authority but we reject his decisions and conclusions (#1 and #4) presented in his book<sup>2</sup>. We agree that the teacher often has epistemological authority by having experiences, familiarity, and interest in the field. However, we also think that learning activism and education ownership begins with our students' constant and changing consideration of what they want to study, i.e., "Open Curriculum." Also, deciding what to study as a class, and therefore having to argue how to prioritize one topic over others, has an important educational aspect in itself. To reconcile these two important concerns -- the teacher's epistemological authority and students' learning activism – we developed a tourist guide metaphor for a role of the teacher. The teacher's epistemological authority should serve an advisory rather than a dictatorial role. As a tourist guide, a teacher should provide the students with the map of the "foreign curricular territory" of possible curricular topics with brief descriptions-provocations of their attractions and possible significance for the students so they can find their own places of their interests<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Later Ira Shor started providing curriculum choices for his students (Shor et al., 2017, in press).

<sup>3</sup> For example, this is one of the listed topics of a Curriculum Map for an undergraduate course on cultural diversity in education:

"Cultural mismatch"

What is a cultural mismatch between the teacher's and students' cultural expectations and behavior? Have you experienced ones? What can educational problems result from a cultural mismatch? Is it possible to prevent cultural mismatches or not and why? How can a teacher recognize a cultural mismatch (and not intentional violation of cultural norms and expectations)? Facing a cultural mismatch, what should the teacher do: a) make the student learn and use only the cultural pattern of expectation and behavior dominant in the mainstream culture that the teacher belongs to, b)

The students are invited to choose a curricular topic from the "Curricular Map" – a collection of curricular topics with short teaser-explanations. Curricular topics in the Curricular Map are compiled from the three main sources: a) the instructors' own authorial professional expertise (before the class starts), b) colleagues' professional authorial judgments (e.g., a list of curricular topics in their syllabi of similar courses) (before the class starts), and c) the former and current students' interests relevant to the course (during the class term). Students decide which of the topics to study for the next class and how long to study it. In case of disagreements, the student-sponsoring the topic has to try to convince his/her peers why this topic is better than all alternatives for the next class. The final decision is often defined by vote, although in some cases students came up with different means of resolution: flipping a coin, sequencing the topics for several classes in advance, studying individually or in small groups in parallel, or scheduling the competing topics for the same class meeting to be studied by the whole class. Students also can and do add new curricular topics that are not originally suggested by the teacher. Finally, in some cases, students suggested the teacher's epistemological authority should define the next option – this option allowed the teacher to select whatever topic the teacher felt to be important and relevant for class at the given moment (although the students always demanded a justification from the teacher of his/her choice). Sometimes, a new topic emerges during the class discussion and the students make a collective decision to put on-hold the topic planned in advance (and sometimes they change their mind later and do not want to return to it). This is how we articulated the Open Curriculum to the students in our course syllabus:

In order to make our class as meaningful and useful for you as much as possible, I want to apply the concept of "Open curriculum": you will design what you want to learn (i.e., the class curriculum) as the class goes. You may ask me and yourselves, "How can students (i.e., we, EDUCXXX students) participate in designing a good class curriculum, if students are not familiar with the academic matter of the class? Is it not a primary, if not the solely, role of the teacher, who is supposed to be very knowledgeable expert in this academic field and knows better what the students (i.e., we, I) should learn in this class?" This is a good and tough question, which, in my view, reflects one of the main paradoxes of learning, namely: *On one hand, a student does not know what to learn because the student is not familiar with the subject of his/her own learning. But on the other hand, learning is transformation of the student's subjectivity: his/her opinions, thoughts, feelings, worldviews, interests, puzzlement, and concerns. Without a student actively raising a question, his/her teacher's answer usually remains meaningless for the student. Thus, meaningful guidance by the teacher starts with the student's question.* To address this learning paradox, I propose us to constantly negotiate what we will learn to reflect your emerging questions, puzzlements, concerns, and interests. It is like going to an unfamiliar foreign country: the guide's suggestions and the tourists' emerging interests generate meaningful, safe, and exciting tourist experiences and learning. The more tourists become familiar with the foreign country, the more informed becomes their interests. Similarly, I hope that the more you become with vast terrain of the field, the more informed you will become your interests and choices of the study.

Based on study of the field of diversity issues in education, I have developed a "Curriculum Map": a list of topics important for diversity in education. At any time, feel free to propose a new topic of your interest that may be not on the list and I will include it on our Curriculum Map. As your views and interests may change during the course, we can travel in different territory of the curricular terrain (i.e., Curriculum Map). At the end of each class meeting, we will make decision of what to study next and check if we want to continue staying on the current topic or move on. We'll try to plan one session ahead. I already asked you to reply on my

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learn the student's cultural pattern of expectations and behavior for providing better guidance and comfort to the student, or c) something else (what is it and why)? What would you do, as a teacher, when facing a cultural mismatch?

Curriculum Map Survey about your familiarity and interest in curricular topics of the class. The results of the Curriculum Map Survey<sup>4</sup> show, you already have certain interests and attractions and also you have certain indifferences and curricular repellences. Some of these indifferences and repellences may be caused by your lack of familiarity, or poor learning experiences with these subjects, but some can be a result of your informed choice. There is also a potential effect of serendipity of getting attracted (or repelled) to something that you did not care before or were not even aware of.

You may ask me about a logical and necessary sequence of curricular topics. How can this issue be addressed in the Open Curriculum pedagogical regime when students select what they want to study? What if students select topics in a wrong sequence? In my view, topic sequence may have many diverse logical and psychological underpinnings but the bottom line is that it should make sense for a student and should emerge as an epistemological and ontological need for the particular student. If a topic sequence is violated for you, you should experience a topic sequence problem first and then we can address it together. I found out that when the students are choosing topics, this logic of the subject-matter needs to be a part of the educational inquiry itself. The issue of sequencing needs to be a part of the student's negotiations within the very process of choosing topics itself. Moreover, the participants may discover during the examination of some topics that they need to have some "prior" knowledge, and decide to switch the class topic to a "previous" topic in a sequence. What is important is that the "sequencing" of the topics itself is a part of dialogic negotiation and examination<sup>5</sup>. Some people argue that Open Curriculum can work in social science where academic issues often have more entries through students' personal experiences but not in exact sciences or math. Interestingly enough, I experienced a pedagogical practice of Open Curriculum in my high school math calculus classes, where my math teachers introduced new big units through many math problems that we had to solve on our own (individually or in groups). Guidance was provided on-demand when some or all of us got stuck. We could jump on any math problem on the sheet (or invent our own). This Open Curriculum approach was developed by Russian-Soviet math educator Nikolay N. Konstantinov<sup>6</sup>. The curricular sequence was dictated by students' emerging educational experiences, needs, and demands.

As to the Summative Assessment (#4), we found that our institutions do not specify how summative assessments have to be performed (except assigning letter grades), leaving it to the full professional discretion of the professors. Based on these institutional regulations, we can legitimately pass the Summative Assessment decision to our students. In practice, in our Open Syllabus classes, students' decisions about Summative Assessment vary. Some students and/or classes choose relatively conventional summative assessments based on their "participation" and "quality" of their work (usually papers) graded by the instructor. These students often argue that summative assessments help them

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<sup>4</sup> Students take the Curriculum Map Survey before the class starts. The survey lists many of the curricular topics of the map and asks the prospective students to rate how familiar and how important each other topic is for them personally and for their professional development.

<sup>5</sup> For instance in one of my (second author) classes on the school-family-community partnerships there are three topics about race issues: 1) Issues of race in school family relationships – problems (I) – introduction to issues of race (general issues of racism, racial identity and dominant and minority tensions, etc.); 2) Issues of race in education - problems (II) – specific issues of educational relationships, problem of "acting white": achievement vs loyalty etc.); and 3) Issues of race and education – solutions (III). My students chose topic #2 that dealt with specific issues of educational relationships and justified it by saying that they are very interested in discussion of the problem of "acting white" and not as interested in general issues of racism. However, during the class itself, they started discussing general issues of racism (topic #1). The topic became a "natural" path for them to address these issues in that sequence.

<sup>6</sup> I (the first author) am working on a preparing a special issue on an innovative math education by Nikolay Konstantinov for the Journal of Russian and Eastern European Psychology. Konstantinov described mathematics as a "living science, still intensively being created, and not a rigid body of knowledge that one must learn and then apply" (Karp & Vogeli, 2010, p. 217).

stick to their learning commitments and manage their life demands. However, some other students and/or classes demand to abolish summative assessment (grading) all together by giving themselves an “unconditional A” for the class from the beginning. The latter students argue that summative assessments are about conformity of the students to the teacher’s expectations – they involve pleasing the teacher’s demands and distract students from their own education. Some of these students may require formative assessment and ask for the teacher’s and/or peer’s authorial feedback and judgment of the quality of their work and progress.

The other two interesting areas for the students’ decision making in the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime are Organization of democratic decision making (#5) and Type of pedagogical regime (#6). As it is now, in our Open Syllabus classes, students have practiced the following diverse ways of democratic decision making:

- a) voting by majority (i.e., majority imposes its decision on minority),
- b) each person deciding for him/herself,
- c) going by consensus via seeking a compromise (with each student having a veto power),
- d) flipping a coin, or
- e) deferring the decision to the teacher.

An issue of how to decide about decision making presented an interesting meta-problem for our students who felt initially that decisions should be reached by consensus. It was a novel experience for the vast majority of both undergraduate and graduate students not only in their educational institutions and, paradoxically, in their life in a democratic society.

Deciding upon a type of pedagogical regime also involves many interesting discussions. Some of our past students wanted Closed Syllabus because they were afraid of “a lack of structure” in the Open Syllabus and of spending too much time on organizational decision taking away from “the class itself.” Meanwhile many of our other past students were either excited or intrigued about promises of the Open Syllabus to promote the ownership of their own education (and life). Often these two groups could not convince each other. In those cases, we, their professors, proposed to have a class with mixed pedagogical regimes: Closed Syllabus for those who wanted it and Open Syllabus for those who wanted it. For the first group, we promised to develop a conventional syllabus and for the second group, the syllabus had to be developed collaboratively. However, while the second group was OK with the proposal, so far the first group unanimously rejected the proposal for the mixed class and demanded from us to impose their choice of the Closed Syllabus on the whole class because “otherwise it would not make sense.” After the second group of students and we, their professors, rejected this demand, the first group reluctantly accepted Open Syllabus (despite our encouragement to stick with their own pedagogical regime of Closed Syllabus).

Finally, we want to describe how we introduced the whole idea of the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime to our students on the first day of the class. Often we tried to connect this idea of the Open Syllabus to the topic of the first class. For example, in one undergraduate class for preservice educators, the class title was “Building community of learners in urban settings” taught by the first author. After we unpacked the notions of “urban” and “community”, I guided my students to contrast the notion of “good learner” versus the notion of “good student.” Very quickly the students came to the important difference between “a good learner,” who tries to pursue his/her own, self-defined, inquiries and studies, and “a good student”, who tries to please the authorities to get good grades. Then I asked them how they wanted me to treat them: as “learners” or as “students” and what pedagogical consequences would follow

from that decision. This discussion quickly led to the discussion of the Open vs. Closed Syllabus. However, connecting the class topic and the consideration of pedagogical regimes was not always possible. In the latter case, we asked our students if they wanted to know about the class syllabus exploiting their conventional expectations. Then the instructor asked them what type of syllabus they preferred, Open or Closed, and the discussion jump-started.

After practicing Open Syllabus for several years, we became excited with many aspects of the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime. We were impressed with many thoughtful deliberations about different aspects of the students' education. The education became more meaningful and exciting for the students. It really worked well for some students, propelling their learning activism and ownership of their education, and spreading their self-initiated educational activities outside of class space, participants, and time. Students brought a lot of pedagogical innovations in our class, curricular, instructional, and organizational. For example, in one of our undergraduate classes, 30 out of the 66 curricular topics on the Curricular Map came from the students. In another graduate class, a student proposed and conducted her Main Learning Project through the whole class' enactment of a hypothetical town hall meeting between urban school administration and parent community to discuss whether the urban school should become a charter or remain traditionally public. Some teacher education students decide to try Open Syllabus in their own classes.

At the same time, we have been faced with two major problems of the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime. One major problem involved a cultural disruption and the second major problem involved an emerging sense of self-failure in some students. Below we will discuss these two major problems in detail. To address these problems, we have moved to another, hybrid, pedagogical regime: *Opening Syllabus*, which we will describe and analyze. We conclude by problematizing democratic education in the society, where the totalities of its practices are based on instrumentalism of labor and work, necessities and needs (Arendt, 1958).

## Two main problems of Open Syllabus in high education

After several years of practicing the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime in our undergraduate and graduate classes, we have experienced and abstracted two major mutually related problems. We have labeled the first main problem as a problem of "culture." It involves a family of issues related to many students' collision with the new pedagogical culture of Open Syllabus, based on their freedom, decision making, and democratic self-governance. These are cultural communal aspects, which are mostly unfamiliar for many of the students. We have labeled the second main problem as a problem of "self-failure." It involves some students' sense of personal failure to prioritize their commitment to freedom to study what they want – the freedom they openly desired -- over their commitment to their life and institutional survival and pressures, coming from the students' other classes and other spheres of their life.

### *Issues of Open Syllabus: "culture"*

"The trouble with Socialism is that it takes too many evenings."  
Oscar Wilde

Democratic governance of the students' own education distracts from the curricular subject matters. Although we tried to connect these two activities, since our curricular subjects also involved education, it was not always organically possible. This was especially evident at the beginning of the class when many decisions had to be made. Some students became frustrated, because they desired



getting into the gist of the curricular issues, which they felt was the purpose to come to the class. However, the professors (and other, more enthusiastic peers) involved them in designing the class. Later, some of the students reported that they felt we, their professors, were “lazy” because it was not their job to design the class but their professors’. Thus, at times, the democratic governance felt like an annoying obstacle on the road to education.

Second, often the democratic governance decision making in the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime felt more intellectual – a game of mind – rather than ontological – an important experienced life tension/dilemma – for the participants. This means that the need for decision making did not come from the participants’ experience with some kind of problem or tension or dilemma but was simply imposed by a need to be organized. For example, deciding summative assessment at the beginning of the class often felt like a remote esoteric issue, while simultaneously it was important as defining the class atmosphere and a nature of the students’ participation: whether the students’ conformity to the instructor would be important for her learning or not. At the same time, diverse alternatives, discussed by the students, were often also driven by their old culture of survival, comfort, and minimizing efforts. For example, in a discussion determining whether a professor should only call on students who raised their hands or also call on students who did not raise their hands, often a majority of the students prioritized their own personal comfort to not be called by the professor without raising their hands. Although the professor warned them that with a high probability it would lead to a split of the class with a minority of very vocal students and a silent majority, they still voted for this option. Later in the semester the students might experience this phenomenon and become frustrated with this decision at the beginning of the class. However, it became too late to change because the semester was almost over. The issue was not that the students did not trust the professor initially or did not even know about the phenomenon but that apparently, they did not prioritize their education over their comfort. In itself, the problem was not inherently bad for education but it became bad in the context of the short 15-week semester.

Third, in the Open Syllabus, the students and professors intentionally design their class culture from scratch, while critically examining their intentions and underlining values at the same time. The task often became overwhelming for many students, especially in the context of the short 15-week semester. The issue became especially evident with a few students who took several Open Syllabus classes. They told their peers how much they relaxed, trusted and liked the Open Syllabus through experiencing and experimenting with it again and again. For example, in a class with both novice and seasoned<sup>7</sup> Open Syllabus students, the novice students were often shocked when the issue of grading was brought to their deliberation by the professor on the first day of the class. In our view, the novice students’ shock was coming from their realization that the institutional power over them was given to them. Grades are the institutional symbolic power over the students that can create pains and pleasures that can open institutional doors and close them. Many novice students became anxious about trusting themselves, if the institutional oppression suddenly disappeared, calling not having grading, “going to the Dark Side.” A former Open Syllabus graduate student wrote to us,

I think, for me anyway, there was also a tension to consider if the course would then be considered as “rigorous” as other courses if it had an unconditional A. Both in my mind and in the mind of others with whom I shared the information the A grade came from an Open Syllabus class that allotted Unconditional A’s – so thinking about the grade as a type of credential to pass a course and as a symbol of the work I completed in the course, is another cultural consideration for me.

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<sup>7</sup> We define “seasoned Open Syllabus students” as ones who took more than one Open Syllabus classes.

In contrast, Open Syllabus seasoned students often got excited about another opportunity to study without the institution looking behind their back and forcing them to learn and defining their success. Thus, one Open Syllabus seasoned student named Paulina exclaimed in a discussion of grades from her previous Open Syllabus class that had decided to have automatic A's (i.e., elimination of grades) that she felt liberated to pursue her project of interest she wanted to explore without any constraints, without pleasing the teacher, without knowing where it would lead her (if at all), or even without knowing if she would finish it.

Fourth, the Open Syllabus created a culture shock for some students that might lead to unnecessary resistance at least for some time. The transition from the ubiquitous conventional Closed Syllabus to the Open Syllabus was not organic or immanent but might feel impositional, artificial, and even alienating for some students. It might feel like it were imposed by a "Benevolent Dictator" (i.e., by us) who might revoke the majestically granted freedoms and rights at their whim at any time. As a result, an introduction of the Open Syllabus to novice students could become an open struggle for the students' trust that could carry to the end of the semester or even beyond. For example, when discussing a possibility for a *joint* learning project, some students might refuse on the grounds, "I'm afraid of free riders," which seems to imply that they would not get a fair reward for their work. This reveals for those students their subscription to a metaphor and a paradigm of the conventional Closed Syllabus pedagogical regime.

Fifth, when imposed educational commitments are suddenly removed from the students by the Open Syllabus, some, many, or maybe even all students may need an "alienation vacation" from any educational commitments (a term of one of our students) before they could generate healthy educational commitments driven by their educational self-actualization. This phenomenon of required "alienation vacation" is not new. Educators involved in democratic education and in homeschooling observed this phenomenon as well, which they characterized as "intoxication" by conventional schooling that paralyzes and colonizes students' authorial agency. The reverse of the process is "school detoxification,"

When you quit school, do nothing academic for at least, at the absolute minimum, a week. If you wish, however, write stories or journal entries about your past and your future. Dream, dream, dream. If you crave TV, watch it. If you crave sleep, indulge. Allow yourself to go through withdrawal. Pass no judgments. If you want to "work" on anything, work on forgiving and forgetting. Forgive yourself for everything. Forgive your teachers for everything. Forgive your parents for everything. Forget the lies school taught-forget that learning is separate from your life, that you can't teach yourself, that you are defined by your grades, and all other such nonsense. Detoxify. Purge (Llewellyn, 1998, p. 126).

A founder of the UK democratic school Summerhill, Neill, even suggested that for each year spent by a student in a conventional school, the student should have a month of the "alienation vacation" of doing nothing educational to recover from their alienation from their own educational agency (Neill, 1960, p. 2). Of course, in higher education when we see the majority of our students only for a 15-week semester (during which they must take other conventional Closed Syllabus classes) the students do not have luxury of the time or opportunity for their "alienation vacation" to recover their educational authorial agency.

Sixth, the pressures coming from the students' conventional response-resistance to impositions of the conventional institutional pressures and need for "alienation vacation" often led to the students to drop opportunities and commitments for their meaningful educational experiences. Some of these

meaningful experiences might require collective efforts from at least a critical mass of the participating students. When there was a critical mass, the learning activity might collapse. For example, an online class forum might require a certain number of participants for its discursive success. When there were not enough students, the forum collapsed,

I believe my answer ([i.e., preference for] Limited open syllabus) was the way EDUCXXX [another past class with the same professor that was not run as Open Syllabus but Opening Syllabus] was run (if not, that what I intended my answer to be). In EDUCXXX I like that we had certain assignments "forced" on us, but the topic, scope, etc. was always at our discretion. I think "forcing" some assignments provides an opportunity for shared experiences and classroom culture. This semester seems a little disorganized in the sense that everyone was doing what was best for them (which I like), but what is best for you might not necessarily be what is best for the group. I guess I am struggling with how best to balance the individual as a member of a group?? I also like voting on the topics from a wide variety of possibilities so we could explore what interested us instead of what you thought would interest us. I wish more professors provided that opportunity (but I understand why they don't b/c it's a lot of work for you!) I missed Webtalk this semester as well, so I wish that was "forced" in some way (Matusov, 2015, p. A200).

Some Open Syllabus students became upset with themselves and/or their peers that their educational opportunities and aspirations were not realized because of these issues.

### *Issues of Open Syllabus: "self-failure"*

Although many undergraduate students may wish to have academic freedom to decide their education completely (Macfarlane, 2016), our Open Syllabus teaching experiences suggest that not all of them are prepared for these academic freedoms. As a result, those students experience disappointment about themselves as capable learners. This can be a part of a vicious cycle: conventional school disables the students' academic authorial agency, which makes the students unprepared for academic freedom that promotes the students' academic authorial agency.

Even when our Open Syllabus students were extremely enthusiastic and excited about the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime and the course overall topic, some of them experienced an educational failure of their own prior commitment to pursue their own excitements (i.e., "autodidact helplessness"). At the end of course, they became very upset with themselves for not taking advantage of the presented educational opportunities that they had desired. Their self-reflection indicated that the main reason for that was that they prioritize other, more demanding, aspects of their life that are guided by necessity and treated our Open Syllabus class as auxiliary, putting it on a backburner. For example, one Open Syllabus student wrote the following non-solicited email to the instructor,

In short, I am having a terrible semester. I have bit off more than I can chew in having a part time job and taking 2 honors classes as well as extracurricular activities. When I miss class it is because I am either working extra hours at work or I am cramming for my next exam. I realize I have not been the ideal participant in our class but I can assure you I do really enjoy our EducXXX class and the topics we discuss. Urban education is a passion of mine and I looked forward to this class until I became so stressed this semester. It probably obvious to you, as well as to myself, that because of our open syllabus and "no grades" policy, that I have used this class as a cushion for my heavy workload. I apologize because I know I have taken advantage of what was supposed to be beneficial to my learning and our class. I don't know how to make up for the class time that I have missed

except to tell you that I really have enjoyed what I have been there for and that I have tried to use webtalk to understand the days I missed. I hope you see that when I am in class I enjoy participating and have a lot to offer (email, November, 2012) (Matusov, 2015, pp. A198-A199).

In this email, the student started with a list of burdens that she faced in her semester in a parallel with our Open Syllabus class, but then she shifted her reflection on the non-coercive nature of the Open Syllabus that allowed her to neglect her commitments to her own educational self-actualization. This indicates a lack of a culture of taking responsibility and caring for one's own self-actualization while prioritizing other responsibilities mostly coming from instrumental necessities and also resting from these instrumental necessities. However, without this culture of commitment to one's own self-actualization life feels like an empty struggle for survival (Arendt, 1958). This is how Open Syllabus students from another class reflected on the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime at the last day of the class:

Student#1: I'll say it [the Open Syllabus class] 100% doesn't work for me and I've learned *that* this semester. ... I'm not a stressed out person, but I put a lot of on my plate often [including] this class clearly for me, which was a class that I was expecting to be my favorite. I mean I still love your class, but... [I was] expecting it to be ... the class I put the most effort in, because it's a topic I'm most interested in and it got completely pushed to the side for me and I [have] consciously realized that the entire semester. But also [I] just couldn't compromise my grades and my work... I have a job ... and my other stuff and I was like... well that's – this unfortunately is the thing that gets significant [...] and I needed that. That's awful...

Student#2: [This was] ... partially true [for me too], in the sense of the Open Syllabus. I absolutely loved being able to pick what we talked about next. And then... if I was present and we talked about something and it wasn't so interesting [for me and]... we are going to talk about [that] next class, I felt I had the freedom to maybe not come, which I really enjoyed being able to. Because I feel like we got to cover things that I was more interested in then – and we skipped over some of the things on the syllabus that I was less interested in [but other people in the class might be interested]... -- [this is] what's my positive side of the Open Syllabus. But there's also the negative side. [By the negative side,] I mean I also I wasn't present every class. And because there's no attendance policy and I probably didn't do as many webtalks [i.e., class online forum postings] as I would if they were graded and things like that. Like in the grade sense, I probably didn't put as much effort into this class as it would have if there were grades.

However, I feel like I've gained a lot more from this class than I would have if it was graded, because when I actually was coming to class I was coming to class to be part of the discussion and to sit here and listen to what was going on. And I think that because this class we learned so much from discussion and it's not like a PowerPoint where you're reading off the slides and lecturing, it's like important to be here and present and I think I took a lot of this class especially, because in an urban setting it's like a different type of teaching and I think I got a lot out of that because we had an open syllabus and it was more of a laid back discussion type feel in the class.

[Another student, Student#3, argued that these important rich class discussions were not enough for her and she wanted a more tangible learning project to supplement classroom discussions – the commitment that she had rejected during the class nerveless.]

Student#4: [Yeah, it could be] a reflective journal that you just keep throughout the semester and like keep every class or every week for the two classes you would talk about what you learned and then topics you discussed and things that you can keep in a little notebook or fieldbook. Like in one of my classes we kept a fieldbook. I wanted to do it [in our class] but I saved it to the end, so that's my fault. But anyway, so it just seems little – if [just] we have the [template] worksheets where like... you can put [...] them into the field book or like pictures or things like that, – because now I'd have had that for the rest of my life, so I know it was a fun thing.

What was interesting in that Open Syllabus class is that we discussed doing collective or individual tangible learning projects – a video on urban education, a book of fieldnotes, a mythbuster book on what is urban and what is urban education, etc. – throughout the semester. At some point, the students arranged special time in the class to discuss making a video. However, when during this discussion and in the middle of excitement one student objected that it might require a lot of work in the context of many demands from other classes, the enthusiasm immediately subsided and the students never returned to this idea until the last day of class. During that discussion the professor suggested that they might not need a consensus and only those who wanted to do this project could but it did not help.

Another interesting theme that emerged from this discussion presented above is these Open Syllabus students' ambivalence about pedagogical coercion. On the one hand, some students were against coercion because it extinguishes the students' enthusiasm, interest, desires, meaningfulness, and learning initiatives about their education. However, on the other hand, the students felt helpless without any coercion to stay true to their commitments to their own educational self-actualization. Also, coercion may lead to serendipity of a student discovering interest in an imposed curriculum theme that might not sound interesting and appealing initially. As a result of this ambivalence, they felt betrayed by themselves. In our analysis, the students' strong experiential socialization in the culture of survival and culture of necessities overruns their will. An alternative culture – a culture of leisurely<sup>8</sup> self-actualization, where survival, necessities, resting, and entertainment are (temporary) bracketed from personal commitments – was not available for these students.

### *Evaluation of the Open Syllabus*

Elsewhere, Matusov argues that the Open Syllabus students' ambivalence about benefits or harms of pedagogical coercion and their sense of self-failure can be important in themselves for the students' development of self-propelled educational agency (Matusov, 2015; Matusov & Brobst, 2013). He argued that if these students were given more time and more experience with the Open Syllabus, it might promote their self-generating authorial agency in education. Now, we have become doubtful about the usefulness of both this ambivalence and the students' experience of self-failure. We also doubt Matusov's hypothesis of time and experience of the Open Syllabus as the crucial element of the development of the students' self-generating authorial agency.

The reasons we are dissatisfied with the experience hypothesis are both empirical and theoretical. Empirical reasons are the following. Despite the fact that our seasoned Open Syllabus students were often more trusting, positive, even enthusiastic toward the Open Syllabus, this does not always translate into their strong self-generating educational authorship. The evidence is mixed. The issue is that even those Open Syllabus seasoned students who demonstrated relative strong self-

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<sup>8</sup> "Leisure" means "to be allowed" (in Latin), "time for learning", "opportunity to do something", "time at one's disposal" <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=leisure>, "time for philosophical discussions of no practical purpose" (Greek), in Greek the word for "leisure" is "school" <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=school>.

generating educational authorship often welcomed it from the very get-go and had some educational or some other cultural background supporting being in control of one's own life/education -- e.g., attending diverse progressive schools, homeschooling, entrepreneurial culture in their past and/or present. A systematic empirical study of Open Syllabus students with strong self-generating authorship (both novice and seasoned) is needed.

For theoretical reasons, we hypothesize that it is culture that creates students' self-generating educational authorship and self-actualization. By culture we mean a dialogically and socially supported strongly valued way of life, without which a person cannot live. In the case of a culture of self-generating educational authorship, the strongly valued way of life becomes self-actualization in a cultural dialogue -- a leisurely pursuit of critical examination of the self, life, society, and world. A famous American theoretical physicist Savas Dimopoulos nicely articulated this culture of critical self-actualization, "Why do humans do science, why do they do arts? They think that arts and science -- the things that are the least important for our survival -- are the very things that make us human" (Levinson, 2013). To generalize, fundamental science, arts, philosophy, play, and non-instrumental education, things that do not serve our survival and necessities, are things that make us human. Valuing these things so strongly that it makes it impossible to live without them is the culture of self-actualization. This culture of self-actualization stays apart from a culture of survival and necessities, on the one hand; and from a culture of entertainment, hobby, and resting, on the other hand. When a famous Russian artist Dmitry Vruble, who testified in a case for two Russian artists accused of offending Russian Orthodox Church, was asked by the judge, "What's the purpose of your art?", he replied, "I don't know for sure, but when I don't paint for a few days, I feel terrible. My body aches, my mood is gloomy, my temper is irritable" (Matusov & Brobst, 2013, p. 63). A culture of self-actualization transcends survival and necessities by engaging itself in imagining how things may be and humanly ought to be rather than how they naturally are. Being fully human is never in the given but in imaginative and ethical becoming as the highest human purpose. However, modern societies, based on post-industrial economy of people functioning as smart machines, do not support and do not tolerate a culture of self-actualization beyond certain enclaves. Institutionalized education is almost totally based on instrumentalism brought by a culture of survival and necessities. So, if our overall hypothesis is correct, we have to work hard on creating a culture of self-actualization and protect it from both institutional and cultural assault by instrumentalism, survival, and necessities.

### **Through Opening Syllabus toward a culture of critical self-actualization**

The two major problems of culture and of self-failure forced us to move us away from the Open Syllabus toward the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime. The Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime starts with a hybrid of Open Curriculum, where students are able to choose topics they are interested in studying, and all other elements unilaterally decided by the teacher. As the class progresses, more and more decisions about other areas of the pedagogical regime are gradually transferred to the students' collective decision making.

The Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime stays a hybrid -- somewhat in between the Closed and the Open Syllabus: it has some common elements from either of these pedagogical regimes but also it has its own unique elements that try to capitalize on advantages of both regimes addressing their disadvantages.

#### ***Similarities between Opening Syllabus and Open Syllabus***

Opening Syllabus has several important elements of the Open Syllabus pedagogical design. These elements involve the following. First element, the pedagogical focus is on promoting students'

voices and authorial judgments in a critical dialogue. We try to engage our students in ontological dialogic provocations (Matusov, 2009) that throw and thrust them into developing their own invested opinions about the issues at hand.

For example, on the issue of inequality in educational testing, we ask each small group of students sitting around a table to volunteer one participant for a musical chair activity. Then we place chairs in the middle of the class – one chair less than the number of the volunteers. While music plays, the students walk around and dance. When the music stops, the students have to sit down quickly on the chairs. Of course, one student will not have a seat and remains standing. The winners, the students who found a chair, get a reward – candies. We ask all students why this one student failed. Usually the students provide many deficit-model replies: she was not fast enough, she did not pay attention enough, she was not skillful enough, she was motivated enough, she was clumsy, and so on. We jokingly translate their deficit ability suggestions into character deficits: lazy, stupid, ignorant, and so on. This continues until someone mentions the deficit of the number of the chairs. A professor gets “offended,” “Oh, now you are blaming me for her failure?! OK, I didn’t provide enough chairs but I provided an equal opportunity for all students to succeed! Why could they succeed and she couldn’t? What’s wrong with her?!” The students usually start realizing that the activity was not fair by the design because it included a deficit of the chairs: it is by default setting up somebody to lose, no matter what. By the activity design, there is no way that all can succeed, the question is who will fail in particular, not whether anyone will fail at all. Then the professor introduces an unusual twist, “Now you all agree that this activity is unfair. But in just a moment, all of you will create a similar unfair educational activity!” Students could not believe that it would be possible because they can clearly see that the deficit in the activity, like musical chair, creates deficits in people.

The professor continues, “Imagine we are an educational testing company and we need to design a math test for 4<sup>th</sup> graders. You are my boss. After some time with experimenting, I created a math test that I decided to try on diverse 4<sup>th</sup> graders across different states in the US. The result of my test shows that 100% of the tested 4<sup>th</sup> graders passed my math test. Is my math test good? Tell me as my bosses of the educational testing company.” The students usually reject this math test because it was “too easy” for 4<sup>th</sup> graders. The professor continues, “OK, you, my bosses, rejected my math test. I go back and design another math test. This time 0% of the tested 4<sup>th</sup> graders succeeded. Is it a good test?” Our students often said no, because it was “too difficult of a test.” The professor asks, “So, tell me what percentage of the students should succeed to make a math test a good test?” The students’ opinions usually split between 50% and 90% percent. By voting we can establish, let us say, 80%. The professor exclaims, “Now we design another musical chair activity: 80 chairs for 100 4<sup>th</sup> graders. We designed an activity where 20% of students must fail but we, the test designers, will blame students for being lazy, ignorant, incompetent, low achieving, and so on, and also blaming teachers, schools, and parents. Is it fair? What kind of test can be fair?” The class usually explode in shock, discussions, inquiries and so on. After these ontological provocations, the educational process of considering educational fairness of testing begins. These ontological provocations for the students’ authorial judgments are common in both Open and Opening Syllabus.

The second similar element involve students’ limited participation in self-government of the class. This aspect is done through three major elements of the Opening Syllabus design: Open Curriculum, Mid-term Town Hall Meeting, and engaging students in collaborative decision making about emerging issues. Open Curriculum involves students collectively deciding the next curriculum topic for the class facilitated by the Curriculum Map offered by the professor, like in the case of Open Syllabus described above. The Mid-term Town Hall Meeting is a class session, set unilaterally by the professor (in contrast to other

classes where topics are selected collaboratively), to evaluate, reflect, and improve diverse aspects of the class pedagogical design. The class starts with a survey, which explores how students feel about the class. What role or roles they have assumed in the class so far: students, pleasing the teacher; learners, pursuing their own interests and inquiries; slackers, trying to minimize efforts; and so on. How they feel about the class: as a community, as a business, as a mad house, and so on. We ask them to evaluate diverse aspects of the class pedagogical design and articulate the class strengths and weaknesses. Finally, we ask the students to make specific proposals for improvement of the class and provide PROs and CONs of their proposals. After in-class and online discussions of the proposals the class votes on the proposals. For example, proposals may include shortening the class by setting a break or just finishing earlier, having more inquiry choices for Self-Studies (exploratory projects that students are assigned to do during the class), allowing as many votes as a student wants during selection of a new topic, and so on. Often the number of improvement proposals vary between 10 and 20. The voted-in proposals are implemented in the second part of the class term with students monitoring their consequences.

Finally, the third element, whatever organizational question a student asks the professor about the class (e.g., length of a reply in a Self-Study, an exploratory online study that students do in class), the professor turns back to the class for discussion and at times for voting in a case of disagreement. Thus, this overall gradual involvement of the students in constantly evaluating the quality and ecology of the class pedagogical processes, proposing improvements, considering alternative ideas and their PROs and CONs implications, making collective decisions leading to the emergence of the students' ownership of their education and life and authorial pedagogical judgments about their education and its quality. Importantly, it makes students' authorial decision making and judgments ontological because it emerges in the students in response to their experienced issues, tensions, and problems, in contrast to often non-ontological decision making in the Open Syllabus.

### *Similarities between Opening Syllabus and Closed Syllabus*

There are also three aspects of the Opening Syllabus that are common to the Closed Syllabus. The first aspect is that the initial class pedagogical regime is designed unilaterally by the professor. The students enter the class with a ready-made non-negotiable pedagogical design. Even its open element like Open Curriculum is not negotiable. The second aspect involves non-negotiable exposure to learning activities – learning assignments, such as each class session Self-Studies, posting at least one message on the class online forum, Main Learning Project, and “class attendance” (see its description below). The third aspect is summative assessment (marks/grades) and surveillance of the students' participation in the non-negotiable course activities like attendance, assignments, online forum (labelled as a “Participation Report”). This aspect creates power of punishment and rewards for the students' unconditional cooperation and conformity with the professor's unilateral and non-negotiable demands. Although many aspects of our Opening Syllabus are new for the students, the overall meta-design of the unilateral non-negotiable regime is not. Through the class the professor's unilateralism and non-negotiability are gradually and contextually melting, as students become more and more engaged in collective problem-defining, problem-solving, and decision-making, while facing diverse emergent issues. Thus, first a dialogic and critical culture based on unilateral, non-negotiable, and preset professor's pedagogical design emerges in the class. Then, this imposed culture of critical dialogue and authorial judgment gradually becomes deconstructed as students find its organizational and pedagogical boundaries insensitive to their own education (i.e., its critically emerging vision) and well-being.



### *Unique features of Opening Syllabus*

Finally, the Opening Syllabus has its own unique aspects uncommon in both Open and Closed Syllabus pedagogical regime. First, all exposures to non-negotiable learning activities are open-ended and involve diverse forms of participation. For example, "class attendance" can be done via diverse forms. One type of class attendance is traditional: the student is physically in the classroom. The second type of class attendance is listening to an audio recording of the class and posting a reflective essay on the class online forum. The third type of class attendance is studying a different topic related to the class of the student's own interest and posting a reflective essay on the class online forum. The latter option allows the student, who did not attend the class, to study something specifically interesting for him/her without receiving agreement from the other students or the instructor (e.g., in a cultural diversity class for future teacher a student chose to study issues of cultural diversity of humor in education). The open and diverse nature of students' non-negotiable exposure to learning activities is designed to promote students' own educational interests, ownership of their own education, flexibility and sensitivity to the students' life demands and conditions, their own experimentation with their education, diverse learning styles, reintegration of life and education (i.e., making education ontological), and serendipity of discovering something interesting that they may not come to without being forced. It also promotes the students' negotiation of types of learning activities and participation because open-endedness and diversity of participation encourages students to propose new learning activities and new form of participation of their interest and meaning-making.

The second unique aspect of the Opening Syllabus is decolonizing the students' personal time from learning assignments (i.e., homework). Homework transforms education into chores for the students rather than leisure (it is *home-work*, not *home-leisure*). One of our students made her Main Learning Project about effects of homework on students' learning. She found that research shows that homework, in whatever form it is designed, is not effective for learning, however it is defined, unless homework is self-generated by the student him/herself. Being surprised by this student's finding, we checked diverse research and came to the same conclusions (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Chen & Stevenson, 1989). Thus, we decided that all assignments have to be done in class unless students freely choose to do them (or something else) at home in their own time. Initially we moved homework "mini-projects", which our students later renamed into "Self-Studies," into the class time without much change but then our students pushed for changes. First, the students demanded to change the nature of the class assignments from responding to professors' questions caused by some provocation to exploration of their own inquiries. Second, suddenly students' complaints about limited time to do the Self-Studies transformed into exciting learning opportunities because some students *wanted* to finish their Self-Study at home, although the Self-Studies were fully credited by the surveillance system of the Participation Report even when incomplete. Decolonization of the students' personal time creates opportunities for the students' self-initiated education.

The third unique aspect of the Opening Syllabus is about summative assessment (i.e., grading). Both Closed Syllabus and Open Syllabus created both advantages and disadvantages with regard to summative assessment, based on the instructor's judgment of the quality of the students' contribution and/or performance. Closed Syllabus usually involves summative assessment that has many functions. One function is to create *pedagogical coercion* for the students to engage in learning activities such as class attendance, assignments, final projects and so on that are considered by the professor as important for the students' education. Another aspect of summative assessment is to provide students with *honest feedback* about quality of their contributions and/or performance from the professor's point of view. Finally, the third function is to *conform* the students to the professor's vision of the truth and the quality of the students' work as defined by the professor. In our view of building a culture of educational self-

actualization, the first and second functions of summative assessment may have limited but important benefits. The first function may create the students' exposure to important learning experiences and professional issues, in which they might not get involved on their own. This is especially important for those students whose educational self-generating authorship is relatively weak. The second function may have a dialogic, critical, and supportive value. However, we consider the third function of summative assessment most harmful for the students' educational agency and voice because it suppresses students' own authorial judgments. In addition, summative assessment disrespects students' non-participation and alternative participation. It also creates an unsafe learning environment where students' mistakes cause punishment from the teacher and are not viewed as teaching-learning opportunities, and thus disrupt the teacher-student trust necessary for providing sensitive guidance. Finally, conventional summative assessment focuses the students on the professor's authorial judgment of quality and does not engage them in development of their authorial judgment and definition of quality of their work embedded in critical dialogue.

In contrast to Closed Syllabus, students of the Open Syllabus educational regime often reject summative assessment because of its negative aspects listed above. It may work very well for autodidactic students with strong self-generating educational authorial agency, who initiate and follow their own learning activities. However, for the rest of the students in the Open Syllabus, who are the majority in our experience, a non-coercive environment without feedback does not work well (see the evidence above).

So far, we have come up with an alternative, authorship-respected, summative assessment in the Opening Syllabus that preserves pedagogical coercion, honest feedback by others, while engaging the students in consideration of the quality of their own work from their own perspective and providing a relatively safe learning environment. In our Opening Syllabus courses, the final mark grade consists of the two following parts:

1. students' conformity with the professor's unilateral requirements, such as "class attendance", a minimum number of online class forum postings, and an online submission of the necessary number of Self-Studies (70 points max total) and
2. the graded quality of the students' Main Learning Project (30 points max plus possible 3 extra credits).

The first part is administrated electronically by the course server through course website. In our undergraduate courses, the Main Learning Project involves students investigating an issue of their interest related to the course to address some questions that they do not know but want to know – the practice that may be important in their future teacher profession. In graduate Opening Syllabus classes, students design their own Main Learning Projects based on their professional interests. Main Learning Projects may involve diverse formats: essay, letter, website, teaching a class, development activity, simulation, song, video, class oral presentation, and so on. In our Opening Syllabus classes, we require our students to produce a proposal and at least two drafts – the "first" draft and the "final" draft. We provide our feedback on the students' proposal focusing on helping to develop their interest without any summative assessment. The student authors can choose who can provide them with feedback and summative assessment: 1) the professor, 2) a peer (or peers), or 3) both the professor and peers. In addition, they have to evaluate their own project using either rubrics or narratives. For the final summative assessment of their "final" draft, in case of grade discrepancy between (or among) their own grading and other people's grading, the student author of the Main Learning Project can choose their own grade on a scale of the minimum and maximum grades of the discrepancy. This way of authorship-respected self-grading informed by others protects the author student from a need to conform to the judgment of the grader (the professor), while allowing to be exposed to other people's honest feedback. It also engages

the student-author in an authorial judgment about the quality of their work and creates a possibility for engagement of the student-author in the critical dialogue about what constitutes the quality of their work. Of course, this practice of authorship-respected self-summative assessment informed by others is not without its own problems.

First of all, students' self and others' summative evaluation can be shallow as they may not engage in dialogue about their evaluation of quality of their work. Second, their primary focus of self- and other summative evaluation may focus on safety and not judgment of the quality their work. Third, self- and others' evaluation is imposed on the students who may not want or need it at the given time or at all. Fourth, if we consider our target group of the students for whom we have designed the Opening Syllabus and for whom the Opening Syllabus is helpful, it is an open question whether the pedagogical coercion built in the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime also impedes the students' agency and critical dialogue. This issue becomes especially acute when the Opening Syllabus students face summative assessment grading of their Main Learning Project. On the one hand, this grading is negotiable and offers honest feedback by others combined with institutional learning safety to the students. However, on the other hand, the honest feedback and institutional learning safety often contradict each other. For example, if in the authorial judgment of the professor a student's project has poor shallow quality that the professor communicates by giving a low score grade, the student's institutional learning safety is jeopardized. This jeopardy can be addressed by the student's high self-grading either because the student wants to protect him/herself and/or because he or she really thinks that his or her project is good (however the student judges it). In this case, we think the grading practice will work well by communicating the professors' honest feedback to the student while providing the student with the institutional safety. However, in the other possibilities -- when both self-grading and grading by others are driven by honest feedback or by safety at the expense of the others' concerns -- either honest feedback or institutional safety will be sacrificed.

Another related problem is that an Opening Syllabus student may realize during the class or when taking the next Opening Syllabus class that pedagogical coercion is a sham, which can be easy to manipulate and beat as a game. For example, the surveillance system of the Participation Report only registers the presence of a student contribution but not its content. Similarly, the summative assessment of the Main Learning Project can be unconditionally set up by the student in advance by a high score in the self-grading regardless of its content. Thus, an Opening Syllabus student may jump to essentially an Open Syllabus pedagogical regime regardless of how much the student is ready or not ready for his/her own successful educational self-actualization. It may again lead to self-failure of missed educational opportunities. Although we believe that genuine education cannot be guaranteed, we still want to work on a pedagogical regime that is sensitive to the diverse needs of diverse students.

### **Does the Opening Syllabus promote the emergence of dialogic culture of authorial agency in education?**

Do we have any evidence that the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime promotes the emergence of an authorial agency dialogic culture for the students that addresses the "culture" and "self-failure" of the Open Syllabus without falling back into the Closed Syllabus coercive pedagogy, robbing the students of learning activism? Yes, we have this evidence. First of all, during the Mid-Term Town Hall meeting, all Opening Syllabus students expressed their great satisfaction with Opening Syllabus. So far, nobody has wanted to switch back to the Closed Syllabus. However, many of them informed us that they had had initial apprehension about the Opening Syllabus. Thus, one undergraduate student wrote about the class at the end of the semester, when the class was over, "At first, I was a little hesitant, just because

it was so different than any other class I have ever experienced, but each week I liked the class more and more" (EM, Webtalk, 16 December 2015), "I also really enjoyed this class! I wasn't really sure what to expect at first but as we got into the swing of things this became one of my favorite classes this semester!" (SG, Webtalk, 17 December 2015). In a graduate Opening Syllabus class, half of the class wanted to switch to the Open Syllabus (and they switched) while the other wanted to stay on the Opening Syllabus (nobody wanted to switch to Closed Syllabus).

In an undergraduate class, when the class term was over several students (8 out of 19) took the initiative and introduced the discussion thread, "Overall Class Experience" on the class web forum (known as "WebTalk"). This was in itself an interesting evidence of emerging culture of self-initiating educational authorship because these postings were not required and because for technical reasons the forum notifications were not working -- this means that they were checking the WebTalk on their own after the class was over (there were some other substantive discussions on the class matters as well). These 8 postings, reflecting the students class experiences, have several themes.

The first common theme strongly going through all postings was appreciation and enjoyment of the class, "It was by far my favorite class this semester... I really enjoyed this class and I will miss coming to class! I learned so much about our culture and the various diversity topics we could have. I hope everyone has a great semester next year. ☺" (KC, Webtalk, 9 December 2015).

The second theme expressed was sadness that many more curricular topics were not studied, "I am actually disappointed we did not get to cover more material" (DS, Webtalk, 13 December 2015), "If I could study the rest of the topics with the class I would in a heartbeat!" (AM, WebTalk, 15 December 2015), "... I wish we could've covered even more in the class. .... The final topic of nutrition, even though we didn't get to finish, I think is an essential lesson teachers need to incorporate into their classrooms. Because so many kids in the US are becoming obese, children need to be aware of the components of living healthy. I wish we could've talked about how to incorporate that into classrooms without devoting an entire lesson or class to health education strictly. How would you incorporate healthy living into a Math classroom?" (GH, WebTalk, 13 December 2015). This theme indicates growing and strengthening educational desires among some of the Opening Syllabus students. They seem to develop more educational future-oriented interests in class.

The third theme was the students' appreciation of the freedom to explore issues of their own interests and a lack of pressure from colonization of the students' personal time by assignments (e.g., homework, tests, taking notes, memorization), "I liked how Eugene gave us so many opportunities of freedom in the class such as choosing a topic or making suggestions to changes in the class during our town hall meetings" (KC, Webtalk, 9 December 2015), "The fact that we did not have tests or homework allowed me to focus more on the discussion and I actually got more out of the class because I was not concerned about writing everything down or memorizing things. I also liked that we got to provide feedback on the class throughout the semester and how we made changes if we as a class wanted to" (NC, Webtalk, 8 December 2015). "I really enjoyed the freedom that we had in this class but also that it was structured enough so that we wouldn't get off topic. We were all able to focus on the parts of each topic that were the most important to us with the self-studies and learn how to implement new ways of teaching into our future classrooms. Thank you for a great semester!" (SG, Webtalk, 17 December 2015). As the last quote shows, the freedom of exploration was not disorienting for the student, it felt secure and served her educational purposes.

The fourth theme, which we are really happy about, was the students' appreciation of the weekly Self-Studies that they did in class (and some continuing at home if they chose to), "I liked having the freedom to learn without worrying about memorizing little bits of information, and with the self-studies I could take my education in the direction I wanted to. All in all, I am very satisfied with this class!" The title for this in-class assignment was given by a student from previous class (our label was "mini-projects"). Not only did we change the name of this assigned learning activity but we also changed its nature and pedagogical purpose. Before it was a responsive assignment, asking the students to respond to some videos or readings or pedagogical dilemmas. Now, we provided guiding opportunities and choices for the students to develop, explore, and pursue their own inquiries by often providing them with about 20 general possible inquiries about the studied topic (e.g., what is considered bullying in different cultures) and about 20 education-related possible inquiries about this topic (e.g., what diverse teaching approaches to bullying). Students asked to select two inquiries from the list (i.e., a mini-curriculum map around a particular curricular topic) or develop their own and study using Internet sources of their choices (guiding sources were provided as well) to find out interesting, new, disturbing, disagreeable, or exiting information for them to share with the class. We intentionally limit time to 20-30 min to make sure that it is not enough for the students to finish to create in the students a dissatisfactory desire that they need to finish and learn more (some continued the Self-Study at home but we jokingly "discouraged" any homework) (cf. "the Zeigarnik effect" of unfinished activity [http://www.psychwiki.com/wiki/Zeigarnik\\_Effect](http://www.psychwiki.com/wiki/Zeigarnik_Effect)) (Baumeister & Bushman, 2011). The Opening Syllabus students, at least some, seemed to appreciate this possibility. Another evidence of that was that in a graduate Opening Syllabus, all of those students who chose the Open Syllabus for the second part of the semester insisted on their engaging with a weekly Self-Study. In an undergraduate Opening Syllabus class, when a professor unilaterally cut a Self-Study because of a lack of time in the second part of semester, several students complained on the class web about a) the cutting of the Self-Study and b) about the professor's unilateral decision making. The professor had to restore this Self-Study that some of the students choose to do it at home.

The fifth theme was the students' contrasting of some elements of the Closed Syllabus and Opening Syllabus: "... I actually got more out of the class because I was not concerned about writing everything down or memorizing things" (NC, Webtalk, 8 December 2015), "...I enjoyed the aspect of no homework or tests. This helped me focus more on what I was learning through the discussions in class rather than struggling to complete an assignment or study for a test" (KC, Webtalk, 9 December 2015). The students saw many aspects of the Closed Syllabus as distracting them from their genuine education.

The sixth theme was appreciation of important learning in the class that helped the students' personal and professional growth: "the open curriculum really brought me out of my comfort zone along with the very relaxed class atmosphere, and I think it is great for students to feel a little unsure at times in the classroom since it means they're only growing as a person" (SB, WebTalk, 17 December 2015), " I liked that we got to choose the topics we discussed in class and all of them were relevant and helpful not only as a student, but also as a future teacher.... I was really glad that I decided to do a lesson plan for my Main Learning Project and that we were able to teach it to the class. It was great experience and practice creating a lesson plan and teaching the topic to the class!" (NC, WebTalk, 8 December 2015). Opening Syllabus students' appreciation of the assigned learning activities and the class overall shows that there were many learning opportunities for them, in contrast to the Open Syllabus courses where many students chose to opt out of these important opportunities (and did not develop alternative learning opportunities for themselves). We judge that there is another "educational culture" – opportunities for the students' learning, nurturing interests, and growth – promoted by the Opening Syllabus. At the same time, so far, we did not see any evidence that the pedagogical coercion of the Opening Syllabus impeded

students who are strong autodidacts, probably due to the flexibility, diversity, and open nature of the assignments.

Ironically, conventional oppressive educational culture shapes the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime much more than the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime. It is ironic because on the surface the Open Syllabus provides all the freedom to the students from the beginning while the Opening Syllabus gradually releases the institutional grip of the power. It is probably because when the Open Syllabus starts with the collapse of the institutional regime and its unilateral power, the cultural vacuum can then be filled out by students' conventional resistive responses to the institutional regime. These responses by the "institutionally good" students involve minimizing efforts while maximizing rewards, looking for preset structure (if the teacher is not going to give this structure, the students will), if something is not required by the authority with consequences attached to the demands – no commitment will follow, life priorities are shaped by the necessities and then by having a break from these necessities (rather than by self-initiatives and self-actualization), and so on. Opening Syllabus socializes the students in an alternative culture of authorial judgment and testing ideas. Like in a case of extreme and prolonged food starvation where it can be dangerous to trust the person's freedom to regulate his or her own eating – the person may die from eating too much food -- excessive educational oppression may similarly require a gradual transfer of responsibility for the students' education from the imposed regime focused on promoting the students' dialogical authorial judgment, i.e., how the Opening Syllabus class starts, to the students' own authorial agency and democratic governance.

The seventh theme of the Opening Syllabus was that unsolicited feedback on class was one of the strongest among all the postings. This feedback involves high appreciation of critical dialogue in the class. "All the topics we covered are relevant to me as a future educator, and the class discussions really made me think about my own pedagogical views. Also, it was always interesting to hear about my classmate's thoughts" (EM, Webtalk, 16 December 2015), "This helped me focus more on what I was learning through the discussions in class rather than struggling to complete an assignment or study for a test" (KC, WebTalk, 9 December 2015), "I took away so much from our discussions and learned so much from the opinions of my peers. I think Eugene is a great model of a teacher. I loved his open teaching style and his great ability to lead a discussion. I also felt comfortable & like my opinion would be respected" (AM, Webtalk, 15 December 2015).

Finally, the eighth theme was the students' growing appreciation and commitment to the democratic self-governance that was strongly evident at the end of the class term. Each time the professor made a unilateral decision, the students demanded a democratic deliberation and decision even though they might end up agreeing with the professor. They were very comfortable to raise their voice and publically (but friendly) criticize the professor, which was supported by the professor. For example, when the professor suggested to cut a second part of the class that previously decided to study bullying in school and to use the class to work on the students' Main Learning Project because the professor forgot a holiday break (the Main Learning Project workshop was scheduled by the students on that class meeting), the class demanded a brief discussion and a vote. As a result, all but two students wanted to do the workshop in the second part of the class and the professor continued the bullying lesson with these two. However, later a student wrote on the class web, "This class was interesting but I wish we did the self-study on bullying, not the MLP" (RM, class web, 17 November, 2015). The professor apologized on the class web for his unilateral decision about the Self-Study on bullying and restored it on the class web (and a few students chose to work on this Self-Study at home, as noted above).

These latest themes about dialogism and authorial judgment were erupting during our Mid-term Town Hall meeting. All of the undergraduate students said that as students they preferred Opening Syllabus, similar to our class, over Closed Syllabus, very familiar to them in their present and past school experience, and that Open Syllabus that threatened them. However, only half of the Opening Syllabus undergraduate students, future teachers, expressed that they would try to practice the Opening Syllabus in their future classrooms as teachers. When they asked their peers, who as teachers would practice only the Closed Syllabus in their future classroom but preferred the Opening Syllabus for themselves as students, the second half discussed how conventional education and recent reform of the No Child Left Behind and the Race to The Top were not compatible with the Opening Syllabus. They reflected that the Opening Syllabus teaches students to develop their strong voice and their own judgment informed by alternative views and to use evidence to defend them. In contrast, the Closed Syllabus of conventional education is aimed at making sure that the students can repeat what was taught (information, skills, problems-solving) on the demand of the test designers. We were amazed by the Opening Syllabus students' ability to articulate the Opening Syllabus philosophy and culture of promoting educational authorial dialogic agency – the theme we did not directly discuss in our classes. It showed not only the students' powerful but tacit, and potentially uncritical, socialization in the new culture of educational authorship but also the *critical* awareness of it in the Opening Syllabus students. Finally, we did not sense any sentiment of “self-failure” in our Opening Syllabus students.

## Unconcluding: Current problematics of the Opening Syllabus

In this paper, we discussed and conceptualized pedagogical experimentation aimed at promoting learning activism and ownership of their own education through critical dialogue and democratic self-governance. To our big surprise, we found out that merely engaging students in decision making about their own education, the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime, does not work for many students because of neglect of the pedagogical culture issues and self-failure. In response to these concerns, we developed a hybrid pedagogical regime, Opening Syllabus. Below we focus on tensions within this new, hybrid pedagogical regime, by analyzing students' reflections and contributions in the class.

One of our biggest concerns with the Opening Syllabus (or even any pedagogical regime for that matter) is whether it “pedagogically works” for all students. For the Opening Syllabus, “pedagogically working” means creating a sensitive environment that provides students' development of the educational authorial agency and personal-professional voice in and around the subject matter of the class. The concept of the Opening Syllabus has been developed in response to the students who are: 1) heavily socialized and traumatized by a conventional education robbing them from self-generating authorship with regard to their own education, 2) interested or can be interested in the subject matter of the class. We judge that majority of our students are like that. We have also experienced or can imagine some other types of the students.

The first possible group involves students who are more or less mature autodidacts, who can organize their own education and for who the peers and/or the instructor may be unnecessary or even detrimental (e.g., Bill Gates in his high school and college, Gladwell, 2008). They may need to be in dialogue with themselves, with literature, and people outside of the class. The Opening Syllabus may accommodate them by offering an alternative sabbatical-like attendance, where students are engaged in their own education and report about it to the class – but even that can be too insensitive and oppressive for some autodidacts. So far, we have not been faced with this situation, but we are considering how to accommodate these students in the Opening Syllabus.

The second group involves students who are ready for Open Syllabus because they can already successfully engage in self-generating educational authorship while highly appreciating dialogue and guidance with and from their peers and/or the professor. For these students, some of the coercive non-negotiable aspects of Opening Syllabus can be unnecessary, insensitive, and, thus, oppressive. The Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime allows for the Open Syllabus to be offered in the second part of the class term for those students who want to grab this opportunity. But this flexibility has a problem for those students who may want to have this legitimate opportunity from the beginning of the class. We have already experienced that the students who chose Open Syllabus, in an otherwise Opening Syllabus class, felt isolated and unsupported. One graduate student who chose the Open Syllabus for himself wrote in his feedback on the class, "The structure gives students an uncomfortable feeling of deviating from the prescribed path and venturing out into the open syllabus world" (December 2016). Another graduate wrote in her self-evaluation at the end of the same class,

Although I chose to move to the open syllabus, I found I was afraid to stray too far from the rest of the class. I continued through the end of the semester as if nothing had changed. If I have the opportunity to pursue a course with an open syllabus again, I hope I will be more adventurous in pursuing my own interests in the class. While freedom is nice, venturing into the unknown can be uncomfortable. I find comfort in structured assignments. I need to find comfort as a researcher as well. Soon I will be on my own without a clear path through research. While I have enjoyed the opportunity to attempt venturing out on my own, I clearly have a long way to go before I am comfortable as an independent researcher (December 2016).

A lack of Open Syllabus community and Open Syllabus public discourse in an otherwise Opening Syllabus class may create alienation in emerging autodidact students and pressure to conform to their Opening Syllabus peers.

Another possible problem related to this group of emerging autodidacts is that some of the students may jump from the Opening Syllabus to Open Syllabus prematurely and experience self-failure, which robs themselves from the available educational opportunities. Again, so far we are not sure we have faced with these possibilities.

The third group of students may be faced with the very different challenge of having not enough necessary coercion in the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime. Our Opening Syllabus classes start with only a very few aspects of the class being open: curriculum and dialogue and then gradually becomes open to other aspects of the class by the mid-term when the students may decide to switch back to the Closed Syllabus or move to an Open Syllabus or to have some open and some closed aspects (i.e., being Open on the meta level). Although in our classes so far this organization "pedagogically worked" for our past students, we do not know if it really worked well for all of our students or will it work well for all in the future. The degree and the pace of how an Opening Syllabus should be open-close at the beginning of the class and should progress to becoming to a more open pedagogical regime may vary from student to student. It may also involve a certain process of negotiation that we are not fully aware of or ready to explore.

The fourth group constitutes students who may need "an alienation vacation" from any coercion (and even from education) to detoxify themselves from the oppression of conventional education robbing them from their authorial agency for so many years. As we discussed above, educators of democratic schools and of homeschooling have noticed this phenomenon of some students being traumatized by



conventional education so much that they may need some time off from any educational commitment to recover their authorial educational agency. The Opening Syllabus in the context of conventional high education does not have enough time to accommodate the needs of these students.

The fifth group of students may also need a vacation from institutionalized education but for a different reason. They may be very interested in the subject matter per se and in dialogue and guidance with and from their peers and the professor but their life circumstances (e.g., poor health, poverty, family issues) may preclude them fully or partially from engagement the class. The Opening Syllabus does provide organizational flexibility and encourages negotiation of the pedagogical coercion (and promote trust to discuss personal issues). However, this flexibility is limited and may not always fit to the life circumstances of a particular student.

The sixth group involves students for whom the subject matter of the class is peripheral to their personal and/or professional interests. We have experienced those students in our Opening Syllabus classes and both they and we have found that the Open Syllabus pedagogical regime provides enough freedom, opportunities, and legitimacy for their both engagement and disengagement. We, the Open Syllabus professors, legitimize both micro and macro non-participation and disengagement from some or many topics of the class communicating to our students that we expect that some topics may or may not be interesting and important for them. Not all of our students are education majors or they may change their professional interests. The students can engage in many alternative activities using their computers in the class or stay on the periphery of learning activities getting in and out. Their grade can be OK when they do the otherwise required coursework or make compensations (which can be too much for these students). Also, the design of the Self-Study explorations allows the students to find their own interests that may peripherally link to the studied topic (e.g., in a topic on the issues of drugs in education, a student may study a different relationship, for example between seriousness of drugs and incarceration rates).

The seventh group, which we have actually observed, involves students who are forced to take our Opening Syllabus classes by the system but who may not have much interest in the overall subject of the class. For these students, our Opening Syllabus class may be felt as a prison or waste their time from the get go even before coming to the class because the institutional and Opening Syllabus pedagogical coercion might be very unwelcome by these students. Of course, their attitude may change through the serendipitous learning through exposure to issues and phenomena that they might not be familiar and through our dialogic provocations (e.g., we may ask students who have particular views on some controversy and for these students create an option "I don't care" which may present an important dialogic position for the class). However, we should not expect that serendipitous learning would happen in each and every of the cases. For the latter students our Opening Syllabus will remain oppressive.

Finally, the eighth issue with the Opening Syllabus pedagogical regime involves a diversity of the students' educational philosophical values. Some students may value only institutional credentials and nothing more, some students may value socialization in a targeted practice that study (e.g., becoming a competent educational researcher or a teacher), some value critical examinations of the targeted practices and beyond, some consider their educational processes as a hobby of their life, and so on. Some students have a combination of these values; some students dynamically change their values during the class, and some students remain vague about their values. In our view, considering educational values is a part of education itself, which is especially important in the education of educators (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012). We think that students have a legitimate right to be involved in the educational practices they believe in, and it is a good idea for their education to engage them in a critical

examination of their own educational beliefs and values in a critical dialogue with the self and others (unless they do not want to do that – we believe that genuine education cannot be forced). When students disagree with us about the inherent critical nature of their education and insist on this disagreement, it might be time for them to change their teachers (i.e., "no-fault teacher-student divorce, see Mayo, Albuquerque Candela, Matusov, & Smith, 2008). From this perspective, only learners can initiate and define their education: curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). This genuine education requires students' freedom from necessities and assignments by others. Our Opening Syllabus pedagogical design is an approximation and invitation to this genuine education, which can be only done fully in Open Syllabus.

We think that our society, based on ubiquitous instrumentalism, is not ready for this type of education yet because it is still too much based on necessity. The fact that the inherent, non-instrumental, nature of the sphere of genuine education (i.e., education for the sake of education itself as the basic human need defining humanity itself) is not publically well-recognized may have deep historical and sociocultural roots, although it is powerfully felt by many people (Matusov, Baker, Fan, Choi, & Hampel, 2017, in press). The notion of education expressed by the Greek word "school" means "leisure" and was understood as a leisurely pursuit of critical examination of the self, life, world, and society (Arendt, 1958; Plato, 1984). This type of leisurely pursuit of critical examination, freed from labor and work, was available to free male citizens of a Greek democratic polis and was based on the exploitation of slaves and women (Arendt, 1958). Until people again become free from labor and work – free from survival and necessities and experience this freedom as a culture given – non-instrumental education for self-actualization cannot be achieved in mass education, beyond small oases and safe havens (e.g., Greenberg, 1992; Neill, 1960). Some older people find this type of genuine leisure and leisurely education when they retire<sup>9</sup>. Currently most economic and institutional practices require people to act as smart machines: to predictably arrive at preset goals and to be mutually replaceable (Mitra, 2013). Of course, it is true that humans can never act as perfect smart machines even when they engaged in the most routine work (Wenger, 1998). It is also true that modern economic and institutional practices also require architects and designers – an intellectual elite – who do not act as smart machines but are engaged in creatively imaging new goals, values, practices, art, theories, and so on. This means the fundamental need of people for self-actualization and personal growth remains mostly unrealized for the majority of modern humanity (Maslow, 1943). These are oases of non-instrumental education in the vast ocean of instrumental education. However, we may come closer and closer to the point when a need for human instrumentality will diminish through robotization, automatization, and telecommunication when economic and institutional practices may not need mass human employment in general (so called "technological unemployment") and smart machine-like employment in specific (Ford, 2015; Markoff, 2015; Rifkin, 2014). These growing changes in technology, economy, and institutional practices may create a new demand for mass non-instrumental education. Thus, the tension in the field of dialogic pedagogy may reflect bigger historic sociocultural tectonic tensions in our society, if not in modern civilization. Further experimentation with non-instrumental education promoting students' authorial agency, learning activism, and ownership of their own education is needed along with critical analysis of this experimentation.

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<sup>9</sup> Father of a friend of mine (the first author) once said that people live genuinely only for 8 years: 7 years before school and one year after they retired. Back then in the Soviet Union, children started school at 7-year of age. Also, often Soviet people got sick shortly after they retired. Being seriously sick often destroys or severely undermines the existential sense of the genuine leisure.

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