
Bakhtin and the poetics of pedagogy: a dialogic approach

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Abstract

Given the enduring educational legacies of apartheid and the continuing poor standards of secondary schooling in South Africa, the question of what constitutes appropriate academic development for educationally disadvantaged students in universities remains pertinent. This paper draws on the work of the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, applying his concepts of dialogue, language types and speech genres to the context of student development. It illustrates how these concepts may be interpreted and applied pedagogically with reference to a certificate course in participatory development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It argues for a pedagogy which negotiates the boundary between formal and informal knowledge, taking into account both disciplinary foundations and students' experiences.

Introduction

I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words (an infinitely diverse reaction), beginning with my assimilation of them (in the process of initial mastery of speech) and ending with the assimilation of the wealth of human culture (expressed in the word or in other semiotic materials).

Mikhail Bakhtin, from notes made in 1970–71, p.143

This passage, written by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) towards the end of his life, captures some of his salient themes: the relation between the *I* and the *other*, the centrality of the word to this relation, the processes of becoming. Students entering higher education institutions also encounter a world of others' words: those of the administration, of their lecturers, of the academic discourses they have chosen along with the canons, codes and conventions of knowledge production that these involve. The challenge that they face is to make the words of the others' their own, and to find ways of expressing their own words in relation to others' words. Students from poor educational and social backgrounds face particular difficulties in this regard. The words of the others are often not in their own language but come to them in a second or third language. In addition, schooling has not adequately prepared them to negotiate others' words in an academic context. Thus some kind of dialogic engagement between the words and worlds of the students, on the one hand,

and of the others whose words and worlds are valued in the academy, on the other hand, is essential if students are to succeed in their studies.

What pedagogical form should this engagement take? One version, strongly informed by Curriculum 2005 and educational ideologies of constructivism and progressivism, argues that a learner-centred approach is most appropriate. This approach embraces principles such as relevance to current and future needs, an integration of academic and applied knowledge, theory and practice, knowledge and skills, and is informed by values such as democracy, equity and redress (Department of Education, 1999). Such an approach foregrounds the experiences of students and situates them as creators of knowledge and makers of meaning. It eschews a focus on content in favour of outcomes. A counter-argument insists that this approach undermines the teaching of the foundations of disciplinary knowledge, and therefore perpetuates disadvantage for students from poor educational backgrounds. In order for such students to gain epistemic access to valued areas of knowledge, they need to be initiated explicitly into the relevant hierarchies of knowledge. Without foregoing the centrality to learning of learners and their experiences, such an approach highlights the importance of the subject and the teacher (Muller, 2000; Hugo, 2005; Harley and Wedekind, 2004). Drawing on Bakhtin's ideas, I argue for an approach which takes both students' experience and foundational knowledge, and the teacher's role in mediating these, as crucial components of a pedagogy of access and dialogue.

This article takes the form of a dialogue between Bakhtin's key ideas about language, dialogue and genre, on the one hand, and the context of student development in a South African higher education institution, on the other. Bakhtin's poetics reject the polarisation of subject and object, expression and structure, personal and social which are found in approaches such as positivism, with its emphasis on the objective, and idealism, which gives ontological and epistemological priority to the subject. His key concepts mediate these dyads to show how they are constitutively interrelated. With regard to education, learning is both social and personal, individual and collective, and reducing one to the other violates Bakhtin's grounding principle of dialogue. A poetics of dialogic pedagogy thus explores the creative tensions between constitutive elements such as learner and educator, formal and informal, programme and institution, university and community, seeing these are relations rather than polarities.

This article begins by identifying some of the difficulties of relating Bakhtin's ideas to education. It then establishes a context of academic development in South African higher education and, more specifically, student development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, from which and within which to engage Bakhtin's ideas. It goes on to explore specific implications of these ideas for

student development in relation to methodology, curriculum content and assessment. The article does not aspire to address and resolve the myriad problems associated with tertiary access and success in South Africa. It focuses specifically on the issue of pedagogy against the background of an impoverished secondary school system, and the imperatives of access and redress.

Mikhail Bakhtin: Background and key ideas

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), described by Zvetan Todorov as “the most important Soviet thinker in the human sciences and the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century” (Todorov, 1984, p.ix), lived in interesting times. Born in tsarist Russia, he experienced revolution, two world wars, Stalin’s long night of terror and purges during which he was arrested, tried and exiled to Kazakhstan, and eventual recognition for his work in his own country and abroad. His oeuvre spanned the disciplines of linguistics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and literary criticism and exhibits an encyclopaedic grasp of western culture and literature. Bakhtin refers to his theoretical approach as ‘metalinguistics’ or ‘translinguistics’: the focus of study is not the isolated text or language system, but “the entire sphere of dialogic interaction itself” (Gardiner, 1992, p.31), that is, language in its psycho-social context of use as discourse.

Of what relevance are Bakhtin’s ideas to education? Perhaps the closest Bakhtin came to addressing the field of education explicitly was in his work on the *Bildungsroman* (the novel of education), most of which was destroyed during World War Two when the publishing house to which Bakhtin submitted the manuscript was bombed. Bakhtin’s greatest works are on the novel: the grand triumvirate of Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984), Rabelais (Bakhtin, 1968) and Goethe (Bakhtin, 1986) feature prominently in his writing. However, the broad sweep of his ideas about language, consciousness and culture are highly suggestive for education, particularly his notions of dialogue, language types and speech genres. Ball and Freedman (2004) argue that Bakhtin’s key idea of ‘ideological becoming’ is highly suggestive for the field of learning. Ideology, in the way Bakhtin uses the term, refers broadly to a world view or system of ideas that frames the way we see reality, and this includes but is not confined to political ideology. This ideological becoming is “the process of selecting and assimilating the words of others” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.341). Thus ideological becoming is central to the learning enterprise and particularly, as I argued above, to students in higher education who encounter and engage with a world of others’ words.

Bakhtin himself would probably approve of an application and development of his ideas in the field of education, since for him each new recontextualised ‘utterance’ of a text has the potential to create new meanings: “To understand a given text as the author himself understood it. But our understanding can and should be better” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.141). In a South African context, Volbrecht (Volbrecht, 1994) has contributed a novel(istic) and genre-sensitive article which explores and applies Bakhtin’s ideas to academic development at a tertiary level. I build on his contribution here, thus extending the dialogue.

Bakhtin was anything but a systematic philosopher. His ideas change over the course of his writing career. He consciously resists the systematizing tendency as ‘monologic’ and prefers to focus on ‘what is created’ rather than ‘what is given’. He is drawn to the particularity of the individual utterance and its dynamic complex of meanings which change with each new contextualisation, rather than to language as a system. One result of this is that his key concepts have a certain elasticity because he defines them differently in successive works, allowing each new text to create a new ‘utterance’ of an enduring idea. His earlier work is informed by Neo-Kantian and Phenomenological orientations, while his later work draws on Marxism, although he never adopts a reductive materialism and is more comfortable with the idea of dialogue than dialectic (Bernard-Donals, 1994; Holquist, 1990; Danow, 1991; Dentith, 1995). There is a powerful centrifugal tendency in his work, as he acknowledges in discussing a collection of his essays from various years that he was compiling shortly before his death:

The collection of my essays is unified by one theme in various stages of its development. The unity of the emerging (developing) idea. Hence a certain *internal* open-endedness of many of my ideas. But I do not wish to turn shortcomings into virtues: in this work there is much external open-endedness, that is, an open-endedness not of the thought itself but of its expression and exposition. Sometimes it is difficult to separate one open-endedness from another. It cannot be assigned to a particular trend (Structuralism). My love for variations and for diversity of terms for a single phenomenon. The multiplicity of focuses. Bringing distant things closer without indicating the intermediate links.

(Bakhtin, 1986, p.155).

Bakhtin’s love for ‘variations and diversity of terms for a single phenomenon’ means that his philosophical method is not precise, linear and analytical, but rather rambling, repetitive, characterised by sudden brilliant insights and circuitous expositions. Given these difficulties, I now turn to three of Bakhtin’s key ideas: dialogue, language types and genre, applying each in turn to the context of student development in South Africa. To set the scene, I discuss briefly academic development and student development in the South African context of tertiary education.

Moyo, Donn and Hounsell (1997, p.16–17) argue that academic development encompasses four aspects: student development; staff development; curriculum development and organizational development. Student development has ‘a distinctive and dominant focus on helping students to learn and study effectively’. In reality, a university programme oriented towards academic development would include all these aspects in ways that are essentially interrelated. My focus on pedagogy within an academic development perspective has an emphasis on student development, but also relates to curriculum development with its focus on “supporting the design and updating of particular courses and programmes of study” (Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, 1997, p.16–17). Since 1994, there has been a proliferation of student development initiatives in South African universities:

pre-entry bridging, access and orientation programmes; academic support programmes; credit-bearing foundation and extended degree foundation programmes – which seek to remedy significant gaps in students’ knowledge and understanding and equip them with the learning skills and study strategies vital to high academic achievement.

(Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, 1997, p.17)

Dialogue and student development

I begin this section with an analysis of Bakhtin’s encompassing notion of dialogue which serves in his work more as an ontological disposition than a single concept. Bakhtin employed dialogue as a fundamental category in his analysis of language, literature and society. Pivotal to his approach is his contrast between dialogue and monologue. Monologism is an oppressive and inauthentic way of being which, “at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.292). He understands speech, language and life itself as dialogic, using this term both as a descriptive and a normative category. An extract from his critical work on Dostoevsky’s novels provides an insight into the breadth of the concept:

The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.293)

For Bakhtin, dialogue is much broader than its manifestation as sequential representation of characters' voices in a novel. Dialogic relationships permeate "all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.40). At times Bakhtin seems to conceive dialogue as a principle of human becoming which involves an intrinsic relation with the other: "To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no sovereign internal territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another."

The goal of dialogue is creative understanding. This understanding is 'created' – in the sense that it is new, dynamic and provisional – rather than 'given' in the sense of a confirmation of what already exists. Creative understanding necessarily involves differences and 'outsideness': "our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7). This creative understanding is not necessarily an easy process of reconciling ideas. It can involve conflict and struggle, but the conflict is for the other rather than against him/her: "In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.142).

As argued above, students coming into higher education institutions encounter a world of others' words. A monologic institution does not recognise the otherness of the students and simply imposes unfamiliar administrative and academic discourses on them. This was probably true of historically white institutions before they began to change in the 1980s in response to an increasingly diverse student body. Students were expected to assimilate and master the canons, concepts and conventions of academic discourse, and students with the requisite cultural capital were at an advantage. Today, in place of the racial hierarchy of the apartheid era, a class-based differentiation is becoming the norm in higher education, particularly in the context of an increasing squeeze on resources. As Chisholm (2004, p.6) argues, "the interests. . . of the new deracialised middle class have come to predominate". Class differences are often, but not always, linked to differentiation based on English language competence. Poor students from townships, informal settlement and rural backgrounds, whatever their academic potential, have poor prospects of making it into universities or succeeding if they do manage to gain access. Even if they succeed academically, they often struggle to avoid exclusion on the basis of unpaid fees.

An institution with a dialogic approach would recognize that students come from a variety of backgrounds and a range of life experiences. It would embrace the importance of the 'boundary' where institutional and student cultures meet in a learning encounter, in what we have referred to elsewhere as

a “dialogic space” (Rule, 2004; Rule and Harley, 2005). This kind of dialogic approach is crucial in granting students social and epistemic access to the university, and giving flesh to Vision Statements about community engagement and relevance, as opposed to simply admitting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To provide a concrete example, the Certificate of Education: Participatory Development, a two-year part-time programme offered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, recruits students from non-traditional backgrounds who would not otherwise gain access to the university. They are typically employed by NGOs or engaged as volunteers with community-based initiatives. Many of these students do not meet the matriculation exemption criteria for entrance to the university and have experienced disadvantaged educational and social backgrounds. Students come from a variety of ethnic and language backgrounds and range in age from 20 to 60, though the majority are mother-tongue Zulu speakers and in the age group 20 to 50.

The aim of the course is to produce qualified community development practitioners who can implement participatory education and development projects at a local level, and, through them, to build capacity in local communities. A secondary aim is to provide students with a basis for further study at a tertiary level. The course was originally developed in collaboration with non-governmental organisations in the Pietermaritzburg area and was strongly informed by a Freirean ethos and a critical pedagogy approach. Paulo Freire, in the setting of mid- and late-twentieth-century Latin America, developed the notion of dialogue in relation to education, in particular to adult literacy (Freire, 1970). For Freire, dialogue is not merely an educational technique; it is something fundamental to the process of becoming a human being. He sees it as an act of communication in relationship that shapes one’s orientation to others and the world: “Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it” (Freire and Shor, 1987, p.98). Freire emphasises the relation between dialogue and political action; dialogue is not simply talking for its own sake. It is part of a praxis of transforming the world: “Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, we can then act critically to transform reality” (Freire and Shor, 1987, p.99). Thus Freire links dialogue, and the changed consciousness that arises from it, to an explicit political agenda of liberation from oppression. The notion of dialogue, within this critical pedagogy tradition, has played a powerful formative role in the conceptualisation and methodology of the CEPD.

Within the CEPD, there is a strong emphasis on the practical application of theories of education and development in local contexts, locating the programme firmly in what Subotsky (2000) terms the ‘partnership model’. Subotsky sees this form of knowledge production, driven by concerns for

social equity and community development, as complementing the growing emphasis on service of private sector needs, marketisation and managerialism. Subotsky (2000, p.91) argues that knowledge production in the partnership model provides conducive conditions for the integration and mutual enrichment of experiential learning, socially relevant research and enhanced community development-oriented service. The CEPD programme includes foundation courses/modules in Lifelong Learning, Adult Education, Development, and Project Management, as well as an elective set of modules in Land Care, Peace Education or Entrepreneurship. A compulsory Development in Practice module, based on the notion of service learning, involves the placement of students within an organisation. Students plan and implement a five-week internship within their own area of specialization.

The course is dialogic in that it is consciously situated on the boundary between the university as an academic institution and the communities from which students come. The 'outsideness' of the students lies in the fact that they are second- or third-language English speakers, that they come from poor social and educational backgrounds, that they do not typically have a history of tertiary education in their families or communities. However, this outsideness, rather than being seen as a deficit to be eliminated in the process of assimilating students into academic discourse and university culture, can be embraced as an essential element of dialogue.

For the students, the 'outsideness' of the university lies in its association with elite culture, its preoccupation with theory and research, its difficult codes and conventions. If these elements are presented as resources rather than barriers, the outsideness of the university can potentially enrich students in their engagement with the academy and their local communities.

Dialogue involves the recognition of difference not as a way of foreclosing engagement ('Let's accept our differences and leave it at that') but of 'seeing' and engaging with each other. The etymology itself indicates a negotiation or contestation of the word ('logue') between two who are different ('dia'), and this is the value of dialogue: not that the two become one, but that they create new, shared meaning out of their engagement to which both contribute. Tension and conflict are integral constitutive aspects of dialogue which are encompassed within a commitment to learn from one another, to struggle with, rather than against, the other (Gadotti, 1996). The university and local communities are different but not unrelated. The dialogic space offered by courses such as the CEPD involves a turning toward one another of the university and local communities, and an engagement, often ambiguous and contradictory, which potentially enriches both. From this dialogue the academy might generate new knowledge and even come to know itself differently, and members of local communities might develop and reflect on

their development. Pedagogy is a crucial terrain in which this engagement takes place.

What specifically does Bakhtin's notion of dialogue contribute to education, and the CEPD in particular? Bakhtin distinguishes between two fundamental kinds of discourse: on the one hand 'authoritative discourse', a prior 'given' discourse such as religious or political dogma, a discourse of fathers, adults, teachers, which demands unconditional allegiance; and on the other hand 'internally persuasive discourse', which is the kind of discourse which people develop for themselves in relation to the words of others through "an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.344). Bakhtin characterises internally persuasive discourse as:

Of decisive significance in the evolution of the individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it.

(Bakhtin, 1981, p.345)

A dialogic pedagogy creates a process through which participants are able to develop their own internally persuasive discourse, and thereby further their 'ideological becoming', by selectively assimilating the words of others. In the context of the CEPD this involves engaging with 'authoritative' academic discourses associated with lifelong learning, adult education and community development, not as canons of irrefutable truth but as 'other voices' in a continuing dialogue, which become part of students' internally persuasive discourse through processes of acceptance, rejection, application and revision in relation to their own experiences. This is not, however, simply a process of individual realisation, but also a socially situated process through which learners engage with the 'language types' and 'speech genres' that constitute the social world of language and knowledge.

From these admittedly broad notions of dialogue and dialogic space, I now turn to more specific applications of Bakhtin's notions of language types and speech genres to issues of methodology, curriculum and service learning on the CEPD.

Language types and pedagogy

Bakhtin distinguishes between "national languages" and "social languages" (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). This section elaborates the relevance of these two types of language to the CEPD. In the context of the CEPD, 'national' languages would include those languages spoken at home by students such as Zulu, Xhosa, English and Afrikaans. A monologic approach prioritises English as a

tertiary medium of instruction and requires that students master the academic codes, concepts and conventions presented in the course through the medium of English to the exclusion of other languages. The problem with this is that it fails to recognise one of the key tenets of sociolinguistics: that students' languages are constitutive of their identities (Hudson, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002) and, as such, potential resources for learning. A denial of their languages involves a denial, at some level, of their identities, and a failure to engage with their languages means that opportunities for learning might be missed.

A dialogic approach would involve recognising that the diversity of languages in the classroom can contribute to learning. Translation of concepts from and into Zulu, for example, can assist Zulu-speaking learners in grasping complex meanings which may be inaccessible, or only partly accessible, in a second or third language. Notes from the facilitator of the Lifelong Learning module of the CEPD indicate some ways of doing this:

- Dialogue among languages: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, e.g. discussion of 'family': nuclear and extended (English) gesin/familie (Afrikaans); umndeni/imindeni (Xhosa/Zulu). This is also a dialogue among cultural experiences. We have a discussion about who a 'brother' is: The son of my mother? A male relative of the same generation? Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia is apposite here.
- A week later, a student raises the issue of stereotypes. We discuss the stereotype of the Zulu male and students (the majority of whom are Zulu) provide the following stereotypical characteristics: unromantic; aggressive; not inclined to negotiate; prone to fighting. Someone points out that the stereotypes of Zulu and Afrikaner males are similar. We discuss how the separation of apartheid made stereotypes a facile shorthand for classifying people without having to recognise their complexity and individual difference. Stereotype emerges as part of a monologue: the way we speak the other, the way the other is conceptually coded within our frames of reference. This kind of stereotyping can cause 'noise' in communication as we impose the expectations of the type on individuals. We agree that we need to be aware of our own stereotypes and how they affect our judgement of others.

These notes indicate how the investigation of key concepts in the classroom, e.g. 'family' and 'stereotype', can benefit from drawing on the cultural and linguistic resources of students in a dialogic attempt at 'creative understanding'.

The dialogic use of languages in the classroom is not without challenges, and these are related to the power relations among languages in South Africa and their social meaning for classroom participants. Kogler (1999, p.1) differentiates between two senses of "the power of dialogue":

1. Power as the potential of dialogue: “the liberating, problematizing, innovative and unpredictable potential of conversation, which is capable of leading us to new insights and critical self-reflection through experiencing the other”.
2. Power as structural constraints on dialogue: “whether these obtain in our symbolic order, in unquestionable established power relations, or in idiosyncratic individual perspectives”.

The use of Zulu as a medium of instruction, on a course where the majority of learners are Zulu-speakers, would make sense in unleashing the ‘power of dialogue’ in the first sense, enabling students to grasp and apply concepts in their own language and to formalize community knowledge and experience within a university setting. The use of Zulu on the course could enable the university to learn from communities rather than only the other way round. This could initiate a radical reconceptualization of the relation between ‘sacred’ university knowledge and ‘profane’ community knowledge.

However, the ‘power of dialogue’ in its second sense is also prevalent here. Students themselves have resisted the idea of Zulu as a medium of tertiary instruction in the past (Houghton and Hlela, 2003; Hlela, 2004; Hlela and Land, 2005). English is seen as the language of access to opportunities for further study, employment and status. Even for dedicated community development workers who value their own languages, the reality is that local and international knowledge resources such as books, journals, manuals, web sites and audio-visual material are predominantly in English. In addition, a number of the facilitators on the CEPD course do not speak Zulu. Until a substantial corpus of knowledge and research has been developed and published in local indigenous languages, English will remain the language of access to valued discourses in the academy. As indicated above, one way of addressing this is to use the range of languages available in the classroom as resources for learning through discussion and translation, using learners themselves as experts in their own languages. Another idea which CEPD facilitators plan to trial is to translate some of the course materials into Zulu and to have them available in both languages.

In addition to ‘national’ languages or ‘linguistic dialects’, Bakhtin identifies ‘socio-ideological’ languages: the languages of social groups. In a tertiary context, these languages could include specific academic discourses such as those of ‘education’ and ‘community development’. A dialogic approach recognises the specific discourses that students are required to master and tries to link these to students’ words and worlds. This draws on the insights of Bakhtin (and his circle) into the dialogic nature of language itself, the meaning of which is created by both its producers and recipients:

[W]ord is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'.

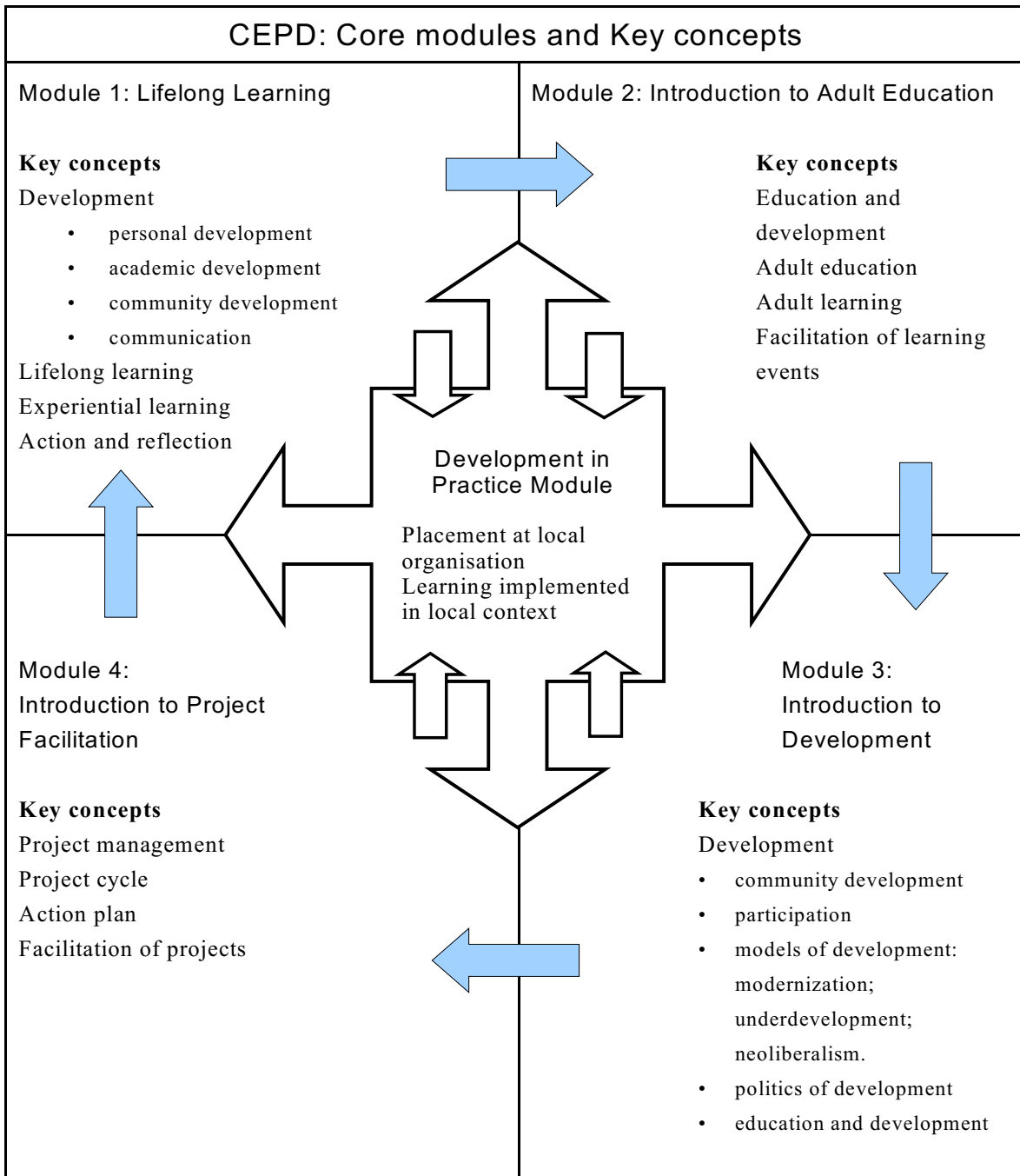
(Volosinov, 1973, p.86)

In the CEPD one dimension of epistemic access involves initiating students into new discourses of adult education and community development. This includes a new conceptual constellation of terms such as *development, facilitation, participation, lifelong learning, service learning* and *context*. It also involves discursive skills and procedures such as analysing, summarizing, synthesizing and reviewing; and conventions of knowledge production such as argument, use of evidence, and referencing. Many students struggle to come to terms with the new discourses, particularly as they do so in English, a second or third language for the majority.

One way that the course has begun to address this is to introduce key concepts in the first module and to revisit, interrogate and deepen their signification in subsequent modules. For example, the Lifelong Learning module introduces the concept of development and differentiates among personal development (dealt with in activities such as writing personal histories and personal profiles), academic development (dealt with through a focus on academic reading, writing and thinking skills) and community development (linked to personal histories and profiles through an exploration of community profiles). The concept of development is picked up again in the Introduction to Development and subsequent modules and explored in much greater depth. Similarly, the concept of facilitation is introduced in the second module and later revisited. Conceptual development thus takes on a recurrent and recursive form and is reinforced through multiple contexts of discussion and application.

One constraint on this approach is the modular structure of the course. Students tend to see modules as discrete learning areas and it is difficult to effect conceptual continuity and development across modules. Related to this is the outcomes-based nature of the course. Students tend to focus on the achievement of particular module outcomes. While this provides focus and specificity, it detracts from the unanticipated outcomes and incidental learning that are a vital part of experiential learning, as well as the cumulative learning across and between modules. Interviews with past students (Hlela, 2005) indicate that they sometimes make conceptual connections after the completion of the course as they continue with their development work, rather than in the Development in Practice module. This suggests that students need a period of conceptual incubation which begins with the course but extends beyond it – a feature that is consistent with the idea of lifelong learning but which is difficult to quantify and assess.

Figure 1: Conceptual development in the Certificate of Education (Participatory Development)



Another constraint concerns the educational background of the learners. Biggs (1999, p.16) argues that one of the factors that encourages a 'deep learning' approach is appropriate background knowledge: "the ability to focus at a high conceptual level, working from first principles, requires a well-structured knowledge base". In the case of the CEPD, this background includes knowledge of English as the medium of instruction; a basic understanding of concepts such as education and development; general knowledge of the world, including the rudiments of South African history and global politics. Without this background knowledge, students can struggle to engage with deeper issues and tend to revert to a surface learning approach as a familiar strategy. This can result in students failing to achieve the more critical and analytical outcomes of the course.

Given the limited time available on the course, it is difficult to fill in all the gaps in students' knowledge, which can include computer skills, English, library skills, the basics of academic reading and writing, and numeracy. Although time is apportioned to each of these areas in the programme, students often require more than the available time to catch up. While students do write an entrance test which assesses English and numeracy competence, and this test does indicate students who definitely will not cope with the course, a number of students are borderline candidates who are admitted to the programme on the basis of their community development experience. The dilemma is that, if only those students with adequate background knowledge and English language skills are allowed into the programme, it would exclude many students involved in community education and development work who could benefit, and so would defeat its stated purpose of access. This is a dilemma faced more widely by tertiary students in South Africa given the poor quality of secondary schooling.

The nature of the CEPD as a 'boundary' intervention located between the university and local communities means that it has to take seriously two kinds of knowledge and, crucially, the relationships between these knowledges. These are the formal knowledge of academic discourses such as education and development, and the informal knowledge arising from student experience within local communities and development initiatives, and their engagement with everyday realities. On the one hand, it deals with formal concepts of education and development by introducing, elaborating and critically engaging with these concepts through the various modules, and by facilitating a process of student reflection on them in assignments, journals, classroom discussions, portfolio activities and reflection sheets. On the other hand, it draws on students' informal knowledge as a constant point of reference in classroom discussions and assignments, encouraging students to apply formal concepts to their local experiences (What kind of development has happened in your community? How would you describe it in terms of the models of

development you have learnt about?) and to formalize their own local knowledge (What have you learnt from your Development in Practice placement? What has it taught you about community development?). Case studies drawing on local development contexts provide a useful link between the informal and the formal, between students' contexts of experience and the academic discourse of analysis and critique.

Speech genres and dialogic learning

A second key concept arising from Bakhtin's work is that of speech genres. This section explains Bakhtin's position on speech genres and relates it to developments within genre theory. It then gives specific examples of how Bakhtin's conception of speech genres can be applied to programmes of academic development.

Bakhtin's work on genre has been a reference point and source of inspiration for genre theorists in a variety of disciplinary areas, including linguistics, literature and education (see Paltridge, 1997 for an overview of genre theory in various disciplines; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1997). A number of theorists, particularly in Australia where Halliday's systemic functional grammar has been especially influential (Halliday, 1985), have explored the implications of genre theory for the classroom (Martin, 1989; Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Johns, 2002; Paltridge, 2001). In South Africa, the strands of Australian genre theory and British Critical Language Awareness have been picked up by Hilary Janks in a series of workbooks on language and power (Janks, 1993a; 1993b).

Bakhtin develops the notion of "speech genres" to describe "relatively stable types of. . . utterances" which are characterised by certain common features of thematic content, style and compositional structure (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60). These speech genres may be spoken and written and their diversity is "boundless". Bakhtin further distinguishes between "primary (simple)" and "secondary (complex)" speech genres. Secondary genres include "novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth" and they "absorb and digest various primary (simple) speech genres".

A dialogic approach to pedagogy identifies the characteristic secondary genres that students are required to master and makes explicit the various 'primary' genres that constitute them. This can be done by providing students with exemplars and helping them to identify the constitutive features of a particular genre, and of adopting a process approach to writing which enables students to develop and revise particular primary genres in the process of developing a completed secondary genre-type assignment. For example, the academic essay

as a ‘written’ secondary genre is made up of a range of primary genres that include, for example, a topic, an introduction, quotations, references, argument, examples, summaries, etcetera. The ‘learning event’ as a spoken genre might comprise primary genres such as a welcome, an ice-breaker, participatory activities, group tasks, report backs, evaluations, etcetera.

Figure 2: Examples of primary and secondary genres in the Certificate of Education (Participatory Development)

Secondary genre	Medium	Constituted by primary genres
Academic essay	Written	Topic; introduction; statement of position; quotation; example; reference; conclusion, etc.
Learning event	Oral and written	Welcome; introduction; activity; question; report back; handout; evaluation, etc.

A specific application of Bakhtin’s ideas to the CEPD lies in developing an understanding of the constitutive relation between secondary and primary genres. An assignment from the Lifelong Learning module, which required that students write an essay in response to the question, ‘Should we make people take the HIV test? Why/why not?’, serves to illustrate this. The assignment requires that students move across the boundary between informal and formal knowledge and at the same time operationalize a number of academic reading and writing skills. The table below indicates the tasks that students are asked to perform and links these to simple genres and their related academic skills:

Figure 3: Component tasks in researching and writing a discursive essay on the CEPD course

Complex genre: discursive essay

Task	Simple genre	Academic skills
Analyse the topic	Topic analysis	Analysis of topic into task and content words; stating what the topic is about and what it requires
Identify your own bias	Statement of position	Identifying and articulating own position on topic
Identify three sources of information relevant to the topic	Statement and justification of sources of information	Identifying relevant sources of information

Identify strategies to access these sources	Statement and justification of data collection techniques	Identification of data collection techniques
Collect the information and analyse it	Statement of other positions on topic	Data collection skills: e.g. interviewing skills; intensive reading skills
Analyse the information	Analysis of other positions Comparison of positions Summary of positions	Data analysis skills
Give your final answer to the question	Statement of position Substantiation of position	Reflecting on own position. Confirming/restating own position. Substantiating own position

Students are given assessment criteria which state the requirement for each step of the assignment so that they can assess themselves as they proceed. After the assignment is assessed, they are given a feedback sheet with comments on how they performed in each of the simple genres that they were required to master in producing the complex genre of the essay. If students fail the assignment, they are given the option to resubmit once they have received feedback and guidance on the shortcomings of their first submission.

The format and process of this essay task links back to Bakhtin’s notion of living in a world of other’s words. Students are required first to state their ‘own words’ in expressing their initial view on the topic. Then, by engaging with various sources of information, they ‘assimilate’ the words of others through a process of data collection and analysis. Finally, by reviewing and restating their position in the light of the words of these others, they make other’s words their own, either by accepting and integrating them wholly or partially into their own position, or by rejecting them and strengthening their stance in response to them. There is thus a process of internal dialogue between students own words and the words of others that takes place through the process of researching and writing the essay as students develop an ‘internally persuasive discourse’.

Another way in which the CEPD develops knowledge of primary and secondary genres is by requiring students to write assignments in a variety of genres, including a personal history. Students identify and reflect on key experiences in their lives which have shaped them. This is part of the exploration of the concept of lifelong learning. They are encouraged to

consider not only formal learning experiences, but also the informal learning that happens in families, communities and organisations, and the learning that occurs as a consequence of failure and struggle. A process approach to the task takes students through stages of brainstorming, planning, drafting, editing and revising, and thus develops key academic writing skills.

Students are also required to plan, conduct and evaluate a 'learning event' in class as part of the Introduction to Adult Education module. This activity requires that students engage with key concepts such as facilitation, learning and participation. This process familiarises them with the primary genres that comprise a 'learning event' as well as giving them an opportunity to realise the genre as a whole in its actual simulated 'utterance in class'. Feedback to students focuses on these constituent parts so that students become more conscious of their own facilitation approach and skills. Later, in their Development in Practice module, students are able to conduct learning events in the organisations in which they are placed.

Two possible pitfalls that a pedagogy of genre needs to take into account are the danger of teaching genres as mere formulas for composition, and of seeing genres as homogenous and unchanging (Paltridge, 2001). In this regard, there is a need to go beyond teaching genre simply as a collection of formal linguistic and structural features, and to address its social situatedness. This includes factors such as context, purpose, and the aims, assumptions and interpretive practices of the discourse communities that employ the particular genre. Bakhtin emphasises the dynamic and evolving nature of the novel genre, its hybridity and plasticity (Bakhtin, 1981). Genres, as particular situated relations between text types and social situations, change. Learner should be made aware of this and of their own agency in relation to genre as a way of communicating successfully in particular discourse communities and of gaining access to socially powerful forms of language, but also of developing and expressing their own voices in various situations.

While the CEPD team still has a long way to go in mapping key concepts within the course and charting a route through them, in identifying and teaching explicitly the various speech genres pertinent to the course, and in addressing the challenges of language and identity, the examples above indicate some strategies for a pedagogy of dialogue and access that have begun to work. The distinctions between formal and informal knowledge, disciplinary content and student experience are useful in conceptualising and problematizing issues of curriculum and pedagogy on the course. However, a further challenge involves trying to understand and articulate the exact relationship between formal and informal knowledge – including the possibility of "their embeddedness in each other", to use Young's phrase (Young, 2005, p.6) – on the course in its boundary location.

A boundary pedagogy of dialogue and access: constraints and challenges

Dialogue is not a new term in education and has a prominent place within the tradition of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Freire and Shor, 1987; Gadotti, 1996). It is, however, a contested notion and the critical pedagogy tradition has come under attack from a variety of perspectives, including some feminists and post-modernists. Post-modernists point out that critical pedagogy is based on modernist assumptions about the unity, agency and rationality of the human subject within the framework of a realist ontology and a 'metanarrative' of emancipation (see Usher and Edwards, 1994). Feminists within this tradition question the tendency of critical pedagogy to impose political assumptions on students about social justice and transformation, its failure to acknowledge adequately differences within the classroom and the priority it gives to rationality above other forms of human intelligence (Ellsworth, 1989).

Bakhtin shares with writers like Freire and Gadotti an emphasis on the importance of the social and the ethical, a commitment to the common good, and an understanding of the contested ideological nature of language. However, Bakhtin's insistence on the open-endedness and unfinalizability of dialogue, and the irreducible 'outsideness' of those participating in dialogue, offer a corrective to some of the potentially reductive tendencies within the critical pedagogy tradition while also staking a claim for a dialogic open-endedness within that tradition.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of language types, dialogue and genre are suggestive for students' 'ideological becoming' and can contribute to a pedagogy of social and epistemic access. In particular, the view of pedagogy as occurring within a dialogic learning space on the boundary between the university and local communities, has suggestive implications for curriculum and methodology. However, a dialogic approach to pedagogy should not be seen as a panacea. The relations between formal and informal knowledge, between disciplinary foundations and student experience, between the academy and local communities, are complex and shifting, and require sustained and continuing interrogation and experimentation. A boundary pedagogy should not assume that all students have equal access to classroom dialogue or that participation in classroom dialogue is an end in itself. It should understand and address the power dynamics of the classroom, the institution and the society at large as it draws students into engagement with 'the world of others' words'.

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