

***FREIRE, BAKHTIN, AND COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY:
A DIALOGUE WITH STUDENTS AND MENTORS***

Trevor Thomas Stewart & Greg McClure
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina (USA)

ABSTRACT. Hermans (2001) has argued that an individual's social position within an organization creates situations where "some people have more opportunity to take the role of power holder than do others" (p. 265). The authors have embraced this concept and engaged in Self-study to examine their teaching experiences to develop an understanding of the ways in which dialogue between students, teachers, and their theoretical mentors can make teaching and learning a more collaborative and equitable effort. This article focuses on how engaging in philosophical dialogue with mentors and viewing students as co-creators of knowledge and pedagogy can enhance teaching and learning and nourish teachers who are working through the constraints teachers encounter as a result of *Standards Era* policies.

KEYWORDS: dialogue, co-creation, collaboration

The isolation lamented by Lortie's (1975) classic text *Schoolteacher* remains a persistent and troubling element of teaching in the 21st century (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Margolis, 2008). Despite recent trends promoting collaborative teaching practices and professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Hargreaves, 2008), teachers continue to cite isolation as a significant consideration in their decision to leave teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2004). We submit that the current educational climate, a conservative restoration of market-based reforms (Apple, 2006), standardization, and high-stakes accountability (Marshall, 2009) has done little to foster an atmosphere of collegiality and collaboration. In fact, Stewart (2012) and Ravitch (2010) suggest that the current sociopolitical climate influencing educational policy is a driving factor of teacher frustration, isolation, and dropout. Hermans (2001) has argued that an individual's social position within an organization creates situations where "some people have more opportunity to take the role of power holder than do others" (p. 265). We believe that attending to issues of power in the classroom and examining the ways in which those issues influence dialogue in the classroom are crucial first-steps in the process of critically reflecting upon our roles in the teaching and learning process.

As critical educators who value creativity, dialogue, and democratic principles in our teaching, we embrace the notion of collaboration and recognize the need to

AUTHOR'S NOTE. Please address all correspondence regarding this article to Trevor Thomas Stewart, Ph.D., Appalachian State University, Department of Reading Education and Special Education, ASU Box 32085, Boone, NC 28608, USA. Email: stewarttt@appstate.edu

identify unique ways to value the presence of others in our pedagogy. Using the tools of Self-study (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Kitchen, 2009; Russell, 2010), we highlight ways in which Freirian (1970) and Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) approaches to dialogue frame our pedagogy and enable us to conceptualize collaboration in unique ways. First, Freire helps us recognize how a dialogic pedagogy, which values students as equal participants, facilitates the sharing of power and decision making in the classroom. Second, Bakhtin's theory of language helps us recognize that the voices of our philosophical mentors and others who have influenced our teaching are ever-present and inform instructional choices. Both of these approaches allow us to see our teaching and learning process as a collaborative endeavor that is guided and informed by the multiple voices of students, scholars, and mentors.

These Trying Times

The current sociopolitical climate of education in the U.S. favors an approach to teaching and learning in which test preparation and scripted curricula are often the order of the day (Hillocks, 2002; Marshall, 2009). This focus on standardization and high-stakes testing has led to a narrow view of what counts as teaching and learning (Franciosi, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Lipman, 2004; Luke, 2004; Ravitch, 2010; Stewart, 2010) and ultimately fails to inspire critical and creative pedagogies. Perhaps one of the most distressing examples of the ways in which standardization and catering to ever-increasing calls for improving students' "employability" can be found in Giordano's (2005) work, which demonstrates how standards are being set and monitored with an eye towards intervening when schools "fail to perform" (p. 208). This punitive model focuses less on what students learn and more on how to punish teachers and schools for unsatisfactory performance on a single, high-stakes test. Additionally, it is critical to note that while the frameworks available to teachers for designing instruction and assessment have become increasingly standardized and constricted, the student population in U.S. schools reflects exceptional diversity, both in terms of social class (Jones, 2006) as well as language and culture (Batalova & McHugh, 2010).

As critical educators who are committed to learning about the unique lived experiences and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) that diverse students bring to our schools and classrooms, we see the scripted and prescriptive formula for teaching and learning as inadequate and misguided. Rather, we assert that instead of being compelled to transmit scripted instructional programs, teachers and students need space to explore content learning in relation to their unique community contexts.

For both of the authors, teaching and learning are political acts that occur in situated sociopolitical and cultural contexts (DuBois, 1918; Freire, 1970; Nieto, 2009). As such, we recognize the influence of ideology on everything from concrete matters like the physical conditions of schools (Kozol, 1987) to policy decisions that decide

whose/which knowledge and history are relevant and legal (e.g. see the American Education Research Association’s resolution to the Arizona state legislature regarding the recent decisions to ban the ethnic studies programs in Tucson Unified School District [“AERA Resolution,” 2012]). Given the current sociopolitical context described above, we reaffirm our commitment to teaching in ways that contribute to education as the practice of freedom, a liberatory and humanizing experience where students and teachers build meaningful relationships as they connect learning to their lives (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). As Hermans and Kempen (1998) have argued, we must be attentive to the myriad implications of the ways cultures are becoming increasingly interconnected in this era of globalization. In our view, this requires a dialogic stance—a stance that interrupts the traditional hierarchy governing relationships between students and teachers in most U. S. classrooms.

Dialogic Perspectives

We enter our classrooms each day mindful of our mentors—scholars and students alike—who guide our thinking and help us approach the classroom with ideological and political clarity (Bartolome, 1996), a standpoint of analyzing how ideological orientations influence social, economic, and political inequities in society. Additionally, our work is informed by Delpit (2006) and Fecho (2004), who have written extensively about the importance of becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable task of relinquishing control in our classrooms and letting go of some of the power teachers traditionally wield. We see this as a critical step in beginning to blur the hierarchy between teacher and student. We agree with Freire (1970) who was highly critical of the unequal teacher-student relationship as manifested in the “banking concept of education” (p. 53), which occurs when teachers perceive students as empty containers to be filled with pre-established bodies of knowledge. This is education as transmission, and it reifies rigid boundaries between teacher/student, knowledge producer/consumer and mirrors other oppressive relations in society. Freire posed a democratic approach through dialogue.

Open to Dialogue

As the foundation of Freire’s (1970) emancipatory pedagogy, dialogue “is the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 63). Not to be confused with conversation, discussion, or debate, dialogue is politically engaged and a “declared act of inquiry, not an act of persuasion with a view to achieving particular outcomes” (Willet & Rosenberger, 2005, p. 193). As educators taking this perspective, we enter into teaching and learning without assuming the outcomes from the beginning; that is, while we have goals and objectives that guide us, we remain open to learning both *with* and *from* our students. Freire (2004) put it this way, “dialogue is the opportunity available to me to open up to the thinking of others and thereby not wither away in isolation” (p. 103). Learning to be open to the ideas of

others is something that we see as infinitely valuable for students *and* teachers. When this concept becomes a touchstone of teaching culture, we become more open to the ideas shared by our students; thereby, beginning to see them as co-teachers. In addition to a Freirian notion of dialogue, we also draw on Bakhtin's theory of language to enrich our pedagogy by brining the voices of our philosophical mentors into full relief.

Dialogue Across Time, Space, and Culture

Teachers interested in successfully navigating the complex terrain of a classroom that eschews *banking model* practices and values students' voices must be able to develop an understanding of the concept of dialogue. As Hermans (2001) has noted, "an increasingly interconnected world society requires attention to dialogical relationships between cultures" (p. 272). This concept holds true in our schools, which mirror the interconnected world society, when teachers in modern classrooms seek to include students' voices in the process of learning and teaching. Simply occupying the classroom roles of student and teacher complicates interactions between these two groups. Inherent in the role of teacher is the traditional expectation that the teacher is the expert to be learned from and obeyed. Similarly, the student role has historically been one of acquiescence. A classroom based on the social construction of learning challenges these traditional cultural positions. Moreover, students and teachers bring myriad experiences and frames of reference with them to the classroom each day. Finding ways to ameliorate these challenges requires teachers to carefully consider the nature of dialogue.

As teacher educators interested in developing an understanding of the concept of dialogue, we turned to Bakhtin (1981, 1984) to help us understand the nuances of dialogue and how it influences and is *influenced by* culture and cultural interactions. Bakhtin's work as a literary theorist was focused on the concepts of voice and dialogue, "which enabled him to deal with both internal and external dialogical relationships" (Hermans, 2001, p. 247). While internal dialogical relationships represent the more traditional terrain of individual (internal) teacher reflection, external dialogical relationships represent the dynamic intersections between self, other, and culture. Like Hermans (2001, p. 253) we see the boundaries between these as rather porous and permeable, and assert that understanding the dynamic interaction and shifting positions among internal and external dialogic relations is critical for teachers and teacher educators of diverse students. We must attend to the dialogical relationships and multiplicity of voices that exist amongst teachers, students, culture, and context as a means of cultivating unimagined possibilities in the classroom. Therefore, we believe that Bakhtin's (1981/1984) work provides a sound foundation for the construction of a pedagogy that values dialogue and collaboration.

For Bakhtin, entering into dialogue is not merely an act of communication, nor does it require face-to-face direct communication with another. Rather, dialogue

COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

represents the ongoing interaction and engagement with ideas and utterances. As such dialogue creates opportunities for individuals' worldviews to be enhanced through the mutual shaping that occurs as ideas are shared. As Bakhtin (1981) argued, words come alive through dialogue because they are "harmonizing with some elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others" (p. 277). Much like Freire's (2005) assertion that dialogue must make room for disagreement, questioning, and critique, Bakhtin suggests that this harmony and dissonance invites the consideration of new perspectives and fosters the development of new ideas. Engaging in dialogue with our philosophical mentors, those teachers, scholars, and students who have influenced our thinking and teaching and make it possible for us to create a community of co-teachers (both theoretically and literally). We believe this process can help stave off the frustration of teaching in isolation and improve our practice as we continue to learn from the myriad perspectives that can be found in this community.

We also draw upon Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) discussion of the blurring of hierarchies during carnival to highlight the value of questioning traditional power structures for teaching and learning and advocate for a classroom that creates the conditions for equitable relations among all learners. Regarding the culture of carnival in medieval Europe, Bakhtin (1984) suggested that "everything resulting from sociohierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people" was suspended (pp. 122-23). Individuals enjoyed temporary relief from the constricting social customs and norms of a highly stratified society. As a result, carnival became a "place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals . . . People who in life [were] separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter[ed] into free and familiar contact on the carnival square" (p. 123). We see direct relevance here to our efforts as critical educators working to remain in dialogic and just relations with our students. The suspension of these traditional hierarchies and power structures during carnival was a temporary moment, just as the critical and dialogic learning spaces we create in our classrooms are often isolated and temporary spaces of equity for our students as well. However, we believe that a shift towards a more collaborative teaching culture—a culture based on dialogue, reflection, and the sharing of ideas—can supplant the unproductive hierarchy between teacher and students and maximize opportunities for teaching and learning to occur.

Seen from this perspective, dialogue is conceptualized as a shared and collaborative act of inquiry. In this way, teaching is no longer an isolated act in which power and decision-making rest solely in the hands of the "teacher." It is this notion of collaboration via dialogue that we emphasize in this study. This stance frees us from having to appear alone on the instructional stage; instead, it enables to engage in the collaborative process of learning together as a community.

Engaging in Self-Study

The practice of Self-study is a vital step in helping teacher educators move beyond the apprenticeship of observation to become more adept at understanding their actions in the classroom. As Lortie (1975) has argued, students often do not have the benefit of understanding teachers' personal motivations and reflections on classroom experiences. As a result, students take incomplete knowledge gleaned from their observation of teachers with them into the classroom when they become teachers. This can, too often, lead young (and experienced) teachers to make instructional choices without a clear understanding of the *why* behind their actions. Self-study offers a unique and useful lens for viewing our actions in the classroom. As Russell (2010) has pointed out, Self-study offers a research methodology that can help teacher educators conduct "research in one's own setting of practice to understand and reduce the gap between the good intentions of teacher educators and the actual learning of pre-service teacher candidates" (p. 690). This was one of the goals for both authors in this project.

This methodology is particularly useful for us, as critical educators, because it requires the researcher to view students from a perspective that sees them as "experienced students with extensive but incomplete" knowledge instead of empty vessels to be filled with information (Russell, 2010, p. 690). Engaging in Self-study requires us to be open to taking a reflective turn (Schon, 1992) that will enable us to critically examine both our teaching practices as well as the beliefs that inform those practices (Mercado, 1996). If we are honest with ourselves and true to the process, any close inquiry into our teaching practice is bound to reveal gaps between intentions and practice, a reality we may not choose to acknowledge. As such, engaging in collaborative Self-study is also of particular interest and relevance to our context. Reflecting on one's practice can be difficult because we can often miss opportunities to improve our practice when we fail to challenge the connections between our actions and our pedagogical foundations. Examining our work with the help of an experienced colleague makes it possible to interrogate the choices we have made and consider the theoretical and ideological standpoints behind the decisions we make in the classroom.

Modes of Inquiry and Data

A key element of our teaching and research practice is the reflective process of returning to the key mentors whose philosophies became the foundations of our pedagogy. Drawing on elements of Coia and Taylor's (2009) *Self-study method of Co/autoethnography*, we collaboratively revisited our lesson plans, teaching journals, and course assignments from our work with pre-service teachers at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Additionally, we engaged in reflection upon how our mentors have influenced our daily practice, to generate data that highlight how we have both succeeded at and struggled with building a classroom culture of shared responsibility for teaching and learning. Since we believe that both teaching and conducting research

are interpersonal acts, we spent considerable time discussing our process with each other to help illuminate the ways in which we can learn from our experiences to remain true to our pedagogical aims. These reflections and discussions have enabled us to see the cyclical and recursive nature of our process—by explicitly reflecting on our teaching with theory in mind, we attend to the guidance from mentors that reminds us to make space for students as co-teachers. This, in turn, makes it possible for us to see how a dialogic stance can facilitate unique approaches to collaboration with students and mentors.

Exploring Collaboration

This inquiry has helped us make sense of two approaches to collaboration. The first is a philosophical and theoretical dialogue with scholars we identify as mentors (e.g. Delpit, Bakhtin, Fecho, Freire, hooks) who inform our pedagogy in the classroom as well as our reflective practice outside. The second speaks to our dialogical stance in the classroom where the teacher/student hierarchy becomes less formal and rigid; the very acts of teaching and learning become a collaborative pedagogy that recognizes students as co-teachers. Despite advances of technology that offer mediums for individuals to connect across great distances in myriad ways (e.g. Facebook and other social media), the influences of globalization, too often, motivate people to seek the perceived comfort of niches which can often divide instead of unite (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Now more than ever, we believe it is vital to create classroom dialogue that invites collaboration and seeks to unite individuals by breaking down barriers between cultural groups (e.g. students and teachers). As Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) argued, “schools that aim to stimulate the personal responsibility and creativity of learners” facilitate discussion that allows room for students and teachers to disagree (p. 38). This sort of discussion, however, is not possible unless teachers view students as co-constructors of knowledge whose voices are valued and recognized.

By recognizing that our students make valuable contributions to our classrooms and also to our pedagogical development, we begin to conceptualize what we are doing as collaboration. Below we discuss how examining our teaching with theory in mind has helped us identify students who have molded our orientations to teaching and learning and acknowledge that, even though they may no longer be in our presence physically, indeed they continue to co-teach with us.

Greg

While my efforts to enact a democratic and dialogic pedagogy have been examined elsewhere (Vasconcelos, 2013; McClure & Vasconcelos, 2011), my purpose in this Self-study was to reflect on how former students continue to mold and influence my pedagogy. I draw on Bakhtin’s theory of language to illuminate how dialogue across

time and space can foster collaboration with those who may not be physically present but continue to contribute to our development as teachers.

Of all the students that have influenced my teaching, none have challenged me as consistently as Reynaldo, an emergent bilingual student¹ in my English as a Second Language (ESL) class during my first three years as a teacher. As I engaged in a sustained inquiry regarding how Reynaldo has influenced my pedagogy, I revisited old lesson plans, a teaching journal I kept for a master's course, as well as personal communications and letters from Reynaldo. I examined these documents with an eye towards my current teaching philosophy and in relation to the theoretical foundations I turn to for guidance. I focus here on one enduring lesson I learned from Reynaldo that continues to serve as a guidepost in my efforts to teach in dialogic and democratic ways.

Lesson 1: Start with me. Before teaching in public schools I worked as a human rights observer in Guatemala and a community organizer among migrant farm workers in the US. I had witnessed firsthand how oppressive political and economic structures resulted in poverty and social marginalization for certain groups in society. As a result, I brought a commitment to issues of equity and social justice to my role as a high school ESL teacher. However, for most of those first few years of teaching I failed to develop the ideological and political clarity necessary to see the connections between language, culture, identity, and teaching. While I advocated on behalf of students like Reynaldo and their families outside the classroom, inside I proceeded to teach the functions and forms of the English language isolated from the personal sociocultural and political realities of my students. Grinberg and Saavedra (2000) described this as “collusion” in the “illusion” that such technocratic and standards-based ESL programs accomplished little more than reinforcing assimilation and English-only discourses. Nothing could be further from my goals as a dialogic teacher.

English, not Reynaldo (or any other student for that matter), was the starting point for my instruction. While most of my students groaned at the decontextualized language instruction, Reynaldo took a different approach. He consistently tried to connect my classroom instruction to his own life in meaningful ways. He interjected personal stories and experiences and often invited me to make time and space for learning more about one another in our classroom. Not only did this help make learning relevant for him and his classmates, but it also significantly influenced the dynamics and the culture of our classroom community. Among the many suggestions he made, there is one in particular that I have continued to practice in my own classroom to this day. Reynaldo suggested that once a week we begin class with one student sharing their favorite *something* with the rest of the class, a high school version of “show and tell.” Most days this involved a student sharing their favorite song or CD at the time, but it

¹ Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi, (2008) suggest this term because of its focus on the bilingual potential of students, as opposed to deficit-oriented terms such as “limited English proficient.”

COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

evolved into students sharing photos of family and loved ones far away, as well as personal pieces of writing and bilingual poetry. This process allowed students to bring their voices into the classroom in ways that were not possible before, and as a result it strengthened the relationships in our classroom community. As I reflect back on this experience, I am reminded of Freire's (1970) thoughts on curriculum and content. He asserted that "The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (p. 85). Reynaldo's efforts helped me to understand the importance of beginning first with my students and then seeking the connections to our content.

While I did develop a strong and caring relationship with Reynaldo and his family during our years together, it was not until I engaged in this examination of my current teaching practices did I realize the significant ways Reynaldo is still present in my teaching. Reynaldo was quite often my co-teacher during my first years. His thoughtful and persistent attempts to insert personal experiences and narratives as relevant compliments to our class content, and his willingness to share how his personal experiences connected and informed our learning community marked a pivotal moment in my development as an educator open to learning with and from my students. He helped me see the beauty of bilingual poetry and code-switching, as well as the drudgery of worksheets and grammar taught in isolation by a novice teacher with little ideological clarity. As a result of my reflection and analysis, I constructed the following poem. Reynaldo's voice itself is in the poem, not only in my reconstructions of his words, but more importantly in his influence on my words. This polyphonic reality that our ideas and utterances are never completely our own is profoundly Bakhtinian. Our utterances do not exist in isolation, but emerge to contribute to a dialogue across time and space. This poem continues the teaching and learning dialogue between Reynaldo and I.

Reynaldo's Tie

I still wear it you know,
The tie you gave me on the day of your graduation.
Each time I pull the smooth silk across my neck
I return to China Grove, careening down the hallways
Pushing that rickety media cart, my portable classroom jalopy:
Posters demanding linguistic order, maps of Mexico,
North Carolina; "The World" fluttering behind.

The tie you took from your own neck,
Wrangled out from robes and regalia,
The blue and silver one that laid right on top of your heart.

STEWART & MCCLURE

“Profesor!” siempre me llamabas.

You called me this way, always,
but this time with conviction, confidence, *cariño*.

I used to keep it reserved for special moments:
A wedding, interview, funeral; those
Life moments that really matter.

Matamorros y maquiladoras

Only the first of many borders crossed daily:
Spanish poetry and the English 5 paragraph train wreck,
Sheets of homonyms, cognates, and irregular verbs
Smelling like stale canned language-sauce alongside
Your bilingual delicacies, your airbrush literacy.

Enseñamos. Aprendemos. ¿Pero siempre juntos, no?.

Together weaving knowledge,
Tossing roles end over end
Like some hungry *perro*
Chasing the tail until it is no more.

Cruzando, luchando, the struggle continues.

Was it those life moments? Maybe these? Which?
Like stones that sink or skip across the water
They are all life moments.

Reynaldo, I wear it now quite often in fact.

As I continue to develop my craft as a teacher, I am mindful of those that sit on my shoulders, encouraging me to approach teaching and learning with an eye towards dialogue. For me that includes scholars like Freire and hooks, who challenge me to remain open to the thinking of others and to frame education as the practice of freedom for all parties involved. It also includes scholars like Maxine Greene, who inspire me to find ways to make teaching and research imaginative, creative, and emotionally expressive, and Hubert Hermans who encourages me to attend to the interactions and shifting positions that occur between internal and external dialogical relations. Reynaldo sits on my shoulder as well. I believe that by actively engaging those on our shoulders to help interpret new experiences, the dialogue between us is extended. What we learn from them is not merely a static occurrence from the past; if engaged through

COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

dialogue their influences continue to contribute to our development as educators. Lastly, given the current sociopolitical climate of education, I find it necessary to seek out new and creative ways to reach new insights in my teaching and research. For me, the poem to Reynaldo represents one way; the research dialogue I maintained with Trevor throughout this project represents another.

Trevor

This inquiry has been a transformative experience in my struggles to articulate a long-held belief about the importance of learning to write to my students. George Hillocks (2007) has argued that we can't access or process many of our feelings or beliefs without the ability to write. This concept underpins much of the work that I do with my students. However, I find myself teaching in an era when standards, test scores, and grades tend to dominate the minds of teachers and students, which can make it difficult to motivate students to write simply for the sake of learning about themselves. As a teacher educator, I have found it equally difficult to help even my graduate students see that writing instruction should extend beyond simply preparing students to succeed on high-stakes writing tests. The ideological clarity I bring with me to my classroom motivates and sustains me as I consistently work to help my students see writing as a key that can unlock concepts lurking beneath the surface of our consciousness.

I firmly believe that writing instruction should do more than just prepare students to succeed on high-stakes writing assessments. Indeed, learning to write should serve the higher purpose of helping students follow their hearts and lead fulfilling lives (Jensen, 2004). However, before students can begin to move beyond learning formulaic writing tasks, writing teachers need to help their students find the courage and confidence to take the risk of making meaning through writing. This requires students to be willing to try new things and put pen to paper—even when their thoughts are not fully formed. This can not happen when students feel as though they are not seen as individuals who can make valuable contributions to the class. So the question of how to effectively create a classroom culture where students feel free to take risks has become paramount for me as a writing teacher who teaches from a dialogic stance and believes strongly in helping my students become the writers they already are—yet struggle to acknowledge.

Reflecting upon my teaching and engaging in dialogue with Greg, helped me work through my struggles to find a meaningful way to communicate the value of this type of writing to teachers in one of my recent graduate courses. This Self-study helped me realize that engaging in dialogue (both written and verbal) with my students was the answer I was looking for. Revisiting and reflecting upon a final course paper written by a student in one of my recent graduate courses helped me to better articulate why I believe that writing for personal reasons can be a valuable and cathartic experience in

educational settings. The following excerpt from the student's paper demonstrates the importance of helping students see that the value of writing comes not in the grade or test score received, but in what we learn from engaging in the process of writing:

Without writing, I would never have been able to share (or even deal with) certain experiences in my life that have formed the person that I am today, such as the loss of my brother. Each piece that I write is like a window into my soul, providing a unique view that would otherwise be nonexistent if not for the craft of writing. Some things are just too painful to talk about- so I write about them.

The ability to process painful memories, joyous experiences, and philosophical struggles can be of infinite value as individuals work to make sense of the world. Writing provides a tool for us to do these things. However, students do not have access to this tool if they do not learn to write for something other than the extrinsic motivators of grades and test scores. For me, learning to view my students as co-teachers and more comfortably teach in ways that reflect that perspective was a pivotal experience in my efforts to help my students expand the array of tools they can use to come to understand the world around them. I would not have learned this lesson without spending some time critically considering what I learned from reading the writing this student shared with me.

Reflecting upon this student's work and considering what my students had to teach me, made it easier for me to see that having the courage to write about such a personal tragedy in a course paper was both an act of learning and an act of catharsis. My response to the student included heartfelt comments that shared the pain I had felt when my own brother had died suddenly. This form of dialogue (written in the margins and in summative feedback) forged a connection between teacher and student that helped both of us see writing as form of processing experience instead of merely a contractual obligation between teacher and student that was focused on giving and receiving a grade. Instead, this dialogue became an authentic learning experience—a lesson wherein we both became teacher-students contributing to knowledge that both of us could carry forward into our lives. This is particularly important because my student and I will both be spending the bulk of our careers teaching others to write. This example illustrates the potential of creating a classroom culture where multiple voices hold equal sway. My philosophical mentors helped me learn to teach in ways that made it possible for my students to be my colleagues—co-teachers in a sense—individuals who were teaching me just as much as they were learning. However, it was my dialogue with my students and my collaborative reflection with Greg, which helped me become more adept at putting this pedagogy in action. The lessons I have learned from this student and this experience are not an end point. They are, in fact, just a guidepost along the path to becoming a more effective and empathetic teacher. This does not, however, diminish the importance of these lessons because each of these guideposts serve as

confidence markers along the trail that connect me to a community of thinkers, teachers, and learners and reduce the isolation that I, admittedly, feel while teaching in these trying times.

Warrants for Point of View

Given that teachers continue to identify teaching as an isolating profession and cite isolation as a reason for leaving, it is critical for teachers, teacher educators, and other educational stakeholders to find meaningful ways to collaborate. We acknowledge that while some do find meaningful ways to collaborate, often times these collaborative efforts are contrived and rife with conflict (Hargreaves, 1994). Further, there is a conservative restoration driving educational policy and practice right now. The status quo reasserts a preference for commercially produced high-stakes assessments that privilege limited views of what counts as knowledge and lock-step instruction geared towards success on those tests. Being committed to a critical view of education with an eye towards building meaningful relations with students and valuing the knowledge and experience they bring often puts us at odds with the status quo. At a time when public scrutiny of teachers and conservative agendas to privatize education flood the media (e.g. *Waiting for Superman*), maintaining a critical orientation and choosing to teach in creative and dialogic ways can become overwhelming, especially for teachers who feel isolated in their struggle.

While this may seem disheartening, we believe teachers can find support and collaboration by engaging in dialogue with mentors and taking risks to blur traditional hierarchies between teachers and students. For us, this process helped develop a meta-awareness of the fact that we are collaborating all the time. However, without a critical and dialogic lens and a commitment to a recursive reflective process, we are often toiling away unawares of the partners with whom are in dialogue. However, it doesn't have to be that way. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language illuminates the ways in which we are always in dialogue with those around us. He argued that outside of "the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet unqualified world with the first word," there is no escaping the influences of previous utterances (p. 279). Each word we use tastes of the contexts in which that word has been used in the past. Every experience we have colors and shapes the ways in which we view the world moving forward. If we take the time to reflect and attend to how that dialogue informs our worldviews, we can avoid feeling like the mythical Adam who was bereft of the thoughts of others to help guide him.

Significance of Dialogue as Collaboration

The experiences chronicled through this project indicate the importance of viewing the classroom as a place where teaching and learning can and should occur as a matter of course for all parties. Drawing on our experiences, we argue for a pedagogy

that recognizes the importance of collaboration with mentors and students as co-teachers.

By engaging in this reflective and dialogic process, both authors individually experienced significant shifts in their thinking about teaching and their teaching practices. Maxine Greene (2007) reminds us of the importance of pursuing yet unforeseen alternatives and possibilities in education. When our pedagogy becomes polyphonic by engaging in dialogue with our current students and former students and mentors across space and time, we open ourselves to a pedagogy of possibility that Greene talks about. We cannot plan for the contributions that others will make to the learning space, but without engaging them in dialogue we remain isolated from the possibilities to learn and change from their influence.

The work of Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon (1992) supports the notion that each person has a story to tell about their experiences. The dialogical self represents the possibility for individuals to consider the implications of the narratives constructed about an experience by their respective “*Mes* and their worlds” (p. 29, emphasis in original). Therefore, we see much value in taking the time to attend to our respective *Mes* and learn from the narratives we construct. Moreover, our inquiry has shown us that we can build upon the knowledge we construct through intentional reflection by engaging in continuous dialogue with others. Through dialogue with former and current students and scholarly mentors, we were able to see that, in fact, we are not alone in our classrooms. This project has helped us see that there are an unlimited number of collaborators available to us if we open ourselves to their voices. Intentionally seeking the benefits of a carnivalesque blurring of hierarchies can provide the nourishment we need to sustain ourselves in these times. Embracing a dialogic pedagogy and engaging in a recursive dialogue with our mentors and students has offered us a polyphonic alternative to traditional modes of teaching and helped us transcend the isolation of teaching.

References

- AERA resolution regarding the teaching of Mexican American students (2012, Feb. 5). American Educational Research Association. Retrieved May 20, 2013 from <http://www.aera.net/Publications/AERAHighlights/February2012/MexicanAmericanStudiesinTucson/TeachingofMexicanAmericanStudies/tabid/12585/Default.aspx>
- Apple, M. W. (2006). Interrupting the Right: On doing critical educational work in conservative times. In G. Ladson-Billings & W. F. Tate (Eds.), *Education research in the public interest: Social justice, action, and policy* (pp. 27-45). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel (C. Emerson & M Holquist, Trans.). In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (pp. 259-422). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. (C. Emerson, Trans). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). The problem of speech genres. (V. McGee, Trans.). In C. Emerson & M. Holquist, (Eds.), *Speech genres and other late essays* (pp. 60-102). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bartolome, L. (1996). Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. In P. Leistyna, A. Woodrum, & S. A. Sherblom (Eds.). *Breaking free: The transformative power of critical pedagogy* (pp. 173-195). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- Batalova, J., & McHugh, M. (2010). *Number and growth of students in US schools in need of English instruction*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). Stayers, leavers, lovers, and dreamers: Insights about teacher retention. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(5), 387–392.
- Coia, L. & Taylor, M. (2009). Co/autoethnography: Exploring our teaching selves collaboratively. In D. L. Tidwell, M. L. Heston, & L. M. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp. 3-16). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-9514-6_1
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1970). Negro Education (*Crisis*, February 1918). In M. Weinberg (Ed.), *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (pp. 161-171). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1918)
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Fecho, B. (2004). *“Is this English?” Race, language, and culture in the classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Franciosi, R. J. (2004). *The rise and fall of American public schools: The political economy of public education in the twentieth century*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Garcia, O., Kleifgen, J., & Falchi, L. (2008). *From English language learners to emergent bilinguals* (Equity Matters: Research Review No. 1). New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Giordano, G. (2005). *How Testing Came to Dominate American Schools: The History of Educational Assessment*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in household, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grinberg, J. & Saavedra, E. (2000). The constitution of Bilingual/ESL education as a disciplinary practice: Genealogical explorations. *Review of Educational Research*, 70 (4), 419-441.
- Guilherme, M. (2002). *Critical citizens for an intercultural world: Foreign language education as cultural politics*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2008). Leading professional learning communities: Moral choices amid murky realities. In A. M. Blankstein, P. D. Houston, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Sustaining professional learning communities* (pp. 175-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Cultural Psychology* 7(3), 243-281. doi: 10.1177/1354067X0173001
- Hermans, H. J. M. & Dimaggio, G. (2007). Self, identity, and globalization in times of uncertainty: A dialogical analysis. *Review of General Psychology* (11)1, 31-61.
- Hermans, H. J. M. & Kempen, H. J. G. (1998). The perilous problems of cultural dichotomies in a globalizing society. *American Psychologist*, 53(10), 1110-1120.
- Hermans, H. J. M., Kempen, H. J. G., & van Loon, R. J. P. (1992). The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism. *American Psychologist* 47(1), 23-33.

COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

- Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hillocks, G. (2007). *Narrative writing: Learning a new model for teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Jones, S. (2006). *Girls, social class, & literacy: What teachers can do to make a difference*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kitchen, L. (2009). Passages: Improving Teacher Education Through Narrative Self-Study. In D. L. Tidwell, M. L. Heston, & L. M. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp. 35-51). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4040-9514-6_3
- Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Luke, A. (2004). "Teaching after the market: From commodity to cosmopolitan" *Teachers College Record*, 106, 1422- 1433.
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Marshall, J. (2009). Divided against ourselves: Standards, assessments, and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 113-125). New York, NY: Guildford.
- Margolis, J. (2008). What will keep today's teachers teaching? Looking for a hook as a new career cycle emerges? *Teachers College Record*, 110(1), 160–194.
- McClure, G. & Vasconcelos, E. F. de S. (2011). From "I am" to "We could be": Creating dialogic learning communities in ESOL teacher education. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 6(2), 104-122.
- Mercado, C. (1996). Critical reflection on lived experience in a bilingual reading course: It's my turn to speak. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 20, 567-602.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Russell, T. (2010). Self-study by teacher educators. *International encyclopedia of education* (Vol. 7, pp. 687-694).

STEWART & MCCLURE

- Schon, D. A. (1992). The theory of inquiry: Dewey's legacy to education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 22, 119-139.
- Stewart, T. T. (2010). A dialogic pedagogy: Looking to Mikhail Bakhtin for alternatives to standards period teaching practices. *Critical Education*, 1(6), 1-20.
- Stewart, T. T. (2012). English teachers, administrators, and dialogue: Transcending the asymmetry of power in the discourse of educational policy. *English Education*, 44(4), 375-393.
- Vasconcelos, E. F. de S. (2013). "I just wanted to make sure that everyone knew I was American": A critical discourse analysis of a dialogic speech event. *Linguistics and Education*, 24, 86-100.
- Willett J. & Rosenberger C. (2005). Critical Dialogue: Transforming the discourses of educational reform. In L. Pease-Alvarez (Ed.) *Learning, teaching, and community: Contributions of situated and participatory approaches to educational innovation*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum