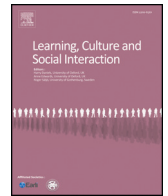




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Peer relationships and internally persuasive discourse

Sohyun Meacham

Nielsen Field House Room 165, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50677, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study explored Bakhtin's theories of dialogism focusing on the concept of internally persuasive discourse in a group of five 4- to 5-year-old children, when they engage in conversations about the theory of the cello's sound production in a naturalistic preschool setting. The author conducted participant-observation in the conversations with the children, minimizing authority on the flow of conversations to allow internally persuasive discourse among them. The findings of qualitative analyses, based upon the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), generated three themes: 1) recognizing new pals that have similar ideas as mine [the child's]; 2) dealing with conflicting ideas between best friends; 3) continuing peer interaction to understand and test different ideas. The current study has implications for an early childhood educator's endeavor to build a respectful and intellectually rigorous classroom environment for young children.

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1. Introduction

The importance of peer interaction in school settings, especially for promoting children's positive peer interaction and reducing aggression, has been elaborated in literature (Alvarez, 2007; Girard, Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2011). This literature, however, has emphasized training teachers to teach the children to engage in positive behaviors, rather than looking closely into the individual lives of young children and their relationships with their peers. Bakhtin's concept of *internally persuasive discourse* (IPD, henceforth) can be an interesting device for the investigation of children's peer relationship building from the children's side, contrasted with the teacher's perspectives projected towards the children's adequate behaviors. The concept of IPD is often used for exploring children's peer interaction, whereas *externally authoritative discourse* (EAD) is used for describing teachers' utterances accepted by the children without suspicion (Cohen, 2009; Matusov, 2009).

The purpose of this article is to explore Bakhtin's (1991) literary concept of IPD within an early childhood education context by analyzing preschoolers' dialogue; the concept of IPD will be used by employing an interpretivist methodology. I sought to describe how children's social relationships progressed in the IPD contexts by conducting a qualitative analysis. The application of Bakhtin's theory in this study is informed by Matusov's (2007) critical review of how education has applied Bakhtin scholarship on discourses. Therefore, the current study is interested in "informing Bakhtinian scholarship and productively pushing it beyond its limits (Matusov, 2007, p. 232)" using empirical data observed in an early childhood education context.

2. Theoretical framework: social interaction in IPD

Bakhtin's explanation of internally persuasive discourse (IPD) is based upon the contrasts between IPD and externally authoritative discourse (EAD). While EAD is recitation of words with others' authorities in history, IPD consists of one's own word and others' IPDs and EAD. Testing of one's own word and others' IPD and EAD is an important feature of IPD; Bakhtin called this aspect "an intense

E-mail address: sohyun.meacham@uni.edu.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2016.02.004>

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struggle ... for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values (Bakhtin, 1991, p.346).” According to Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky’s novel where the characters are relatively unpredictable and surprising because of their multiple voices (heteroglossia), characters continue to deal with urgent dilemmas that involve other characters surrounding them. While these characters are interacting with one another in dilemmas, they develop options of ideas; they test these ideas to accept an option and move onwards without external authority. IPD can be defined as the process of characters’ collective idea testing.

Heteroglossia is one of Bakhtin’s (1991) concepts, which can explain how various voices exist in cultures and societies (Cohen, 2009). “Heteroglossia is a variety of voices and their corresponding values and views of the world (Cohen, 2009).” People talk and add new meanings to a strand of ideas, where multitudes of nuanced details are generated. In heteroglossic IPD contexts, children can easily use another child’s words as building blocks for their own ideas, which blossom into authentic languages (Bakhtin, 1991).

Social interaction in IPD can be exemplified in the concept of carnival in folk cultures. Carnival in a folk culture is filled with informal thoughts and freedom, as no hierarchy among participants with different social status is practiced (Bakhtin, 1984). There is no automatic approval that is based upon established hierarchy or support of authority of the members of the society in IPD. Instead, the approval and persuasion of an idea in IPD is based upon mutual communication and mutual knowledge construction among the conversation participants (Cohen & Uhry, 2007). In this way, IPD can enable collaboration.

Educational researchers have explored Bakhtin’s concept of IPD. According to Matusov and von Duyke (2009), the majority of Bakhtinian researchers, such as Ball and Freedman (2004) and Wertsch (2002), focused on appropriation, interpreting Internally Persuasive Discourse to be an aspect of the inner self of individuals; this is compatible with the Vygotskian explanation of internalization. Or, the second approach, influenced by Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work, connects internal discourse to a specific type of discourse that belongs to a community of practice where a novice learner gradually approximates to the targeted discourse type of the chosen community. This understanding is not free from a uni-directional developmentalist approach, similar to the first approach. Matusov and von Duyke’s (2009) work suggests, as an alternative approach to two approaches, internal disclosure should be applied to the dialogue itself in which everything is constantly tested. In this *third* approach, surprising voices can be flourished and nuanced differences of similar ideas can be articulated in the continuous dialogic contexts.

3. Previous studies on IPD

There are several pieces of useful literature for exploring the concept of IPD in early childhood education, although we rarely see the literature at the preschool level or below. Matusov’s (2009) analysis of Paley’s (1981, 1991, 1992) anecdotal classroom research explored the concept of IPD, which ended up finding Paley’s classroom discourse relates to “externally authoritative discourse” (EAD) rather than to IPD. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) theoretical monograph about ethics and politics in early childhood education briefly explored Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy through Readings (1996) lens. Dahlberg and Moss did not use the term “Internally Persuasive Discourse”. Instead, in their own term “radical dialogue”, they explained that the child’s interest, which will maintain the child’s attention for learning, is aroused by participating in radical dialogue. These authors believed that radical dialogue is a relational activity; ideas are tested and negotiated in a continuous process of formulation and reformulation, which is relevant to Bakhtin’s concept of IPD. They claimed that teachers of young children have to participate in the radical dialogue to foster children’s learning. As Dahlberg and Moss’ exploration of IPD, however, did not provide empirical data, we do not have information of their perspectives on how the children interact with one another in radical dialogue contexts. Meanwhile, a few empirical studies (E.g., Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Uhry, 2007; Lee, 2010) elaborated meanings of IPD in different sub-contexts (e.g., dramatic play, block play, science lesson) of early childhood education, as encouraged by Matusov (2007). Cohen’s (2009) interpretive study analyzed preschoolers’ pretend play using empirical data. She found that children dealt with a struggle between an authoritative voice and internally persuasive discourse. Cohen focused on children’s process of appropriating, redefining, and making the adults’ words their own in their peer interaction during pretend play, which is interpreted as internally persuasive discourse, while she considered any adults’ interaction with to be authoritative discourse. Lee’s (2010) dissertation study examined kindergartners’ scientific discourses finding that the children explored others’ perspectives in multiple modes of discourse (e.g., narratives, artifacts, texts, bodily actions, images) tailored in questions about scientific models, evaluations about their works, personal reflection of in-class discourse, and participation in class dialogue providing information. Lee particularly explored Bakhtin’s concept of “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1991) that requires IPD, as ideological becoming is progressed in the tension between EAD and IPD. Cohen and Uhry (2007) explored Bakhtinian dialogism in young children’s block play focusing on 5-year-old children’s communication strategies and the ways children appropriate meaning in block play. These authors found that children used descriptions of action, calls for attention, and directives to share knowledge of their everyday world in order to describe events, request the attention of peers, and direct and control behavior of peers in block play. Cohen and Uhry connected their findings with Bakhtin’s concept of IPD in terms of the progression of children’s EAD towards IPD in block play where children constantly deal with others’ ideas in their own language.

While literature about children’s IPD is rare, available recent literature about children’s authentic learning process, meaning-making, and agency building can shed light on the current work (Caiman & Lundegård, 2014; Goulart & Roth, 2010; Kane, 2015). This literature problematized traditional classroom structures where children’s authentic meaning-making process can hardly be recognized. Particularly, children’s authentic meaning-making about scientific phenomena is limited in traditional classrooms in institutional goal-directed settings. Nevertheless, these studies report that the children still could engage in their authentic idea development and agency building within classrooms. Caiman and Lundegård (2014) studied children’s agency building for sustainability development. Their concept of agency building is not related to traditional individualistic development but to democratic pluralism that had them emphasize children’s capability of listening to one another’s ideas and collaboratively develop the ideas. In their data, the

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