

Chapter Thirteen

Play Through a Bakhtian Lens

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This chapter presents an examination of the ideas and theories of Russian philosopher, literary critic, and scholar Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975). Teachers and play researchers and others in the community of play scholars are urged to use his work and worldview to recognize our unfinalizability (i.e., the idea that utterances do not ever end) in discussing play, and early childhood play in particular. We can listen to the multiple voices in classroom play, for instance, to better understand how children develop a sense of identity and concepts about others.

Applying Bakhtin's scholarship to play is an underdeveloped but potentially very promising resource for studying play. With a focus on play and education, this chapter unpacks his global concepts and some of the many meanings of the term dialogic; this chapter explores how dialogism and other important constructs shed light on the study of play within and across academic disciplines and on practical uses of play in clinical, educational, and other applied settings.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin has been cited and used for a remarkably broad range of topics across numerous disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and even natural sciences. More recently, Bakhtin's "dialogic pedagogy" (Matusov, 2009; White, 2011a) is applied to education. Moreover, a Bakhtinian framework for thinking about play is now possible and seems very worthwhile. This is assumed even though only a handful of Bakhtin's ideas have been thus far applied to play and play research (Cohen, 2009, 2011; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Edmiston, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 2001).

The limited literature connecting play and Bakhtinian theory is hardly surprising, insofar as Bakhtin nowhere discusses children's play or play pedagogy. Nevertheless, Brian Sutton-Smith, in *The Ambiguity of Play* (2001), briefly discussed Bakhtin, comparing the fluidity of imaginary play with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia or the internal dialogue of voices (i.e., another's speech and different "speechness"). Moreover, although only a few scholars have used Bakhtinian theories in play research, Emerson (2000) predicts that Bakhtin will have a profound influence in the social sciences in the twenty-first century. Emerson is arguably the most knowledgeable and gifted Bakhtin scholar in the United States.

The closest concept to playful interactions is discussed in Bakhtin's essay, "Author and the Hero in Aesthetic" which appears in an earlier work, *Art and Answerability* (Bakhtin, 1990). Here Bakhtin links authority to authorship, specifically a mother's loving authority with her child's identity and linguistic development. Keeping this idea in mind, knowing that play is related to the social construction of meaning-making (see for example Corsaro, 2003, 2005,

2011; Hughes, 2001) through a dialogic process, those with some knowledge of Bakhtin's writings, and dialogic process in particular, could recognize a link to play pedagogy.

Bakhtin (1981, 1986, 1993) championed dialogism (i.e., the carrying on of a continual dialogue) as a meaning-making process that can be linked to the ontological dimensions (i.e., lived in or being) of play: he argued that we struggle between monologic (one voice) and heteroglossic (different voices) discourses, and he claimed that a dialogic view of human beings and social life is multi-voiced. The common thread of Bakhtinian's dialogic meaning-making lens, specifically self-other relations, is related to children's representation of the perspective of others (Corsaro, 2005, 2011). This occurs when children are engaged in pretend play episodes.

Several researchers have examined intersubjectivity and children's play (Edmiston, 2010; Göncü, 1993a, 1993b; O'Loughlin, 2001). Matusov (1996) states, "intersubjectivity has been traditionally defined as a state of overlapping individual subjectivities or *prolepses*" (p. 26). He further defines a prolepsis as a "communicative move in which a speaker presupposes or takes for granted something that has not yet been discussed by the time of the move" (p. 26). Intersubjectivity is related to Bakhtin's concept of self and other; both intersubjectivity and speakers' anticipations or prolepses are involved in social pretend play, as a clear example of the relevance of these notions of Bakhtin to the study of play.

The rest of this chapter is organized in the following way. First, biographical information is given about Mikhail Bakhtin and his scholarship in order to provide some historical context for his life and writings. Next, with its relevance to play theory in view, the Bakhtinian dialogic approach to self and other is further discussed, after explaining some prerequisite concepts (i.e., unfinalizability, prosaics as opposed to poetics, dialogue, and also heteroglossia). Third, the proposal to examine Bakhtin's dialogic process, and other core concepts from his theory, is elaborated upon in connection to play scholarship, particularly in relation to intercultural understanding and play in education.

BAKHTIN: THE MAN AND HIS PEDAGOGY

Since Mikhail Bakhtin's life spanned from 1895 to 1975, he lived in Russia during very interesting times. Only twenty-two years old at the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917, he was coming of age during the Revolution and the Civil War that followed it. He witnessed "the excitement of the 1920's, the imposition of Stalinism, the purges of the 1930's, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the cultural freeze of the Cold War, the [Khrushchev] thaw, and the stagnation of the Brezhnev years" (Dentith, 1995, p. 4).

Although he worked under extraordinarily difficult conditions in Stalinist Russia, Bakhtin produced a body of writing that not only covered the philosophy of language, but also included a wide array of subjects, including metaphysics, Freudianism, Soviet Marxism, formalism, physiology, art, poetics, and social theory. Bakhtin developed a "science of ideologies," or a "theory of values," which describes "the nature of the person, the relation of selves to others in patterns of social behavior, and the way those patterns are modeled in language practices" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 195).

Bakhtin completed his education at Petersburg University in 1918 and moved to Nevel, a small city in western Russia, to work as a teacher for two years. He was plagued by poverty and ill health throughout much of his life. He suffered from osteomyelitis and in 1938 had his right leg amputated (Clark & Holquist, 1984), but this did not stop him from writing during these difficult times. His scholarship overall and his views of dialogism were influenced by "The Bakhtin Circle."

Bakhtin's Scholarship

Bakhtin is often credited for Bakhtinian theory, but his earlier writing was done within small informal groups of young intellectuals, called "The Bakhtin Circle," who addressed the social and cultural issues posed by the Russian Revolution and Stalinist dictatorship in philosophical terms. Dentith (1995) described the writing of members of this circle by suggesting that, "some members of the circle V. N. Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev wrote in a Marxist way; others, like the Jewish philosopher and mathematician M.I. Kagan, wrote and thought in another way" (p. 5). Out of these discussions came a series of definitions of the nature of social life and human beings.

The Bakhtin Circle were influenced by their experiences with Marxism and German philosophy, law, and philology. Early Marxist publications have been attributed to Bakhtin (Dentith, 1995; White & Peters, 2011), although there are questions as to whether his close friends Voloshinov and Medvedev authored the Marxist writings (e.g., *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, 1927; *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 1929; *The Formal Method of Literary Scholarship*, 1928).

Clark and Holquist (1984) clarify the intellectual and social properties of the books and attribute them to Bakhtin, but not without challenge and debate. The discussions and writings of the circle ended in the late 1920s, due to political interventions and Bakhtin's arrest in 1929. Bakhtin was affiliated with some unofficial groups and arrested for anti-Soviet conspiracy and for corrupting the minds of youths. He was sentenced to five years of internal exile (Dentith, 1995).

Despite ill health and difficult times, Bakhtin continued to write until his death in 1975. His writing reflected the ideas of the circle as well as his teaching career. His early writings include *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (written between 1919 and 1921) and *Art and Answerability* (written between 1919 and 1924). Both were later translated into English. In these early writings Bakhtin had not examined the importance of dialogic interactions, nor had he examined the novel as a literary genre (Morson & Emerson, 1990). *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* and *Art and Answerability* both focused on ethics, morality, authorship, alterity (i.e., otherness), symbolism, and aesthetics.

Bakhtin's theory of language as dialogic was influenced by two novelists, François Rabelais and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Both offered Bakhtin a way of entering into the "unofficial discourses that exist through language, as well as an introduction to alternative genres, in particular *carnavalesque* (Rabelais) and *polyphonism* (Dostoevsky) as a means of entry into the discursive world" (White, 2009, p. 52). Bakhtin (1973) utilized their words to endorse his own ideas.

His first major work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, first published in 1929, outlines a dialogic approach to language and a theory of polyphony or many voices that never merge and are silenced by the more powerful majority. Bakhtin (1973) claims the term polyphony was borrowed from Dostoevsky's relation of author to hero in his novels. Polyphony (i.e., having many tones or voices, as found in the immense plurality of relationship experiences), in short, is a theory of the creative process and a theory of ethics, because dialogue is unfinalized. In a "human being there is always something that only he can reveal" and may either conceal or communicate to others (Bakhtin, 1973, p. 58). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* was translated into English and published in the West with a different title, *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984a).

Most of Bakhtin's writing was published in the 1960s. In the United States, the first book to attract attention was *Rabelais and His World* (1965, reprinted in 1971; 1984b), which is the

least representative of his thought, but became a means by which subsequent translated writings were read.

Rabelais, the second novelist who influenced Bakhtin, was a writer of satire, fantasy, and the grotesque, and his influence on Bakhtin is evident in *Rabelais and His World* (1984b). Bakhtin claimed that Rabelais's book *Gargantua and Pantagruel* was misunderstood, and he tried to clarify these misunderstandings in *Rabelais and His World*. In this work Bakhtin analyzes the Renaissance social system in order to reveal language that was suppressed and language that was permitted.

Rabelais and His World (1984b) was submitted as a doctoral dissertation, but was not allowed to be published until 1965, because the ideas in the book caused much disagreement (Morson & Emerson, 1990). The book is about the "carnivals and popular festivals of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, tracing the history of class distinction as expressed in monologic versus dialogic modes of communicating" (Cohen, 2011, p. 178). Bakhtin viewed carnival as an act of rebellion against the life conditions and authoritarian state of affairs of the times. Carnival for Bakhtin was a way of breaking down barriers, of overcoming power inequalities and hierarchies through satire and playfulness.

According to Morson and Emerson (1990), Bakhtin's popularity in the West rests on his later publications and "theories of genre and of the novel" (p. 272). His last works are four essays from the 1930s, translated as *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986). In these later publications Bakhtin's approach to subjectivity is dialogic, referring to the exchange of utterances in both the analysis of texts as well as speech.

In the essay "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin theorizes that a person's ideological becoming is developed through judgments and experiences of the transmission of other people's discourse. The person and his discourse are simply a transmission of information, not a representation. Bakhtin wrote that "in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about" (1981, p. 338); half of the words are someone else's words, transmitted through varying degrees of accuracy and precise information. This recognition of two sides to a dialogue is perhaps what deepened his theories of language and genre, as well as returning him to the ethical and philosophical themes of his earlier writings.

Central Concepts in the Bakhtinian Framework

Before discussing the important concepts in Bakhtin's theory, it is useful to note that play research has been dominated by a reliance on developmental psychology (Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; MacNaughton, 2005; Rogers, 2011) and a "progress rhetoric" (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 123). Bakhtin's dialogic theory thus can offer a new voice to contemporary perspectives and theories of play (Cohen & Johnson, 2011; Johnson, 2010).

Play, and play in children in particular, can be perceived in many ways, but always if possible it should be probed and interpreted more deeply than the penetration typically obtained by using only a developmental approach, which emphasizes changes over time and individual differences. In addition to reconceptualizing tools representative of more recent bodies of thinking than the developmental literature (Jones, Holmes, MacRae, & MacLure, 2010), Bakhtin and his scholarship offer tools for studying more thoroughly the meaning of play in human interaction, communication, and development.

A prerequisite is an understanding of his theory of dialogism. Three global concepts of dialogism are (1) unfinalizability, (2) prosaics as opposed to poetics, and (3) dialogue.

Unfinalizability. First is the concept of unfinalizability or a conviction that the world is not only a messy place, but an open place. This concept is used frequently in his works and in

different contexts. Bakhtin argues, “Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, and everything is still in the future and will always be in the future” (1984a, p. 166).

Bakhtin believed people are always rediscovering themselves, for each person has an unrealized potential. This recognition for a person’s unfinalizability or the capacity for “surprisingness” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 37), newness, freedom, and openness is central to Bakhtinian ethics, which is based on his (1984a) proposed dialogic equality with children at play, capable of disagreeing, debating, and altering their opinion based on an open dialogue. Children can begin a play episode with a theme or genre, with each player taking on a role. At the end of the episode an entirely new theme or genre has evolved, and players are taking on new roles, thus surprising the teacher, observer, or researcher.

“Play is privileged, but elusive in early childhood practice, since it is one lens through which adults can try to understand points of view, and through which young children can safely grapple with difference in ways that are relevant to their specific styles of communication” (White, 2011b, p. 80).

Freedom and openness, as seen in socio-dramatic play in the preschool classroom with the use of open spaces, dress up clothes, and play props, can be likened to play in quite another kind of setting. Here reference is made to Bakhtin’s (1984b) ideas of carnival and carnivalesque discourses in social pretend play. “Bakhtin’s festivals of the Middle Ages and young children’s pretense in an early childhood classroom have designated spaces where all children can participate and assume roles – and the consciousness – of characters” (Cohen, 2011, p. 182).

Players, both adults at festivals and parties and children in socio-dramatic play, dress up and masquerade in costumes. They take on new roles and reverse roles in the middle of a play episode. For example, two children are playing doctor; one is the doctor and the other player is the patient. In the middle of the play scenario, the child begins to bark and takes on the role of a yelping dog, crawling on the floor.

Prosaics. The second global concept is *prosaics*, as opposed to *poetics*, and involves an approach to literature and a view of the world. It is also relevant to play. According to Bakhtin, the most important events in life are not the grand and dramatic events, but the small and prosaic ones of everyday life. The mundane and everyday experiences of life are often fodder for play and imitation, as well as art and creative inspiration.

In his view of the world, Bakhtin mistrusts the reliance on system theorists (i.e., the belief that everything can be explained through wide-ranging systems, such as Saussureanism, Freudianism, Marxism, or formalism). Bakhtin suggests that a system of theorism functions in a fundamentally mechanical way that elicits generalizations from completed acts and placed into theoretical transcription (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Dynamic processes of play escape capture by systems theorists.

Bakhtin used a variety of terms for the attachment to systems, including theorism and monologism. Morson and Emerson (1990) describe this as “*semiotic totalitarianism*, the assumption that everything has a meaning related to the seamless whole, a meaning with only one code” (p. 28). This is related to Bakhtin’s views of *prosaics* and his approach to language and literature. The novel, and play moments and episodes, cannot be analyzed by a linguistic approach, but require a dialogic approach that includes both language and literary discourse.

Dialogue. Dialogue is Bakhtin’s third global concept. He uses the term in many contexts throughout his writing, including theories of the self, language, and literature. In Bakhtin’s early writings he described dialogue as a theory of the self. Dialogue is described as a means

of making sense of self through our experiences in the world and through a developing consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981).

According to Bakhtin (1981), developing consciousness of self is an awareness of the fact that the self is fundamentally a register and shaper of change and the future. Such development takes place as human consciousness enters the world through acts that define values, or through a dialogue that expresses these values. This development happens via an intense struggle among various points of view, positions, and values. The process is open-ended. As he states, "Discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal even newer ways to mean" (1981, p. 346).

The process of conceptually seeing one's self against the ground of values of *the other* begins as soon as a child enters the social world and continues throughout life. Developing *consciousness* is the process of attempting to make sense out of one's continuing experiences in the world. Whatever else social make-believe play may be doing for young children, such as developing self-regulation and language skills, it is also helping them form more nuanced identities and social concepts of others.

The above discussion of the global concepts of unfinalizability, prosaics, and dialogue sets the stage for the material in the next section of this chapter on the dialogical utterance involving self and other. Before reaching the next section, however, another important term needs to be introduced: *heteroglossia*.

Bakhtin's 1981 essay "Discourse in the Novel" points out that language can be an active, productive form of struggle, even seen as a struggle between hundreds of discourses. He uses the term heteroglossia to describe the social diversity of speech types. Bakhtin (1986) theorized that there are many variations of speaking or voices that position individuals in a social environment. Noting that languages have many discursive strata, including dialect and other social linguistic differences, including cohort or generational ones, he comments on the politics of speech, "languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even the hour, for, each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphasis" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263).

Heteroglossia then also describes the fact that cultures or societies are not unified and that there is a variety of voices and their corresponding and often conflicting values and views of the world. The term refers also to the "idea of a multiplicity of ways of speaking in a social environment" (Cohen & Uhry, 2007, p. 304). Heteroglossia tends to move language toward the multiplicity of meanings of individual words or phrases and includes a wide variety of different ways of speaking, as well as "multivoicedness" (Cohen & Uhry, 2007, p. 304).

Heteroglossia is not new to play scholarship (Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Uhry, 2007; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). Bakhtin is one of Sawyer's (1995, 1996, 1997) sources and a starting point for scholarly interest in him and pretend play. Sawyer's account of play as an improvisational verbal interaction is similar in many ways to Bakhtin's account of the heteroglossia of play.

Drawing on Bakhtin, Sawyer (1995) primarily discussed voice in terms of different societal roles: "The term *voice* then becomes 'ways of speaking' within the genred activity (usually, but not necessarily, associated with specific 'roles' of that genre). Thus each play activity, or genre or play, may contain several distinct voices, each typically associated with a different role in the interaction" (p. 140). Sawyer (1996, 1997) compared the heteroglossia of play to polyphonic voices of a musical performance. He states that, "both concepts suggest that one can view each child's voice as an ongoing parallel contribution to a polyphonic composition, an improvised collective performance" (Sawyer, 1997, p. 74).

Duncan & Tarulli (2003) also related Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia to play. They described how children learn to enact roles of mothers, babies, or animals. While enacting

roles, children expressed voice and dialogue of a particular character. Voices tended to change with enactments of a particular role, which suggests that a variety of voices and social views of rules govern the role (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). The study's interpretation of the results included comparing heteroglossia to play, illustrating how Bakhtin's views of discourse have been employed in play research.

In sum, then, the global concepts of unfinalizability, prosaics, and dialogue, as well as Bakhtinian theorizing concerning heteroglossia, provide background material for next examining Bakhtinian theory about the dialogical process and selfhood within the context of socio-dramatic play. Briefly, the structure of self is dialogical and unfinalizable, meaning that each individual comes to consciousness through dialogue with another, such as children engaged in play. Children are engaged in diverse and dialogical conversations as they role-play mothers, restaurant owners, or grocery store managers. Their play is layered, complex, and filled with multiple voicing, or in Bakhtin's terms, a form-shaping ideology that combines dialogue with heteroglossia.

THE DIALOGICAL UTTERANCE: SELF AND OTHER

Previous researchers (Cohen & Uhry, 2007; Sawyer, 1997; White, 2009) investigating play using Bakhtin have selected genre or genre and utterance as an analytic tool and discursive framework to help interpret play, language, and social interaction. As children engage in play scenarios and try to make sense of the world, they do so through different types of play having characteristics of a speech genre (e.g., playing with dinosaurs in the sandbox or drawing a picture). "Genre is the type of play activity and utterance is the communication within the genre activity" (Sawyer, 1997, p. 173).

The relevance of genres to voice inheres in the fact that "each play genre may contain several distinct voices, each typically associated with a distinct role in the interaction" (Sawyer, 1997, p. 173). The utterance's belongingness to a particular genre is based on the relation of the individual child's word to the words of others. For example, Sawyer (1997) provides an illustration of two four-year-old children, Jennifer and Kathy, playing with toy animals in the sandbox. They are improvising and voicing the characters of the movie *Land Before Time*. Sawyer (1997) observed how the children's voices switch between "director" voice and the toy character (p. 64). The sandbox is the play genre in which the two children use different voices to reenact the movie characters.

The notion of alterity is a Bakhtinian (1986) concept based on the dynamics of self and other. It stands for heterogeneity of different perspectives, of different voices. Bakhtin's notion of alterity is similar to concepts of intersubjectivity in play. Göncü's (1993) study of intersubjectivity in children's dyadic play focused on children's agreement about their engagement in communication. The results of Göncü's (1993) study showed that children "work towards constructing intersubjectivity by extension-extension sequences" (p. 112). Children extend their play partners ideas, which were extensions of their own ideas.

Children's voices can be seen as an important type of tertiary intersubjectivity or metacommunication (Göncü, 1993). Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) has shown that language use always involves perspectives. The self needs the other in order to constitute itself as something cognitively determinate and to pass from "primitive self-sensation to complex self-awareness" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 146).

The dialogical self is a site of becoming that is a never ending and a creative process, constantly accruing new meanings (Bakhtin, 1986). When children role-play, their language is a combination of their own words (self) as well as the words of parents, teachers, or peers

(others). The notion of alterity can be especially helpful in understanding how bilingual children make meaning in play as they use two languages, home and school, while playing.

For Bakhtin, it is the utterance that needs to be considered more fully, for it is only in the use of concrete utterances that language assumes its real being. Bakhtin (1986) writes that “language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well” (p. 63). An utterance is defined as “the real unit of speech communication” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71). Bakhtin advocated a unit of analysis based on utterances, which is linked to voice (Cohen & Uhry, 2007, p. 303).

In the context of play, there is always a speaker(s) and listener(s), addresser(s) and addressee(s). Beneath the surface, there is both speaker and listener, both addresser and addressee in any dialogue in a play scenario. As two children, for example, collaborate and play doctor in the dramatic play center, they engage in a dialogue and appropriate the words of others. In the absence of a “real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the social group to which the speaker belongs” (Voloshinov, 1973, pp. 85–86). Children are appropriating the words of parents and speak their home language, as well as school language, while playing or interacting with peers.

Bakhtin (1986) claims that addressivity is inherent “not in the unit of language, but in the unit of utterance” (p. 99). For Bakhtin the utterance is a singular phenomenon. Two verbally identical utterances will never mean the same thing, because the reason and context of each utterance will differ from those of every other utterance. Voloshinov calls the word “a bridge thrown between myself and another” (1973, p. 86).

The source of all our language is the language of others, and the word is shared territory, a bridge between internal consciousness and the external reality. Bakhtin’s concept of appropriation is active; the word is not simply acquired, but taken from another’s mouth and made our own through assimilation. Children appropriate and assimilate the words of others in play for conceptual understanding (Cohen, 2009, 2011). This is similar to Göncü’s (1993) research on intersubjectivity.

A dialogical approach to oneself, according to Bakhtin (1984a) is founded on the assumption that we achieve meaning as selves through our discourse with others. Bakhtin (1981) states “language, when it means is someone talking to somebody else, even if that someone else is one’s own inner addressee” (p. xxi). According to Junefelt (2011), an individual’s own utterance or discourse involves reliance on the word of the other; language use becomes the site of the other’s involvement in a discourse for self-relevant meaning.

Bakhtin’s theory discusses the special dialogic relations between the repeatable on the one hand, and the individual, unique, and unrepeatable poles of an utterance on the other hand. His discussion about this dialectic is useful for coming to grips with the meaning-making that occurs in the context of play, in general and for all young children. Children who speak a language other than English are using two language systems for meaning-making by appropriating and assimilating words in their first and second languages.

For Bakhtin (1984a) the pronoun “I” is never about one person; rather “I” represents multiple voices and ideologies that constitute self. Bakhtin (1986) states, “The I hides in the other and in others, it wants to be only another for others, to enter into the world of others as another, and to cast from itself the burden of being only I (I-for-myself) in the world” (p. 147). Drawing from Bakhtin, “I” is generated through language participation and mediation in play. Play is the genre in which children articulate utterances as they dialogue with other players for self-relevant meaning-making and cultural understanding.

DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

Bakhtin's (1986) work on intercultural understanding is relevant to understanding play and its use in applied settings. Paradoxically, intercultural understanding involves entering another culture and remaining outside it at the same time. Culture for Bakhtin (1986) can be described as the product of human interaction (equality among participants). According to Bakhtin, "a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging and mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched" (1986, p. 7). From a Bakhtinian perspective, "a person that speaks two languages is a bearer of two or more cultures" (1986, p. 7). "Such a person taps on several cultures at once and can compare them, thus getting a deeper insight into each of them" (Marchenkova, 2005, p. 180).

Young children's play represents one of the earliest contexts within which children can begin to dialogize the necessary distance or otherness and begin to see themselves from a perspective other than the one they associate with the words of teachers and peers. This is especially true for young children, who through early play experiences can begin to achieve an objectifying distance and become more rooted in their cultural narratives.

In play, young children sometimes begin to switch between their native language and a second language they are learning. González and Maez (1980) referred to this alternating use of two or more languages between utterances (intersententially) and within utterance boundaries (intrasententially) as code-switching. Peynircioglu and Durgunoglu (2002) investigated code-switched discourse in Spanish-English bilingual preschoolers and found that bilingual preschoolers engaged in more intersentential than intrasentential code-switching. This is especially true when preschoolers are acquiring language, because they are not judging the compatibility of the two languages (Peynircioglu & Durgunoglu, 2002).

As children engage in a themed play scenario, they will frequently code-switch and use two languages to act out characters or roles in imaginative play (Han, Benavides, & Christie, 2001). The use of two languages may offer opportunities for children to negotiate their speaker identities within their peer culture (Blum-Kulka, 2005; Kyratzis, Tang, & Koymen, 2009). Orellana (1994) emphasized this point in a study of the pretend talk of three native-Spanish-speaking children.

Interestingly, Orellana found that the children used English to communicate pretend characters from popular culture, such as Barbie, Little Mermaid, Ninja Turtles, and Peter Pan, while they used Spanish, their first language, when they enacted everyday roles such as mother, father, baby, or teacher. Orellana (1994) pointed out that code-switching by these children was used in ways that displayed their self-construction as bilingual speakers. They creatively interanimated the voices of others and developed their own local speaker identities. In the process of role-play, they became the authors of their own words (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986).

Consistent with Orellana's view of appropriating the voices of others, Kyratzis, Tang, and Koymen's (2009) examination of bilingual preschoolers' pretend play found play is an "in-group communicative style that actively marks children's social identity as members of a second generation immigrant kids' group within a bilingual community" (p. 283). Code-switching during pretense was a heteroglossic language practice used as a vehicle to construct a social identity. Children's appropriation and assimilation of cultural rules and meanings was supported by the intersubjective imaginary situation created between play partners, as well as by the encountering of others' knowledge and points of view.

Play discourse is something whose nature is social and whose origins often lie in the interpersonal, social, and cultural matrix of which the child is a part. Children's discourse is appropriated and assimilated by others' words and voices (Cohen, 2009, 2011). From a Bakhtinian stance, children would live in a world of others' words and be sensitive to and respon-

sive to them in innumerable ways. This happens, according to Bakhtin, “beginning with my assimilation of them (in the process of initial mastery of speech) and ending with assimilation of the wealth of human culture (expressed in the word or in other semiotic materials” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.143).

Through play interactions children learn about language and themselves by being interlocutors, by hearing, by internalizing, and by responding to the utterances of others, and by being enculturated into different discursive forms for self-understanding. Play provides children with culturally specific ways of talking about themselves and their experiences through their exposure and participation. Hence, consistent with a Bakhtinian account, children acquire a particular sense of self-understanding, not simply by reworking their discourses in solitary context, but by virtue of hearing how others portray and respond to them in conversational contexts.

Children’s talk is an expression of the concrete voices they have heard and appropriated. These may be the voices of their first or second language, but they are finding new ways of re-accenting the words of others and hence finding new ways of knowing themselves. Thus, current approaches to play pedagogy with children need to pay much more attention to the notion of a discursive construction of identity so that children’s speaking personalities are heard and appreciated.

Seeing Bakhtin as an influential thinker for play studies requires appreciating his many concepts, including dialogical processes, unfinalizability, heteroglossia, voice, and genre, among others. Bakhtin argued that the social individual participates in a dialogical and unfinalizable linguistic world, with different voices that represent social roles and self-relevant meaning-making. These ideas can be identified in children’s play. Children use a variety of speech styles when enacting a play role. A Bakhtinian perspective in play research enriches the field relative to what is accomplished using only traditional approaches to thinking about play.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLAY

From a Bakhtinian perspective, children appropriate and assimilate the voices of others as they engage in play for meaning-making (Cohen 2009, 2011). Knowledge and learning can’t be a prescribed set of developmental profiles or learning standards. Using a Bakhtinian view of otherness or alterity, one can say children are learning about themselves while playing, and their discourses are not finite. A child’s utterance belongs to two people: the speaker and his or her listener. Voloshinov (1986) states: “In point of fact, *word* is a *two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. . . . Each and every word expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other.’ I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view” (p. 86).

Sullivan, Smith, and Matusov (2009) suggest that dialogic pedagogy is an opportunity to risk genuine encounters of the multiplicity of others. Divergent theories include both traditional and postfoundational or postmodern discourses; they are important for the field of early childhood education in order to render more meaningful children’s development, play, and learning (Cohen & Johnson, 2011; Moss, 2007).

Early childhood education has become a field whose work and influence extend well beyond the Euro-American academy and English-speaking world. At the global level there has been an increasing discontent with how children have been labeled and measured in the context of play (Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; MacNaughton, 2005; Rogers, 2011; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). Children are

often evaluated and assessed based on traditional developmental theories of play that don't take into consideration a cultural view of the child (Zepeda, Castro, & Cronin, 2011).

This chapter has presented background on Bakhtin's life and writing, shared his dialogic approach to self, and proposed a Bakhtinian perspective for future pedagogical play theorists and practitioners. More important, the chapter has drawn attention to a dialogic approach to self and other from a Bakhtinian perspective of children's play. Bakhtin's work moves beyond philosophy narrowly defined to encompass anthropology, literacy studies, historiography, and political theory (Brandist, 2002). Likewise, play is interdisciplinary in nature, and a Bakhtinian framework for play pedagogy would add to the existing play research. What we have learned from Bakhtin is valuable for thinking about play, studying play, and putting play into practice.

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