

about. This presentation will also help teachers understand the ways students talk about these issues and the teacher's role in guiding and nurturing the talk. Teachers are in a unique position to talk about values, morals, and ethics because school, in addition to being a site where adolescents learn the basic skills of reading and writing, is a place where students engage in processes of socialization that confirm and challenge the values of one's culture. This research is a rationale for the value and importance of carefully examining samples of verbal discourse and stresses the relationship between an individual's strategies for expressing and exploring meaning through talk and an awareness of the dynamics involved on an internal level when one confronts and explores an idea that potentially challenges one's moral being.

Bakhtin's Dialogue of Voices

"We must deal with life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-languaged world" (275).

M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1981)

We all have students who push our buttons. And where these students are concerned, I have to understand that I probably push their buttons as well. A question, a comment, a particular tone of voice might be the only way one student knows how to frame her interaction

with a text, and it is our job to translate what we often hear as dissonance into an opportunity to offer a different perspective. Sometimes we can identify these personalities with an hour or two of our first contact. During the first night of one of my graduate adolescent literature classes a woman raised her hand and asked, "What is your definition of an adolescent novel?" I could have given her the answer she wanted, a text-book definition that would certainly support most of the books I usually include on my reading list. But I didn't want to suggest that defining a novel was all so easy, and so I explained, as I believe, that any single definition of a novel is really a location of the mission and intent of those writing for young adults at a given time in history. The young adult novel, like all novels, is in a continual state of becoming. It would be the job of the individual studying the adolescent novel to determine what aspect of this developing genre she intended to locate and define. My course syllabus is only representative of the way I have decided to define the genre. She was not happy with my answer.

For Bakhtin the novel is a place where multiple languages co-exist. It is a combination of stylistic devices: the language of the author, the language of the accepted form of the novel (at a given time in history), the language of every day writing, the language of moral and philosophical speech, and the language of a character in the novel. Bakhtin believed that in the novel these voices all work together to create a multi-layered whole and a unified meaning. However, Bakhtin's understanding of the nature of the novel carries a message that is critical of any philosophy of language that works towards the discovery of this unity as a way to define the novel. He calls for

research that explores the diversities of language as they co-exist and act upon one another.

Bakhtin extends his discussion of the novel into the realm of spoken language. He identifies the qualities of talk that give words a socio-ideological dimension. Every word an individual speaker uses is loaded not only with an intended meaning, but is an invitation loaded with intentions, conceptualizations, and evaluations. Bakhtin writes,

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated---overpopulated---with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (294).

M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1981)

When we are engaged in a conversation we are using language to ask for understanding and response. This is why in order to make ourselves clear we will often try on languages other than our own. In fact, and Bakhtin acknowledges this, the notion that each of us has our own language does not take into account that our *own* language is a complex web of speech acts appropriated through everyone we come into contact with.

Bakhtin's understanding of spoken language is an important lens to use when examining classroom conversations. If we listen carefully to the ways our students talk, we can begin to identify the strategies each child uses to appropriate language and consider how these strategies relate to one's socio-ideological development. The mistakes and irregularities are valuable if we privilege a multi-layered philosophy of language. The classroom I present here is unique because it is small (eleven students), diverse in age (6th, 7th, and 8th graders), ethnicity, and economic status.