

## “Silencing” the Powerful and “Giving” Voice to the Disempowered: Ethical Considerations of a Dialogic Pedagogy

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### Abstract

As an educator who is committed to social justice, I bring certain values and political commitments to the classroom. The counter-hegemonic voices that I bring into the classroom in the form of constructs, readings, assignments, discussions, and visual culture challenge more often than confirm students' world-views and assumptions. The question that arises for me is whether I am silencing students' voices through my teaching practices. Does my support of dialogic articulations and interests constitute privileging one “truth” or discourse over another? If so, am I using dialogue as a rhetorical device to persuade or to indoctrinate my students according to beliefs that I personally find emancipating? These are certain beliefs that, frankly, some students in my courses have met with various acts of resistance, ranging from disapproving silence to outright rejection. In this investigation, I reflect on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching, and explore the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy.

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As an educator who is committed to social justice, I bring certain values and political commitments to the classroom. The counter-hegemonic voices that I bring into the classroom in the form of constructs, readings, assignments, discussions, and visual culture challenge more often than confirm students’ world-views and/or assumptions. Influenced by Paulo Freire’s theories of education, Ronald David Glass (2004) has written extensively on the potential of education as a practice of freedom. Yet, he concludes that educators consistently silence certain voices and amplify others through the selections they make for the curriculum, the structure of assignments and assessments, and the overall classroom environment. Similarly, Nicholas C. Burbules (2004) observes that the commitments of socially engaged teachers often determine what is discussed and which views are heard and validated. The question that arises for me is whether I am silencing students’ voices through my teaching practices. Does the support of dialogic articulations and interests constitute privileging or defending one “truth” or discourse over another? If so, am I using dialogue as a rhetorical device to persuade or to indoctrinate my students according to beliefs that I personally find emancipating? These are certain beliefs that, frankly, some students in my courses have met with various acts of resistance, ranging from disapproving silence to outright rejection. In this investigation, I use Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) theory of *dialogism* to reflect on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching and explore the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy.

The stories or pedagogical encounters that I *remix*, i.e., recollect, interpret, recreate, and retell to use Lev Manovich’s (2005) term, are composite narratives<sup>1</sup> that I hope capture the essence of my teaching experiences at two different universities. For me, interrogation and contestation of controversial issues are processes that are needed for dialogic teaching and learning. In this, I am compelled to take a stance or defend the idea that as educators we must not only accept but also embrace education as a contested space. Sites of contestation are not inimical to dialogue but vital and constitutive of dialogic relations. In fact, tension-filled places of learning offer valuable working spaces to *de (fence)* or transverse barriers. By transversal, I am referring to a stance that claims a critical middle ground. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) characterize the middle as a place that gets its strength and energy from the oppositional forces that surround it.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, I encourage students to raise questions, voice reservations, and discuss disagreements in relationship to course content through written journals and during class discussion. There have been occasions when students’ dissenting voices have openly and categorically condemned difference and diversity (ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) in a highly negative way—a position that in my teaching experience is most often used to support what students identify as conservative political and religious worldviews.

In my university teaching experience, particularly in courses geared toward elementary education and art education majors, students are primarily female and Caucasian. Most

often, the students self-identify as middle-class, holding conservative political views, and as supporters of conservative Christian values. The multiple subject positions that shape my personal and professional realities, for the most part, are historically, politically, and culturally different from my students'.<sup>3</sup> In addition to identifying with the political and Evangelical Right, during class discussion, students in my courses often named reality shows with plenty of partying, semi-nudity, and intimacy scenes (e.g., *The Kardashians* and *Jersey Shore*) as their favorite television programs. Paradoxically, the same students wrote in their journals that some of the course content was "offensive," and perhaps worse, "irrelevant." Some students were especially opposed to topics that dealt with gender and sexuality and with artworks that depicted nudity. The intent here is not to evaluate the choices students make regarding visual culture but to point out perhaps the obvious: multiple and contradictory subject positions shape students' perspectives and agency. Yet, students in my courses often failed to recognize that these multiple discourses are not separate but rather competing ideological systems and subject positions that are inescapably connected, however distant or incompatible they might appear to their common sense. I now turn to these conversations.

### **De (Fence):**

#### **The Interjection of Poetic Language, Picking up Speed in The Middle**

Despite the blizzard-like weather, only a few students were late to my Introduction to Women in the Arts and Humanities course. For this particular class, I asked students to write down the names of female visual artists whose work they admired. Out of a class of almost thirty, only one student was able to recall the name of a female artist—a local artist from her community. The following weeks we delved into a unit of study titled: "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," inspired by Linda Nochlin's (1971) canonical essay by the same name. In response to our analysis of feminist art interventions in the art world, a student complained in her weekly journal that viewing Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum* (1973), and Katherine Opie's *Self-Portrait/ Nursing* (2003) might be acceptable for art or women's studies majors, but as an education major, she did not feel the work was "appropriate" or "relevant." Alison (pseudonym) was especially "offended" by the nudity and the "sexual nature" of the artwork. Nudity, sensuality, and sexuality seemed to be a concern in relationship to class content, but not the media culture that was part of the students' everyday lives, which students often and openly discussed in class. Following our investigation of gender-based oppression in the art field, via *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998) and *The Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book* (2004) the class examined the influence of visual culture, in particular, the impact that movies and music videos have on young girls.

In addition to written assignments, for instance, weekly journals and critical response papers, the students had the opportunity to create visual response in relationship to course content. Visual responses could take the form of photos, collages, paintings, performances, and short videos. Alison, the same student who complained of the inappropriateness and the lack of relevance of the course content, specifically, the images shown in class, created

for the semester final a very personal five-minute video. Her video told the story of the love/hate relationship that she had with her body and her struggles with eating disorders and standards of beauty.

Video projects started out with a short written proposal and storyboard that delineated the theoretical, conceptual, and visual concepts of the project. To my surprise, Alison used Jenny Seville's and Catherine Opie's work to ground her analysis. In fact, she discussed artwork that had not been analyzed in class, such as Catherine Opie's *Cutting* (1993). What had changed? I asked her why these particular artworks were important and relevant to the narrative she was proposing. She replied that our class examination concerning the impact of the media on young girls made her realize how attuned young girls are to visual culture and how early they begin to think about their body image. This inquiry made her reflect on her struggles with her own body and the complex relationship between body image and self-esteem. She remarked that Seville's and Opie's works were related to the pain and self-hate that women sometimes feel about their bodies. However, she stated that she did not think their artwork was "beautiful" and that she could never show her body in the way that these two artists depict their bodies. Alison's altering views suggest a dialogic process of "mutual interillumination," whereby utterances "throw light on each other," i.e., when one language sees itself in the light of another language (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12). For instance, the way in which Alison begins to see her experiences through the language of young girls and filters those experiences anew through feminist art, simultaneously confirming and contradicting the various discourses that she encountered.

Julia Kristeva (1980) writes that Bakhtin's theory of *dialogism* does not allow for a "logical system based on a zero-one sequence or (true-false, nothingness-notation)" (p. 70). Contrary to the binary logic of authoritative discourse, which she represents by the integral 0-1, Kristeva emphasizes that dialogism or poetic language is doubled. It works on the principal of 0-2. For Kristeva, poetic language is "both 'A' and 'not-A'; here '0' equals 'nothing,' while '2' equals an element which is at least 'double,' that which equals a single element, '1'" (Allen, 2000, p. 45). The implications of moving beyond a zero-sum paradigm are highly significant for pedagogy. I am arguing that when the utterances of individuals are doubled, the intersections between one's words and the words of others become fluid. Thus, the language of the other can be apprehended through a relationship of limits and possibilities (both/and, A and not-A), and not strictly through an either/or, us/them, or monologic lens. For example, Alison's simultaneous assimilation and rejection of feminist art is a double movement (both/and, A and not -A). At the beginning of the course, Alison unequivocally rejected the validity and relevance of feminist art practices for her own life and academic interests. Yet, during the video production of her final project, she entered into an agonistic process of negotiation with Opie's and Seville's discourses on sexuality and the body. By concurrently confirming and contesting multiple and disparate narratives in relationship to her own voice, Alison shifted from a binary logic (0-1) to the double (0-2) continuum of dialogic communication. In so doing, Alison is answering dialogically. Answerability entails becoming conscious of the self in relation to another. Consequently, ontological intersubjectivity is a way to decenter one's own language through the language

of the other, which is a significant tenet of dialogism and feminist thought. It is in this double movement, in which the accepted common sense, when buttressed by the “true-false, nothingness-notation,” can begin to be deconstructed and reconstructed (Kristeva, 1980, p. 70). The struggle to center and decenter one ideology over another refracts different ways in which power relations are produced and reproduced. The production of power that leads to transformation is a complex phenomenon that cannot easily be explained or readily measured, especially because dominant ideology is often used to rationalize abuse of power and structural and systemic oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, poverty, and homophobia).

### **De(fencing) The Hegemonic Common Sense: Agonistic Re-workings**

Educational theorist Megan Boler (2004) observes that when students are confronted with information that suggests radical alternatives to the accepted common sense of thinking or dominant ideology, they resist in myriad ways. Many semesters later and at a different university, it was unsettling to receive an email from a student to let me know that the course content was “highly offensive” to her moral values. Her letter concerned me for many reasons. Student resistance can be manifested through what students do not say or say with their actions, which can take on multiple forms. In my classroom, almost invariably topics that dealt with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) concerns were often occasion for students to question what they perceived as an inversion of “acceptable” socio-cultural mores and values.

This was my third year teaching a course that covered concepts of current art education theory and practice for the elementary teacher. As part of my commitment to socially responsible teaching, I select course content that both focuses on issues inhering in diversity and difference and offers ways to critically analyze the power structures that create social inequality. For this class, I asked students to read articles by art educators Dennis E. Fehr and Karen Keifer-Boyd (2000), Laurel Lampela (2001), and Ed Check (2004). In addition, as part of course requirements, the students screened the film *Ma Vie en Rose* (*My Life in Pink*), directed by Alain Berliner (1997).<sup>4</sup> About a half hour into class discussion of the readings and film, a student, Yvette (pseudonym) started out with the all too familiar, “I don’t have anything against gay people,” she paused and continued, “but according to the Bible it’s a sin.” There was another pause, and then she said: “That is why homosexuals are going to hell.” Although I anticipated contentious debate on the subject, the bluntness, force, and conviction of Yvette’s statement made me quiver, a reaction that I am sure was clearly visible. Earlier in the semester, in response to course readings, students, including Yvette, had written reflections that were especially sensitive regarding bullying in schools, and in particular, cyberbullying. In thinking about this along with a thousand other jumbled thoughts, I stated:

Yvette, let me ask you a question. If a student came to you because he or she was being bullied, whether verbally taunted or because he or she had become a victim of physical violence based on his or her sexual identity, how would you respond to the student?

Yvette: I was not talking about bullying [she was by now visibly upset].

There was a long period of silence before I reiterated:

My question was: how will you personally respond to students? What is the role of the teacher? Let me open this up to the rest of the class. What is the correlation between discrimination based on gender and sexual identity and bullying? How do the course readings address these concerns? What are your thoughts?

I felt out of breath; I was still thinking about what the student had said, and no one was responding. I felt queasy. I wanted to say:

As future educators should you be concerned ... is violence acceptable under some circumstances, for instance, due to sexual orientation or gender? Or is this not a concern because gay people are "going to hell" anyway? Yvette has judged and declared this to be the "truth" in accordance with her belief system. Are teaching and education all about you, about what you believe, about your personal comfort zone, or are they about the students you will be teaching? Are they about both?

In essence, these are questions regarding the role and function of pedagogy. For me, these are also questions about the limits of dialogue. As I work to fulfill the idea of socially responsible teaching, a central question arises: As part of my commitment to democratic dialogue, do I have the responsibility to passively listen to voices in the classroom that manifest oppressive ideology? Glass (2004) asks the same question and answers with a resolute, no. Specifically, in Glass's view, students who express hegemonic ideology "in effect resilience subaltern or counter hegemonic voices that have already been silenced by ideological structures imposed on the poor and the working class, people of color, and women, for example" (p. 18). In light of this, Glass (2004) suggests that it is sometimes necessary to "mute" or "selectively silence" particular dominant discourses (p. 20). A similar conclusion can be found in Boler's (2004) proposal that "an affirmative action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting, dominant voices" (p. 4). With James H. Sanders III, Karen Hutzler, and Jennifer M. Miller (2009), Christine Ballengee Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001), Vesta Daniel (2007), and Jennifer Eisenhauer (2007), I hold the opinion that any expression of racism, sexism, homophobia, or ableism in the classroom, must undergo critical analysis within the classroom. What is not always clear is the best way to actively negotiate with the competing discourses that students bring to the classroom. And though I hold that one must not respond passively to oppressive or injurious language, to borrow Judith Butler's (1997a) term, affronting students from an authoritative position creates an environment that closes down communication and reduces, rather than enhances, the students' willingness to participate. Thus, I remain highly skeptical of any pedagogical practice, as Burbules (2004) argues, that would deliberately "silence" or "mute" the voices of students (p. xvii). In fact, giving priority to social justice over dialogue, whether to "give" voice to or

“silence” certain opinions can create serious pedagogical, ethical, and political problems (Burbules, 2004; deCastell, 2004; Jones, 2004; Matusov, 2009).

Struggling to find my composure, attempting to quiet down the internal monologue/rant in my head, and with what felt like unsteady hands, I wrote on the board a series of questions that we (as a class) would consider throughout the following weeks. In many ways, and I believe in much more productive ways, we addressed slowly and gradually, the students’ contestation regarding diversity and difference. Specifically, we examined a series of questions about sexual identity, the status of religion in public schools, and the role of the teacher in education.

### **De(fencing): Finding Entryways That (Re)Authorize Student Perspectives**

Laurel Lampela (2007) has written eloquently about the need to include sexual identity in the discussion of culturally inclusive curriculum, a discussion she sees as seriously lacking in art education. She proposes that sexual identity needs to be integrated holistically into multicultural education. I agree. In my teaching experience, I have found that students are more likely to make the connection between discrimination and violence based on race and ethnicity, in part a result of multi-cultural education, but less likely to make the same connection when it comes to sexual identity. For instance, Yvette saw bullying and sexual orientation as two separate issues.

The first step to understand how difference is codified and used to support dominant norms and abuse of power is to contextualize difference as part of a large set of socio-political ideologies. Ideologies carry actions that have a direct impact on people’s lives (Butler, 1997b). Through various readings related to gender and sexual identity (Check, 2004; Keifer-Boyd, 2003, Lampela, 2001; Sanders, 2005; 2007), class discussions, and written and visual culture assignments, students examined the correlation between verbal and physical violence based on sexual identity. They analyzed how oppression based on sexual identity, for instance, bullying, has contributed to the high rate of suicide among gay youth. These are connections that students had not explored before. Critical awareness of difference is a way for members of society to make sense of diversity and a way of understanding that can potentially lead to working productively with students’ cultural, economic, gender, and social diversity.

The class also delved into new topics, such as the separation of church and state. Although many of the students in my courses mediated class content through the lens of the religious values they espoused, they often failed to consider that in the U.S., as afforded by the First Amendment, there exists the separation of church and state. Through various course content, I encouraged students to examine the discourses of religion and public education, which had recently come to the forefront with the debates about whether creationism or intelligent design should be taught in public schools.<sup>5</sup> I believe this process opened up a space for students to locate themselves in relation to contemporary discourse in education, to how their worldviews impact what they teach, and to how they relate to others and

themselves. From the perspective of feminist epistemology, self-reflexivity does not imply that one's worldviews remain unexamined. On the contrary, one must continuously struggle to decenter one's own authority, i.e., locate one's position of power in relation to another person's worldviews and social experiences, dialogically (hooks, 2000, 2004; Weir, 2008).

Another question that students considered was: What is the role of the teacher? Is the role of the teacher to guide, train, learn, facilitate, or collaborate with students? How this question is answered has direct implications for how educators address and respond to students. One of the objectives for entertaining this question, from my perspective, was to stress the opportunity for reciprocity, for becoming polyphonic authors, and co-experiencing relational knowing. This would entail that students and teachers abandon the position of omnipotent voice or all-knowing author deciding in advance what counts as knowledge and what the outcome or fate of others will be and on the basis of their own interests, values, and belief, making moral judgments that affect students' lives.

### **The Act of De(fencing) or Envisioning Reciprocity: Towards Dialogic Pedagogy**

A dialogic or intra- and inter-personal approach to education is not possible without reciprocity, or Bakhtin's (1990) concepts of addressivity and answerability. A pedagogical relationship based on responsive understanding entails a complex process of negotiation between the teacher and student. For example, when the teacher constructs an utterance (curriculum), s/he presupposes the student's response. Thus, the utterance is created in response to the teacher's perception of the student's conceptual horizon, i.e., the student's needs, likes and dislikes, experience, and knowledge. Additionally, addressivity entails anticipating the force that the student's responses will exert on the text. Consequently, addressivity and answerability can be used as a method to structure content; however, more importantly, it is a specific way to respond and relate to students ontologically. Stated differently, the instantiation of addressivity involves locating the anticipated expectations and responses of students and guiding the curriculum with that presumed audience in mind. This requires a willingness to modify, rectify, or completely change for oneself, as much as for students, what is being taught and how it is being taught. Answerability entails ethical responses to students that ultimately have an impact on whose voice gets heard or silenced in the discourses of school.

I return to the notion of dialogue to trouble the disjuncture between "silencing" students' voices and "enabling" the voices of those who are marginalized by social inequalities. A dialogic view of language emphasizes that silence is a form of communication. Non-verbal communication has the potential to be dialogic or monologic, depending on the contextual particularity, intonation, body language, and other factors that enable each utterance. From a Bakhtinian perspective, silence is not the opposite of speech. This is a view consistent with Western cultural bias evidenced in the privilege given to speaking over listening, to written over oral communication, and to sound over silence. It is also important to point out that dialogue is not value-free. Dialogue makes very dissimilar demands on different individuals, e.g., men and women, dominant and marginalized students, parents, and teachers (Boler,



2004; Glass, 2004; Jones, 2004). Furthermore, a word is not “a neutral media that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; [this media] is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Words should belong to no one. Thus, making space for discourses in the curriculum that emphasize counter-hegemonic perspectives and critical analysis of dominant ideology, though important, in and of itself does not necessarily either silence or empower students (Boler, 2004; deCastell 2004; Glass, 2004; Jones, 2004; Matusov, 2009).

In consideration of monologic (i.e., authoritative) and dialogic communication, Bakhtin demonstrated that there are two potential drawbacks to creating internally persuasive<sup>6</sup> discourses: excessive monologism and excessive dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov, 2009). Excessive monologism presumes that through the epistemological and institutional authority of my position as the teacher I have the power to silence students’ voices.<sup>7</sup> Excessive dialogism suggests that this same position accords me the power to give voice to and empower those who are marginalized and disempowered. Excessive monologism and excessive dialogism are uncritical and dichotomous; one posits the authority figure to be wholly powerful; the other sees this figure as wholly powerless (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov, 2009).

Bakhtin’s (1981) ideas are significant to a consideration of uncritical reflections on dialogue and relationships of power. From the perspective of *dialogism*, voice is not given but posited. This means that voice is realized in the process of active and responsive understanding. In relationship to my own voice, I must register a paradoxical position. In advocating for those who are marginalized in some way, I am attempting to shift relations of power, which necessarily makes what I am doing a personal and political endeavor. However, such an agenda does not furnish an excuse for creating a classroom that engages teacher and students in anything other than respectful, ethical, and dialogic or counter-point relationships (Bakhtin, 1986; Burbules, 1993; 2004; Glass, 2004; Matusov, 2009). At the same time, though being self-reflexive requires constantly monitoring oneself in order to decenter one’s authority, it does not mean that one should become paralyzed by the process. “Education as a practice of freedom recognizes that perfection is impossible. It requires neither tragic suffering nor heroism” (Glass, 2004, p. 24). For me, authorizing student perspectives and decentering authority do not mean shying away from asking hard questions, analyzing controversial topics, or challenging social practices complicit with oppressive norms. In fact, doing so is necessary to stimulate learning environments that forge connections and relationships across difference in which multiple worldviews and differing perspectives are understood and valued. From a dialogic perspective, it is equally important to draw attention to convergences and similarities explicit in self-other relations or the simultaneity of interdependence and individuality. Mindful of the theoretical and material limits of dialogue, I have argued that dialogue can be understood in terms of a process that needs to be critically interrogated or realized in the practice of active and responsive understanding.

## Reflections

In reflecting on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching, and in exploring the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy, I have argued that it is not the role of the teacher to impose ideologies or knowledge on students, and neither is it her place to convince students of the rightness of any given position through the institutional, epistemological, personal, and professional authority inhering in the role of the teacher. What is important from a dialogic point of view of communication is not to privilege dialogue as an instructional method to improve, create, or transfer knowledge, but to awaken the student's internally persuasive discourse (Matusov, 2009). Authorizing student perspectives is crucial because it positions students to construct and negotiate their own learning in connection to social others. Furthermore, as Elizabeth M. Delacruz (2011) suggests, teaching ethical behavior, or responsive understanding, entails that educators "excite students about the notion of being a globally connected and ethically charged citizen as a means of facilitating our creative, educational and civic goals as a society and as world citizens" (p. 8).

In sum, I have proposed that excessive monologism and excessive dialogism obscure relationships of power. Monologic discourses cease the dialogic function of dialogue and impede dialogic communication and ways of being. Authoritative discourse, no matter how well intentioned, produces inflexible boundaries between the discourse of the speaker and the discourses of others. Authoritative discourse demands that individuals either categorically accept a certain discourse or categorically reject it (zero-one sequence). Though its purpose is to control all other discourses, authoritative discourse, try, as it might, cannot shape them. Presented as the definitive and irreversible truth, authoritative discourse cannot be shaped by other discourses, or by the context in which it exists, at least not without becoming something else.

In contrast, dialogic communication is dynamic in that it continuously responds to its changing context and grows in meaning. "Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Considered in the present inquiry through the concept of internally persuasive discourses and addressivity and answerability, dialogic communication acknowledges the relational concept of the self, in which subjectivity is achieved by forming relationships with others. Moreover, it understands that the words of others are closely interconnected with one's own words, as Alison's encounter with feminist art demonstrates. Dialogic communication is based on answerability, which "responds first and foremost to the social other, rather than responding to or through an abstract system of ethical rules to be followed" (Nealon, 2003, p. 141). When classroom discussion became embroiled in harmful and dichotomous pronouncements (Yvette's statements regarding sexual identity), I attempted to open up entryways for students to consider answering to the social other dialogically, rather than through an intolerant system of norms and values. Influenced by Bakhtin's (1984) theory of dialogism, I have proposed that a critical understanding of the

complexities and ambiguities inherent in dialogue be undertaken. I conclude with the suggestion that a dialogic communication, pedagogy, and Being indicate the necessity to attend to the oscillating, active, counter-point, and interconnected relationships between the speaking subject, the addressee's responsive understanding, and the relationship and territory shared between the two.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I use composite stories, a collection of real teaching experiences, and change the students' names to protect confidentiality and the students' identity.

<sup>2</sup> "The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

<sup>3</sup> The multiple subject positions that shape my personal realities are historically, politically, and culturally different from my students': I was born in Northern Mexico; I am a non-native English speaker; I got my post-secondary education in the U.S.; I belong to the professional middle class, I am center-left to far left politically inclined (depending on the issues at hand), and hold multi-faith and non-fundamentalist views of religion.

<sup>4</sup> The plot of the film revolves around Ludovic, a seven-year-old boy who cross-dresses (boy-to-girl). At first, Ludovic's parents are understanding and consider his actions as a developmental stage or simply child's play. His parents become increasingly vigilant of Ludovic's continued desire to dress like a girl and talk of marrying another boy. Cinematographically, Ludovic's fantasies are depicted as innocent, beautiful, and colorful dreamscapes. Toward the end of the movie, Ludovic's family pressured by their community (neighbors, the parents' co-workers, and school) find Ludovic's behavior intolerable and deplorable. Ludovic is confused about the adults' reactions and rejection, and he attempts suicide by locking himself in a freezer (Also see Jennifer F. Eisenhauer: *What is a girl? Producing subjects in feminist and visual culture pedagogies*, PhD dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Matusov (2009) writes of a similar experience with his students.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin argues that language is internally dialogic. It is constructed through and within social relations. Consequently, he contends that language is history- and context-dependent. In the struggle to "make the words of other's one's own, words become part of one's own thoughts" (Allen, 2000, p. 28); but as I hope it has been shown in this article, this does not happen without first going through a selective and agonistic critical process.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Jones (2004) and Susanne deCastell (2004) contend that in reality, no matter what arguments educators assemble, teachers, particularly women and minority teachers, are seldom able to quiet speech actions that are both aggressive

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and ignorant, when uttered by dominant voices (deCastell, 2004). Art educator Dipti Desai (1997) takes this argument one step further. Reflecting on her personal teaching experiences, Desai observes that the “voice of white students often silence [her] as person of color” (Check, Deniston, & Desai, 1997, p. 50). In an article published in *The National Education Association (NEA) of Higher Education Journal*, a group of scholars make a related argument. These authors write that ethnicity and race play an important role in how faculty of color in predominantly White classrooms experience the classroom environment (Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009).