



Book Review

Introducing Dialogic Pedagogy: Provocations for the early years by Jayne White

Marjolein Whyte
New Zealand Tertiary College

This book introduces us to the concept of dialogism, developed by the Russian philosopher Bakhtin in the early to mid-1900's. Jayne White explores how this concept can be meaningful for teaching and learning in the early years while drawing on examples from her own research with infants in New Zealand.

Bakhtin's dialogic engagement is described as 'meaning-making' between people, considering each participant's perspective, context and feelings. This perspective offers a fresh view on learning through interactions. Instead of focusing on imparting knowledge, dialogic practice looks at what is meaningful to the child, the emotional affect, and how dialogic interactions enhance the child's agency. As opposed to developmental theories, the dialogic approach values 'difference' of subjectivities and contrast. The objective of the dialogue as highlighted by White is not an end-point of learning, but to explore multiple representations of 'lived truths' in the here and now.

The opening chapter starts off with an overview on theoretical perspectives that have influenced Bakhtin, which can be a challenging read at first, however this is followed by a description of the key-aspects of Bakhtin's theory. It soon becomes clear that it is worth persevering as this book offers new ways of looking at and reflecting on dialogic interactions and relationships. Subsequent chapters go on to explain dialogic pedagogy in the early years including the role of the teacher, dialogic interactions in the context of play, and laughter and the diversity of voices adding complexity to 'meaning-making'. Given the complexity of the concepts around Bakhtin's theoretical framework, this book seems particularly suitable for postgraduate students, providing different perspectives.

Dialogic pedagogy is seen as a creative act in which 'meaning-making' becomes a living, evolving event that happens 'in-between' the child and the teacher. The child's sense of agency is enhanced with the teacher attending to body-language, intonation of the teacher's and the child's voice, feelings, what is being said or left un-said and the context of the dialogue. Teachers actively reflect 'in-the-moment' on their interpretation of what they see and hear and how this impacts on the dialogue. Meaning is revealed in the process of the dialogue as a 'lived knowing', and is not fixed. It keeps changing and evolving and as such gives a different orientation on learning and development, allowing for less rigidity and a wider sense of exploration.

White explains that teachers practicing dialogic pedagogy need to become familiar with uncertainty: instead of seeing the child as an 'object', the child and the teacher are seen as two subjects influencing each other and having 'authorship' in their own right, exploring multiple voices and ways of seeing that are different from each other. Differences and contradictions are welcomed, which



can create uncertainty for the teacher, however this also invites innovation and creativity.

Jayne White sees teachers affirm the child's creativity by 'lingering lovingly' appreciating the child as the author of their own learning. It is the child's way of knowing and their priorities that are acknowledged by the teacher; hence, the knowledge is produced inside the dialogue with the other.

While the book describes many new and at times difficult concepts, White supports her reader by presenting an overview of the key concepts of dialogism, providing real-life examples from her research and by highlighting key aspects of dialogic practice in the early years in the last chapter of the book. For readers who are open to be challenged, this book is definitely worth the read.

References

White, J. (2016). *Introducing Dialogic Pedagogy: Provocations for the early years*. London, England; New York, NY: Routledge.