

Supervising Australian and International Postgraduate Students: Bakhtinian Dialogical Pedagogy as a Means of Enhancing Lifelong Learning Partnerships and Pathways

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Abstract

Drawing on their respective experiences as supervisors of Australian and international postgraduate students, the authors identify several supervisory practices based on Bakhtinian dialogical pedagogy that can enhance lifelong learning partnerships and pathways. The authors acknowledge also some contemporary challenges to postgraduate supervision as a vehicle for this enhancement.

Overview of presentation

- Bakhtinian dialogical pedagogy
- Opportunities and challenges in postgraduate supervision
- Lifelong learning partnerships and pathways
- Focused discussion

Bakhtinian Dialogical Pedagogy

- Dialogical pedagogy is “aimed at enabling the co-construction of knowledge between student and teacher” (Skidmore & Gallagher, 2005, n.p.)
- Two crucial and interdependent elements:
 - primacy of learner-educator relationship
 - centrality of language in promoting that relationship
- Bakhtinian dialogical pedagogy presumes willingness to attend to others’ perspectives

Bakhtinian Dialogical Pedagogy (Continued)

- Skidmore's (2000) contrast between one classroom with "pedagogical dialogue" ("teacher talk") and one with "internally pervasive discourse" (p. 283) in which students first reflect on and retell a story to another person
- "The struggle for a dialogical pedagogy is not reducible to a formulaic set of techniques; rather, it is concerned with the quality of the human relationship established between a teacher and his or her students, and the limits placed on this by prevailing social circumstances" (Skidmore & Gallagher, 2005, n.p.)

Bakhtinian Dialogical Pedagogy (Continued)

- Both postgraduate supervision and lifelong learning partnerships and pathways can create opportunities for dialogical pedagogy to flourish
- Counter-pressures can also mean that they are agents in replicating existing authority and ongoing inequities

Opportunities and Challenges in Postgraduate Supervision

- Transition from undergraduate to postgraduate:
 - from answering the question to asking the question
 - developing independence within a community of scholars (Kandlbinder, 2001)

Opportunities and Challenges in Postgraduate Supervision (Continued)

- Student-supervisor talk:
 - Monologism (Bakhtin, 1981):
almost closing down the conversation before it starts
 - Dialogical pedagogy:
complex and changing interactions as the candidature progresses
 - Encouraging critical thinking by asking questions

Opportunities and Challenges in Postgraduate Supervision (Continued)

- Co-operation versus competition:
 - Benefits of students undertaking different, but complementary, research
 - Co-operation among students and between students and their supervisors
 - Pressures of competition (for all parties)

Lifelong Learning Partnerships and Pathways

- Role of dialogical pedagogy approach to postgraduate supervision in enhancing partnerships
- Role of cultural and symbolic capital in academic performance
- Dialogical pedagogy encourages academics to make connections as well as claims

Engagement with Multiple Communities

- Horizontal as well as vertical approach to lifelong learning
- Unfinalisability: ongoing and generative conversation between student and supervisor
- Shifting power balance – overcome a sense of being an impostor

Different Forms of Partnerships and Pathways

- Collaboration between student and supervisor
- Student becomes co-supervisor with former supervisor
- Partnerships with stakeholders from beyond the academy

Conclusion

- “Language lies at the borderline between oneself and others. The word in language is half someone else’s. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions. It is populated – over populated – with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 294)
- Encapsulates philosophical and ethical dimension of dialogical pedagogy – focus on self, other and language
- Summarises our approach to supervision: replace ‘language’ with ‘postgraduate supervision’
- Synthesises our argument about LLL partnerships and pedagogies: replace ‘language’ with ‘lifelong learning’

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Thankyou forparticipating!

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Focused Discussion

- What have been your experiences of postgraduate study or supervision?
- What do you see as links between postgraduate supervision and lifelong learning partnerships and pathways?
- How (un)helpful is Bakhtinian dialogical pedagogy in facilitating our understanding of:
 - postgraduate supervision
 - lifelong learning partnerships and pathways?