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## UM DIÁLOGO ENTRE EDUCAÇÃO, LINGUAGEM E ÉTICA A PARTIR DE IDEIAS BAKHTINIANAS

# A DIALOGUE BETWEEN EDUCATION, LANGUAGE, AND ETHICS FROM BAKHTINIAN IDEAS

### UN DIÁLOGO ENTRE EDUCACIÓN, LENGUAJE Y ÉTICA BASADO EN IDEAS BAKHTINIANAS

#### **Leticia Ferreira Pires**

Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG), Inhumas, Brasil pires.prf.leticia@gmail.com

#### Marcela Inácia de Sousa

Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG), Inhumas, Brasil marcelainaciadesousa18@gmail.com

#### Liliane Barros de Almeida

Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG), Inhumas, Brasil liliane.cardoso@ueg.br

Resumo: Com o intuito de estabelecer determinado diálogo entre educação e ética pensando na relação com a linguagem e a formação humana, fez-se uma discussão a partir de princípios bakhtinianos. Nesse sentido, o certame partiu do levantamento bibliográfico, cuja temática envolvia a relação do eu e o outro presente nos escritos de Bakhtin (1895-1975). É possível depreender de seus textos que o outro está sempre presente, pois as vozes sociais constituem o ser nas interações sociais e na formação do

sujeito. Dessa forma, o objetivo desse estudo foi realizar uma reflexão sobre a constituição ética, os juízos éticos, a moral e a filosofia do ato ético, que se faz presente na interação entre o eu e o outro, diante da unicidade e responsabilidade social. O aporte teórico permitiu compreender a respeito do sujeito social, que não vive isolado, pois o contato com o outro está presente em sua constituição desde o seu nascimento, durante sua formação, por meio das interações sociais. Para Bakhtin (2017), isso possibilita a formação da consciência, no decorrer das relações sociais e no permanente diálogo com o outro.

Palavras-chave: Bakhtin. Educação. Ética. Linguagem. Social.

**Abstract**: This article discusses certain Bakhtinian principles to establish a dialogue between education and ethics, considering the connection between language and human formation. In this context, the inquiry began with a literature review about the relation between the self and the other, contained in the writings of Bakhtin (1895-1975). It is possible to infer from his work that the other is always present, as social voices constitute the self in social interactions and the formation of the individual. Thus, the article aims to reflect on the ethical constitution, ethical judgments, morality, and the philosophy of ethical action, features encompassed by the interaction between the self and the other, in its uniqueness and social responsibility. The theoretical framework allowed an understanding of the social subject, who does not live in isolation, as contact with others is part of their constitution from birth, throughout their formation, and within social interactions. According to Bakhtin (2017), this process allows for the formation of consciousness during social relations and the permanent dialogue with the other.

Keywords: Bakhtin. Education. Ethics. Language. Social.

Resumen: Para establecer un diálogo entre educación y ética, será necesario también pensar en su relación con el lenguaje, con miras a la Formación Humana y, en este texto, haremos esta discusión a partir de algunos principios bakhtinianos. Haremos la discusión sobre la relación entre uno mismo y el otro, presente en los escritos de Bajtín (1895-1975). Es posible inferir de sus textos que el otro está siempre presente, como las voces sociales siempre están presentes en la constitución del ser, en las interacciones sociales y en la formación del sujeto. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre la constitución ética, los jueces éticos, la moral y la filosofía del acto ético, que está presente en la interacción entre el yo y el otro, en su unicidad y responsabilidad social. El marco teórico utilizado en este texto permite comprender al sujeto social que no vive aislado, pues el contacto con el otro está presente en su constitución desde su nacimiento, durante su formación y a través de las interacciones sociales. Para Bakhtin (2017) la conciencia se forma en el transcurso de las relaciones sociales en diálogo permanente con el otro.

Palabras clave: Bakhtin. Educación. Ética. Lenguaje. Social.

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## Introdução

This research aims to associate ethics as a foundational principle of educational relationships. It considers the constitution of the self with the other, from the Bakhtinian ideology. Accordingly, the first topic focuses on a conceptual introduction of ethics, moral consciousness, and ethical judgment, which build themselves through the subject's social and cultural relations. The second topic approaches Bakhtinian theory's foundational principle, the self's constitution through their relationship with the other. Finally, the third topic connects ethics, dialogical formation, and education.

Ethicality manifests itself in relationships within society. Humans are always in contact with others, with beliefs different from theirs. Education is not separate from society as action is always related to the other. In that sense, the concepts Bakhtin developed are extremely relevant.

The connection between education and language is essential to think about society. Thus, educational professionals have responsibilities concerning the ethical formation of individuals. It's important to be mindful of not disrespecting people's personal values and customs as people have distinct values and customs.

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Moreover, education is a social right. Everyone is entitled to education as an exercise of citizenship. Pondering this matter in current capitalist society becomes more complex each day, considering we live in a world where competitiveness and individualism constantly grow, establishing technical rationality as a principle.

Educational action, the one that aims to respect the other and the humanity of beings, requires formation based on sensibility and the ethical foundations concerning educational practice, seeing as, generally, education is part of the individual's life since birth, encompassing constant apprenticeship - formal or informal.

### An Introduction to Ethics

Humans are rational and, in contrast with other animals, have total freedom and conditions to develop the ability to make choices and agree or disagree with facts. They can interact with their fellows and nature, and live in society.

From the moment humans started interacting with each other, they renounced individual freedom to insert themselves into a world governed by laws, created to guarantee adequate coexistence and harmony in social relationships. "Insofar as I affirm my

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own unique place in the unitary Being of historical mankind, insofar as I am its non-alibi, i.e., stand in an active emotional-volitional relationship to it, I assume an emotional-volitional position in relation to the values it recognizes" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 65 [1993, p. 47]).<sup>1</sup>

In that sense, the subject constantly faces situations where they put the societal ethics of humanity into practice. Chauí mentions "[t]he ethical field constitutes itself by values and obligations that form moral conducts, that is, virtues. They are practiced by the moral subject, the main part of ethical existence" (2000, p. 424, our translation). It refers to moments when we question what to do in the face of a situation that requires ethical judgment.

From this perspective, ethical judgment supposes making decisions with reasoning for yourself and others, and taking on responsibilities, because subjects become responsible for their decisions. Moral sense and consciousness refer to values, feelings, intentions, choices, and actions directed at good, evil, and the

**Original citation, in Brazilian Portuguese:** Na medida em que eu afirme meu lugar próprio e único no ser unitário da humanidade histórica, na medida em que eu sou seu não álibi, isto é, mantenha em uma relação emocional-volitiva em relação aos valores que ele reconhece (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 65).





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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> All English versions for Bakhtin's direct citations (1993) were extracted from: BAKHTIN, M. M.; HOLQUIST, Michael e LIAPUNOV, Vadim. Toward a philosophy of the act. Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 1993. Available at:

https://hscif.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/bakhtin mikhail toward a philo sophy\_of\_the\_act.pdf Access on: July 17th, 2024.

desire for happiness. Thus, "they refer to the relations we keep with others and, therefore, they arise as part of our intersubjective existence" (Chauí, 2000, p. 431, our translation). Social norms constitute ethics, which only becomes possible in a society where people exercise their humanity individually and collectively.

Therefore, we establish social responsibility to the other, which allows the individual to practice ethical principles and be accountable for their actions. "Consciousness and responsibility are imperative for ethical living" (Chauí, 2000, p. 433, our translation).

Moral values constitute themselves through the subject's coexistence and interactions within their family, school, religion, and other institutions. Thus, morality reflects social interaction. "Of course, various degrees of perceptibility, distinctiveness, and differentiation in the social orientation of experience are possible; but without some kind of evaluative social orientation there is no experience." (Volóchinov, 2017, p. 206 [1973, p. 87]).<sup>2</sup>

monoskop.org/images/8/86/Volosinov VN Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.pdf Access on: July 24th, 2024

**Original citation, in Brazilian Portuguese:** "É claro que essa orientação social da vivência pode possuir diferentes graus de consciência, precisão, diferenciação, porém não pode haver vivência sem ao menos uma orientação social valorativa" (Volóchinov, 2017, p. 206).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> All English versions for Volóchinov's direct citations (2017) were extracted from: VOLOSHINOV, V. N.; LADISLAV MATEJKA, TITUNIK, I. R. MARXISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE. New York, NY: SEMINAR PRESS New York and London, 1973. **Available at:** 

Furthermore, as per Volóchinov (2017, p. 216 [1973, p. 93]), the subject's constitution and utterances are not inward but outward, their composition occurs in the social environment and interactions, since "[t]he organizing center of any utterance, of any experience is not within but outside, in the social milieu surrounding the individual being".<sup>3</sup>

Thus, we can claim that the subject's formation, values, and morality constitute themselves through their social interactions and their consciousness arises from discursive interaction, as per the Bakhtinian theory. In that sense, education aimed at ethical human formation must occur through the constant exercise of critical reflection and the expression of humanity through inquiry and doubt, which necessarily comprise possibilities for a better society composed of humans and to humans.

## I and the other in Bakhtin's perspective

In his theory, Bakhtin (1993) defends that everyone occupies a place in the world. The moral **self** occupies a unique space, which cannot be occupied by the **other**. Therefore, the subject is responsible for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> **Original citation, in Brazilian Portuguese:** "o centro organizador de qualquer enunciado, de qualquer expressão não está no interior, mas no exterior, no meio social que circunda o indivíduo". (Volóchinov, 2017, p. 216) Revista UFG, Goiânia. 2023, v.23: e22.77266



their uniqueness, which occurs through the individual and answerable act or deed.

However, uniqueness does not mean that the self lives solely for themselves. Regarding this, Bakhtin approaches the constitution of the **self** in relation to the **other**:

> This world is given to me, from my unique place in Being, as a world that is concrete and unique. For my participative, act performing consciousness, this world, as an architectonic whole, is arranged around me as around that sole center from which my deed issues or comes forth: I come upon this world, in as much as I come forth or issue from within myself in my performed act or deed of seeing, of thinking, of practical doing. (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 74-75 [1993, p.

The **self** will always see or know something that the **other**, from their standpoint, cannot see, like parts of their body that become inaccessible to their eyes, or the world from behind; information accessible to the **self** and inaccessible to the **other**. Bakhtin (1993, p. ) discusses this: "Life knows two value-centers that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around these centers that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged."4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Original citation, in Brazilian Portuguese: A vida conhece dois centros de valor que são fundamental e essencialmente diferentes, embora correlacionados um com o outro: eu e o outro; e é em torno desses centros que todos os momentos concretos do Ser se distribuem e se arranjam. (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 91)





When recovering the perspective from the self about the **other** and from the **other** about the **self**, we encounter the concept of overreaching vision, part of the **other** that they cannot access. The overreaching vision goes beyond the idea of putting oneself in place of the **other**, it refers to contemplating parts of them that are concealed from them. The Being constitutes itself through the perspective of the other, parts inaccessible to the self, through interaction and dialogue. This reinforces the idea of uniqueness in Bakhtinian theory, considering each subject occupies a unique space - this does not mean that they are exempt from being individualistic but that they are socio and historically constituted and inserted in a context to occupy their own place. Thus,

> In life, each of us occupies a unique place, that is, a position irreducible to that occupied by anyone else. In that sense, when contemplating someone, exterior and ahead of me, our horizons, concrete and effectively lived, never overlap. Because, in any situation or proximity in which the other whom I contemplate may relate to me, I will always see or know something they, from their position exterior and ahead of me, cannot see. (Faraco, 2009, p. 24, our translation)

The deed materializes from interactions between different subjects, dialogical beings. The philosophy of the act constitutes moral philosophy, which guides the concrete existence of human beings and their deeds.



Concerning this "[a]n answerable act or deed is precisely that act which is performed on the basis of an acknowledgment of my obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 42). Accordingly, the philosophy of the act, in an answerable situation, is not legal or normative but a connection through the concrete deed, that ties humans to the world in their relationship with the other, as Bubnova (2023) points out

Responsibility is ontological and concrete: it conditions the being-for-the-other in each particular situation and enables the myself-for-me while I rely on the other. Because of this "there is no alibi for existence" (1986, p. 22)16; being in the world commits; living is a dangerous endeavor that doesn't exempt anyone from the inherent obstacles to interaction with the other. (Bubnova, 2013, p. 12, our translation)

To comprehend Bubnova's (2013) perspective, the interaction with the other assumes different social voices, as a living movement of new words through verbal interaction. The ethical deed constitutes itself in the relationship between the **self** and the **other**. In the concrete world, the subject and the other constitute themselves through social relationships and interactions. In that sense,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> **Original citation, in Brazilian Portuguese:** "Um ato ou ação responsável é precisamente aquele ato realizado sob a base de um reconhecimento da minha obrigatória (dever-ser) unicidade" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 60). **Revista UFG, Goiânia. 2023, v.23: e22.77266** 



Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left. Consciousness can harbor only in the image, the word, the meaningful gesture, and so forth. (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 13)

Volóchinov (2017 [1973]) refers to the word as a bilateral act, because it is determined in the same way who the word is for and who it is intended for. Bakhtinian dialogism emerges from this, conceptualized by the constructive principle of language and its relationship with the other.

In their dialogical constitution, the subject does not find the word as something neutral because it is always packed with aspirations and judgment from the other, with their voice. Therefore, discourse comes from the dynamic social interrelationship between individuals, in their verbal and ideological communication - the latter refers to how the other's exteriority intervenes in the discursive constitution, produced by the social environment.

According to Bakhtin's Circle, the dialogical constitution of a subject occurs through culture because their consciousness takes shape in the face of



sociological relationships, displaying an attentive glance with the other. Their interaction happens daily in their social connections.

In that sense, the ethical deed is not necessarily the same as normative ethics. Instead, it refers to the subject's comprehension of relationships, ethical constitution, and moral consciousness, which emerges from dialogical interactions that permeate education and their formation.

## The Ethical Relationship with Educational Action

Throughout humanity's historical and anthropological constitution, we can observe the transmission of genetic memory, in addition to cultural memory. At the start, the transmission of cultural memory occurred through generations, spontaneously and almost instinctively. With the diffusion of socialization, institutions emerged to formalize the development process related to culture.

> [...] Culture is the improvement of human nature through education in a general sense, that is, how children's instruction doesn't happen only through literacy, but also through the introduction of life in collectivity, learning music, dance, gymnastics, grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, Philosophy, and others. (Chauí, 2000, p. 372, our translation)



Concerning culture, Rio (2001, p. 30, our translation) affirms that "[c]ulture can be defined, primarily, by how the world is transformed by humans". In that sense, what emerges is the mutual relationship "human-world", which doesn't have an exterior connection but an ontological application that constitutes itself between both concepts.

Educational action is marked by constructivism and the historicity of human praxis, a sociohistorical practice. Unlike other areas, where instructions are given in a technical form, it acts carefully, reaching subjectivity and fostering the production of concepts and the experience of values.

Thinking formation within the exercise of citizenship - in the face of society's dehumanization, and social inequality resulting from the capitalist regime, which focuses on qualifying individuals for the market - requires preparation to overcome traps from this productivity process, aimed at profit.

Ethical sensibility and moral existence are common experiences for all. Humans are formed by moral consciousness, which expresses their actions, constantly evaluating and judging them as good or bad, correct or wrong. Accordingly, during the exercise of sociocultural deeds, individuals end up imposing behavior norms on each other.

First, consciousness constitutes itself in social dialogues and history. Values learned by subjects and their world comprehension are always connected to the historical and cultural period.

Concerning values, ethics exposes how culture and society define for themselves what they see as violence and crime, barbarity and addictions, and, in contrast, what they see as goodness and virtue. As an intersubjective and social relationship, ethics is not detached or indifferent to the historical, political, economic, and cultural conditions of moral action. (Chauí, 2001, p. 434-435, our translation)

Action, customs, and attitudes that subjects carry are particular features that structure human actions in multiple cultures, and constitute morality, considering values constantly impose norms and act upon consciousness, differentiating attitudes that must be taken.

Every culture and society institutes a particular morality, that is, values related to good and evil, what is allowed and prohibited, and the correct conduct, which are valid for all their members. Highly hierarchical cultures and societies that have profound differences between castes and classes can even have different sets of morality, each one referring to the individual values of a caste or social class. (Chauí, 2000, p. 437, our translation)

Ethics involves critically reflecting on morality from a universal perspective, while morality connects to the particularities of social groups, or even humanity. If values are the foundation of human actions, it is



inevitable to recognize their importance for educational practice. In the face of the challenges of formation, it is fundamental for it to reinvent itself through continuous criticism, envisioning the construction of a civilizational process.

The reinvention commences at the center of universities, especially for new professors who will confront unforeseen challenges, not yet conceived, but who, through their qualifications, maintain dignified values as a principle of the human constitution.

Education and ethics establish complex relationships, maybe because we live in a critical period where moral values are highly disturbed. And, especially in this crisis, moral education is incontestable, although there are notable difficulties in practicing it.

This is how, in light of the most critical contributions of the current Educational Philosophy, we attribute to education the essential role of building citizenship. Education has already taken on the full responsibility of applying our most important tool for guiding our lives: knowledge. This knowledge must then become a creative and critical component. (Severino, 2011, p. 141, our translation)

Learners come to school with a concrete set of morals, stemming from the social groups subjects are into, such as religion, ideologies, and common sense for their sociocultural environment. Their moral values



are not always ethical, which frequently leads them to hurt other's dignity by following their individual values.

Education of values, virtue, and ethics refers to educating for the compromise with citizenship, aiming at a just and equitable society. It is possible to assert this by Silva's (2017, p. 78, our translation) remark that "Living ethically means thinking and acting considering the dimensions of the other and everything good in relationships between humans and social production; it is awakening collective sense and consciousness in the experience with the other". In that sense, education, with an ethical purpose, aims to heighten thought and action toward autonomy, recreate social and cultural values, and foster an ethical stance in one's actions.

### **Final Considerations**

The ethical field discussed constitutes itself of values and obligations that compose moral conduct practiced by a moral subject, formed by ethical action. Ethical conduct becomes possible in society because subjects act individually and collectively, developing, through their interactions, moral sense consciousness that refer to good or bad deeds. Thus, the social responsibility to the other establishes itself.

In Bakhtin's perspective (1993), the **self** and the **other** occupy a unique space unrelated to individuality.





These two concepts are essentially different fields of value although correlated. In Bakhtinian theory, dialogism is conceived by the constitutive principle of language and the relationship with the other. When approaching the individual through their dialogical constitution, we find the word always relates to the voices, evaluations, and aspirations of others, while discourse results from social interaction, connected to the intervention of exteriority i.e. the participation of the other. Additionally, Bakhtin's theory is not restricted to the linguistic field, it infiltrates every area, especially humanities, which are directly related to socially constructed subjects.

That said, this article aimed to connect Bakhtin's theory and ethics, considered essential for contemporary pedagogical reflection. It encompasses dialogue and social relations, considering that thinking about education and its connection to language means thinking about human interaction as constant dialogue, recreating culture, customs, and habits.

Through the sociohistorical movement, the subject creates culture, practices education, and poses ethical inquiries in their communication with the other. Thus, ethics does not define concrete rules for human actions and behavior, nor does it determine what an individual must or must not do. However, considering the educational debate about appropriate human



coexistence, committing one**self** to be empathetic with the other fosters dialogue and provokes the exercise of action, thinking, and existing in an intersocial network.

Ultimately, taking into account the educational context, and respecting diversity and particular values, customs, and culture, ethical action is not necessarily the same as normative ethics. However, it does support the comprehension of the relations that permeate dialogical interactions, founded in human values and the critical view of the world.

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#### Um Diálogo entre Educação, Linguagem e Ética...

Leticia Ferreira Pires • Marcela Inácia de Sousa • et al...

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