

Classroom Storybook Reading as a Dialogic Speech Event

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ABSTRACT

In this yearlong qualitative case study of literacy teaching and learning, we utilized Bakhtin's ideas on speech genres in social contexts as a theoretical base for the analysis of a storybook read-aloud event. We first discuss Bakhtin's theories on language and literature and then apply the theories to a read-aloud activity in a kindergarten class. This classroom event involved the kindergarten teacher reading aloud, and the kindergarten children orally responding spontaneously during the reading. The teacher allowed the voices of the children and echoes of social language to enter into her performance as the class participated in a dialogic relationship

In home and at school, picture books lead to particular kinds of interactions between adults and children. The activity of reading a picture book aloud is a social event, but it is also a cultural event—a performance and an art exhibition. Storybook readings are heterogeneous for they vary with each individual reading. The performance is influenced by the particular reading style of the adult, the purpose of reading the story, the setting of the performance and the particular people involved, the genre of the book, the artistic style of the illustrations, the time of day or the mood of those participating in the reading, and prior experiences with the particular book.

For those who wish to understand the multiple dimensions of storybook read-aloud events, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1987) ideas on speech genres, dialogicality, voice, and social languages provide a framework for exploring the nature of storybook readings as language events and reveal the interrelationship among language, ideology, and world view involved in the activity. The purpose of our study was to apply Bakhtin's theories to the reading aloud of storybooks as classroom literacy events. After a discussion of Bakhtin's theories and terminology, we focus

on a particular storybook reading in a kindergarten class to situate Bakhtinian concepts in the context of an actual classroom and show how the language of the children and the teacher reflect both individual voices and social languages of the home, school, and community.

Bakhtin's Theory of Speech Genres

Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher and literary critic whose writings on language and literary theory were rediscovered by Russian scholars in the 1960s and translated into English in the 1980s. In his writings, Bakhtin approaches language from a perspective that emphasizes communication and social interaction. For him, the *utterance* is the "real unit of speech communication," rather than the word or the sentence (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 67). He defines an utterance in terms of its boundaries. An utterance is the language of a particular speaker during the time that person has the floor. When a new person begins speaking, the previous utterance ends and a new utterance begins (pp. 71-72). Utterances can be oral or written. Examples of utterances are the comments and replies in a conversation or a teacher's questions and students' answers during classroom instruction. In both situations, as speech alternates between

conversational partners, each person's spoken language until it is cut off by another speaker is an utterance. The utterances together function as speech communication.

Utterances can occur as "relatively stable" forms during particular human activities (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 60). Bakhtin refers to these forms of communication as speech genres. Letters, business documents, scientific research reports, poems, and dinner conversations are some common speech genres. Bakhtin further distinguishes between two types of speech genres that differ primarily in form—*primary (simple) speech genres* and *secondary (complex) speech genres* (pp. 61-62). Primary (simple) speech genres are less complicated in form and include such communication modes as thank you notes, military commands, and personal introductions. Secondary (complex) speech genres are shaped from these primary (simple) speech genres: "they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion" (p. 62). Novels are one of the most common secondary (complex) genres. Everyday dialogue, private letters, short news articles, legal documents, poems, advertisements, and other simple genres are often "absorbed" into the form of the novel. As Bakhtin has noted, however, once these simple genres become a part of a secondary (complex) genre, they are "altered and assume a special character" within the context of the secondary genre (p. 62).

The storybook reading event, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is a secondary (complex) speech genre. What makes this genre even more complicated than many other secondary speech genres is the intricate way that oral primary speech genres are interwoven with written genres. The picture book itself, an artistic and literary creation, allows for extreme heterogeneity. Not only is there unity to the overall form of a picture book so that a book could be classified as a pattern book, a biography, a fairy tale, or a book of scientific experiments, but also primary (simple) speech genres are often embedded in the verbal text. The alphabet, nursery rhymes, personal letters, various types of conversations, and numerous other primary (simple) genres become essential parts of many picture books. The degree to which primary genres predominate in a text also varies greatly.

Dialogicality, Voice, and Social Language

The utterances of an adult and children during a storybook reading are "links in the chain of speech communication" (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 91), for each utterance is a response to a previous utterance. Utterances are "not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another" (p. 91). Bakhtin explains the relationship between utterances as dialogic, a process of struggle and interaction

that reflects different worldviews. Thought is born during this give and take between speech subjects. The words and utterances of others are reinterpreted or absorbed into a person's speech. What has previously been said or written about a topic, whether in an ancient recorded document or in the words just spoken by an acquaintance, will influence the next utterance. Sometimes the links in cultural communication are close; other times the links are quite distant. A topic is never new: it "has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways. Various viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it" (p. 93). Any reference to the speech of others involves dialogicality, for a reaction or a response is anticipated.

World views or differing perspectives are expressed through voices, which reflect social languages. Holquist and Emerson have defined Bakhtin's conception of voice as "the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1981, Glossary, p. 434). For Bakhtin, each speaker has a voice. Behind this voice lies a certain intention, a particular meaning to be expressed, and a way of using language that can be identified with that particular speaker (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324). During a classroom read-aloud event, numerous voices can be heard: the voices of each individual child, the voice of the teacher, and the voices of the author and illustrator. Varying voices in an elementary classroom empower children in their self-expression and language learning, providing them with the opportunity to present a broad range of meaning through their own cultural experiences and creating a learning environment that is diverse and multilingual (Nutta, Strelbel, Mokhtari, Mihai, & Crevecoeur-Bryant, 2014).

Utterances that reflect the speaker's own language and own intentions are *single-voiced*. Some utterances, however, are *double-voiced*; a speaker uses the language of another person to simultaneously express two different intentions and two different meanings. The speaker's intention is directly expressed, while the second person's is "refracted" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324). Bakhtin sees such doublevoiced discourses as "internally dialogized" for "a potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages" (pp. 324-325). A teacher commenting on a story may speak in the language of the author. She uses the author's discourse to create her own meaning, but at the same time the original intent of the author cannot be separated from her words. Her voice and the voice of the author are dialogically inter-related in this double-voiced discourse. While the teacher is reading, a child calls out, "Keep your hands and feet to yourself," a phrase often repeated by the teacher. The child's immediate intention is to get the boy next to him to move

over so he can see the illustrations the teacher is showing, but in using the language of the teacher, he shows his status as a leader in the class. He also is challenging the teacher's authority in a way he thinks is acceptable to this particular teacher. The teacher's laugh in response to his imitation of her language supports the child's use of double-voiced discourse.

Communication of any kind involves a diversity of individual voices, as well as a diversity of social languages with their specialized vocabularies or jargons, differing speech genres or ways of organizing thought, and unique systems of accenting or performing discourse. Bakhtin refers to the occurrence of different speaking voices as *heteroglossia* and the interrelationships between multiple social languages as *social heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). Every voice reflects social languages – the particular ways that language is used by different social, cultural, political, or religious groups at different times or in different situations. Literary language, the language of various professions, languages of different age groups, and the language spoken by a particular family in their home are all examples of social languages.

“In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 290). The language of a particular kindergarten class is a different social language than the language of a high school biology class. Yet at the same time, within that kindergarten class exists a social heteroglossia of languages. Child language and adult language, languages of the individual families of each child, languages of education and pedagogy, languages of the mass media, religious languages, scientific languages, literary languages, languages of different centuries and of different cultures all intersect within the classroom as the teacher communicates with the children and the children interact with each other. Although researchers have not universally agreed on a definition for the word culture, it is clear that there is a growing need to understand how to create a supportive and positive culture for children (Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009). This begins with a teacher acquiring knowledge about the lives of her students and then embracing their cultural identity (Au, 2011). Children need to know they are valued. A child's race, ethnicity, identity, gender, family background, languages and social class are all components that contribute to their culture (Gay, 2013).

Some discourses in school settings are authoritative. They do more than provide rules or models, or give information or directions. Authoritative discourse attempts to change behavior and to determine an individual's ideological interrelations with others in the world. Teachers in

urban classroom environments that are diverse in social, cultural and economic domains may be authoritative due to structural needs and the perceived positive impact this discourse may have on a child's ability to authentically engage in the overall content of instruction. The language of the teacher or the parent, or religious or scientific language, is authoritative when it demands “unconditional allegiance” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). Authoritative discourse imposes itself on the listener, demands acknowledgement, and expects to be internalized, even though it may not be persuasive. “Its authority has already been acknowledged in the past” (p. 342). The formal language of instruction in the classroom is authoritative. Most teachers, however, do not speak exclusively in authoritative discourse. They tell stories, answer questions, make suggestions, tell jokes, and describe things they have seen. Social heteroglossia and dialogical interrelationships between utterances can be observed during the reading aloud of picture books in classrooms. As a teacher reads a picture book aloud to her students, authoritative language may enter into the complex speech genre. But the speech patterns and primary speech genres that are absorbed into a storybook reading event are heterogeneous and represent a vast variety of language forms with varying functions.

We utilized Bakhtin's ideas on speech genres in social contexts as a theoretical base for the analysis of a particular storybook read-aloud event. We discuss the speech event that took place in Mrs. Morgan's morning kindergarten class in a small public school for grades K to 2. We chose pseudonyms for all participants in this speech event. The school is located at the edge of a quaint little town situated along a canal in the eastern United States. Altogether, there were 22 children in the class, 12 girls and 10 boys. Most of the children lived in housing developments or motor homes in the surrounding rural areas, and several African American children were bussed to the school from their urban homes.

I (Cynthia-first author) was a participant observer in the classroom, conducting a yearlong qualitative case study of literacy learning. LaSonya, Susan, AnnMarie and I analyzed the transcript of one kindergarten read-aloud event as our primary data. However, I spent extensive time in the kindergarten classroom and had a collection of digitized children's drawings/writings, field notes from September through June, video and/or audio recordings of 86 read aloud activities, video recordings of other types of literacy activities, and video and audio recorded interviews of children and the teacher.

The principal of the school, where our study took place, moved curriculum away from standardized seatwork and basal texts towards hands-on learning experiences. Mrs.

Morgan had taught in elementary classrooms for 17 years, with 7 years in kindergarten. She believed it was important to keep up with the latest trends in teaching. Often she arrived at school early so she had time to read recently published instructional material. If she read or heard about other teaching practices that were more effective than the ones she currently used, she was open to change. To Mrs. Morgan, each child was special, and she wanted each child's voice to be heard. She encouraged the children in her class to express their ideas and feelings and to respect the ideas and feelings of others. In this classroom, you could hear respectful discourse as Mrs. Morgan encouraged her students to explore and communicate through informal partner and group discussions. At the same time, she wanted to prepare the children for first grade where the communication patterns between teacher and students would be more formal. Her verbal interactions with the children reflected her desire to balance self-expression with appropriate social forms of response, such as "One person talks at a time" (Transcript Sept. 8).

This read-aloud event took place on October 12, known as Columbus Day. Mrs. Morgan read aloud from a Big Book entitled *In 1492* by Jean Marzollo (1991) and illustrated by Steve Bjorkman. The picture book is about Christopher Columbus sailing to the Bahamas. This was the first time the class experienced a Big Book. The children sat "in storybook position," commonly referred to as "criss-cross applesauce," on the rug where the students engaged in group activities. Mrs. Morgan sat on her chair with the children grouped together in front of her. Carol sat on the rug with the children and took notes while tape recording the event. Prior to the reading aloud of the picture book, the children told their own versions of "The Rain Song" – Rain, Rain, Go away! Alex, who is usually quite vocal during group time, initiated this activity. Children were allowed to add comments or initiate responses without teacher direction during read alouds. Following the reading, the children played "Surprise Box," a game where they tried to guess what object one of the children, the night before, had put into a special plastic lunch box. Carol interviewed the teacher after the event in order to make connections to Bakhtin's theories.

LaSonya, Susan, AnnMarie and I (Cynthia) viewed this read-aloud event as an example of a secondary, or complex, speech genre, as defined in the introduction to this article. For purposes of analysis, we divided the transcript of the read-aloud into segments that exemplified Bakhtin's concepts related to speech genres and assigned the codes *speech genre*, *dialogicality*, or *social heteroglossia* to each segment. After initially identifying those segments, we followed a more detailed analysis with identification of utterances

that represented different voices and social languages, including authoritative discourse. We then described the interrelationships among social languages, ideology, and worldview that occurred during the read-aloud in order to understand the nature of classroom storybook reading as a complex speech genre.

Links in Cultural Communication—Framing the Reading Aloud

In 1492 presents a "politically correct" version of Columbus setting sail for India but arriving instead at the Bahamas. Most of the picture book is about the sea voyage, with illustrations spread across the two open pages. Eighteen of the twenty-seven pages of the book depict Columbus and his men on board the ship at sea. On another two pages, Columbus, still aboard ship, sights natives in the bushes. Only four pages of illustrations show Columbus and his crew interacting with the islanders. In the text, Columbus referred to the people he finds living on the island as "Arawak natives" (unpaginated). When Columbus first sees land, however, he cries out, "Indians! Indians!" Two lines later, the narrator excuses Columbus for his inappropriate labeling of the natives. Since he thought he was in India, the inhabitants would naturally be called Indians – "But 'India' the land was not." Columbus is presented as an intelligent and brave man, and the word *discover* is never used in the book. Again, the narrator sets the reader straight:

*The first American? No, not quite.
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.*

Mrs. Morgan selected this book to read aloud because she wanted the children to learn about Columbus Day and about the country where they lived: "We live here today... because of these explorers coming and finding this land" (Transcription, pp. 14-15). She presented her own prologue and epilogue to the story read aloud. Her explanations of the discovery of America framed the text of the picture book.

Prologue: This is a poem I think will help you also not only find out what happened many, many years ago when America got discovered, but he actually didn't discover the America, the United States like we're living in. And he came to some islands close... What's his name? Christopher Columbus, right, and he is given credit for discovering America. (pp. 2-3)

Epilogue: We cheer for him and say hooray. And it is Columbus Day, because he came over here and found the Bahamas. They also then later, they also discovered America, and because of discovering that, now we have a place called America, the United States of America.

We live here today because of these early explorers coming and finding this land... We're celebrating finding America yesterday and today. Some people celebrate yesterday; some people celebrate today. And that's very important. (pp. 14-15)

Mrs. Morgan wanted to make clear to the children that it was the Bahamas that Columbus discovered, and not America, even though some credit Columbus with discovering America. She also used the word *natives* to refer to the people then living in the Bahamas. She tried to be accurate in her historical discussion and drew on these two details from the written text. At the same time, though, she presented a Eurocentric perspective of American history when she talked about the "discovery" of America and explained to the children that they would not be here today if it had not been for the early explorers. She felt Columbus Day was an important celebration because it commemorated the discovery of America. Underlying her comments is a deep patriotism, a love of her country (Interview with Mrs. Morgan after read-aloud event).

The author, Jean Marzollo (1991), avoided any mention of the discovery of America in her picture book, yet on the last page of the book, Christopher Columbus is shown in a float waving to a crowd during a Columbus Day celebration. The couplet on this page reads:

*We cheer for him and say hooray,
Especially on Columbus Day!*

The reasons for honoring Columbus are unclear. The text implies he is admired for making a long journey by sea, but other adventurers did the same, and they are not commemorated with their own holiday. Marzollo of this picture book does not suggest the current controversy over the celebration of Columbus Day – a controversy that is emotionally charged for some ethnic groups in America. Mrs. Morgan, on the other hand, does share with the children that there is presently some discrepancy over who actually was the first European to come to America. While she may be politically "incorrect" for taking the stance of a European American, Mrs. Morgan is trying to present to the children a simple explanation of a celebration that involves the coming together of various, and at times, clashing perspectives.

As Mrs. Morgan read aloud *In 1492* and commented on the written text or expressed her interpretation of early American history, a dialogic relationship was established between the ideas presented in or omitted from the picture book, Mrs. Morgan's beliefs about Columbus and the discovery of America, her patriotism, the knowledge she acquired from reading other books or articles on the subject, the discourse of her history lessons at different stages of her own schooling, her literary interpretation of *In 1492*, as

well as the various social and political positions currently and historically expressed about Christopher Columbus or the discovery of America. A dialogue between these different perspectives and different discourses was embedded within the read-aloud activity Mrs. Morgan performed in her classroom.

The act of a teacher reading a picture book aloud to a class may seem like a simple activity, for in most instances, it is a pleasurable experience for both the children and teacher. The classroom read-aloud event, however, is a genre of complex cultural communication. Students rely on cultural background experiences and utterances of the teacher and other students to make meaning from and understand different texts. As children listen to the story, they adopt an "active, responsive attitude" towards the words they hear (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 68). Bakhtin does not agree with those who say that listening is a passive form of understanding. All understanding, he believes, is "embued with response" (p. 68). The listener perceives the language and understands the meaning of speech often from the first word spoken. Sometimes the listener immediately responds to the understanding through action. She may apply or augment what she has been told, or she may plan ways to later implement her understanding. At other times, the response is delayed, but this "silent, responsive understanding" is never passive (p. 69). As Bakhtin explains, "Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener" (p. 69). He further believes that genres of complex cultural communication, such as picture book read-aloud events, were "intended precisely" for this type of delayed response (p. 69).

Dialogic Voices of the Children

When Mrs. Morgan read aloud, the speech act resulted in the product of many voices. Since she respected the voices of each child in her class, she felt she should allow the children to ask questions or share personal stories as she was reading, even though the children's verbal responses might interrupt her performance of the printed text. Mrs. Morgan provided a space for empowerment and self-expression important for their dialogic voices because the utterances and personal cultural experiences facilitate deeper understandings. Each utterance during the storybook reading is a link in the chain of other utterances, as the teacher and her students make connections between the verbal and pictorial material of the picture book and their personal knowledge and life experiences. The sharing of these experiences allowed Mrs. Morgan to build relationships while also increasing the students' interaction with the text, therefore supporting students' desires to connect to their own literary links. The following example shows how utterances

of different speakers became linked together during the reading. This segment of the speech event begins and ends with rhyming couplets from the printed text.

Ninety sailors were on board;

Some men worked while others snored.

(Children as a group begin laughing)

Alex: And need their own snoring? (He has misunderstood the words of the story)

Charles: Snore, snore, snore! (Spoken in a silly voice)

(Mrs. Morgan turns the page)

Then the workers...

(Some of the children make snoring sounds)

Michael: They're dolphins. (He refers to the large fish in the illustration)

Alex: Oh, what are they? In the water?

Michael: They're dolphins.

Mrs. M: Could be.

(A child makes loud sounds: AHHHHHHHHHHH-HHH)

Tasha: Maybe a whale or maybe a shark.

Mrs. M: Could be

Michael: I got I got a little wha whale statue.

Alex: Or maybe Doso.

Mrs. M: Maybe dolphins like Doso.

Then the workers went to sleep;

And others watched the ocean deep.

Alex: I have a friend. He's new.

(Mrs. Morgan turns the page)

The language interaction taking place as Mrs. Morgan read these few pages of the story is quite complex. Alex has misunderstood the words in the couplet. Charles acted out a humorous impersonation of the snoring sailor. Then other children, following Charles's lead, began to snore and by so doing participated in the printed/illustrated narrative.

The rest of the responses focused on the illustration that covers the next two pages of the book. Michael thought the large fish were dolphins. Tasha was not so sure about the kinds of fish pictured, maybe whales or sharks. Mrs. Morgan affirmed each of the children's responses with her comment, "Could be." This is one example of Mrs. Morgan allowing students to build on their background knowledge and explore the text. The students' voices intermingled at points, but at others, they brought their distinct personal experiences into the social creation of the dialogic speech event. When Alex suggested the fish might be a fictional character, Doso, from previous stories Mrs. Morgan had read to the class, she continued to agree with the logical possibility of his response: "Maybe dolphins like Doso." Michael, Tasha, and Alex drew on knowledge from outside the physical boundaries of the text. Michael and Tasha had

prior knowledge of large sea mammals and fish. At home, Michael had his own little whale statue. When Tasha mentioned the word whale, Michael made connections between his statue and the fish in the illustration.

Alex's understanding of the illustrations was linked to other stories he had heard in the classroom. He brought in primary speech genres to engage with more complexity and through dialogic voices in the secondary speech genre of the read aloud. During the first weeks of school, Mrs. Morgan had read stories about Doso the dolphin. She spoke through the voice of the puppet Doso. Alex enjoyed playing with the puppet during Choices Time. His comment – "I I have a friend. He's new." – was unrelated to the story of Christopher Columbus. Friendship, however, was the theme of some of the Doso stories, so when Alex told about making a new friend, he was continuing his discussion of Doso. At the same time, he was connecting Mrs. Morgan's previous puppet readings of the Doso stories with his own life experiences. The Doso stories had become shared knowledge, a part of the classroom culture. Alex's utterances and his puppet performances with Doso during Choices Time were shaped in the process of interaction with the Doso stories – interaction with Mrs. Morgan's past performances and with the children's talk about the verbal text, illustrations, and their personal experiences related to these texts.

An earlier segment of the read-aloud event centered around In 1492 shows how the interrelationship between the voices of different speakers was set up at the beginning of the reading. Alex's comments in the above sample of speech communication cannot be separated from previous utterances by Kevin and Mrs. Morgan. Dialogical echoes of these preceding utterances occur in his discourse.

Mrs. M: Christopher Columbus, right. And he is given credit for discovering America. Well, I told you the story about him sailin' over on the three ships.

Alex: I see fish. I see fish in the water in the story.

Kevin: Hey, it looks like Doso a little.

Mrs. M: It does? Some kids in the P.M. class said the same thing.

In this instance, Kevin's utterance is linked both to Alex's interjection that he saw fish in the illustration and to the Doso stories. Likewise, Mrs. Morgan's response to Kevin extends the dialogical relationship by connecting her reading aloud of the Doso stories in the morning kindergarten class to her reading of the same stories in her afternoon class. She wanted the children in her A.M. class to see that other children's thoughts and utterances were related to their own. In so doing, she taught them about culture and

about their connections to others. Using their own cultural lenses, students' shared and connected their reflections on the story as they created meaning. When Alex made references to Doso, in the first sample of the read-aloud discussed here, he was drawing on the complex relationships that had already come into play at the beginning of this storybook reading. By creating this learning environment, Mrs. Morgan supported students' self-expression while utilizing their cultural lenses, and dialogical voices, to empower them.

Social Heteroglossia and Different Discourses

At other times the children and Mrs. Morgan used the discourse of different social languages as they responded to the story or to each other's comments or interpretations. In this particular speech event, religious, scientific, and pedagogical languages entered into the dialogue. Tasha drew on religious discourse when she commented: "Um, um, God does everything to make the world" (p. 3). This thought came to her mind as she saw the first illustration of the book where fish are leaping out of the ocean. She made connections to the Biblical story of creation. Seeing the fish, she thought of God creating the fish of the sea, and the thought led to her verbalization of the idea that God created everything in the world. Mrs. Morgan quickly answered, "All right," then continued reading the next page of the text. Mrs. Morgan chose to circumvent religious discussion. She did not want to question Tasha's response or comment on it since Tasha was rephrasing a Biblical passage, which could be considered authoritative.

Scientific discourse was also an important element of this read-aloud activity. When Alex thought the fish illustrated on the cover of the Big Book had blood on them, Mrs. Morgan tried to explain to him that the red color was probably a reflection and not blood.

Alex: See these two fish.

Mrs. M.: Right.

Alex: They have blood under 'em.

Mrs. M.: Do you think they, it's blood?

Tasha: It's just red.

Mrs. M.: Or maybe it's a reflection.

Alex: It's a waterfall.

Mrs. M.: Well, you know, sometimes, have you ever noticed the sun shining on something and sometimes it looks, makes the colors look different?

Michael: Yeah.

Other children together: Yeah.

Mrs. M.: Have you seen that? I've seen that happen.

Alex: See that blood on that? See that blood on there? Blood on that one and blood on that one.

Mrs. Morgan convinced most of the children that the red color on the fish was not blood. Alex, however, held fast to his idea that the fish were bleeding. What Mrs. Morgan did not know at the time was that Alex had had an experience at home with fish. One day he found the fish in his tank dead and floating on the top of the water with blood on them. His interpretation of the red color on the fish in the cover illustration was influenced by the connection he made to his fish at home. This image of blood on fish was so strong that four months later when he was asked about the story, he again told Cynthia that the fish in the picture had blood on them. On several occasions, he told her about his experience with his dead fish.

Mrs. Morgan spoke in an authoritative tone as she tried to teach the children to raise their hands when they wanted to talk. She used formal instructional discourse as she guided the children to respond in a way she believed was appropriate for school. Most of the children did not yet understand what she expected of them, since from the beginning of the school year, she let them call out their comments whenever they wanted. She was gradually acculturating them to school ways of communicating, such as raising their hand to be called on before speaking, but at the same time she did not want to hold back any child from expressing an idea. Although Mrs. Morgan offered a safe space for students to express their thoughts with their cultural lens, she also asserted her authoritative voice when she deemed it appropriate. She was especially concerned that some of the children, primarily boys like Alex, Michael, and Jessy, would take control of the speech event and that the girls, who were less inclined to call out responses, would be silenced by their more assertive classmates. The following segment of the read-aloud event shows Mrs. Morgan teaching the children a scientific concept – that things faraway look small – while at the same time teaching them about turn taking.

Mrs. M.: So you mean to tell me looking way far away things look real small?

Michael: Yeah.

(Several children are talking at the same time – inaudible)

(Some children raise their hands)

Mrs. M.: Ned raised his hand.

Ned: They look like toys.

Mrs. M.: Sure. Sometimes things faraway do look like toys.

Michael: And little babies.

Alex: Mrs. Morgan? (Alex raises his hand and call out at the same time)

Mrs. M.: Joshua raised his hand?

Joshua: One time I went on a submarine.

Mrs. M.: Ah, did you look far away? Did things look real small when you looked far away? At Inner Harbor (Baltimore)? Did you go on that submarine?

Alex: I'm raising my hand?

Mrs. M.: Kevin.

Joshua: One time I went in a real submarine.

Mrs. M.: Excuse me. Kevin is not

Joshua: and I saw a, and I

Mrs. M.: talking out of turn and he is raising his hand.

Joshua: I saw an octopus.

Kevin: Um (inaudible)

Mrs. M.: OK. Wait, let let

Joshua: when I was on a submarine.

Mrs. M.: OK, OK, OK. Kevin go ahead.

Jessy: Cool.

Different social languages intersected as the children shared their experiences in brief narrative vignettes and their teacher tried to enforce a "school" form of turn taking during read-aloud events in her classroom. Joshua raised his hand in the traditional way and was called on to respond. Thinking his story was over, Mrs. Morgan prematurely interrupted his utterance. She added her comments to his response, thinking the submarine he was talking about was the one she had seen at Inner Harbor, Baltimore. Joshua was determined to finish his utterance, but Mrs. Morgan kept interrupting him until finally he completed his narrative. Jessy had been listening all along to Joshua and, excited about his classmate's adventure, shared Joshua's feelings by adding, "Cool". Utterances were layered on top of each other as Kevin, who had been given the floor, also tried to share his story.

All along, Alex raised his hand and called out to Mrs. Morgan because he wanted to have the floor. He did not understand that when Mrs. Morgan asked the children to raise their hands, she also did not want them to speak. Alex continued to raise his hand and call to Mrs. Morgan, but she did not give him a turn to speak. Alex eventually went back to his prior mode of turn taking, calling out his responses whenever the ideas came to him, and Mrs. Morgan carried on a dialogue with him as she had done at the beginning of the read-aloud activity. At this time in the read aloud, Mrs. Morgan dealt with navigating authoritative discourse, while the students navigated how they would contribute to the event within the classroom context.

During the reading aloud of this one picture book, many different speech genres became a part of the speech event. There was sometimes a disconnect between the children's use of the discourses of their homes and communities and the teacher's attempt to teach them school discourse. The different social languages created heteroglossia, as the languages interplayed and at times overlapped. At the same

time, a collage of oral primary speech genres – narratives, questions and responses, scientific explanations, private conversations, affirmative statements, literary interpretations, and historical explanations – were embedded in this secondary (complex) speech genre of the classroom read-aloud event. Oral genres alternated with the performance of the rhyming couplets of the picture book's printed text. The illustrations became part of the context of the performance, a visual setting for the oral story. The fifteen sets of couplets generated fifteen pages of transcription as the children and their teacher explored the possibilities of text and created their own meanings from the classroom experience.

A classroom storybook read-aloud activity is much more than the oral reading of a story by a teacher. The printed text can generate the interplay of multiple dialogues. Sometimes several dialogues take place simultaneously. Other times the children coordinate their responses to create a smoothly flowing discussion with one utterance closely linked to another. Mrs. Morgan allowed the voices of the children and the echoes of social languages to enter into her performances of children's picture books. She helped the children develop an understanding of the significance of culture as she encouraged them to make connections between home and school experiences, and between oral and printed texts of a variety of genres. The children participated in a dialogic relationship with the picture books that she shared with them. In so doing, they experienced a sense of community and learned that their individual voices existed in a social context and that each individual utterance was, as Bakhtin had envisioned, a "link in the chain of speech communion" (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 93).

Implications

This study provides an example of ways Bakhtin's theories of speech genre, dialogicality, voice, and social languages can be applied to the picture book read-aloud event to better understand the complexity of this classroom activity as a cultural event. As children begin formal schooling, picture books play a prominent role in their classroom education. When teachers allow the voices of children and the echoes of social languages to enter into read-aloud events with picture books, they help children develop an understanding of the significance of culture as they make connections between home and school experiences and between oral and printed texts of a variety of genres.

Read alouds offer beneficial experiences and opportunities for students to engage with texts, their classmates, and their teacher while providing more in-depth comprehension, interpretations, enjoyment, and higher-level thinking (Layne, 2015). Various read-aloud activities can

enhance and deepen students' comprehension, vocabulary, and understandings while offering a space for different perspectives. Mrs. Morgan in this study supported the interplay of the children's voices while she read aloud. She provided a space for diverse voices of her students to be heard. She guided their discussions, and through her own voice, allowed for a cultural event to promote more understanding of time, space, people, and culture throughout the read aloud. In this environment, students become empowered through self-expression and language learning as they made meaning through the dialogic utterances (Bakhtin, 1981; Block & Israel, 2004; Lennox, 2013). Adults play a key role in the read-aloud process. As children and adults connect through shared reading experiences, focused conversations and images mix and blend with creative words (Sezzi, 2009).

Most importantly, teachers can cultivate a positive learning environment during read alouds with social interaction, in-depth dialogue, and conversations to deepen understanding and amplify the pleasure of reading. The interplay between the teacher and students' utterances, as expressed by Bakhtin, promotes a deeper understanding of the text. While individual utterances hold meanings for each participant, the interplay among utterances of the teacher and classmates allows for a collaborative understanding of the story. The learning and understanding that results from read alouds can facilitate students' future academic success and cultural understandings.

Although authoritative discourse may be essential in certain content instruction, teachers must learn to navigate and encourage students' discussion at the forefront. They must create a space in read alouds for student voices, author voices, and teacher voices to be expressed in order to bridge different world perspectives. They must not rely on authoritative discourse to control behavior during read alouds or allow dogmatic discourse as an avenue to avoid uncomfortable conversations (Bakhtin, 1981; Nutta, Strelbel, Mokhtari, Mihai, & Crevecoeur-Bryant, 2014). As discussed by Bennett, Gunn, and Morton (2014), teachers "no longer can ignore difficult topics because of fear or anxiety because these issues can negatively impact individuals" (p. 650). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to recognize the significant impact of high quality read alouds and to understand how to effectively present read alouds to enhance learning.

This discussion of Bakhtin's theories applied to a classroom read-aloud event offer suggestions for ways to strengthen professional practice through understanding the potential of using read alouds as best literacy practices. We suggest teacher educators utilize observations of read alouds of experienced teachers, as well as their

own, and then examine and analyze those read alouds through lenses such as Bakhtin's (1981). Although read alouds may be present in schools, the question remains as to whether the teacher presents a high quality read aloud (Block & Israel, 2004; Lennox, 2013). Teacher educators can help inservice and preservice teachers identify ways to develop effective read alouds while recognizing the power of dialogicality and social heteroglossia, not just the power of literary texts but the social power and dynamics that are expressed in read-aloud interactions (Roberts, 2012). Teacher educators need to prepare teachers to recognize the complexity of read alouds as a secondary speech genre. They can apply this knowledge to their own professional practice through intertwining oral primary speech genres and written genres, while recognizing that language differs across various social, cultural, religious, and political groups, as well as times and contexts (Bakhtin, 1981, 1987). In addition, teacher educators can emphasize the significance of creating a learning environment where students express their ideas and use their cultural lenses to facilitate meaning making in a dialogic setting, which can lead to student empowerment. ■

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