

2-2016

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Eugene Matusov
University of Delaware

Ana Marjanovic-Shane

Chestnut Hill College

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See next page for additional authors

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Recommended Citation

Matusov, Eugene; Marjanovic-Shane, Ana; and Meacham, Sohyun, "Pedagogical Voyeurism: Dialogic Critique of Documentation and Assessment of Learning" (2016). *Curriculum & Instruction Faculty Publications*. 33.

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Authors

Eugene Matusov, Ana Marjanovic-Shane, and Sohyun Meacham

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Pedagogical Voyeurism: Dialogic Critique of Documentation and Assessment of Learning

Eugene Matusov¹, Ana Marjanovic-Shane², Sohyun Meacham³

- 1) University of Delaware
- 2) Chestnut Hill College
- 3) University of Northern Iowa

Date of publication: February 24th, 2016
Edition period: February 2016 - June 2016

To cite this article: Matusov, E., Marjanovic-Shane, A., & Meacham, S. (2016). Pedagogical Voyeurism: Dialogic Critique of Documentation and Assessment of Learning. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 5(1), 1-26. doi: 10.17583/ijep.2016.1886

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2016.1886>

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Eugene Matusov
University of Delaware

Ana Marjanovic-Shane
Chestnut Hill College

Sohyun Meachan
University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

We challenge a common emphasis on documentation and assessment of learning for providing good education: from the mainstream of neoliberal accountability movement to the progressive Reggio Emilia schools. We develop these arguments through discussing: 1) immeasurableness of education and learning, 2) students' ownership/authorship of education and learning. We ground our conceptualization of educational assessment in critical dialogue, in a case of a student who requested assessment of her research project, and guided her peers and the teacher in providing different aspects of this assessment. We argue that documentation of learning on teacher's demand leads to surveillance, discipline, distraction, teacher-student distrust, and robbing of students from ownership of their education and thus it is anti-educational.

Keywords: educational assessment, documentation, educational surveillance, kidwatching.

Vigilancia Pedagógica: Crítica Dialógica de la Documentación y la Evaluación del Aprendizaje

Eugene Matusov
University of Delaware

Ana Marjanovic-Shane
Chestnut Hill College

Sohyun Meachan
University of Northern Iowa

Resumen

Retamos el énfasis común puesto en la documentación y la evaluación del aprendizaje para proveer una Buena educación: desde el movimiento dominante de la contabilidad neoliberal a las escuelas de la Reggio Emilia. Desarrollamos esos argumentos mediante la discusión de: 1) Lo inmensurable de la educación y el aprendizaje, 2) la propiedad del alumnado sobre la educación y el aprendizaje. Basamos nuestra conceptualización de evaluación educativa en el diálogo crítico, en el caso de un estudiante que solicitó la evaluación de un proyecto de investigación y guió a sus iguales y a su profesor en proveer diferentes aspectos de esa evaluación. Sostenemos que la documentación del aprendizaje como demanda al profesorado conduce a la vigilancia, la disciplina, la distracción, la desconfianza entre profesorado y estudiantes y a robar al alumnado de la propiedad de su propia educación y, por esto, es anti-intelectual.

Palabras clave: evaluación educativa, documentación, vigilancia educativa, vigilancia de niños.

Somehow, little kids learn to speak without somebody following them with the inquiry about "evidence of learning"

Eugene Matusov, Dialogic Pedagogy Facebook page,
March 25, 2013.

Burning Learning Day

I (the first author) had my first professional pedagogical night-dream in three scenes:

Scene 1

I'm a novice at a meeting of the K-12 parents-teachers-students innovative school-cooperative in front of the school on a parkway. Only teachers and parents are present, a rather big crowd. A nearby parent tells a small group that she participates in an online discussion about what is learning with some of her friends. She wishes that "we" (parents and teachers?) also had such an online forum. I propose to have a Facebook page. Many parents and teachers support this idea. Another parent says she wants to discuss "evidence of learning" and "what is learning." Many other parents and teachers enthusiastically want to join a discussion of these topics.

Scene 2

I'm in a classroom of teenage kids with a few other female parents and a male teacher. I'm schmoozing from one group of kids to another. Suddenly I hear some parents yelling at some kids. I turn around and see a group of teens burning their artwork in the classroom. I can smell smoke of burning paper. A few parents yell at the kids, "Why do you burn your beautiful evidence of learning?! Stop it at once!" The kids reply, "It's our work, we can do with it what we please!" Parents yell, "You can't! You mustn't!" — the parents try to extinguish the fire. The involved teens ran away from the classroom and the school. The parents

follow them. The only adults who remain in the classroom are the teacher and me. I try to comprehend what just happened. The other kids in the classroom mind their own business.

Suddenly with enthusiasm, I come up to the teacher and tell him that what the kids did makes a lot of sense to me. Products of learning must be burned! The teacher does not reply to me — he seems to be still in shock of what happened. I'm leaving the classroom in search of the kids.

Scene 3

I found the group of teens, who burned their artwork outside of school, hiding from the parents. I tell them that I understand why they burned their learning products. They ask me with surprise, “You do?!” They say that all learning must be burned. They say that their parents do not understand that. I agree. I promise to talk to the parents and the teachers and explain that to them. I say that maybe “we” (who?!) should establish a Burning Learning Day as a tradition in the school.

I woke up.

I remember that when I graduated from a high school in the Soviet Union, some of my classmates and I burned our school textbooks and our notebooks. In my dream, the students of an apparently innovative school burned the fetish of learning through a carnivalesque celebratory ceremony.

Introduction

In this paper, we want to challenge a common current ubiquitous insistence on documentation and assessment of learning as necessary and important for providing good education, coming from diverse corners of the Educational Empire: from the mainstream of neoliberal accountability movement to the progressive Reggio Emilia schools. In both cases, it is the assessment itself that drives and defines the practice of “good pedagogy.” Thus, the former President of the United States George W. Bush announced at the joint session of the Congress his famous educational policy “No Child Left Behind” on February 27, 2001,

Critics of testing contend it distracts from learning. They talk about ‘teaching to the test.’ But let’s put that logic to the test. If you test a child

on basic math and reading skills, and you're 'teaching to the test,' you're teaching math and reading. And that's the whole idea.

For a different reason and different aim, progressive education movement also calls for documentation of students' learning. At presentation on "Playworlds and Exploratory Learning: Preschool Didactics from Inside" at the CUNY Graduate Center, on May 6th, 2014, Anders Jansson, an early childhood education scholar from Sweden, inspired by the Reggio Emilia, announced,

Just being with children is already very gratifying for the teachers, but once the teachers have collected documentation [on what children are doing] and look at children's learning through this documentation, then it becomes pedagogy.

In the former case, good pedagogy is guided by standardized testing. In the latter case, good pedagogy is guided by learning portfolios – a collection of students' work and documentation of students' learning processes – to make learning visible.

[Documentation] allow[s] us to make visible the process of children's learning, the ways to construct knowledge, the emotional and relational aspects; in fact, all the facets that contribute to leave traces of a competent observation. ... Through documentation we leave traces that make it possible to share the ways children learn, and through documentation we can preserve the most interesting and advanced moments of teachers' professional growth. It is a process in which teachers generate hypotheses and interpretations of theories that can modify the initial, more general theories [about children's learning] (Rinaldi, 1998, pp. 120-121).

In both cases, genuine good pedagogy starts with documentation of the students' learning. In contrast, we think that good pedagogy should start with supporting students' autodidact learning (Sidorkin, 2009), emerging from the practice itself, unpredictable, surprising, self-correcting and inherently relevant to the participants.

The notion of "documentation" was recently developed by the Reggio Emilia approach to preschool education. In their very extensive writings about "documentation" and later also in the Swedish Reggio-inspired approach to Early Childhood Education -- "documentation" is: photographs and videos of children at work and play, children's narratives and artifacts,

teacher's field notes as they observe children and listen to children. Teachers then use the documentation they collect to further develop extensive learning projects for and with the children. So if they notice that someone is interested in sharks, they will then develop a whole project involving multiple activities: reading about sharks, finding out more about sharks through videos, creating drawings of sharks, making sharks out of different materials, creating play involving sharks, etc. Thus, documentation is used as a pedagogical tool. A child's engagement in painting, storytelling, or just having a good time with the others, is "documented." Looking from a Bakhtinian stand-point, through inscription of children's life, the teachers become authors of children's lives, and children, from the teacher's point of view are characters in the narrative (environment) they shape for them (Lensmire, 1997; Miyazaki, 2010).

We will consider whether pedagogical documentation of students' learning, activities, projects, achievements, behavior is:

- a) "A vital tool for the creation of a reflective and democratic pedagogical practice... [for] the discourse of meaning making... [for] providing the means for pedagogues and others to engage in dialogue and negotiation about pedagogical work" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 145);
- b) pedagogical voyeurism, surveillance, patronizing, normalizing, subjectification, disrespecting the students' privacy and agency;
- c) a bit both; or
- d) something else?¹

We argue that documentation of learning on teacher's demand leads to surveillance, discipline, distraction, and robbing of students from ownership of their education. Although the Reggio/Reggio-inspired and some other "student-centered" progressive pedagogies are open-ended and children may participate in the decision-making processes for their school lives and activities, children are very aware that they are being documented by the adults. In some instances, children may even document themselves for the self-assessment in those schools. However, the documentation process itself is for the most part, initiated by the teachers who claim that documentation makes the students' learning visible (Giudici, et al., 2001; Kinney & Wharton, 2008). We claim that this process objectivizes and finalizes students, making them into objects rather than subjects and owners of a

pedagogical practice, e.g. in the so called, “kidwatching,” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002), the classroom-based assessment (Serafini, 2010), etc. It disrespects students’ privacy and agency. Finally, it exploits the students’ images as learners defined by the teachers to manage the relationship with parents, create favorable image of the school, and justify the school existence for the society and taxpayers.

Part I. The Nature of Education and Learning

Education is often viewed instrumentally as a public business. Politicians, educational activists, parents, and even students are often advocates for education by referring to economy, global competition, upward social mobility, employment, national security, social justice, participation in a democratic society, patriotism, social coherence in the society, providing daycare and healthcare for young children, and so on (Labaree, 1997). Although these instrumental functions of education may or may not be legitimate, the public debates of education often neglect the inherent function of education as a basic human need for self-fulfilling, self-actualization, and self-improvement. We define this inherent purpose of education as a pursuit of critical examination of the self, life, society, and world as embedded in a critical dialogue (Plato, 1997). Thus, using the Aristotelian terminology of causes, the *final cause* of education is education for its own sake. We argue that education, as any practice, has to be defined by its primary, inherent, needs and not by secondary, instrumental, needs (Arendt, 1958).

As a basic human need of self-fulfillment, inherently-defined education is a personal, private business (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2011). Society does not have rights to define, shape, or dictate it. The role of the society has to be limited to providing a financial opportunities and access to quality education for all people during their lifetime (and guarding against obvious abuses). Nonetheless, the quality of education has to be defined by the students themselves. Inherently-defined education involves not only the transformation of students’ subjectivity, but also the critical examination of this transformation. In other words, defining the quality of education and assessing this quality is a part of education itself – the primary business of the students.

One may object that the non-instrumental inherently-defined education is a luxury that only a few can afford. Meanwhile most people need instrumental education to fulfill their needs. We somewhat agree with this objection. Genuine education needs resources and conditions to be met. Similar to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, basic survival needs have to be satisfied first before human needs of self-actualization. Although some people may not wait until their basic survival needs are satisfied and insist on their self-actualization immediately, it may not be a common trend. Nevertheless, the Greek term "school" means "leisure" (Arendt, 1958). The genuine inherently defined non-instrumental education emerged in an Ancient Greek democratic slavery-based polis, where (male) citizens were free from labor, survival, and necessity of basic needs. Numerous and diverse oases of genuine education have always existed for those who had material opportunities for leisure² (often for the rich) and to a certain extent smuggled into the everyday lives of everyone, whenever the circumstances of their lives would allow for it, e.g. various hobbies, passionate pursuit of certain practices, or just having time to hang out with friends and "discuss politics." Currently, our civilization may be at the brink of a new possibility for the genuine education on a large scale, due to the emergent "technological unemployment" when economy reliance on human labor will subside due to automatization, robots, and smart machines (Ford, 2015; Kaku, 2011; Keynes, 1963; Markoff, 2015). The rapidly growing productivity may create again a possibility for leisure-based society and leisure-based education. The current oases and islands of genuine education may start growing to become available for all.

Conventional instrumental education often defines educational practice as a production of well-defined learning in each student. Societal curricular goals are carefully set (Dewey, 1956), educational curricular standards are defined (e.g., The Common Core in the US), and teaching objectives and assessment are established through lesson plans (e.g., "By the end of lesson, students will be able to do... and know..."). Here learning process is viewed as bounded in time (i.e., lesson, class term, school term) and place (i.e., classroom, school). What is not well known is whether learning occurred or not. This uncertainty calls for learning assessment to see how successful was teacher's guidance causing students' learning.

Studying informal and formal learning outside of modern schooling, Lave has discovered that non-school learning seems to be upside-down (Lave, 1992, April). Learning always occurs in any activity, however it remains uncertain what is learned. Non-school learning is a future oriented and future-evolving process, not bounded by time and place. The participants' experiences in the activity keep evolving in the participants' new future experiences. Learning, initiated in the past, keeps evolving in the future and, thus, keeps redefining itself through encountering new activities and experiences and through reflection arising from these encounters.

There is no reason to believe that school learning is different from non-school learning, rather conventional normative view of learning may be wrong. Thus, Lave claims that "learning assessment" is a special parasitic practice in itself that conventional schooling creates for non-educational needs. Conventional "learning assessment" is a special practice in itself because it involves students' recognition and production of the patterns of actions and discourse that are desired by the testing agency and/or the teacher – the proxy of the society (Lemke, 1990). It is parasitic because it usually aims at non-educational goals like sorting students for social mobility (see Sorokin, 1959, who was an advocate of this goal of education), forcing students to do assignments imposed on them, and creating credentials "to increase the exchange value of learning independently of its use value" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 112).

Genuine learning cannot and should not be the purpose of guiding efforts. Learning is an ephemeral future-oriented by-product of activities. When targeted, learning becomes distorted. In targeted learning, people often learn their alienation from the practice, in which the targeted learning is embedded. Targeting learning shifts the focus of the participants from the activity itself: from the logic of the activity, its meaning, its value, its success, judged by the activity participants and especially by the novice; to the focus on teacher's approval. Often a student worries more about the "evidence of his/her learning" desired by the teacher and test – how to get good grade and to get approval of the student's action from the teacher – rather than about the activity itself. For instance, Gee, found that even 80% of the honor students could correctly answer SAT questions relating to a paragraph of a literary text, even without seeing this paragraph or knowing what novel or story it is from, but basing their answers only on good guesses

about the test makers' intentions and values (Gee, 1997). In our view, a student's success on a standardized test suggests the student's surrender of his/her own authorial agency in the name of compliance and conformity to the test designers' preset curricular endpoints. Bakhtin (1986) argued that understanding is infinite and bottomless. When test designers preset the correct answers or performance in advance, they oppress students by turning them in the successful test takers, "A thought that, like a fish in an aquarium, knocks against the bottom and the sides and cannot swim farther or deeper. Dogmatic thoughts" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 162). Thus, the practice of standardized testing with preset curricular endpoints is anti-educational.

But even to view education as non-schoolish learning is problematic. Education should not be reduced to learning because education can happen without learning. To consider this issue, first of all we have to define education and learning. Elsewhere, we, the first two authors, defined three major approaches to education and learning (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012). We called the first approach "alienated learning." It defines education as learning discrete, well-defined, self-contained sets of knowledge, skills, attitudes pre-established by the society. "Good" learning is seen as the product of education. In this conventional approach, education and "good" learning are equated. We call second major innovative approach "socialization in a socially desired practice." This approach defines education as socialization into a practice. Learning is defined here as transformation of a novice's participation and social relations in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning is an unpredictable (or not fully predictable) by-product of participation in practices. However, we argue that socialization into a practice may be achieved not only through learning but also through transformation of the practice itself. Thus, for example, blind people got access to the practice of reading not through learning to read the conventional texts but through invention of a new practice of writing and reading invented by Louis Braille in 1824. Political struggle of people with disabilities has transformed public transportation to allow people in wheelchairs to access public transportation without learning how to jump on old buses. Learning is one of many possible pathways of socialization, involving technical innovation, political struggle, social networking, and so on.

Finally, we defined third innovative approach to learning as critical dialogic examination, which we equate here with non-instrumental inherently defined education. In critical dialogic examination, people are engaged in developing their own authorial judgments, opinions, worldviews, attitudes, and perceptions and testing them in critical dialogue with other alternative judgments, opinions, experiences, and so on – what Bakhtin (1991) called “internally persuasive discourse”. In this approach, learning is viewed as authorial, agentive, creative, and dialogic: as transcendence of the personal, social, and/or cultural given recognized by the self and/or others. However, for learning to become education, it has to be embedded in a never-ending critical dialogue with others: other people, other experiences, other values, other worldviews and so on. Can education happen without learning in this approach? Yes, when, for example, critical dialogue deepens own position without necessarily transcending it. Thus, like in the second approach, learning is not a goal of education but rather it is an emerging unpredictable by-product unbounded by time and place.

In sum, our discussion of the nature of education and learning problematizes the need of learning assessment because learning does not define genuine education. Education is a personal, private business and not a social endeavor. Even more, the issue of quality and success of education belongs to the educational practice itself. Now we will turn to the issue of whether learning can be measurable and if documentation of learning is necessary and desirable for the educational practice.

Part II. Is Learning Measurable? Is Documentation of Learning Necessary and Desirable for Education?

Our answer is “No,” learning is immeasurable because it is a future-oriented and future-defined authorial subjective process. Positivistic measurement of learning involves development of the definition of learning and the unit of its measurement *before* observation and judgment of a particular experience. For example, conventional standardized tests define the correct answers regardless of the student’s past and emerging experiences. They view learning as a transition from the student’s wrong to the correct answers caused by the instruction (and self-studies), so-called “learning gains.” However, Bakhtin (1986) argues that meaning is rooted in the relationship between genuine information-seeking question and serious answer and not in

statements that people produce. Thus, meaning-making is dialogic, relational, and bottomless process (Bakhtin, 1986). For example, let's consider a case of the first grade boy who constantly turns to his peer, a girl, for answer to his math problems like "4+1=" (Matusov, 2009). The girl systematically produces the correct conventional answers. However, when an adult visitor challenges her to consider if "2+2" is always four for any objects, the situation abruptly changed. Initially, the girl claimed that it does not matter what to add: lines or her pencils that she draws to represent 2+2, Russian pencils, or imaginary Martian pencils. Her understanding of arithmetic addition corresponds to the conventional view. However, when the visitor asks what is 200 plus 200, the girl remembers that her mom said 300. Meanwhile, the boy says that it is 400 because it does not matter what to add: pencils or hundreds. The girl protests that a hundred consists of many "lines" difficult to count. So, based on the conventional positivistic measurement of learning, the boy had "learning gains," while the girl showed "learning regression." However, after some more reflection and discussion, the visitor realized that the girl might be right to reject the idea that it does not matter what to add. For example, two friends and two friends is not necessary four friends – even more, the answer is unpredictable (it can be zero friends, 2 friends, 3 friends or 4 friends) and unstable in time. Not all 2 objects and 2 objects produce four objects. This investigation can be continued. The assessment of the correct answer is in the eye of a beholder – how far and deep the observer wants to investigate the problem. Also, the problem may potentially generate many diverse questions, which lead to many diverse contexts and meanings, such as: why people add numbers, for what objects 2+2 is four and for which is not four, why we should study it here and now, what is the aesthetics of adding numbers and so on. For many diverse answers and investigations, the predefined "correct" answer of positivistic measurement of learning becomes irrelevant and even wrong disregarding people's goals and thoughtfulness.

Constructivist measurement of learning – measurement that does not pre-exist but emerges in the consideration of the phenomenon – also has its own problems. Like positivistic measurement, it ignores the observer and dialogic and authorial/subjective nature of meaning-making. In the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach, the teacher attempts to make students' learning visible through analysis of students' products accumulated in learning

portfolios. This reflective exercise ignores at least several important aspects. First, the educator ignores creative, subjective, and authorial efforts that *he/she* adds to the assessment. Another educator may legitimately construct different “learning” and educational values in the student’s work. The creative, subjective, and authorial nature of the constructivist assessment is often invisible for the constructive educators.

Second, the educator essentializes students’ work, forgetting that meaning is always co-constructed. The author (the student) and the audience (the assessing educator) are in a dance *together*. Forgetting that the teacher is the partner in this dance shows only the child’s “learning”, which is sometimes like inexplicable dancing leaps. Even the very process of documentation of an educational activity changes the evolving meaning of this activity. This can be illustrated by the following event that took place in a Reggio inspired setting. Two 4-year-old children, Scott and Madi (pseudonyms) were dancing to the background tango music during free playtime when a teacher was taking photographs for documentation. Scott and Madi saw the teacher taking pictures when they were dancing and then they saw the photos as they were being placed on the documentation panel. They even participated in the panel making process with the teacher. Interestingly, when the teacher shared the photos with Scott and Madi, they wanted to dance again requesting a different music than tango. The reality captured in the angle of the teacher’s camera seemed to be the teacher’s validation of the students’ practice, which influenced the students’ future practices. Thus, documentation, as a form of essentializing student’s learning, paradoxically changes the meaning and the course of this very practice. This essentializing of the student’s learning may have something to do with what we see as a paradoxical potential of documentation to become another form of normalization and standardization. Namely, it has been noticed that some parents of Reggio/Reggio-inspired schools frequently complain about the lack of their children’s visibility compared to other stellar students in documented artifacts, apparently questioning the teacher’s choices of display panels.

Third, learning is immeasurable because the educator ignores the dialogic nature of the constructivist assessment. In the constructivist assessment, the educator finalizes the student’s work by responding to the pedagogical community and not to the child, thus excluding the child from this dialogue.

It is a shift away from educational practice itself. The educator's response is above and beyond the child, who is not and often cannot be a partner of pedagogical discourse in which the child is not involved.

Thus, fourth, the constructivist assessment usually does not emerge from the student's need and from the student's inquiry as asking the educator for help (in learning), which makes the assessment irrelevant, if not meaningless, for the student.

In the critical dialogic examination approach to education, the educator's legitimate social evaluation of the student's actions or products starts with the student's request to the teacher (and other participants e.g., other students, peers, parents, remote audience) for assessment, evaluation, appreciation, and/or help. This assessment is often not necessary an assessment of learning but an assessment of the student's action and products for which the student wants to get feedback. It is not always even an assessment (e.g., good or bad) but at times it is a critical analytic evaluation (e.g., what does it mean, where it may go). Art teacher Crowley describes this serious approach to students and evaluation of their work in the following way,

We had visiting artists..., whose practice was fresh. ...this is where it gets really interesting, when I can't stop enthusing about my work to my students and talking to them like peers... Drop the "please, sir, can I go now" or "is it alright, professor, what I'm doing?" "Is this meeting with your approval, Graham?" Students wouldn't even ask whether I like things or not. They'll ask me candid questions about "so what you think of that? Do you think that's better than that?" I'll give them a damn straight answer; of course I will! But I'll give them a reason for why that is a better piece of work (Reardon & Mollin, 2009, pp. 125-127).

This social evaluation starts with the educator's asking about the student's own subjectivity: how the student sees and evaluates his/her actions and work, what the student likes and dislikes and why and where the student wants to go from there (Schaefer-Simmern, 1948). Then the teacher can provide alternative ideas, approaches, perspectives (including his/her own, if asked) to help the student make his/her mind about future direction of actions. To be truly dialogic, social evaluation has to be voluntary for students who should have the legitimate and recognized right not to participate in the evaluation. Art teacher Armleder described his own

dialogic deeply serious and mutually interested guidance in the following way,

I just don't know how to teach other than understanding it in terms of working with a group and using ... the *energy* of the group and the different points of view, to understand more about what you're doing yourself. So I'm in exactly the same position as the students when I'm working with them, because I'm discovering things as much as they are. And, as a matter of fact, I take much more out of it, because there are more of them than me.... I don't believe at all in any kind of power relationship in any situation, and certainly not in art, so I never consider myself as knowing more than students do. I just know it differently, because I have a practice and have shown as an artist. And most of them have not as yet.

[So can you teach art?] Well, I don't know if it's teaching... I'm involved as much for myself, as I am for them in trying to understand what we're doing. So my involvement with the students is more experimental, much more like a laboratory where people get together to understand a bit more about what they're doing, and what they want to do. Of course, because of my long-time practice I have some kind of knowledge. And because I'm someone who's been interested in art for a long time, I do have that kind of knowledge, not as an art historian, but as an artist, which, in a way, I'm very happy to share. Because if you give something out like that, it will be assessed critically by the people who are listening to you, and given back to you in a different way. So it's reviewing from both sides. And because most of the students are people who are just trying to find out if they want to do art or no, and I'm a person who has been doing art for a long time and takes for granted that's what his life is about, but who still doesn't know why, its' a discussion (Reardon & Mollin, 2009, pp. 27-28).

The meaning of the teacher's guidance is always in a dialogic response to the student – how useful the student finds it for him/herself. Also, of course, the teacher can make private evaluations of the student's actions and contributions as dialogic understanding of another person, but these private evaluations have to remain private in the dialogic flow of their being together. The teacher's evaluation is dialogic finalizing aiming at a dialogic provocation of the student to develop new inquiries, test ideas, find new

approaches and perceptions as needed by the student. Dialogic evaluation is a part of dialogic interaddressivity – a genuine human interest in each other (Matusov, 2011).

Part III. Dialogic Authorial Educational Assessment Initiated and Owned by Students

Recently I (the second author) experienced one of my students take a leading role in soliciting the assessment of her main learning project from her classmates and the instructor. This event happened in a combined graduate-undergraduate course on “School – Family relationships.” I ran this course with an Opening Syllabus Education approach, in which the students were progressively engaged in making democratic decisions about different components of the course initially designed by me.² In a mid-term Town Hall meeting, the class decided to abolish summative assessment (grades) for their Main Learning Projects (MLP), but to preserve formative assessment in the form of meaningful feedback on their work in progress – both by their peers and by the instructor (me).

When we made this decision, Maureen⁴, a graduate student, decided to organize her MLP as an experiment involving everyone in our class. Maureen was intrigued by a real event, in which she participated as a parent of a student: a Town Hall meeting in an urban neighborhood held to decide the fate of a traditional public school – to keep it public or to transform it into a charter run by a big private company. The result of the Town Hall meeting was to keep the school public. However, people voted according to the roles: administration for charter while parents against. Maureen wanted to explore an intriguing question, “whether the role of the participants or the issue drives the outcome of controversial situations” (Maureen, MLP, 2015).

Maureen created an activity for our class: a simulation of this neighborhood meeting. We played the roles of the actual parents, teachers, school administrators, neighborhood representatives, board of education representatives, and people from a big charter school company. None of us in the class were familiar with the actual event and our roles were chosen randomly: we drew cards out of a hat, each with a role and its short description. Playing our roles, we improvised a debate about transforming this public school into a charter school. The improvised debate and its outcomes surprised not only Maureen but also almost all of us – our vote

was unanimous to keep the school traditionally public and not charter, regardless of our roles! Even those who played the board of education and the charter school agency representatives surprisingly voted to keep the school traditionally public! It turned out, however, that the seemingly unanimous vote might happen for different reasons, and we were not sure what to make out of them. Some students could not accept their role but voted from their prior true beliefs but some people voted in role regardless of their beliefs (even though they may believe that charter school might be better). Maureen initially concluded that her initial hypothesis of people voting according to their roles was wrong and she asked us what we thought about her conclusion.

However, other students came to different interpretative possibilities. Some students noticed arbitrary nature of the outcome: it just happened that all students who did not accept their simulated roles had roles of pro-charter while those who did accept the simulated roles were pro-public. Some students raised a possibility that if this simulation were done by the business or law students, or just by more politically conservative students, the outcome could have been different. Maureen's experiment provoked a lot of questions: can the result of the simulation be accepted when the participants understood their roles differently; what were the reasons for each one of us to say what we said and to vote the way we voted; was our final vote a result of our "real" positions or the assumed positions of the "roles" we played; can the two be separated; etc. We discussed that most of us shared similarly liberal political orientations. We also discussed Maureen's research methodology (e.g., to use a simulation to study what could happen in a real debate). Maureen was authentically interested in our views.

In this whole educational event, it was Maureen, the student, who initiated and owned different aspects of her learning process, including the assessment – which she made herself and solicited on different levels and which she received as a feedback in the whole class discussion of her experiment. In the MLP paper she wrote for the course, Maureen described this experiment and the discussion we had after it in the class, and discussed different dilemmas that the class opened for her. Thus, the educational assessment became an organic part of her research project. Her learning was inseparable from the activity itself. She owned her assessment and guided us how we could help her. The assessment itself had a form of a reflective

critical dialogue – “an internally persuasive discourse” – where truth is tested and remain forever testable (Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010; Morson, 2004).

However, a student may not always want evaluation of his or her work from a teacher even when the student may ask a teacher for a snapshot of his/her activity. For example, a staff and founder of a democratic school describes these occurrences:

... it's a common occurrence, perhaps weekly, sometimes more often. A child comes to me and says "Jim, will you take a picture of...". It might be a block structure in the playroom, or a dress-up clothes creation. It could be a fort outdoors after two days' work. Sometimes it's performance art: a few weeks ago four girls doing back bridges in a line, after much practice and many attempts to align and synchronize, while a younger child crawled through their human tunnel. It's usually something fleeting -- only occasionally a painting or drawing...

They aren't looking for praise. Sometimes I don't say a word; I just get my camera and silently photograph the scene. I think my silence reflects my own desire not to break the dynamic of their group -- often serious but palpably joyful in proportion to the magnitude of the achievement, and still constrained by whatever unspoken rules govern the creative play.

The interesting part is that whatever purpose is served is complete when the picture is captured. After that it's forgotten. They almost never come to me later asking to see the picture or asking what I'm going to do with it.

I think one of the most important things we staff adults do is to witness children's actions, accomplishments, and growth. Our witnessing seems to validate, honor, make real, or complete the moment.

I wonder if our witnessing also enacts for them their own "outside perspective" -- their own growing ability to see themselves as though through the eyes of another. Doing so may boost their transformation of subjective, immersive, immediate experience to objective, assimilated insight or capacity, available for later examination as mental object, or exercise as mental process. Is this on the path to verbalized or intellectualized critical examination?

I share [...] discomfort with adult authoring "on behalf of" children. I think such efforts miss what's more thrilling to children. Pardon my language, but at a deeper level they don't give a shit about sharks. It's the fin and the fear, or the imagined life underwater, or the association with a family fishing trip, or playing with a new cognitive capacity, perhaps for understanding systems, or any of a multitude of possibilities that are almost always impossibly beyond observation....

Maybe the camera and my picture-taking habit serves only to advertise my "witnessing service". It's an excuse or reason for them to come get me. Saying to me "Come watch me, Jim" might feel (to them) too childish or too much like a child's request of their own parent, but if they are helping me in my mission to get good pictures for publications and ads, well then there needn't be any self-consciousness or childish feeling about asking me.... I like ... the word "celebrate" into the mix; feels like a good fit. I think ceremony and celebration are in our blood and bones, deep and primal. Maybe what's happening in my picture-taking is less validation and more imprinting a moment in children's individual and cultural lifelines; recording a new insight or way of seeing or doing.

Maybe the primal tendency for ceremony itself is about the imprinting of important new modules of thought and culture -- aiding the individual and the group in assimilation, consolidation, and preservation of new faculties or milestone memories.

If so, then the come-take-a-picture ritual might be viewed as a child's version of documentation -- capturing a snapshot in the mind of the individual, and in the mind of the group (i.e., culture), available for future reference just as documentation ought to be. The static image in the camera and the action of making it are just prompts or external ceremonializing of a primal interior act.

When parents celebrate their children's accomplishments by taking pictures, it seems different. That is more commonly initiated by the parent, not the child, and it seems to be serving the parent's purposes first. And the parent is less "external" to the child (and vice versa). Also, in parents taking pictures of their children, I think I sense more approval (necessarily bound to values) and less simple witnessing. Certainly not

always, but commonly (Jim Rietmulder, The Circle School, personal communication, May 18-19, 2015).

Back to the issue of pedagogical voyeurism — to the claim that documentation of students' learning experiences creates good pedagogy. We think this claim may ring some truth, in a sense that pedagogy is created by a special judgment about one's learning experiences. Where the claim gets wrong, in our view, is *whose* judgment constitutes the pedagogy. We think that it is the student's/learner's own judgment and nobody else's. Paraphrasing writer Aldous Huxley's famous quote, "Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him," we can say, "pedagogy is not what happens with the learner; it is what a learner does with what happens to him/her." However, we doubt that learners need any documentation of their own learning for themselves because learning is a byproduct of their activities and not a self-contained goal.

Part IV. Why People Get high on Assessment of Learning? Is it a Disorder?

In conventional education of alienated learning, learning assessment is desired because it provides the basis for an analysis of the quality of educational practices to take a corrective measure when education is unsuccessful. This pedagogical desire is wrong because learning assessment distracts students from exploration of their subjectivity and testing their ideas. In many conventional and some innovative schools, positivist learning assessment directs the students to conform to the preset ideas, statements, and answers regardless how relevant, meaningful, or wrong these preset ideas felt by the students are. The students try to recognize patterns of actions and discourse that may lead them to the "correct" actions and answers (Gee, 1996). When it is successful as defined by the test scores and grades, this type of education can produce people acting as smart machines that can produce desired reliable outputs. This type of "educational" successes may fit industrial and post-industrial knowledge- and skills-based economy and society. In the words of Sugata Mitra (2013),

0:28 I tried to look at where did the kind of learning we do in schools, where did it come from? ... It came from about 300 years ago, and it came from the last and the biggest of the empires on this planet. ["The

British Empire"] Imagine trying to run ... the entire planet, without computers, without telephones, with data handwritten on pieces of paper, and traveling by ships. But the Victorians actually did it. ... They created a global computer made up of people. It's still with us today. It's called the bureaucratic administrative machine. In order to have that machine running, you need lots and lots of people. They made another machine to produce those people: the school. The schools would produce the people who would then become parts of the bureaucratic administrative machine. They must be identical to each other. They must know three things: They must have good handwriting, because the data is handwritten; they must be able to read; and they must be able to do multiplication, division, addition and subtraction in their head. They must be so identical that you could pick one up from New Zealand and ship them to Canada and he would be instantly functional. The Victorians were great engineers. They engineered a system that was so robust that it's still with us today, continuously producing identical people for a machine that no longer exists. The empire is gone, so what are we doing with that design that produces these identical people, and what are we going to do next if we ever are going to do anything else with it? (Mitra, 2013).

Shaping people into smart machine is not humane, even if it is functional and useful for economy. It robs people from self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and making their life meaningful. Besides, there are growing signs that the economy has been undergoing a transformation to become post-knowledge, post-skills agency-based (Zhao, 2012).

In progressive innovative education of socialization in targeted practices, constructivist learning assessment is desired because it guides the progressive educator to design future educational activities that are sensitive and exploitive of the students' interests and to communicate students' learning achievements to outsiders and the students themselves. In our view, from education as dialogic critical examination point of view, this pedagogical desire is also wrong because students remain being objects of teachers' pedagogical actions. However carefully Reggio Emilia educators want to listen to their students, their goal of learning assessment is to monologically finalize the students' subjectivity to communicate to themselves, other educators, parents and even students themselves about

their learning achievements as the teachers understand and define these achievements. The students are expected to produce learning and the goal of the teachers to notice and explicit this learning in the students' work, actions, communication, and relationships through documenting learning into learning portfolios. By constant explicating learning, the progressive teachers put their students into a position of "learning machines," hijacking the students' own desires, subjectivities, goals, relationships, and so on, for the primary purpose of learning. The by-productive nature of learning is lost here. Instead of looking at learning as a by-product of engaging in meaningful activities and placing the main focus on these meaningful activities, learning again becomes the main focus of the teachers' pedagogical activity. Again education is equated with learning. The relationship between the teachers and the students is turned upside down. Instead of serving their students when and how the students need them in their own meaningful activities, the teachers view students as producers of learning, learning that is seen, recognized and designed by the teachers, to justify the teachers' existence, employment, and educational professionalism (i.e., they are not merely babysitters!).

We conclude that a pedagogical desire for a public normative learning assessment – whatever form this learning assessment may take – is anti-educational. It equates education with learning. It distracts the students from their education – dialogic critical examination of the self, life, world and society. It disrespects and violates students' authorial and subjective meaning making process and their educational privacy. It makes students objects of the teachers' pedagogical actions justifying the quality of the teachers' pedagogical work. This is why in our judgment, any pedagogical desire for a public normative learning assessment, whether positivistic or constructivist, is voyeuristic.

Notes

¹ At the same time, the Reggio educators also emphasize an image of a teacher as researcher. In this paper, we do not consider issues of pedagogical research, where research and not on-going pedagogy is prioritized.

² We define leisure as a realized opportunity for self-fulfillment, self-actualization, development and pursuit of one's own interests supported by the culture and society,

in contrast to idleness, vanity, pure self-entertainment (as a way of killing time), and so on. Not all people who have material means or interest for such leisure.

³ See more on the Open and Opening Syllabus class regimes at The Open Syllabus Education and Research website: <http://diaped.soe.udel.edu/OSER/>

⁴ Maureen O'Hara asked that her name be used in full.

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Eugene Matusov is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware, USA.

Ana Marjanovic-Shane is an Associate Professor of Education at Chestnut Hill College, USA.

Sohyun Meacham is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at University of Northern Iowa, USA.

Contact Address: 206D Willard Hall, School of Education, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA. Eugene Matusov's email: ematusov@udel.edu