Mary Juzwik

Towards an Ethics of Answerability: Reconsidering Dialogism in Sociocultural Literacy Research

This essay responds to the problem that sociocultural literacy research has failed to adequately theorize individual literacy learners as moral agents with the capacity to produce harm or good to themselves and others. Building from the rhetorical construct of dialogism, this inquiry explores how the early ethical thought of Mikhail Bakhtin can contribute an "ethics of answerability" to sociocultural literacy studies. Explicating and extending a more established perspective in classroom literacy study—what I call an "ethics of difference"—my reading of Bakhtin's early work offers a shift in focus from linguistic difference to the *self* who responds, or answers, to difference. An ethics of answerability highlights the unique and heavy responsibilities that individuals face as they respond to others in everyday interaction and in textual production. Proposed in light of this theoretical orientation are questions to guide inquiry in classroom-based sociocultural literacy research.

Bakhtinian dialogism has served as an influential conceptual tool in recent sociocultural studies of literacy, allowing researchers to understand the "ethical" in social and rhetorical terms. However, the status of individuated *selves* as moral agents within dialogic contexts remains unelaborated in sociocul-

Copyright © 2004 by the National Council of Teachers of English. All rights reserved.

tural literacy theory. I will argue that Mikhail Bakhtin's theme of answerability—as explained in his earliest writings, which have been largely ignored by literacy researchers—affords the very insight into moral personhood missing from current sociocultural perspectives on language and literacy. Answerability, as I interpret it, has much to contribute to researchers' and educators' understandings of individual students as responsive and responsible moral agents in the social contexts of literacy classrooms. Thus I articulate how a turn toward the ethical might be conceptualized in sociocultural literacy research and theory.

The ethical, as Bakhtin treats it in his early writings and as I understand this term throughout this paper, is not a matter of dutifully following, nor of creating, a philosophical system of prescriptive, universal "moral imperatives." In this sense, as Don Bialostosky has pointed out, Bakhtin's early work is not about "ethics" as a disciplinary tradition following Immanuel Kant. Rather than being codifiable into general categories, ethical responsibility is a defining feature of self-other relations. Thus Bakhtin describes a relational, participatory understanding of moral personhood that focuses attention on the authorial responsibility of individual speakers and writers and is thus concerned with the individual's capacity for good or harm, through responsive acts of language.

This inquiry proceeds first by discussing dialogism as a rhetorical theory of language—traceable to the rhetoricians and teachers of ancient Greece—that has become an important interactional approach to language and learning in sociocultural literacy studies. With that historical frame provided, I turn to a discussion of how recent sociocultural research in schools has drawn on the later work of Bakhtin in order to address ethical dimensions of literacy learning in dialogic terms. This work—most explicitly Anne Dyson's (*Social, Writing*) school-based studies of students' literacy practices—has contributed what I call an "ethics of difference" to the field of literacy studies. While this view situates the ethical dimensions of literacy learning within a broader rhetorical theory of dialogism, I argue that Bakhtin's earliest writings (*Toward,* "Author") complicate and expand such a perspective. Drawing on these early works, I propose an alternative perspective—what I call an "ethics of answerability."

While Bakhtin's early work on answerability has increasingly been brought to bear on pedagogical questions in composition and rhetoric by such scholars as Bialostosky, Caryl Emerson, and Helen Ewald, and in early childhood education by studies such as those by M. Elizabeth Graue, Janice Kroeger, and Dana Prager, I extend this work to the field of sociocultural literacy studies.

Answerability, as elaborated in this paper, highlights the unique responsibility that characterizes the individual's responses to others in everyday interaction and in textual production. I suggest how answerability provides a mechanism for theorizing individuals as responsive *and* responsible moral agents in classrooms, and I demonstrate how this approach contrasts with an "ethics of difference" through discussion of two small-group interactions in a college writing classroom. I further propose new directions for classroom-based literacy research, focusing on what answerability might enable literacy researchers to understand about such activities as small group interaction and students' production of texts.

Answerability provides a mechanism for theorizing individuals as responsive *and* responsible moral agents in classrooms.

Background

As Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz have noted, most of what sociocultural research has learned about literacy in the past thirty years comes from studies conducted outside schools. This movement can be traced to Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's study of Vai literacy, which introduced ethnographic methods to examine the contexts in which different literacy practices are learned and used (*Psychology*). In proposing a practice, rather than a developmental, approach to literacy research, Scribner and Cole called for the field of literacy studies to move beyond its then-narrow focus on school-based literacy ("Unpackaging").

In this spirit, ethnographic studies of literacy proliferated among sociocultural researchers in the eighties and nineties. Shirley Heath's ethnographic research in the Piedmont region of South Carolina, for example, documented how the differing literacy practices in three different speech communities prepared children differently—and unequally—for the literacy demands of school. Brian Street's ethnographic study of literacy in an Iranian village moved even further from schools and led him to argue that the ideological dimensions of literacy practices needed to be better understood (*Literacy*). James Gee further refined an ideological approach to literacy study by revealing the role of discourse in literacy practice (*Social, Introduction*), which he defined in social terms as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles . . . by specific *groups of people*" (*Social* viii, emphasis in original). These and other sociocultural studies of literacy have pointed out the situated nature of literacy practices (Street, *Literacy*), illuminating how literacies—in the

plural—always interact with contexts and group affiliations, how literacies are embroiled in power relations, how literacies are ideological rather than "autonomous," and how, through literacies, individuals fashion socially situated identities.

Hull and Schultz, and Street ("Higher") have persuasively argued that the time has now come to reconsider academic literacy learning in light of this work. At this juncture, as the field of literacy studies applies what has been learned in out-of-school contexts in a re-examination of school-based literacies, it is particularly important for literacy educators and researchers to critically consider the relationship between primary discourses, to which students have been apprenticed in the life worlds of childhood, and the secondary discourses, which students are called upon to perform in classroom settings (Gee, *Social* 137–41).[1] As already suggested, one particular dimension of this relationship has been inadequately theorized in much recent sociocultural literacy research: the status of individuals as moral persons who respond to secondary discourses—such as those of the composition classroom—differently, as individuated and uniquely "intonated" selves who are irreducible to any context.

This gap is particularly relevant when considered in light of the connection between literacies and new capitalism that have been well documented in the new literacy studies (e.g., Brandt, Gee et al., Hull, Lankshear and Knobel). As situated within global economic contexts, persons have the potential to be reduced to their production and consumption capacities, where "'knowledge' [is] defined in terms of 'value added'" (Gee, "New" 189) to the economy. Literacies also have the potential to become limited to such market-driven valuation. For literacy studies, then, developing an ethical understanding of personhood is crucial to any pedagogical or research practice that has the power to resist such reduction (Gee et al. 151–52). Yet such a perspective—one that treats individuals as moral agents with the capacity for good or harm—remains undeveloped in much sociocultural research.

Gee, Hull, and Lankshear have argued that such an ethical perspective on literacy teaching and learning is needed to guide a "critical" literacy pedagogy that constructively empowers individuals to *act* in their own moral interests, even while encouraging these same individuals to engage in transformative social and cultural critique (151–52). Russel Durst has documented the ways that the tension between these two aims of literacy pedagogy plays out in college composition classrooms, as he reveals the conflict between the pragmatic goals of students and the more critical aims of teachers who were well-schooled in sociocultural literacy studies and were equipped with critical approaches to

literacy pedagogy. While Durst finally suggests a pedagogy of "reflective instrumentalism," this theory of the individual response to literacy learning contexts stands as a provocative, but unelaborated, suggestion at the end of his study. This problem is not limited to Durst's work; in fact, he goes further than most sociocultural literacy researchers to explore the aims and conflicts of agents within literacy classrooms.

A robust theory of the moral agency of individuals in classrooms would speak particularly to the challenges facing literacy learners in the institutional contexts of higher education.

A robust theory of the moral agency of individuals in classrooms would speak particularly to the challenges facing literacy learners in the institutional contexts of higher education. As Durst shows, the conflicts between students' "life worlds" (New London Group) and the academic literacies expected in university writing courses are particularly intense, perhaps more so than at any other transitional point in an individual's schooling.[2] In addition, and more generally, a nuanced theory of individuals as "ethical" agents responding to—and in some sense responsible to—literacy practices in situated contexts would contribute to the field of literacy studies as a whole.

Dialogism: A rhetorical theory of language and literacy

Numerous scholars in composition and literacy education have, in recent years, turned to the writings of the Bakhtin circle in order to situate individual literacy learners and their literacy practices in the social contexts of classrooms. Much of this work has been framed within a theory of "dialogism," which, in addition to being a social theory of language and learning, is also a rhetorical theory with ethical implications.

Dialogism, an interpretive principle introduced by Michael Holquist to schematize Bakhtin's corpus, is an epistemological approach to discourse that focuses on the uses humans make of language (Holquist 15). Bakhtin's thought, in Holquist's words, "is a meditation on how we know" (18). Martin Nystrand and colleagues elaborate, "because it offers insights into human interaction as a foundation of comprehension, meaning, and interpretation, [dialogism] is of special interest to educators" (10). Before discussing how dialogism has framed ethical considerations of literacy learning, I first review this concept as an organizing interpretive principle to emerge in late-twentieth-century readings of the Bakhtin circle.

Dialogism understands communication to be a process of negotiation among contested positions, ideologies, and languages; therefore, meaning is only achieved in the context of struggle. As such, this theory offers a broad

definition of communication that comprehends such disparate communicative contexts as everyday interaction (Bakhtin, *Speech*), psychoanalytic treatment sessions (Volosinov, *Freudianism*), and the discourse of novels (Bakhtin, *Dialogic, Problems*). This approach privileges living and changing texts rather than those that are dead and fixed.[3] From a dialogic perspective, human language use can never be understood as only expressive and therefore reducible to the psychology of an individual mind (Volosinov, *Marxism* 48), nor can it be adequately described simply as socially constructed normative rules that are increasingly absorbed as persons become socialized into particular cultures (Volosinov, *Marxism* 57). Rather, dialogism locates the crux of communication in between individuals, social worlds, and ideologies. Utterances, in this view, develop as "link[s] in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (Bakhtin, *Speech* 69). So situated through their language use and that of others, "sentient beings always exist in a state of being 'addressed' and in the process of 'answering'" (Holland et al. 169). Thus dialogism posits a reciprocal relationship between hearers or readers and speakers or writers (Volosinov, *Marxism* 86). As Nystrand describes it,

> The roles of teacher and learner (and parent and child, writer and reader, cop and speeder, lover and loved, etc.) each respectively and mutually entail those of the other, the one in effect defining the parameters of meaning and communication of the other. (*Opening* 10)

Reciprocity, in this view, does not (as the word may connote) describe the degree of symmetry among participants in a communicative situation. Rather, from Bakhtin's perspective, reciprocity is a constituent of any textual production (spoken or written), functioning as a kind of unspoken yet mutually agreed upon contract to be negotiated and achieved in the moment of a particular interaction.

From Bakhtin's perspective, reciprocity is a constituent of any textual production (spoken or written), functioning as a kind of unspoken yet mutually agreed upon contract to be negotiated and achieved in the moment of a particular interaction.

As the principle of reciprocity suggests, dialogism foregrounds the social, interactive contexts of language use, asserting that any communicative event occurs in the heteroglossic sea of conversation—made up of competing voices and "their associated values and presuppositions" (Holland et al. 170). Locating language use within a highly social, inherently conflict-ridden "simultaneity of uniqueness" (Holquist 153), the dialogic is a "stern philosophy" that never reduces difference and always insists on the utter noncoincidence of self-other and

mind/world (Holquist 37–39). Instead, it maintains that communication always occurs as a process of negotiation among contested positions, ideologies, and languages. In a dialogic theory of language, meaning takes shape through the negotiation of difference.

Dialogism as rhetorical theory

Bakhtin and his colleagues were not the first to recognize the dialogic nature of discourse. Such an approach to language and learning has its roots in the field of rhetoric, which (although much maligned by philosophers throughout history, even by Bakhtin himself) directs attention to the socially situated, locally contingent nature of discourse. Rhetoric, as a disciplined course of study (e.g., Aristotle), as a teaching tool (e.g., Quintilian), and as an inventional practice (e.g., Antiphon and Andocides) has always focused on how language functions socially and politically to negotiate conflict in civic contexts.[4]

In seeking a place for ethics within a dialogic view of language and learning, it is especially relevant to understand dialogism as rhetoric. For the relationship between the social functions of language and the individuality of speakers and writers as ethically responsible agents has long been an important problem in the field of rhetoric. From the time when Plato accused the early Sophists of immorally "making the weaker argument the stronger," rhetoric as an epistemic theory of language has contended against ethical suspicions, and its defenders have framed language study and teaching in terms of value-laden self-other relationships (e.g., Isocrates, Garver).

Isocrates, in *Antidosis*, defends himself against charges of unethical sophistry,[5] which assert the arts of discourse to be corrupt and immoral because of their co-option by individuals for self-serving ends. Isocrates responded to these charges as an educator who believed that the primary object of language instruction was the right conduct in the "man" and in the citizen:

> If one is to govern his youth rightly and worthily and make the proper start in life, he must give more heed to himself than to his possessions, he must not hasten and seek to rule over others before he has found a master to direct his own thoughts, and he must not take as great pleasure or pride in other advantages as in the good things which spring up in the soul from a liberal education. (345–47)

Isocrates sought to build a foundation for a workable morality in the whole of his students' future lives, which would enable them to successfully and productively contend against others and to learn new things. He cites his own students as evidence that rhetoric was not corrupt: instead of becoming self-

serving "immoral" sophists or otherworldly Platonic philosophers, his students had become outstanding citizens. Thus the pragmatic work of teaching rhetoric grounded Isocrates' articulation of the ethical function of discourse.[6]

In recent literacy research, researchers with explicitly pedagogical aims have made similar headway in developing ethical approaches to understanding, teaching, and learning literacy. Bakhtin's rhetorical theory, particularly its ethical sensitivity, has been instrumental in developing such approaches.

Literacy studies and dialogism

Dialogism has become a compelling framework for researchers such as Dyson who grapple with the question of how to cultivate ethical responses to others among students faced with increasingly diverse and complex social worlds. Their work, however, emerges from a more general appropriation of Bakhtin's later work (*Dialogic, Rabelais, Speech*) in literacy education and composition, much of which can be characterized in Emerson's terms, as marked by "the embarrassing excesses of carnival and dialogism" (p. 12).

Such social constructionist perspectives, which tend to privilege the group over the individual, have importantly overturned problematic notions of literacy learning (for summary, see Ewald 227–30). This body of work has challenged literacy theories that position learning to read and write within ethnocentric developmental trajectories (e.g., Olson). They have exposed the limitations of expressivist approaches to writing pedagogy (e.g., Atwell, Elbow, Murray) and their failure to hold up to the empirical and theoretical testing grounds of diverse urban classrooms populated by nonmainstream students and "basic writers" (e.g., Bartholomae; Delpit; Gee, *Social*; Purcell-Gates). Kay Halasek well articulates what Bakhtin's dialogic perspective on language offered to the field of literacy: a "new notion of dialogizing rhetorics" ("Starting" 102), a rhetorical method of analysis that searches for the polemic rhetoric of dominant culture and parodic rhetoric that responds to this hegemony.[7] Accounting for linguistic diversity—a task of particular concern for literacy researchers in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries—a dialogic rhetorical perspective examines texts and contexts to see how the tensions between polemic/centripetal/official and parodic/centrifugal/unofficial rhetorics dialogically constitute communicative situations (Halasek, "Starting" 102–103).

As valuable as these contributions have been to the field, the problem remains that much of this literacy research and scholarship framed within Bakhtin's dialogic perspective has still not provided a nuanced account of students as moral agents. I contend that an "ethics of difference," as elaborated in

In an "ethics of difference," important aspects of moral personhood remain unelaborated.

the following section, is implicit in the social constructionist use of dialogism as a theoretical approach to literacy study. I go on to suggest that in an "ethics of difference," important aspects of moral personhood remain unelaborated.

An ethics of difference: Understanding literacy and learning dialogically

In what follows, I briefly outline Dyson's work (*Social, Writing*) to clarify what I mean by an "ethics of difference," a perspective that a growing number of classroom-based literacy studies have embraced (e.g., Greene; Greene and Smith; Lensmire). Dyson's research has examined the "social worlds of children learning to write" and has particularly studied how popular, cultural, and unofficial worlds of students interact with the official world of the classroom.

I choose to focus on Dyson, who is slightly outside the fold of college composition, for three reasons. Because her books explicitly discuss literacy learning in *ethical* terms, she articulates a perspective that remains implicit in much of the other work on classroom discourse, writing, and literacy learning built upon a foundation of dialogism. Dyson's work is further apt for illustrative purposes in this paper because she explicitly draws upon Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to scrutinize literacy learning in classrooms. Finally, as a researcher drawing on ethnographic and discourse analytic methods in the tradition of sociocultural inquiry, her claims about literacy in classroom contexts are grounded in carefully documented and highly persuasive empirical evidence. I go on to illustrate this "ethics of difference" through a discussion of a small group interaction (SGI) that occurred in a college writing classroom, data that I borrow from the research of Greene and Smith. Finally, I suggest some of the important ethical matters that are backgrounded in this perspective, which will be foregrounded in the answerability perspective that I lay out.

Explication of an ethics of difference

The view of moral personhood in Dyson's work can be summarized as follows: students increase their freedom—that is, their repertoire of possible responses to others—to the degree to which they practice encountering and responding to wide varieties of cultural voices, artistic languages, and more general differences. This ethical framing of teaching and learning acknowledges that individuals are both constrained and given possibilities for action in what Dyson calls the "social world" of a classroom. Therefore, for Dyson, "ethical" teaching

would engage all children in the participatory negotiation of meaning in this community of noncoincident others, thereby capitalizing on the benefits of sociocultural difference to create a permeable curriculum whereby students can become authors, in an ethical as well as artistic sense.

Three central components define an ethics of difference. First is the use of a theatrical metaphor (cf., Burke, *Grammar*; Goffman) where the classroom is a stage and students, "performers." In this view, which operates upon a generative analogy between art and life,[8] writers and speakers in classrooms are performing ever-shifting identities and roles. As students write and perform stories in such a classroom (crafted, aesthetic practices of personal expression), this view suggests, they may increase their individual freedom with and through the literacy "superpowers" that enable them to engage dialogically with one another and with literary forms and spheres beyond their own immediate experience (an ethical practice of civic engagement).

Secondly, with the classroom treated as a kind of stage of civic identity play, the ongoing process of authorship entails participation in what Bakhtin called a chain of utterances:

> As authors, [students] must learn that, no matter how much they revise and edit their texts (and despite the importance of those tasks), they can never "own" meaning, because meaning only exists in the *meeting* of voices. So authors never have the last word, just (hopefully) a good turn that furthers or deepens an ongoing conversation. (Dyson, *Writing* 180, emphasis in original)

Rather than focusing on finalized products, this view of authorship explores the processes of writing and highlights the extent to which meaning making always remains open and unfinished. This view of writing leads to what Halasek (*Pedagogy*) has called a "pedagogy of possibility," in which literate practices, identities, and futures are all viewed as possibilities that are open to be shaped by the influences of "otherness" in the classroom.

In such a pedagogy, thirdly, the curriculum is permeable through such sequences as (a) individuals writing or planning to write, (b) engagement in a forum of difference (in Dyson, this would be author's theatre, but in a composition classroom it might be peer response groups or whole class workshop), and (c) revisions of plans or texts based on the ideas of others. A diversity of responses is essential to such a dialogic curriculum, and thus inclusion becomes an important pedagogical focus: in this view of the ethical classroom, no one should be a nonparticipant.

Following this logic, the possibilities for individual freedom in respond-

This ethical perspective on literacy learning focuses on student voices within the local, interactive world of the classroom imagined as a microcosm of citizenship in a democracy.

ing to a range of diverse others becomes greater, as the scope of differences articulated and responded to in classrooms increases. In sum, this ethical perspective on literacy learning focuses on student voices within the local, interactive world of the classroom imagined as a microcosm of citizenship in a democracy.

Example of an ethics of difference

To illustrate and critique how such an ethical approach might work in an analysis of literacy learning in a college classroom, I next examine data from Stuart Greene and Erin Smith's research study of the changing authoring practices of a first-year college student named TJ. I have extracted these interactional data from a study of college writing that seemed to implicitly depend on an "ethics of difference" for purposes of illustration. This interaction serves well to demonstrate what is likely to be foregrounded in an analysis of literacy learning from the perspective of an ethics of difference. Due to the constraints of the present paper, the data are not fully contextualized within the complex thesis of that chapter. For a full account of this argument, I refer readers to Greene and Smith's article.

TJ, Eddie, and Arschelle are engaged in a SGI, assigned with the task of planning their drafts of an essay assignment through the tool of the Planner's Blackboard (Flower et al. 51), which has just been introduced by their teacher.

TJ: Okay. What I just did, I basically broke it down to where I want to *talk in real depth about* more in my personality and childhood and, uh, one of the main factors that we wanted to discuss with my purpose was how a minority as myself, a Mexican American, was being brought up from more or less, like a ghetto area, a bad area

. . .

A: So basically what you're focusing on is your upbringing, your raising?

TJ: More or less . . . and the experiences and all that I've gone through with my childhood and seen the way today is and like *I want to see the advantages and disadvantages there are* and, like you see, jobs, certain lifestyles have changed, my education, and then mainly on today, *how that really differs from the past*. I mean I can *go into real depth* about it, but my more or less key points that I want to really *hit these*, uh, now that I'm here I want to try to make a world of

difference not only to my parents but to myself, that I can really make something of myself here.[9]

A: m-huh.

TJ: Uh, there's so much in my past and my people that I've known and grown up with that gave up on life pretty quickly.

A: Uh-huh, that's what I was kind of talking about . . . All of these negative things are around you and you kind of gotta separate yourself from them.

TJ: Exactly . . . Right. So, that's . . . I want to *talk about* that because I feel that it *needs to be talked about* because it's really happening. There tends to be more of a higher percentage of Mexican Americans really giving up on their lives. You know, dropping out of middle school, high school, trying to live off welfare, making babies left and right.

. . .

A: Okay, 'cause I heard you talk about what went on and everything, so how are you going to connect that to what you feel about your cultural identity. Or what do you think your cultural identity is? I mean, just being Mexican American, or . . . (Greene and Smith 157–58, emphases in original)

I want to use this transcript to point out several aspects of this interaction that can be seen when examined from a perspective of an ethics of difference.

First, the curricular and instructional context in which these student writers are situated is overtly dialogic: according to Greene and Smith, this first-year writing course is "designed to help beginning writers bridge the distance between life outside of school and life in school" (156). Moreover, the assignment itself—which asks students to write about their cultural identity, and particularly about their experiences as writers in such various settings as family, school, and community—is permeable: students are invited to engage in a dialogue between their life worlds and a newer, more academic conversation. A strategy of inclusion is embedded within this assignment: the teacher aims to teach students through this assignment that definitions of good writing are constructed, rather than naturally occurring (156). This SGI, as a pedagogical method, is also inclusive, for it invites individuals to negotiate between the talk about writing they are accustomed to and the new discourse of collaborative planning introduced by the teacher (159). This interactional genre provides a kind of "safe space" where students may practice talking about their writing.

Secondly, an ethics-of-difference perspective would highlight how this interaction enters into an ongoing chain of utterances of which each utterance in the group, as well as TJ's emerging text, are links. In this process orientation to writing and classroom talk, students are learning that "authors never have the last word, just (hopefully) a good turn that furthers or deepens an ongoing conversation" (Dyson, *Writing* 180). As he brings his individually developed writing plans to the group, TJ encounters difference and then, presumably, takes away an expanded set of possibilities for his writing. As such, this peer group might be theorized as a forum of difference, where conflicts and differences of backgrounds, perspectives, and ways with words are negotiated to produce expanded possibilities for participants.

Finally, the notion of "authorship" extends beyond the aesthetic task of shaping texts. When considered from the vantage point of an "ethics of difference," the metaphor of authoring extends to TJ's own identity: in the process of negotiating decisions about how to craft this text, he is authoring himself, in the paper as well as in the group, as a Mexican American who will transcend any "disadvantages" of his upbringing through the opportunities available to him at the university. Thus as TJ "aesthetically" shapes his story for the group, he also articulates a set of expanded, more advantageous possibilities for his future. This Bakhtinian view is inordinately optimistic about the expanded set of possibilities for TJ's self that becomes possible through negotiation with others about his writing.

This view does not enable researchers to examine either students' (such as TJ's) personal experiences of negotiating difference or the consequences of their positioning by others in the interactional space of the classroom.

While this dialogic view has offered many insights to composition studies, like any theory, it has backgrounded other dimensions of literacy and learning. While an ethics of difference allows a researcher or a teacher to understand the process dimensions of literate practice—the sense in which writing and talk about writing are like the oft-cited Burkean parlor conversation (*Philosophy* 110–11)—this view does not enable researchers to examine either students' (such as TJ's) personal experiences of negotiating difference or the consequences of their positioning by others in the interactional space of the classroom. Nor does this view encourage exploration of the ways in which students in classrooms must create "final products" that are, at some point, evaluated by others as finished and final, rather than as "always in process." Thus, attention to the *self* (in this case, TJ), who does or does not actively respond to diverse oth-

ers and to competing literacies in social contexts of negotiated difference, is backgrounded.

It is this ethical dimension of literacy in classroom practice that an ethics of difference does not adequately address, and it is this sense, I believe, that Ewald intended when she argued in 1993 that composition studies as a field was "waiting for answerability." In the remainder of the paper, I pursue the question: What do Bakhtin's early writings on ethics (*Toward*) and aesthetics ("Author") offer to fill this ethical gap that remains in literacy studies?

Toward an ethics of answerability: Bakhtin's participatory understanding of self-other relations

Bakhtin's theme of answerability affords the very insight into students' individuated, morally "intonated," and responsible trajectories that is missing from current sociocultural literacy research. Extending an ethics of difference, my reading of Bakhtin's early work offers a shift in focus from linguistic difference to the self who responds or answers to difference. In what follows, I first present Bakhtin's theory of answerability through a four-part schema and suggest the new research directions in literacy and learning that become possible through this theoretical perspective.

Bakhtin's theme of answerability affords the very insight into students' individuated, morally "intonated," and responsible trajectories that is missing from current sociocultural literacy research.

Explication of an ethics of answerability

Among the earliest of Bakhtin's writings, these philosophical works have gone largely unplumbed by sociocultural literacy researchers, with the important exception of Deborah Hicks whose thoughtful readings of Bakhtin's earliest works have stimulated my arguments here. Explicating *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," I clarify the notion of answerability to suggestively frame Bakhtin's ethical concerns for literacy studies.

Following Hicks, Holquist, and others, I view answerability as a philosophical precursor and foundation for his later ideas about dialogic discourse. While a rhetorical theory of dialogism considers how meaning gets made in between self and others through processes of socially situated response, answerability explores the role of individual consciousness and its responsibility within this process. As Bakhtin articulates the constitution of selves within self-other relationships, ethics precedes epistemology: knowing and express-

ing (epistemological concerns, traditionally those of educators) always occur relationally, soaked with values, feelings, and moral stances to others (ethical concerns). Answerability provides a conceptual framework for understanding these others-saturated, yet still individually intonated, acts.

As such a framework, answerability focuses on the agentive, morally weighty work of linguistic appropriation, a once-occurrent responsive and responsible event in which a particular self-within-the-dialogic-world acts. In observing that "the responses of individuated subjects are flexible and answerable in ways that can embrace, resist, or redefine what is 'given' historically or culturally" (Hicks 231), Hicks begins to theorize moral agency in terms of answerability. I follow this vision by suggesting this four-part scheme for understanding Bakhtin's view of answerable selves in discourse practices: (a) Selves exist only in the condition of *outsideness;* (b) Selves are uniquely positioned in the *event-of-being*; (c) Selves, as positioned consciousnesses, *make active and intonated responses*; and (d) Selves produce *utterances as ethical acts.*

First the condition of outsideness insists that any self is entirely noncoincident with any other that should address it or be addressed by it. Two noncoinciding consciousnesses, according to Bakhtin, are necessary for any ethical act to occur. For a self can never conceive of itself as whole or complete; rather there is a radical unfinished, always-in-motion quality to any "being-for-myself." Only others have power to summon a self into existence as a whole, as a bounded other, for such wholeness can only be experienced from outside a self in the different value-field of another. Bakhtin called this act of empathy *consummation*. He writes, for example:

> The child receives all initial determinations of himself and of his body from his mother's lips and from the lips of those who are close to him. It is from their lips, in the emotional-volitional tones of their love, that the child hears and begins to acknowledge his own *proper name* and the names of all the features pertaining to his body and to his inner states and experiences. ("Author" 49, emphasis in original)

Thus selves depend on transcendent others who respond to them, from beyond the boundaries of their bodies, for their existence. While the idea of consummation suggests a merging of selves (as happens with lovers and often with mothers and children), Bakhtin clarifies that for ethical acts to occur, boundaries between bodies and selves must be recognized as acting from distinctive vantage points in relation to one another.

Secondly, and following from the idea of outsideness, selves exist in ethical relation to others in a state Bakhtin calls "being-without-alibi" or the event

of being: every individual always stands at a unique place in "once-occurrent time," and no one else can respond to the world and to others just as that individual can at any particular moment (*Toward* 40). Thus individuals in any given historical and cultural context are themselves uniquely positioned to see and to act within that context. As individuals are shaped, even fated, by the dialogic world that is given to them, they are uniquely capable of responding to that world in better or worse ways. Holquist describes such responses: "We are responsible in the sense that we are *compelled* to respond, we cannot choose but give the world an answer. Each one of us occupies a place in existence that is uniquely ours" (Holquist 30, emphasis in original).

Thirdly, the actualization of active rather than passive response instantiates this event of being (Bakhtin, *Toward* 15, 34). Bakhtin explains, "To understand an object is to understand my ought in relation to it (the attitude or position I ought to take in relation to it), that is, to understand it in relation to me myself in once-occurrent Being-as-event, and that presupposes my answerable participation" (*Toward* 18). Such a participant is summoned (by an object, an other, a situation) to be active: "And all these moments, which make up the event in its totality, are present to him as something given and as something-to-be-achieved in . . . a unique answerable consciousness, and they are actualized in a unitary and unique answerable act" (*Toward* 30). To any situation and to the others therein, a participatory individual consciousness contributes a uniquely configured actualization of that situation; without that actively positioned, answerable consciousness, the situation would be historically otherwise. Bakhtin goes on to name this "active experiencing of an experience" the emotional-volitional tone of a consciousness, which orients a self (*Toward* 34).[10]

For Bakhtin, this active ethical moment of consciousness is critical to articulating individuals as moral agents. In such terms, one can be more or less active in "experiencing an experience" through an emotionally-volitionally intonated consciousness. Ruth Coates explains, "the conscious suppression of one's active subjectivity, the desire to be passively closed off from the event of being, is ruinous both for oneself and for the world for which one has abdicated responsibility" (Coates 31).[11] According to Bakhtin, this actively intonated consciousness always affords some choice in how we respond to the world as given to us. The extent to which we actively respond is a measure of the extent to which our humanity is fully realized.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for literacy studies, answerability highlights how utterances (and texts) are acts that do ethical work through

the active intonations of once-occurrent selves in the event of being. Bakhtin suggests,

> The answerable act or deed alone surmounts anything hypothetical, for the answerable act is, after all, the actualization of a decision—inescapably, irremediably, and irrevocably. The answerably performed act is a final result or summation, an all-round definitive conclusion. (*Toward* 28–29)

This ethical perspective focuses on *singular intentions and understandings in language events,* in contrast to an ethics of difference with its focus on the multiple possibilities for meaning that authoring entails. This perspective instead leads researchers and teachers toward an understanding of "finalized" actualities of performed acts:

> The performed act concentrates, correlates, and resolves within a unitary and unique and, this time, *final context* both the sense and the fact, the universal and the individual, the real and the ideal, for everything enters into the composition of its answerable motivation. The performed act constitutes a going out *once and for all* from within possibility as such into *what is once-occurrent.* (*Toward* 29, emphasis in original)

Thus considered, words become acts in the dialogic world performing social functions that cannot be undone, that carry moral heaviness.[12]

Such an understanding of answerability breaks from a Kantian ethics, which would require that particular responses to others be derived from more general prescriptions for conduct. Instead, the early Bakhtin suggests a more relational notion of ethics that would focus literacy studies on the particularity of students and teachers in literacy events, refusing to efface such particularity for general principles of codified, systematized "right" or "wrong." And unlike an ethics of difference, answerability suggests the importance of focusing on individual agents, situated in, and also moving among dialogic contexts, yet existing distinct from others—uniquely positioned—within and among these contexts. Within a given constellation of relationships and utterances, individuals as

The early Bakhtin suggests a more relational notion of ethics that would focus literacy studies on the particularity of students and teachers in literacy events, refusing to efface such particularity for general principles of codified, systematized "right" or "wrong." And unlike an ethics of difference, answerability suggests the importance of focusing on individual agents, situated in, and also moving among dialogic contexts, yet existing distinct from others—uniquely positioned—within and among these contexts.

communicators respond to and are in some sense responsible for the future of relationships and utterances defining the communicative situation of the classroom. With the particular position of "being without alibi" that is an unquestionable possession of all students and teachers comes an opportunity and responsibility to actively respond to (literacy) events in ways that are more or less active in creating and defining an ethical self in the unfolding social worlds of classrooms.

Toward an ethics of answerability: New directions for literacy research in classrooms

Rather than focusing on the production of expanded possibilities for the self as in an ethics of difference, Bakhtin's theory of answerability focuses on the everyday processes of becoming a certain kind of person and the good or harm that comes to oneself through responding to others in certain ways. More desirable—producing greater good to the individual self in question—is to become the kind of person who actively responds to classroom literacy events as a co-creator of the emerging lesson, through the unique "outside" position that one occupies in the relational matrix of the classroom. As such, one's utterances change the course of that unfolding history by offering a uniquely actualized contribution among multiple possibilities. Less desirable—producing greater harm to the individual self in question—is to become a person who remains passive and closed off in response to unfolding situations and interactions. Such passivity might produce rule-bound responses (for example, parroting the teacher's language or directions), but it does not "concentrate, correlate, and resolve" that individual's uniquely configured position of "being-without-alibi" by going forth from the possible into an actual and answerable response.

Rather than focusing on the production of expanded possibilities for the self as in an ethics of difference, Bakhtin's theory of answerability focuses on the everyday processes of becoming a certain kind of person and the good or harm that comes to oneself through responding to others in certain ways.

This ethical conceptualization may be heard as a response to the call of Gee et al. for a more nuanced theory of moral personhood within the social orientation of sociocultural literacy studies. Answerability conceptualizes students as moral agents for whom ethically attuned literacy practice might be cultivated in classrooms. Responding to this possibility, I articulate new directions for ethical inquiry, proposing questions that theorize SGI and students' composing practices in *answerable* terms.

As discussed above, an ethics of answerability places an emphasis on individual student responses—as agentive, once-occurrent events—to classroom interaction and literate activities therein. Through the concept of answerability, I next re-examine the SGI between TJ and Arschelle already introduced and explore another interactional example from the same classroom. With answerability as a grounding principle, a different set of questions might be asked of this event (and other classroom literacy events) in order to conceptualize them as *ethical* practices.

Answerability and SGI

With "outsideness" as a grounding principle, these (and similar) events could be explicitly reframed in terms of the ethical trajectories of individual students as they respond to others. Returning to the SGI already introduced, for example, a researcher would look more carefully at TJ's individuated experience in and beyond this group, throughout the class, and possibly even outside of the classroom. From the vantage point of answerability, some questions to ask of TJ's experience in this classroom would be these: What images of "being Mexican American" are circulating in this classroom, from "outside" TJ and his life experience? What transcendent "images of selfhood" are at work in the peer world(s) of TJ?

In asking the first question, the contextualizing information of the class curriculum would become important. In the "academic literacy" curriculum that is discussed elsewhere in the volume of which the Greene and Smith article is part (Weese, Fox, and Greene), students are reading Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*. Such information would be useful and relevant for the analysis, as would more particulars of the ethnic makeup of the class and the extent of whole-class discussion around being Mexican American, the identity marker that was central to TJ and his writing. More ethnographic data, such as Dyson's, would be necessary for answering the second question. We might extend this issue into the domain of writing to ask: How do these circulating images filter into and become transformed in TJ's writing practices?

It would also be illuminating to probe how it was that TJ was so comfortable and free to talk about his family, his ethnicity, and the "negative" dimensions of Mexican American cultural experience. A noteworthy feature of TJ's discourse that remains unnoticed in an "ethics of difference" is how, while TJ treats being Mexican American as having both advantages and disadvantages, it is mostly the disadvantages (to university-defined "success") that are articulated. These include coming from a bad area (a "ghetto"), "negative" things,

"giving up on life," and "having babies left and right." Yet TJ's talk seems focused on his own life trajectory of becoming a college-educated Mexican American who is determined to overcome these "disadvantages." There are complexities in TJ's presentation of self to be further examined here.

TJ is, moreover, remarkably comfortable in responding to others through the framework of his own life experience. In my own experience teaching first-year composition, his participatory voice is noteworthy. Thus an ethical inquiry might additionally ask: What factors of the classroom ecology, of the particular SGI dynamics, and of TJ's particular life history or disposition enable him to overcome the temptation to maintain a self-enclosed autonomy, or passivity, rather than an active, ethically adventurous engagement with others? Along these lines, it would be furthermore important to ask: To what extent do students other than TJ actively respond (so binding themselves to others) rather than passively shut down within the SGI and within the classroom?

What factors of the classroom ecology, of the particular SGI dynamics, and of TJ's particular life history or disposition enable him to overcome the temptation to maintain a self-enclosed autonomy, or passivity, rather than an active, ethically adventurous engagement with others?

This question might be further explored in light of addtional data presented by Greene and Smith, involving an SGI that revolved around a group discussion of the writing of another student, Eddie, who was not so optimistic about his ability to overcome the "disadvantages" of being a minority in this country. Consider this interaction:

Eddie: Key point is . . . key point is I feel I was born in wrong time, at the wrong place . . .

TJ: . . . at the wrong time?

Eddie: Yeah. So, I'm . . . two things. I talk about why I feel that way, about the way things . . . OK, why I feel that way. First, I talk about where I was born, OK, and how my life was over there, my native land. How I . . . we went, we escaped.

A: Well, I have a question. You said: "This is a dream. It must be a nightmare." Could you explain that?

Eddie: Um, I don't even know what I mean by that. I just write it . . . Um, what I was trying to say is that right now I feel like this period of time, 1993, in United States, I feel like I'm, uh, living in a dream. Because I don't like to live in so . . . I don't like societies, I don't like . . .

A: I can understand that, coming from somewhere else.

TJ: Oh, I was just gonna say you're not liking the way this society is now, um, is it a lot . . . um, I'm sure it's different than from where you were, otherwise you wouldn't be thinking this.

Eddie: That's why I say I was born in wrong place and wrong time.

TJ: Are there any advantages or likes about this society here that you like other than back home? . . .

Eddie: There is nothing really, um . . .

TJ: Really?

Eddie: . . . um, I had everything I ever wanted, actually.

A: . . . What can you do to . . . I wouldn't say change your opinion about it, but what can you do to make it more of a better experience for you? I mean not that it's an experience cause you're probably gonna be here for the rest of your life, but I mean instead of just always looking at it like that because you can't change it, what can you do to just . . .?

TJ: What do you think you can do about changing your way of life to make things better . . .?

Eddie: There's nothing. I was just saying it is my destiny. It is my fate.

. . .

TJ: You're talking negative here. You gotta have a positive outlook on life. I mean, life's filled with the pain and agony and you name it. I mean I'm sure everybody at some time in their life's gonna go through it. But you just can't give up on yourself and see it one way and that's the only way it's gonna be. I feel there's always a chance to want to be somebody, to change an outlook on something that you wanted to put effort into it. (Greene and Smith 160–61)

Here, TJ and other group members try to persuade Eddie not to fight his "fate" or articulate it in a negative way but, instead, to see his experiences more positively. They suppress his "emotional-volitional" tone as he responds to the assignment about cultural identity.

From the perspective of answerability, some further questions to emerge in response to this second SGI might include: What comparative "outside" notions of themselves and their self-representations did TJ and Eddie each adopt or resist? How did the "outside," somewhat normative influences of group members first shape TJ's, then Eddie's writing practices beyond the group? How and why is TJ's "emotional-volitional tone," in response to the assignment, supported by the group? Likewise, why is Eddie's repressed and redirected by the

group? What moral decisions do TJ and Eddie make when they respond to the voices of others as authors recrafting their drafts and, by extension, their identities? Answering these questions would involve asking how TJ and Eddie—as writers taking in the response of the "supporters" in the group—each responded to the others' "consummation" of his paper idea (TJ) and paper draft (Eddie) in the next phase of writing. This issue might need to be addressed by additional data collection, such as interviews and possibly even think-aloud protocols, in addition to audiotaped interaction of groups.

To conclude this presentation of the new questions that an answerability perspective would bring to these interactional data generated in Greene and Smith's study, I want to point out some limitations of these examples. While serving the present illustrative purposes, these data would likely not be the center of a literacy study focused on answerability in classroom contexts. Given these two examples as contrasts, however, I would venture to suggest that, within the framework of answerability, the focus of the analysis might be on Eddie's experience rather than TJ's (as it was in Greene and Smith's analysis). Eddie's example highlights the rather "heavy" consideration of what he might need to give up—in terms of his identity, his primary (non-English) literacies—in order to respond to the "difference" (which has something of a hegemonic feel to it) that he encounters in the group.

Answerability and students' texts

Answerability as an ethical perspective would also prompt researchers to consider the written products resulting from students' composing processes within composition classrooms. Analysis in terms of answerability would involve conceptualizing composing and revising less as a turn in ongoing dialogue and more as "a going out *once and for all* from within possibility as such into *what is once-occurrent*" (Bakhtin, *Toward* 29). Since answerability theorizes student utterances as "once-occurrent" responses, this view would encourage more closed, singular analyses of the ethical—or relational—work particular student and teacher utterances and texts seem to be doing. This perspective takes classroom discourse analysis in a much different direction than do popular Bakhtinian readings of utterances as containing multiple possible meanings. Instead of seeing utterances as radically open, this perspective considers how and why an utterance has foreclosed certain possibilities. The process orientation of an ethics of difference would be replaced by questions about the "heaviness" of spoken utterances in classrooms and final drafts as utterances that—at least in some senses—have consequences that cannot be undone.

This line of inquiry, in accordance with Bialostosky's reading of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, pursues the notion of utterances as closing off, rather than opening up, possibilities. Some questions for researchers to pursue along these lines would include the following: How do students position themselves in moral relationships with others in their final products, given a range of possibilities and "differences" to which they *might* respond? To what "others" are students considering themselves morally obligated (e.g., class members, teachers, family members, etc.)? How, when, and why do students *make final decisions and close off other possibilities* when given a wide range of linguistic and artistic possibility? More specifically, researchers might ask as Bialostosky has suggested, when and why do students decide that they have a finished draft? When and why do students decide that they have written the last draft among many possible drafts?

Such questions would lead to at least some consideration of processes of evaluation at work in literacy classrooms and as they are situated within the institutional context of the university. The aspect of evaluation that would come into focus, however, would be the writer's "participative consciousness" that anticipates an instructor's (and other) evaluation, for better or for worse, in response to the writing. These sorts of questions—missing from an ethics of difference—might allow educators and researchers to explore how students negotiate and cultivate their position of "being-without-alibi" in a classroom setting, while still keeping in mind the evaluation that students do negotiate in (and beyond) an institution such as the university.

Finding out how students negotiate between such a weighty responsibility, on one hand, and creative self-expression, on the other, becomes a key task for an ethical consideration of literacy research and pedagogy.

Table 1 provides a summary of this line of inquiry in more general terms. These questions suggest avenues for investigation into how utterances involve individuals in the heavy responsibility of venturing responses to others in contexts of classroom interaction and textual production. Finding out how students negotiate between such a weighty responsibility, on one hand, and creative self-expression, on the other, becomes a key task for an ethical consideration of literacy research and pedagogy. Bakhtin's theory of answerability would insist, as did Isocrates, that the moral weightiness of our responses to others be incorporated into responsible pedagogy and research.

Table 1. Research Questions to Guide an Ethics of Answerability

Area of Inquiry*	Research Question
Classroom Interaction	What images of the self are circulating in the classroom, from "outside" multiple individual students?
	What "outside" images of selfhood are at work in the peer world(s) of individual students?
	How do these circulating images filter into and become transformed in individual student's writing practices?
	What factors of the classroom ecology enable individuals to overcome the temptation to maintain a self-enclosed autonomy or passivity, rather than an active, ethically adventurous engagement with others?
	What factors of students' particular life histories or dispositions enable them to overcome the temptation to maintain a self-enclosed autonomy or passivity, rather than an active, ethically adventurous engagement with others?
	To what extent do students actively respond (so binding themselves to others) rather than passively shut down within classroom interaction?
	How do the "outside," somewhat normative influences of others in the class shape students' writing practices beyond the interaction?
	How and why are students' "emotional-volitional tones" in response to assignments supported or repressed and redirected by others in interaction?
	What moral decisions do students make when they respond to the voices of others as authors recrafting their drafts and, by extension, their identities?
Students' Texts	How do students finally position themselves in moral relationships with others in their final products, given a range of possibilities and differences to which they might respond?
	To what "others" are students considering themselves morally obligated?
	How, when, and why do students make final decisions and close off other possibilities when given a wide range of linguistic and artistic possibility?
	When and why do students decide that they have a finished draft?
	When and why do students decide that they have written the last draft among many possible drafts?

*These two categories are not entirely distinct from one another (e.g., "How do these circulating images filter into and become transformed in individual student's writing practices?"); I simply use them for heuristic purposes.

Implications for literacy and composition research

I have outlined the concept of answerability, drawing on readings of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in order to propose how this theme can be operationalized in classroom-based empirical research. In elaborating this argument, I have contrasted the affordances of an "ethics of answerability" with a more established perspective in sociocultural classroom research, what I have called an "ethics of difference." In this concluding discussion, I point out how answerability might further be considered in ongoing conversations about ethics and research methods; how some of the limitations of answerability and dialogic theory more broadly need to be recognized by literacy researchers; and, finally, how answerability provides a useful construct for the field of sociocultural literacy research despite these limitations.

The methodological dimensions of answerability as an ethical orientation to literacy study are a fertile direction for further exploration by literacy researchers, particularly those working within the tradition of ethnography. Answerability as a construct guiding ethical inquiry in literacy studies would necessitate research methods that capture the particularity of individuals responding to the social worlds and words of classrooms. It would further suggest, on a more critical and reflexive level, that research methods should hold researchers relationally responsible to classroom participants. In a sense, answerability provides a terminology for further discussion of ethical concerns that have already emerged in literacy and composition research, much of which center around the notion of "reciprocity" (e.g., Powell and Takayoshi).

In particular, answerability might provide a way for researchers to speak of cultivating an "etic" perspective on studies that have been conducted, as they move back into their own outside positions, distancing themselves from participant perspectives in order to call students into being as "literacy learners" (an identity category probably not of paramount interest or importance to students) within the academic field of literacy research. Many methodological discussions have noted that the act of writing and contextualizing a research report commits the researcher to a heavy responsibility to her informants (e.g., Mortensen and Kirsch), but answerability would further suggest that research writing is a once-occurrent and therefore "answerable" act that places the researcher's self in the morally weighty position of "being-without-alibi." These answerable dimensions of research method await further investigation and elaboration.

Further, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations of this Bakhtinian construct, lest this argument be dismissed as "old-fashioned" or overly idealistic. With these limitations in mind, however, it becomes possible to see how answerability might fit into the body of knowledge about literacy—in its historical, political, and social contexts—which much recent sociocultural research has generated.

In creating a richly textured, interactive, agent-centered theory of language in context, the work of the Bakhtin circle in theorizing dialogism and answerability alike does not adequately account for how different artistic forms and expressive language patterns situate students differently—unequally—in relationships of power that often have consequences for students' futures.[13] Answerability does not provide an account of the "others," including groups of others situated among social and political structures within and beyond the university, which are present beyond immediate interactional classroom contexts and which do undoubtedly influence what happens therein.[14] This critique resonates with Brandt and Clinton's argument, which calls upon the work of Bruno Latour to overcome the limitations of local literacies. No matter how much teachers recognize and valorize a variety of answerable, expressive art forms and once-occurrent student utterances, certain social languages continue to count for more in schools, workplaces, and other civic institutions.

Literacy studies drawing on Bakhtin need to be aware of these origins and these gaps in Bakhtin's thought and to bear in mind that, as Emerson has pointed out, materialist social analyses do not necessarily follow from Bakhtin's early writings on answerability. This concept ought not be abandoned because of these limitations but, rather, enlisted to do what it can do: to conceptualize responses to particular, local relationships and literate practices embedded within those relationships as actively and ethically enacted by individuals in dialogic everyday situations. Answerability as a theoretical construct for approaching the study of literacy in schools and particularly in contexts of higher education should be taken up in relationship to other insights (particularly about the social nature of literacies) that are well established within sociocultural literacy studies. Thus, not only does answerability serve as a complementary concept to more socially oriented Bakhtinian ideas, such as addressivity, heteroglossia, and reciprocity, this theory might also be understood as complementary to more overtly political and materialist analyses of how literacy "travels," as Brandt and Clinton put it. Students in writing classrooms, as they come into focus as "answerable" persons, need also to be situated in more global contexts.

What has been learned about literacy practice through the social, political, and ideological commitments of extant sociocultural work, then, should provide a significant backdrop for analyzing academic literacies in the ethical terms of Bakhtinian answerability. To this social work, however, answerability presents an important and much-needed theory of moral agency. For answerability reminds us that social analyses, however powerful, are never enough: the particularity of individuals embedded within morally obligating relationships must also be examined in order to understand the intricacies of literacy teaching and learning as they emerge in "answerable" classroom practice. Answerability suggests that language and literacy be considered within contexts of students and teachers and researchers acting to position themselves, through literacy practices, as more or less responsive and responsible to others.

Answerability reminds us that social analyses, however powerful, are never enough: the particularity of individuals embedded within morally obligating relationships must also be examined in order to understand the intricacies of literacy teaching and learning as they emerge in "answerable" classroom practice.

To return to the concerns of Gee et al., answerability reconsiders students as moral agents who are in "once-occurrent" positions to maximize good and reduce harm in the interactional spaces they occupy and the texts they produce. Furthermore, answerability frames learning in terms of individual moral agents who respond to others from the unique value field of their individuality. By foregrounding questions of the actualized, ethical consequences of utterances and texts, which much sociocultural literacy research has tended to background, answerability may provide a lens for better articulating and understanding how college writers not only do but also should interact with literacy in a new economy.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank friends and colleagues whose responses to various drafts of this paper have been enormously helpful: Jennifer C. Stone, Anna Ruth Allen, Martin Nystrand, Samantha Caughlan, Matthew Ferkany, and Michael Bernard-Donals. I am also grateful to Marilyn Cooper for her attentive reading and thoughtful revision suggestions and to Roz Ivanič and Frank Farmer for their insightful feedback.

Notes

1. I follow James Gee's distinction between primary and secondary discourses, in order to conceptualize the literacies that are introduced and practiced in college

writing classrooms. Gee defines *primary discourses* as "those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings" (*Social* 137). *Secondary discourses* are defined as "those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socializations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization—for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices. They constitute the recognizability and meaningfulness of our 'public' (more formal) acts" (137). I draw on this distinction to understand the literate practices, both spoken and written, in classrooms as sets of practices, identities, ways of being in the world, and "ways with words" that are not "natural" for many students. Therefore, when I use the term "academic discourse" or "academic literacies" in this paper, I refer back to Gee's distinction and intend to suggest the particular discourses or "ways with words" that are expected in composition classrooms.

2. Possible exceptions include kindergarten and graduate school.

3. Valentin Volósinov (*Marxism*) critiques the entire field of linguistics, and most particularly Saussure, for taking as its object of study dead, defunct written texts: "European linguistic thought formed and matured over concern with the cadavers of written languages" (71), had its focus on "finished monologic utterances," and was predicated on passive understandings (72).

4. I define rhetoric here broadly, in a Burkean sense, as (a) the art of persuasion and (b) the study of the means of persuasion available for any given situation (Burke, *Rhetoric* 36, 46). In this Burkean view, the basic function of rhetoric, everywhere to be observed in human behavior, is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (*Rhetoric* 41).

5. *Antidosis* is quite literally constructed dramatically as a trial at which Isocrates is the defendant.

6. Richard Weaver has also explored this relationship between rhetoric and ethics, though he differs from Isocrates in that his vision is Platonic; moreover, his ethics of "language citizenship"—a civic unification through commonly shared meanings and uses of words—are simply not adequate for students in pluralistic classrooms who will leave school to enter a global economy.

7. In this view, Bakhtin's dim and very particular definition of rhetoric-as-polemic can be seen as his antiauthoritarian response to oppression in postrevolutionary Russia (Halasek, "Starting" 101).

8. This analogy between ethics and aesthetics is not limited to the relational ethical ideas to be found in Anne Dyson's "ethics of difference" and in Bakhtin's ideas on answerability: it can also be found in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

9. Based on the context provided by Stuart Greene and Erin Smith, I interpret *here* to mean "at the university."

10. Deborah Hicks has foregrounded this notion in her reading of Bakhtin's early writing.

11. Such suppression might involve withdrawing one's consciousness from the actual situation at hand by becoming invisible, numb, nonresponsive, or by adhering to abstract prescriptive ethical systems. I acknowledge that individuals may have good reasons for these sorts of retreats, reasons that stem from life histories as well as social structures. This limitation of dialogism is briefly treated in the final section of the paper.

12. Deborah Hicks, working with Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* extensively develops this metaphoric contrast between lightness and heaviness, arguing that Bakhtin's early writings focus on a more sober, heavier aspect of human interaction than do the later writings. Caryl Emerson's reading of the early Bakhtin accords with Hicks's metaphoric explanation.

13. Pierre Bourdieu recognizes something like this limitation as the failure of the "populist aesthetic": he critiques Labov on these grounds (see chapter six, particularly 136–37).

14. This gap in Bakhtinian theory can partly be explained by the Christian framework that was called upon by Bakhtin (himself a committed believer) to ground and to explicate his dialogic perspective on self-other relations. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," the answerable self in relation to others is developed through Christian themes and motifs that suggest an ultimate other/author, a transcendent, benevolent Christian god—beyond the fray of humanity—by whom all is made meaningful. Ruth Coates argues that, for Bakhtin, "the concept of the author is derived from God the Creator, and the paradigm for responsible, active self-hood is found to be Christ" (56). This insight, in Bakhtin's view, seems to mitigate the unsettling problem for answerability—a problem of particular concern to many literacy researchers today—that between any self and the other on whom it must ultimately depend to "bring me into significance," significant and entrenched power differentials often exist.

Works Cited

Antiphon and Andocides. *Antiphon and Andocides*. Trans. Michael Gagarin and Douglas M. MacDowell. Austin: U of Texas P, 1998.

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1987.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays of M. M. Bakhtin.* Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: U of Texas P, 1990.

———. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

———. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.

———. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1984.

———. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.

———. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: U of Texas P, 1993.

Bartholomae, David. "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow." *CCC* 46.1 (1995): 62–71.

Bialostosky, Don. "Bakhtin's 'Rough Draft': Toward a Philosophy of the Act, Ethics, and Composition Studies." *Rhetoric Review* 18 (Fall 1999): 6–24.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Practical Reason*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy and American Lives*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Brandt, Deborah, and Katie Clinton. "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice." *Journal of Literacy Research* 34 (2002): 337–56.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1945.

———. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973.

———. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969.

Coates, Ruth. *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New P, 1995.

Durst, Russel. *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999.

Dyson, Anne H. *Social Worlds of Children Learning to Write in an Urban Primary School*. New York: Teachers College P, 1993.

———. *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy*. New York: Teachers College P, 1997.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing without Teachers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.

Emerson, Caryl. "The Next Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin (The View from the Classroom)." *Rhetoric Review* 19 (2000): 12–26.

Ewald, Helen. "Waiting for Answerability: Bakhtin and Composition Studies." *CCC* 44.3 (1993): 331–47. Rpt. in *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing*. Ed. Frank Farmer. Mahwah: Lawrence-Erlbaum, 1998. 225–41.

Flower, Linda, David Wallace, Linda Norris, and Rebecca Burnett, eds. *Making Thinking Visible*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993.

Garver, Eugene. *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1994.

Gee, James. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis Theory and Method*. London: Routledge, 1998.

———. "The New Literacy Studies: From 'Socially Situated' to the Work of the Social." *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. Ed. David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanič. London: Routledge, 2000. 180–96.

———. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Falmer, 1996.

Gee, James, Glynda Hull, and Colin Lankshear. *The New Work Order: Behind the Language of the New Capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996.

Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper, 1974.

Graue, M. Elizabeth, Janice Kroeger, and Dana Prager. "A Bakhtinian Analysis of Particular Home-School Relations." *American Educational Research Journal* 38 (Fall 2001): 467–98.

Greene, Stuart. "How Beginning Writing Students Interpret the Task of Writing an Academic Argument." *Teaching Academic Literacy: The Uses of Teacher-Research in Developing a Writing Program.* Ed. Katherine L. Weese, Stephen L. Fox, and Stuart Greene. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999. 85–118.

Greene, Stuart, and Erin Smith. "Teaching Talk about Writing: Student Conflict in Acquiring a New Discourse of Authorship through Collaborative Planning." *Teaching Academic Literacy: The Uses of Teacher-Research in Developing a Writing Program.* Ed. Katherine L. Weese, Stephen L. Fox, and Stuart Greene. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999. 149–74.

Halasek, Kay. *A Pedagogy of Possibility: Bakhtinian Perspectives on Composition Studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois P, 1999.

———. "Starting the Dialogue: What Can We Do about Bakhtin's Ambivalence toward Rhetoric?" In *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing*. Ed. Frank Farmer. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence-Erlbaum, 1998. 97–105.

Heath, Shirley B. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 1982.

Hicks, Deborah. "Self and Other in Bakhtin's Early Philosophical Essays: Prelude to a Theory of Prose Consciousness." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7 (2000): 227–42.

Holland, Dorothy, William Lachicotte, Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.

Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Hull, Glynda, ed. *Changing Work: Changing Workers*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.

Hull, Glynda, and Katherine Schultz. "Literacy and Learning out of School: A Review of Theory and Research." *Review of Educational Research* 71 (2001): 575–611.

Isocrates. *Antidosis*. Trans. George Norlin. Vol. 2. Loeb Classical Library Series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1961.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment.* Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.

Lankshear, Colin, and Michele Knobel. *New Literacies: Changing Knowledge and Classroom Learning.* Buckingham, UK: Open UP, 2003.

Lensmire, Timothy J. *Powerful Writing, Responsible Teaching*. New York: Teachers College P, 2000.

Mortensen, Peter, and Gesa Kirsch, eds. *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1996.

Murray, Donald. *A Writer Teaches Writing.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review* 66.1 (1996): 60–92.

Nystrand, Martin, Adam Gamoran, Robert Kachur, and Catherine Prendergast. *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom*. New York: Teachers College P, 1997.

Olson, David. "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing." *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (1977): 257–81.

Powell, Katrina, and Pamela Takayoshi. "Accepting Roles Created for Us: The Ethics of Reciprocity." *CCC* 54.3 (2003): 394–422.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria. *Other People's Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.

Quintilian. *On the Teaching of Speaking and Writing*. Ed. James J. Murphy. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez.* New York: Bantam, 1982.

Scribner, Sylvia, and Michael Cole. *The Psychology of Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981.

———. "Unpackaging Literacy." *Writing the Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication. Vol. 1: Variation in Writing Functional and Linguistic-Cultural Differences*. Ed. M. F. Whiteman. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1981. 71–87. Rpt. in *Perspectives on Literacy*. Ed. Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988.

Street, Brian. "Higher Education in the New Work Order: Implications for Student Writing, Reading, and Representation." Paper presented at NCTE Assembly for Research Midwinter Conference. New York, NY. 2002.

———. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

Volósinov, Valentin N. *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*. Trans. I. R. Titunik. Ed. Neal Bruss. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

———. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973.

Weaver, Richard M. *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Davis, CA: Hermagorus P, 1985.

Weese, Katherine, Stephen Fox, and Stuart Greene, eds. *Teaching Academic Literacy: The Uses of Teacher-Research in Developing a Writing Program.* Mahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999.

Mary Juzwik

Mary Juzwik is an assistant professor of English at Northern Arizona University. She teaches courses in language and literacy to preservice secondary English teachers. Her current research, which theorizes and empirically examines "teaching as performance," explores how rhetoric and the practices of literacy teaching illuminate one another.