

Dialogue in Adult Education

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In his writings on education Martin Buber delineated the way to dialogue between the educator and his young students. Is this way also suitable for adult education? The first part of the article presents the main concepts of dialogue philosophy and the foundations of Martin Buber's educational approach, with emphasis on adult education. In the second part the author applies the concept of the triologue (a three-way conversation) she developed in the context of training psychotherapists, to adult education in the spirit of dialogue philosophy.

"The real struggles not between East and West, or capitalism and communism, but between education and propaganda. Education means teaching people to see the reality around them, to understand it for themselves. Propaganda is exactly the opposite. It tells the people, 'You will think like this, as we want you to think!' Education lifts the people up. It opens their hearts and develops their minds, so that they can discover the truth and make it their own. Propaganda, on the other hand, closes their hearts and stunts their minds. It compels them to accept dogmas without asking themselves, 'Is this true or not?'"

Hodes (1972), p. 135, quoting Buber

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Preface

I am neither a teacher nor an educator in the conventional sense. I am a clinical psychologist and therapist. My experience in education is in teaching and supervising psychotherapy. In this respect, teaching for me is not conveying knowledge, but educating to values, and meeting the “other” – whether student or patient – as uniquely whole and uniquely present.

I found particular relevance in Buber's writings on education to psychotherapy. Martin Buber was not a psychologist, and was not particularly interested in the intrapsychic dimension. He considered psychology only as an adjunct to the real relationships between people. However, the psychologist who is ready to learn and apply dialogue philosophy to psychotherapy can find in Buber's principles of educational dialogue the basic tenets of being a psychotherapist. It is from this place that I dare, as a psychologist, to write about dialogue in adult education.

In the first section of this article I will delineate the essence of dialogue philosophy and the foundations of Martin Buber's educational approach, with emphasis on adult education. In the second section, I apply what I have written about training in psychotherapy to adult education.

The nature of dialogue and the genuine encounter

In constructing a vital language for his Dialogue Philosophy, Buber employed new words, the translation of which from German (the language in which he wrote most of his books and articles) into Hebrew or English cannot rest on just their literal meaning. For example, when Buber writes of the I-Thou relationship he uses the word “Beziehung”, while the word used in the I-It relationship is “Verhaeltnis”. The word ‘relationship’ in English does not convey the crucial difference between a unique relationship to the other when the I is open to the presence of the other in his/her uniqueness and fullness, as opposed to the I-It connection

where both the I and the other are objects. Buber gives us to understand that it is presentness that epitomizes the I-Thou relationship. It confirms one's uniqueness, and enables wholeness, direction, and responsiveness to the world.

To the question 'what is Man?' Buber (1947a) answers that Man's uniqueness is in his ability to enter into dialogue with his fellow-man. True dialogue takes place between one person and another, and not within any person, nor is it a sum of two individuals' discourses. 'I' does not exist as an exclusive category; it cannot exist by itself, it has no meaning by itself. 'I' is always part of a relationship, either I-You or I-It. When the 'I' relates as I-It, it relates to the other partially, as an object of observation, analysis, exploitation, and utility. What distinguishes the dialogue, that which Buber calls the I-Thou relation, is relating to the other authentically, perceiving the other as whole and unique without making use of the other for the I's own needs (Buber, 1970).

In any genuine dialogue between two or more people, something is immediately created between them, an entity that is new, is common to all, did not previously exist and does not exist inside any one of them. Buber (1947a) called this creation 'das Zwischen' in German, translated to 'the Between' in English. His name for the area within which this new entity emerged was 'das Zwischenmenschliche' or 'the Interhuman' (Buber, 1965). He also distinguished between 'the Interhuman' and 'the Intrapsychic,' by which he meant the individual's inner world and which, unsurprisingly, includes most of the phenomena with which psychology deals. What is essential is not what goes on within the minds of the partners in a relationship but rather what comes to exist between them. Buber writes: 'The inmost growth of the self does not take place, as people like to suppose today, through our relationship to ourselves, but through being made present by the other and knowing that we are made present by him.' (Buber, 1965: 71). A further distinction was made

between 'the Interhuman' and 'the Interpersonal,' a designation covering social processes that are not necessarily dialogical, such as observation, analysis and exploitation. We could say, then, that 'the Interhuman' is the area in which the 'third being' is created.

The meeting in the Interhuman is a very real one that takes place in the here and now, in what Buber terms 'the common world'. The common world encompasses the reality of our waking life in which we participate together as members of the human community. It is built of people's everyday intentional interactions with each other in word and deed. Buber propounds the common world in contrast to the tyrant collective on the one hand, and to the quest for pure individualism on the other: The common world is characterized by the dialogical quality of its relationships, and by the inherent belongingness to a community of humans.

It is only in an interhuman common reality that the dialogue can unfold. When the partners both give up their ego, meaning the I in the I-it relation and are open and attentive to each other as to a Thou, thereby transforming their I, even if for just a moment - at that moment there will be a transition to the Interhuman or to the Between. The Between (*das Zwischen*) is different from the potential for dialogue and even from the relationship itself. It does not erase the differences between an I and a Thou or close the gap between them; It merely bridges the gap by locating the special common ground of being in the real here and now, which is created with the transformation of the I in the relationship.

The I-Thou encounter is not intended to last. Buber writes: 'But this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It. ... Every Thou in the world is by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things. (Buber, 1970).

But there is hope, as the occurrence of I-Thou between human beings is always also spiritual, and as such it is sustained even in face of the dynamics of alternations Between I-Thou and I-It in our daily life. The dual basic attitude that is destined to Man, writes Buber, is carrying Being in his person, wishing to complete it, and ever again going forth to meet worldly and above-worldly Being over against him.??

And indeed, the question of the transitions from I-It to I-You, which is articulated both by educators-teachers and by psychologists as a question of professionalism, rather than one of authentic dialogue, is a difficult issue (Kron, 1992; 1995). There is no answer to this question, which causes continuous deliberation, however, as Buber wrote – there is a hope of engendering dialogue if we are aware of this possibility and do not block the dialogical moment when it occurs.

Genuine dialogue in education: Imagining the reality of the other

How do we go about creating an Interhuman and shared reality in education? Where does the responsibility rest for its creation? Will this shared reality be the same or different in the education of adults as opposed to that of children?

Buber describes the mutual, albeit asymmetrical, relationship between educator and student in his beautiful essay, “Education” (Buber, 1947a). The education of children is marked by mutuality, the same as can be found in the relationship of parents and children. However, there is no symmetry here since the educator and student, like the parent and child, are not equals. In this situation, it is the educator’s responsibility to create the Interhuman and shared reality. This can be done by a special variation on the I-Thou relationship that Buber calls “inclusion”, that is, the kind of mutuality in both educator-student and psychotherapist-patient relationships that can be partial without losing immediacy and

authenticity. The word “inclusion” is the English translation of the concept Buber employed that he named “Umfassung”. Here too, we have the same problem I noted before with the word “Beziehung”- there are multiple levels of meaning that go beyond the simple sense of “Inclusion”.

Inclusion has its rules and boundaries. It is not dependent on atmosphere or feelings. Neither is it a technique. It is an attitude that has also to be expressed in behavior.

The first element of Inclusion is “a relation” (ibid.), meaning a dialogical relationship. It is enabled whenever student and educator (or patient and therapist) meet as two human beings, beyond the specific professional definition of their encounter. This possibility does not run counter to the non-symmetrical form of the education or therapy situation, for it is the educator – or therapist – who can facilitate the occurrence of the dialogue, or inhibit it.

The second element of Inclusion is “An event experienced by them in common” (1965). In talking about education, Buber noted that the event experienced in common is the educational situation. It is the responsibility of the educator to make him/herself present in the educational situation. Making myself present entails risking and sacrificing my I as ego, my seeming, my self- image, my persona, my theories and programs, and open myself to the spontaneous, the unpredicted.

The third element of Inclusion is “imagining the reality of the other”, defined by Buber as: “a bold swinging - demanding the most intensive stirring of one’s being – into the life of the other” (ibid.). And “one person, (educator or therapist), without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other”. The educator, writes Buber in “Education”, experiences the pupil’s being educated but the pupil cannot experience the education of the educator. The educator stands on both sides of the common situation, the pupil only at one end.

The educator can imagine the reality of the student whenever he opens himself to the other, and is prepared to “enter his otherness”, while maintaining his own separateness at the same time. This is not identification, for throughout, the educator retains her own viewpoint at the same time as being able to experience that of the student. Nor is it empathy, for empathy is not always associated with a concrete reality of participation in a common situation. Imagining the reality of the other expands the concrete reality, and has an ontic meaning. It is a sort of receptivity of the educator towards the student as someone unique, in her entirety. The educator or therapist permits himself to be, as it were, imprinted by the unique stamp of a certain other facing him, and does so without losing her own separate identity. This is the special structure of Inclusion – a person remains him/her self at the same time as experiencing the other.

The responsibility of the educator includes imparting and fostering values. “Self-actualization”, the expression of one’s creative potential, is a basic goal of education, although not enough by itself according to Buber. The dialogue between one human being and another, and between the human being and the surrounding world, are values that the educator must impart to his pupils. This includes awareness of one’s belonging to the human community and the responsibilities this entails. The educator’s actions in fostering such values define what is meant by “Inclusion”. In doing this, he assumes the responsibility towards his students as human beings, and the possibility of unfolding dialogue between himself and them, and between and among themselves, as well.

One might ask, is this responsibility for fostering dialogue as valid for adult education as it is for the education of children and adolescents? Buber claimed that there is a significant difference between the education of the two groups. Adults come of their own free will to learn, and their aim is learning rather than education broadly defined. They feel that they

are already “educated” and that their only need to is to acquire additional learning. As adults, they and the teacher share in equal status, without the asymmetry characteristic of the education of children. If so, then perhaps there is no place for “Inclusion” as we have previously described it.

But is this really the case? I would submit that the dialogical principal applies to adult education, as well. Even if the adult comes to the learning situation with life experience, knowledge and beliefs of his own, it is possible that he is no less open to change than the younger learner. According to Buber, the adult who comes to learn from us expects that we will draw from the wealth of knowledge, observation and understanding that we have accumulated in our experience of the field we are asked to teach. Along with this, Buber presents adult education as a reciprocal conversation in which both participants ask and answer questions of each other.

The dialogical meeting is the root and basis of education

Therefore, in spite of the symmetry of the teacher-student relationship in adult education, the principle of “Inclusion” still holds.

It should be incumbent on the educator to imagine the reality of the students as they experience his/her teaching. It should also be incumbent upon the educator to be open to the experience of the students from their own point of view, while still maintaining his/her own perspective. Without actively practicing these principles of “Inclusion”, it is quite possible that the educator will lose contact with the students. Perhaps they will acquire some sort of knowledge, but they will not receive the essence of what Buber calls Education. It will be more like a lecture transmitted over the internet or by a recording, devoid of the living presence of the educator. It becomes a situation in which the students passively listen without any participation. Not only is the educator depriving the students of “Inclusion”, but they cannot reciprocally include the educator in their

educational experience. Again, this becomes a situation of learning without dialogue, a situation which cannot be defined as Education.

Buber believed that the correct way to educate is through personal example that emerges from the whole person. The educator who employs “Inclusion”, and who is both willing to listen to his students and change along with them serves as a model, and thus provides an opening to a dialogical and transformative experience. Thus, the educator’s contribution to his/her students goes beyond simply imparting knowledge.

Friends and students of Buber described him as always open to dialogue with them. He would pose questions designed to lead the listeners to discover answers of their own. He was not concerned with his students blindly accepting what he had to say, but to find their own unique path, even if it meant contradicting their mentor. For him, the essence of education was in freeing the personality, together with learning to live in the human community.

Buber insists that adult education requires the total being and presence of the educator - instruction itself does not educate. Even when silent, the teacher is the educator, in both his behavior and his presence. He provides his students with presence as human beings and as partners in the educational enterprise. At the same time, the educator requires the students to provide a personal presence-making for him/her. These processes are mutual, and take place in the interpersonal space between the Being of one person with another.

The educator contracts himself as part of imagining the reality of the pupil, the therapist contracts herself as part of imagining the reality of the patient, and makes room for his unique otherness. But this is not a one-directional process. As the parent actualizes her parenthood by making room for the child and letting the child grow, so the educator actualizes his being by contracting his ego and making place for the student.

Paradoxically, by this contraction the educator and the therapist becomes confirmed, while at the same time she or he confirms the student or patient as a unique other. Confirmation is based on the recognition of otherness, even when there is not full acceptance, and even when there is debate or contention. The tension between these poles - the one that is within each person, and the one between the two persons encountering one another - always remains (Buber, 1965). The student confirms the educator as a person and an educator, just as the educator confirms the student. Who knows better than we educators and therapists how much we need this confirmation from our students or patients! Yet this human need does not in any way diminish our value as professionals. On the contrary, the more aware we are that we truly and deeply need our patients to confirm us as human beings, as a “You,” the less is the danger of us exploiting them for our own needs as objects, as “Its.”

Triologue in training and education: actual communication and transferred communication

Training in psychotherapy is not teaching in the usual sense, however, apart from instilling knowledge it includes educating to values: respect for the individual who comes for treatment whatever his situation is; professional ethics; the requirement to behave in a highly professional manner at all times; and most importantly - responding to the needs of the individual who is suffering. In an article on psychotherapy training I related to communication between the three participants in training which I called a “Triologue” (Kron, 1994; 1999). I wish to describe triologue as it is implemented in adult education in the following:

The term “Triologue” refers to the tripartite structure of communication in supervision between three apexes: the patient, the therapist-supervisee, and the supervisor. Awareness of the triangular structure acknowledges that communication is not one-directional as is commonly assumed, but

can flow in all directions. Attention to communications in the triologue means that one looks not only “at” the patient or “at” what happens in the therapy room, but also at what happens “between” supervisor and supervisee. The assumption is that the latter communication has an impact on the interaction between the therapist and the patient and vice versa – on the interaction between the patient and therapist will affect what happens between the supervisor and the supervisee.

I distinguish between two different qualities of communication: actual communication and transferred communication:

Actual Communication is the verbal interaction in real time between the patient and the therapist or between the supervisee and the supervisor. If we apply this to adult education, actual communication transpires in real time between the teacher-educator and his/her students.

Transferred Communication is non-verbal communication that is not immediately linked in time or space to an actual event. Rather, transferred communication takes place in the space that is created within the triangular structure of supervision or education. This is an authentic, existential space, which I will describe its characteristics in more detail henceforth. Transferred communication can be, but is not necessarily, related to a specific verbal interaction at the time of the event in question. It is affected by the participants' attitudes or positions, the quality of their interaction, and the space in which the interaction takes place, as well as by unconscious aspects of communication. It is transmitted through the participants' immediate experience, but it may include people who were not present actually in the same space at the time of the interaction and who do not actually communicate one with the other.

In the actual communication that occurs during supervision only two pairs in fact meet and hold conversations: patient-therapist and supervisor-supervisor. So, too, in education: the actual encounter is between the teacher-educator and his students. When the supervisor

and supervisee communicate at this level, they are mainly aware of channels of communication which are related to the manifest structure of supervision: the supervisee presents information about the therapy to the supervisor and the supervisor reacts to the particular piece of therapy that has been presented. Aspects of this communication will be transferred onwards to the patients by means of what the supervisee has learned from the supervisor: increased understanding, different interpretations, etc. These are conscious, overt communication channels that relate mainly to verbal interactions. In the field of education the teacher and his students are aware of the communication channels that relate to the overt structure of education and teaching. The students receive knowledge from the teacher that will expand their education and understanding.

In transferred communication the channels are open between all three – or even more – participants, even if not all of them actually meet. These channels are not overt, and awareness of their existence is only partial. Communications are transferred during and through the supervision session, and also through the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. The communications are shaped by the nature of the supervisory relationship (authoritative and one-directional versus reciprocal and enabling of shared understanding); the style of training (didactic or relational); and subjective elements that arise in each of the participants in the wake of the supervisory experience. The trainee-therapist brings these communications into the therapy session, and through this, to the patient.

Models of relations between educator and student, and their influence

In the field of education, transferred communications are shaped by the relationships between teacher and student, and by the nature and style of the teaching: didactic-authoritative and one-directional, or mutual and

relational. The teacher-educator's teaching experience and the students' learning experience repeatedly affect the communication transferred during teaching, even if the teacher-educator and the students are unaware it.

It should be emphasized that even if relations between a teacher and his students are characterized by warmth and attention, this is insufficient to prevent the relationship from becoming authoritative. The teacher-educator can appear and function as omniscient, while the student is unaware and relates to the teacher's words as though they were absolute truth. Such teacher-educator-student relationships give rise to veneration and dependence on the part of the student, and will not encourage actualization of the principle Buber so emphatically emphasized: asking questions and re-examining the system of attitudes to "the facts."

In dialogical relations of inclusion characterized by mutuality and open questioning by both parties, when the teacher imagines the students' reality through the power of his imagination and how the conversation impacts them, transferred communication takes place. In the dialogical encounter itself, the teacher-educator transfers his opinion and values about the relations between individuals and within the group non-verbally, through his behavior and how he relates to the students. There will be an increased chance that the students' openness to a dialogical encounter outside this study framework will be strengthened, that they themselves will be open and encourage dialogical encounters in other settings in their lives. Thus the communication will be transferred in a dialogue – from the teacher to his students, and from the students to other people, to partners in the community of mankind. All this takes place without words in a kind of "underground current" that flows alongside the acquisition of knowledge.

The triologue as a basis for the “Between” space

I see triologue and transferred communication as the basis for the “Between” space that Buber describes as the Interhuman dialogical space in which the I-Thou can transpire. In adult education as well, the responsibility for the existence of triologue is on the teacher’s shoulders. Adult education, Buber writes, requires the teacher’s entire being. Teaching itself does not educate. The individual – the teacher – is the educator, even when he is silent, both through his behavior, and mainly, through his presence. Through him the students are made present – he offers them presence as human beings and as partners in the act of education; and at the same time the teacher needs the students to make him/her present. This confirmation occurs in the interhuman space, between the experience of one individual and another. Thus Buber writes, in his lyrical style: “Man secretly, bashfully, and anxiously watches for a “Yes” which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human soul to another; It is from one man to another that the heavenly-bread of self-being is passed” (Buber, 1965b: 131).

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