

# Living the Sense of Subjectivity: Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue and Its Enlightenment to Education

Huifang Cheng

Educational Technology Centre of Hebei University of Engineering, Handan, Hebei, China, 056038

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to reveal Buber's understanding of education through the interpretation of his dialogue philosophy. In order to understand Buber's educational philosophy, we need to examine it in the context of a meeting of "I and Thou". Through analysis, Buber's concept, the process of education is a "dialogue" between teachers and students, which allows students to participate with a sense of subject, and helps students to meet "Thou" and step into the "I-Thou" relationship. At this time, no matter how serious knowledge is, it will not be boring. Through discussion, the author shows that the sense of subject in Buber's philosophy will lead Thou into the reciprocal and independent "I-Thou" relationship, and the "meeting" between teachers and students is regarded as the manifestation of the true teacher-student relationship.

**Keywords:** Martin Buber; Dialogue; Education

Martin Buber's "I and Thou" opens our eyes to wisdom. This book has great respect for you, for you are the most precious of all. One is willing to open himself only if one is assured to live out one's sense of subjectivity; otherwise, one closes himself. The most important thing in education and teaching should be to let every participant have a sense of subject, and to teach and learn with real heart. Real teaching is to help students become better themselves, not to teach students to become or mold students to become better themselves, because the true self of each student is, in essence, the best. The real purpose of learning is to create a I and Thou environment, and to experience the existence of Thou.

It is of great significance to reexamine Martin Buber's philosophy of relations and reveal the enlightenment of his education. Buber's work was small in number but had an important influence. The primary words "I-it" in relational philosophy reflect a world of experience, while "I and Thou" shapes a world of relationships. The world is twofold, the perspective is twofold, and can be changed by the use of different primary words. Buber argues that no matter how noble and correct your aims and motives are, when you impose them on others, you create an "I and it" relationship. For example, "obedient education". Too much effort is not an "I and Thou" relation. In the world "I and Thou", you and I have not lost the subjectivity, each other can blossom.

## 1. The basic characteristics of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

First, directness. Buber's relations philosophy emphasizes the directness of the I-Thou relation. Buber points out that "Thou" does not have any contrast, and the relation to Thou is direct<sup>[1]</sup>. There is no conceptual system, no transcendental knowledge, no hallucinatory imagination between "I" and "Thou"<sup>[2]</sup>. The "I and Thou" relation is a real relationship, a social relationship in which Thou interact with others without any intention, with your whole being, and with your true self, also known as "meeting." Some people report and process the relationship between "I and it", and the barrier of ideas and experience not only makes people have obvious purpose and utilitarian but also cuts off the integrity of the other side, so that they cannot see the truth<sup>[3]</sup>. To reach a true immediacy, all intermediaries must be abandoned, lest we lose ourselves in intermediation and forget our original, pure and oneness of existence with the world.

Second, mutuality. "When the primary word 'Thou' is spoken the speaker enters the world and takes his stand in it<sup>[4]</sup>." According to Buber, the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one<sup>[5]</sup>. Relations are mutual. My "thou" affects me, as I affect it. We are molded by our pupils and built up by our works<sup>[6]</sup>. In the "I and Thou" relation, both parties are free, equal and mutual.

Third, integrity. Buber<sup>[7]</sup> said that "The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to Thou; as I become I, I say thou.<sup>[8]</sup>...so long as it does not see a whole being, it is not truly under the sway of the primary word of relation<sup>[9]</sup>. People abandon egoism, break through limitations, open themselves to the world, enter the infinite world of relations, appreciate the true face of the complete essence, and then they will arrive at the true state of the "I and you" relation.

## 2. The enlightenment of Martin Buber's dialogue philosophy to education

### 2.1 Look at the students as a whole being

Under the control of scientific rationality, the focus of education lies in the quantity, quality, efficiency and benefit of knowledge

giving and receiving, as well as improvement and perfection of corresponding educational methods, means and contents. The meaning and value of life and spirit, which constitute the integrity of human beings, are obviously on the edge or neglected in education<sup>[10]</sup>. An educational program that ignores the essential aspects of reason, or that eschews the allegorical and emotional aspects of life itself, is at best only half an education<sup>[11]</sup>. Dilthey also hated the practice of only taking knowledge as a measure of talent in traditional education, which he thought was “the education that kills people’s lives”.

Both teachers and students take part in the teaching as real subjects. Responds with a bountiful sense, with the whole heart, as if the other were full being with flesh and blood, feelings and intentions. The “I and Thou” relation is the best, and cutting it off leads to darkness. Buber believes that as long as there is scrutiny and expectation, what is constructed is the “I and it” relation. When teachers no longer judge and estimate students by experience, they are not excessive pursuit of perfection and profound. Students also get rid of the illusion of knowledge and devote themselves to learning, focusing on the vivid and real life of the moment. At this time, the meetings between teachers and students, students and what they have learned will happen.

The teacher-student relation should live in the present, meet completely. When a true meeting occurs, both Thou and I will be illuminated. Therefore, students are the object of the teacher’s teaching. The teacher should treat the students as a whole, and should understand all aspects of them. He should not only be the guide of knowledge, but also focus on educating people.

## **2.2 The essence and process of education is “dialogue” between teachers and students**

“The important thing in communication is to have a dialogue with the soul”<sup>[12]</sup>, “Without dialogue, there can be no communication; Without communication, there can be no real education”<sup>[13]</sup>. If the teacher regards the student as a whole person, the student is a subject, and the learning between them should have a dialogue and realize the “I and Thou” relation. Therefore, the essence of education is dialogue. Because “dialogue is the way to explore truth and self-knowledge”<sup>[14]</sup>.

The process of education is to communicate in a loving language, full of words coming and going, telling and responding. Thou and I are bound together in a solid dialogue by that element that immerses both sides of the relation -- dialogue -- where we can come face to face with the fullness of “Thou” as we wade. The dialogue reflects respect for the subjectivity of both teachers and students; It means harmony between the subject and nature. It can be seen that in dialogue education, the relationship between teachers and students is no longer a one-way indoctrination relationship between the subject and the object mediated by knowledge, but a “I-Thou” dialogue relation<sup>[15]</sup>. In dialogue education, knowledge is no longer static book content that the educator delivers to the educatees in the form of monolog, but is dynamic, open and generated. The value of knowledge does not lie in giving people ready-made things, but in providing a starting point for continuous creation<sup>[16]</sup>. For students, learning is no longer passive acceptance, but rather knowledge generation that takes place in dialogue and cooperation<sup>[17]</sup>. This means that education pays attention to people and embodies the humanized pursuit of education.

As Buber elaborates, what distinguishes a true dialogue or “meeting” with another is not only certain astonishment or surprise in the face of the other’s alterity but fundamental appreciation thereof: “that which is different in the other person, his otherness, is prized<sup>[18]</sup>.” Buber consequently doesn’t conceive of dialogue as a simple exchange of words. Not only can dialogue also take the form of a non-linguistic interaction, e.g. an exchange of glances between strangers, but it specifically requires the recognition or acknowledgement of the other’s difference. From the perspective of social philosophy, Dialogue life is a kind of life that takes place in the world of interpersonal interaction and is oriented by the practical purpose of human interaction, communication and understanding.

## **2.3 The purpose of education is to help students meet “Thou” and awaken a sense of life and worth**

The so-called “I”, is a person’s inner world, the so-called “Thou”, can be understood as the whole external world. It is a fundamental question whether a person’s perception of the external world is a spiritual “Thou” life that pays no attention to utilitarianism and pays attention to human life and value experience, or a utilitarian and rationalized “it” life at the material level. People without a secular life cannot go on, but only in secular life, it will lose the meaning of human. For Buber, it is only the I-Thou attitude that establishes a proper relation with entities in the world, whereas the I-It attitude only allows for an “experience”. Buber believes that people should be involved in the real world. But at some critical moments, it is necessary to look at the great events of life from a detached perspective. For example, when teaching students, it is necessary to abandon purpose and utility and build an “I and Thou” relation. According to the transcendence of education, improving the spiritual realm of students, so that students learn to look at the world in the way of ‘Thou’, learn to carry on communication and exchange with the universe on the life level.

“The essence of teacher-student communication is the meeting between teacher’s personality spirit and student’s personality spirit in education, and teacher’s personality spirit must have an enlightening influence on student’s spiritual development. Man receives, and he receives not a specific “content”, but a Presence, a Presence as power. It consists of three things, undivided, yet in such a way that we may consider them separately. First, there is the whole fulness of real mutual action, of the being raised and bound up in relation: the man can give no account at all of how the binding in relation is brought about, nor does it in any way lighten his life—it makes life heavier, but heavy with meaning. Secondly, there is an inexpressible confirmation of the meaning. Meaning is assured. Nothing can any longer be meaningless. . . . It does not wish to be explained (not are we able to do that) but only to be done by us. Thirdly, this meaning is not that of “another life”, but that of this life of ours, . . . This meaning can be received, but not experienced; it cannot be experienced but it can be done, and this is its purpose with us. The meaning that has been received can be proved tried by each man only into the singleness of his being and the singleness of his life.

## **2.4 Teachers and students Relation**

Attempting to overcome the traditional subject-object dichotomy, Buber and his fellow “dialogicians” sought to disclose a more fundamental dimension arising between beings. The teacher-student relationship not only refers to the educational objective of individual growth but also to the other important aim of education: to enable the individual to relate in a meaningful way to the social

world. According to Buber, teachers are responsible for free development and historical renewal of students' potential, enabling students to form the ability to establish a "dialogue" relationship, and transforming knowledge from "I and it" to "I and Thou". In the dialogue teaching, the teacher is the guide of the students' soul regeneration, and the whole existence of the body should be regarded as the norm of the students. Ontologically, teachers and students are independent individuals (equal). As for the teacher-student relation in dialogue teaching, Buber believes that trust is the basis for the existence of teacher-student relationships, "affirmation of others" is the attitude of teachers to students, and "Umfassung" is the essence of teacher-student relations.

Why can the relationship between teachers and student's reciprocity, reciprocity is based on the "unequal" relationship between teachers and students. This kind of inequality does not refer to the high and low social status, but the accumulation of knowledge and experience "inequality". The process of education is a process in which teachers and students learn from each other. The so-called "mutual cultivation" means that teachers and students meet as independent subjects and absorb the experience wisdom created by both sides in the dialogue. It seems that only students benefit from the interaction between teachers and students, but in fact, both sides are the common beneficiaries. As a person with educational status, teachers have more cultural achievements such as knowledge, thought, wisdom and experience than students. Teachers and students acquire new knowledge in the process of dialogue and improve together. Teachers and students create educational significance in the dialogue, and at the same time constantly enhance the meaning and value of their lives.

### 3. Conclusion

According to Buber, the teacher must know the student completely, or wants to know the student before teaching. The process of teaching is a process of understanding each other through dialogue. For Buber, real dialogue takes place in the presence, that is, in responding to the other person as a whole person and creating space where the other person can say his or her own words and meanings. When a person is open to the existence of another person, he will not attempt to speak for the other person, nor will he impose his own language, concepts and interpretive schemes on the other person. The other party will participate as a Subjectivity. When one steps out of the essential act of pure relation, one's life becomes more abundant.

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