

# EDUU.

## EDUCATION INQUIRY

Volume 1, No. 2, June 2010

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# EDUCATION INQUIRY

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ISSN online 2000-4508

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DOI: 10.1080/09500690701338901

# Editorial

## The concept of “educational science” in the Swedish context

*Education Inquiry* is a new international journal in the area of educational science. It has emerged in a period and a situation where in particular the concept of “educational science” is being used in different contexts in Sweden, not in the sense of the discipline of “education”, but as a field with unclear boundaries and ambitions. Initially, the concept was employed in various types of investigations and policy documents that in different ways concern proposals to change teacher education in Sweden.

The concept is conspicuous by its absence in the Swedish educational encyclopaedia, *Pedagogisk uppslagsbok. Från A till Ö utan pekpinna* [“Educational encyclopaedia. From A to Z without lecturing”] from 1996, but it had already been used in an investigation of teacher education from 1978 *Lärare för skola i utveckling. Betänkande av 1974 års lärarutbildningsutredning (LUT 74)* [“Teachers for schools under development. Report from the teacher education commission of 1974”] in connection with proposals to provide teacher education with a research basis by means of various different postgraduate studies. On that occasion, the proposal contained three different types of postgraduate studies: discipline-oriented postgraduate studies based on disciplinary depth in the departments, and postgraduate studies in “education” as an educational methodology alternative. Between these, let us call them extremes, a third alternative was also suggested, namely postgraduate studies as a “general educational science alternative”, with demands for knowledge of subject theory, but also something else concerning teaching and learning.

After that, the concept seems to have lain fallow for several decades before it was again used in the 1990s by one of the two teachers’ unions, Lärarförbundet, in *Professionella lärare* [“Professional teachers”] (1995). The concept was used there in relation to issues concerning teachers’ efforts regarding professionalisation. In this connection, the expression “educational science basis” is used, referring to scientificity in a general sense, but also to didactic research in connection to different disciplines, i.e. subject didactics, research and development work in the activities of schools as well as engagement in the development work of schools.

The concept of “educational science” then cropped up in a proposal for a new teacher education *Att lära och leda. En lärarutbildning för samverkan och utveckling* [“Learning and leading. Teacher education for cooperation and development”] (1999). It contained a proposal to establish a new branch of science, Educational Science.

In Sweden fixed scientific resources are allocated precisely via branches of science, and the idea was hence that this branch would for the first time be guaranteed fixed scientific resources. However, the Swedish Parliament decided not to approve this proposal. Instead, an “Educational Science Committee” was established within the Swedish Research Council for the purpose of allocating research funding to research projects in the area. The concept of “educational science” is used for the broad research and postgraduate studies that are conducted in connection with teacher education and correspond to the needs of teacher education and professional educational work.

In the proposal for a new teacher education presented in 2008, *En hållbar lärarutbildning* [“Sustainable teacher education”] (HUTO7), the “teacher education” concept is used in the sense of a “common educational science core”, i.e. knowledge to be acquired in teacher education. This core includes issues concerning the organisation and conditions of such education, the foundations of democracy, curriculum theory and didactics, the theory of science, research methodology and statistics, development and learning, special needs education, social relations, handling conflicts and leadership, assessment and marking, evaluation and development work. Educational science is seen as an umbrella term for research in different disciplines that is devoted to culture, education, teaching, fostering and learning. In the government proposal for a new teacher education, which is intended to be launched in 2010, *Bäst i klassen – en ny lärarutbildning* [“Best in class – a new teacher education”] (prop. 2009/10:89), these areas recur as examples of this educational science core.

The rise of the concept of “educational science” should be seen against the background of an enormous expansion of the education area in Sweden. From the early 1990s onwards new curricula for schools, a new marking system, wider entrances and programmes at upper secondary level were introduced, efforts involving adult education, child care and care of schoolchildren became parts of the education sector, preschools were given a curriculum of their own, the quality assessment of educational activities was started etc. In this period, the education sector in Sweden was doubled; the number of children in the sector grew from about 1.4 million to more than 2.5 million at the same time as the number of adults in education also rose. Taken together, including teachers and pupils and other school staff, the sector increased from about 1.5 million to about 2.8 million. If academic education is also added to these figures, more than 40 percent of the country’s population is found in this sector.

In a recently presented report from January 2010 on transition to postgraduate studies in different areas, the National Agency for Higher Education shows that there are limited postgraduate studies in the Educational science area (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2010). It reveals that, on average, six percent of the students who have completed an undergraduate programme in Sweden start postgraduate studies. Among those who have parents with a postgraduate degree the proportion is higher, 16 percent, as might be expected. These are average figures. A closer inspection reveals great differences among the different disciplines. In science

about 30 percent of the students proceed to postgraduate studies after their undergraduate programme. The corresponding figures are in descending order: medicine and odontology (16 percent), humanities and theology (10 percent), agriculture and forestry (8 percent), technology (8 percent), social sciences and law (4 percent), health sciences (3 percent) and fine arts (1 percent). At the bottom of this scale we also find education and teaching, i.e. educational science, where only 1.5 percent of the students proceed to postgraduate studies after their undergraduate programme.

As is well known, it is now easy to conduct searches via Google and obtain a conception of different concepts and their distribution. In February 2010 the Swedish concept of “utbildningsvetenskap” [“educational science”] produced 131,000 hits. On the same occasion other concepts in the education sector gave the following number of hits: “skola” [“school”] 15,500,000, “universitet” [“university”] 10,900,000 and “pedagogik” [“pedagogy”] 1,230,000. The conclusion that might be drawn from this is that the concept of “utbildningsvetenskap” is relatively new, but also that it has become increasingly frequent in social discourse and education in Sweden. Another conclusion that may be drawn is that the concept is employed in many different contexts, as a name for university departments, conferences, graduate schools, faculties, research, professorships, lectureships etc.

Ever since the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been an intimate relationship between the growth and institutionalisation of the social science disciplines on one hand, and a context with great social problems and strong demands for generating knowledge of social facts from different parts of society on the other, in particular from institutions such as schools, politics, administration etc., all connected to the state. Actors in the political field have received support and inspiration for their political innovations in the discourses developed by actors in the disciplinary fields. When the concept of “educational science” is being launched on a wide front, this should be seen in this connection. As a concept, content and practice, it has not been formulated by the researchers and teachers in the area. It should rather be seen as a politically determined multidisciplinary organisational principle lacking specific content but working for the attaining of goals without them being decided. As Trondman (2006) puts it, educational science actors have provided a multidisciplinary bunch of researchers with a concept, an organisational principle and a research area that are now also supposed to be filled with content. *Education Inquiry* will participate in this work.

This issue of *Education Inquiry* contains four articles. In “Spaces of social inclusion and exclusion. A spatial approach to education restructuring and identity in Sweden”, Joakim Lindgren takes as his point of departure the decentralised Swedish school system that has become ever more directed at the construction of self-governing and responsible pedagogical identities that are supposed to make integration and participation possible. Drawing on the work of the geographer Edward W. Soja, he acknowledges how material and symbolic spatialisation intersects with the local production of included and excluded identities in the context of restructuring education. The article

is based on a study in two areas of a segregated Swedish city, one disadvantaged and the other advantaged. Lindgren uses a wide range of data such as policy documents, questionnaire data, longitudinal statistics, interviews with local politicians, school actors and former students. The findings show that former students from the disadvantaged area were more often excluded from further education and dependent on social welfare to a higher extent. Moreover, they faced low expectations and were simultaneously excluded from new educational processes that explicitly aim at social inclusion. Lindgren discusses how ethical ideals of decentralisation and participation, and the evaluation of such policies in terms of access to further education and work, conceal the local production of excluded identities. This production, he argues, is based on an amalgamation of material conditions and spatial representations.

In his article “Student Participation and School Success. The relationship between participation, grades and bullying among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in Sweden”, Björn Ahlström finds his starting point in the Swedish school law and curriculum which states that students are to be participative in their work and that they should work in a participative manner. The pedagogical idea is that influence and participation have multiple benefits for students’ development. The article examines the relationship between student participation and school success. By using a theoretically based participation index, eight schools were chosen for closer examination. Success was measured by school grades and the level of perceived bullying among students. Student participation seems to have beneficial effects on students’ academic and social development. In schools with a higher level of student participation, the grades were higher and the level of perceived bullying among the students was lower than schools with a smaller level of participation.

In “Proposed Enhancement of Bronfenbrenner’s Development Ecology Model”, Jonas Christensen deals with how academic disciplines are constituted and claims that the related professional developments must be viewed within their wider social, political and economic frameworks. When studying the organisation, transformation and spheres of influence of professions, the Development Ecology model, he argues, provides a tool for understanding the encounter among societal, organisational and individual dimensions, a continual meeting point where phenomena and actors exist on different levels, including those of the organisation and society at large. However, the theory of development ecology may be questioned for how it looks at the individual’s role in relation to other actors in order to define and understand the forces underlying the professional development and constitution of academic disciplines. Factors relating to both the inside of the individual and social ties between individuals and in relation to global factors need to be discussed.

In Jonas Aspelin’s article, “What really matters is ‘between’. Understanding the focal point of education from an inter-human perspective”, the focal point of education is simultaneously defined as the place where the most important educational activity is taking place, and the place where the main interest of educational theory (and

educational practice) should be located. Aspelin discusses the idea that the focal point is located somewhere between the teacher and the student. This idea is introduced by references to Gert Biesta's inter-subjective theory. The article discusses Martin Buber's contribution to understanding the focal point of education. Buber contributes by emphasising "the interhuman" as a primary dimension in relation to "the social". From Buber's perspective, what really matters in education exists in an ontological and relational event. In the last section of the article it is suggested that exploration of the focal point should not stick to just one form of relationship. The interhuman event is, taken by itself, supposed to be primary, yet the focal point cannot be fully understood without a penetrative picture of its social context.

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# What really matters is ‘between’ Understanding the focal point of education from an inter-human perspective

Jonas Aspelin\*

## Abstract

In this article, the focal point of education is simultaneously defined as: i) the place where the most important educational activity is taking place; and ii) the place where the main interest of educational theory (and educational practice) should be located. The article aims to discuss the idea that the focal point is located somewhere between the teacher and the student. This idea is introduced by references to Gert Biesta’s inter-subjective theory and to some more or less classical conceptions which distinguish between two main aspects of sociality. Further, and as a more specific aim, the article discusses Martin Buber’s contribution to understanding the focal point of education. Buber contributes by emphasising “the interhuman” as a primary dimension in relation to “the social”. From Buber’s perspective, what really matters in education exists in an ontological and relational event. In the last section of the article it is suggested that exploration of the focal point should not stick to just one form of relationship. The interhuman event is, taken by itself, supposed to be primary, but the focal point cannot be fully understood without a penetrative picture of its social context.

**Key Words:** Buber, educative relationship, focal point of education, interhuman, social

## Introduction

In his book *Beyond Learning* (2006) Gert Biesta analyses how educational questions can be approached following “the death of the subject” or, in other words, in respect of the inter-subjective turn. The inter-subjective turn is a discursive process within the human sciences whose roots lie in the discovery of *Thou*, often derived from Feuerbach and called by many (see e.g. Asplund 1992, p. 20; Pfeutze 1973, p. 30; and Buber 1947/2002, p. 176) a ‘Copernican revolution’. Biesta’s inter-subjective framework puts into question the two dominating approaches within contemporary educational theory: First, what we might call ‘the societal approach’ in which the main aim of education is understood in terms of students’ adjustments to the social order. Second, what might be labelled ‘the individualistic approach’ in which values such as rationality and autonomy are emphasised and the improvement of individuals is set as a central goal of education. According to Biesta’s alternative approach, educational theory should not, at least not in the first place, deal with questions to do with how students should adjust to society, what a student might become or what the educa-

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©Authors. ISSN 2000-4508, pp.127–136

tional subject is. Instead, the central question is: where does the individual/student become a subject? In my (2007) essay on Biesta's book this question is rephrased in this way: *where is the focal point of education located?*

'Focal point' is synonymous with both centre and focus. Accordingly, the focal point of education is assigned the following twofold meaning:

- the place where the most significant activity is taking place; and (as a result)
- the place educational theory (and educational practice) should pay specific attention to.

This article aims to discuss the idea that the focal point of education is located somewhere 'between'. More specifically, it deals with Martin Buber's contribution to the understanding of the focal point.

### **Two aspects of sociality**

Let us start by reviewing some more or less classical theories that put the idea of 'between' in perspective by distinguishing between two aspects of sociality.

Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/1957) makes a distinction between the concepts *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). *Gemeinschaft* is a living organism, a naturally grown and unplanned form of co-living between humans. In *Gemeinschaft*, relationships are close, intimate and personal. Thoughts and actions are integrated and intrinsic values. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, is a mechanical aggregate, an artificial and planned form of fellowship. Relationships in *Gesellschaft* are impersonal and characterised by distance and scepticism. Thoughts and actions are separate entities and the environment, e.g. other individuals, is treated as a means for predefined goals (cf. Asplund's interpretation of Tönnie's theory in 1991).

Charles H. Cooley (1909/1956) speaks of *primary groups* and implies the existence of something that has later been called *secondary groups*. A primary group is characterised by permanence, close and emotional relationships, face-to-face meetings and a strong we-feeling. The primary group is fundamental in the individual's identity and self-esteem. The secondary group is temporary and characterised by distanced, anonymous relationships and weak we-feelings.

George H. Mead (1934/1947) distinguishes between a kind of *general sociality* in the sense of any constellation larger than one person, and a sociality in which the participants practice *role taking*, that is, share each other's minds. His focus on the latter follows from the basic assumption that there must be other selves if the individual is to exist.

Tamotsu Shibutani (1961/1995) draws a distinction between *interpersonal roles* and *conventional roles*. Interpersonal roles are at work among individuals who are in regular contact with each other. These roles are marked by the participants' personal qualities and the history of their personal relationships. At the same time the actors

appear in conventional roles. They behave according to standardised behavioural patterns, in line with what is expected from the positions they hold in the specific institutional setting.

Victor Turner (1969) distinguishes between *communitas* and *structure*. *Communitas* stands for an unorganised, unstructured type of sociality. In *Communitas* human relationships are characterised by unmediated communication, closeness, spontaneity and social solidarity. *Structure* is an organised, ordered form of sociality. In *Structure*, relationships are mediated by formal structures, as norms, status and sanctions, and they have a distanced, rational and hierarchical character.

Johan Asplund (1992) elaborates the concepts *concrete sociality* and *abstract sociality*. He argues that social interaction has, through the process of modernisation, gone through a radical, qualitative change. The bonds between man and environment have been cut and a new, "naked" individual has appeared. This individual lives in two surroundings: one concrete and personal, the other abstract and societal. Concrete sociality and abstract sociality are two aspects immanent in modernity. Every one of us is a concrete person and has at the same time an abstract double.

Alphonso Lingis (1994) designates two social forms: *the community of those who have nothing in common* and *rational community*. The first is sociality built on difference; individuals get together without having fixed notions of each other, each one expresses his/her personal, unique voice and answers to other unique voices. Rational community is sociality built on identity. It is a social system in which actions are representative for and structured by the specific institutional discourse.

Of course, this brief review does not do justice to the complexity of these theories, nor does it imply that the conceptions are immediately congruent. It simply illustrates two aspects of sociality we could consider when we explore the question of the focal point of education. No actual educational process or educational situation can be fully understood from just one of the two aspects. In line with Asplund's (1991, pp. 42-43) interpretation of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, we could understand the concepts as a "puzzle picture." This means that in every picture of one of the phenomena (e.g. *Gemeinschaft*), a picture of the other (e.g. *Gesellschaft*) is embedded and yet the two pictures cannot be seen at the same time. In other words, a particular educational setting can be understood in terms of one *or* the other aspect, but a fuller understanding requires both aspects to be considered and their mutual relationship to be recognised.

### **The focal point of education is somewhere 'between'**

The works outlined above encourage a shift of interest regarding the specific meaning of education; from separate individuals and social systems towards relations. Different directions within contemporary educational theory are more or less explicitly built on the idea of relations as a basic unit. One of these directions goes under the name 'relational education'. The concept of relational education is often associated with

feminist theory, with names such as Nell Noddings and Carol Gilligan, but in recent years it has become more widespread. For example, in the anthology *No Education Without Relation* from 2004 (Ed. C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin) a number of researchers from different nations and disciplines unite in a “Manifesto of Relational Pedagogy” and sign a common premise that “meaningful education is possible only when relations are carefully understood and developed” (ibid. p. 2).

Biesta wrote one of the articles in the anthology: In “Mind the Gap! Communication and the Educational Relation,” he outlines a theory of the “educative relationship” based on the assumption that there is a fundamental gap between teachers and students. The gap is considered to be a necessary condition for communication and therefore for education to take place. According to Biesta, education is neither located in the teacher’s activities nor in the student’s, but in the reality between the two parties.

Biesta (ibid. pp. 13-22) presents three communication theories which could contribute to an understanding of the gap. The first two – communication as transportation of information and as participation – are set up as contracting pictures, but the third model – labelled “Performative theory of communication” – claims to pave the way for a more precise conception. In describing this model, Biesta refers to the concept from Homi K. Bhabhas (1994) of the “third space of enunciation”. This concept signifies a reality not identical with I or You but instead describes the room or passage between the two poles. According to Bhabha, the construction of meaning takes place between two negotiated distinct parties (individuals or groups). Meaning is therefore always an ambivalent process. As Biesta says in his pedagogical reconstruction of Bhabha’s thought, meaning is not created by the teacher and transferred to the students, and it is also not something the students can create on their own. It is something that originates from and occurs through mutual activity. What really matters is not what I do to you or what you do to me but what we do to each other, or rather: what is being done to us. The main source of students’ understandings of the world and of educational creativity stems from the relationship between themselves and the teacher.<sup>1</sup>

### **Buber’s anthropology**

Buber’s contribution to the question of the focal point of education will now be considered, starting with a depiction of his anthropological philosophy.

In his magnum opus *I and Thou* (1923/2000) Buber develops his ontological notion of two fundamental dimensions in humanity and in a person’s attitude to his/her surrounding world. *I-Thou* is a mutual relationship, a relationship between two living subjects. *I-It* is an individual experience, a connection between a subject and an object without a life of its own. Human essence is realised in the *I-Thou* relationship. In relation to a *Thou* a person becomes present in the world. This world “teaches you to meet others, and to hold your ground when you meet them” (ibid. p. 43). A man

becomes *I* through *Thou* (ibid. p. 39). The *I-Thou* relationship constitutes the human being and it is a possibility in every moment of life. Nevertheless: "The particular *Thou*, after the relational event has run its course, is bound to become an *It*" (ibid. p. 43). Human life has to be arranged according to the *I-It* relationship. *I-It* gives order to our lives; it provides a structure, a "grid of time and space" to use Buber's words, and it organises us socially. But, as Buber puts it in his classic phrase: "All real living is meeting" (ibid, p. 26).

In *Between Man and Man* (1947/2002) Buber elaborates his ontological conception. He now speaks in terms of "the sphere of between" to describe the reality in which the human being has its origin and root. Human experiences, he says, are often divided between two poles, the individual and the collective. "The interhuman" is something else, a third dimension, the pure substance that is left if we exclude inner impressions such as feelings, and external conditions such as interaction structures. It is true community, a realm shared here and now in an encounter, accessible only to the persons who participate in the meeting. Still it transcends the specific spheres of each one: "On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of 'between'" (ibid. p. 243). Thus, the interhuman is not a social or psychological condition but an *event*. It takes place on the edge between a person and his/her surroundings. True community is "the dynamic facing of the other, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*" (ibid. p. 37). The event is extraordinary, fragile and floating. It can neither be expected nor created. It is an ontological reality.

In *Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen* (1953) Buber specifies his conception of human nature as co-existence. He now distinguishes between *the interhuman* and *the social*, and thereby acknowledges two distinct areas of human life. Social contact in groups, Buber notes, does not have to imply personal relations. On the contrary, personal relations are often restrained in groups. In groups we speak and discuss, argue for our positions, talk over different kinds of things. In an interhuman relationship none of this has to happen, but there is a meeting, between two persons who recognise each other as unique, and experience from the other side of the relationship, without losing their grounded subjectivity. Hence, the interhuman is not synonymous with communication processes, nor with other group phenomena or individual processes. It is an event actually located in a vivid sphere between two or more humans. This event is the basic existential condition.

### **Co-existence is the focal point**

Buber's concepts *I-Thou/I-It* and the *interhuman/the social* are apparently related to the other pair of concepts already briefly described above: they capture two main, inter-related aspects of relationships and aim to overcome the duality between individual and society. His explicit notion of the interhuman as a distinct, ontological reality is significant for Buber's conception. Lotta Jons links this idea to education

when saying that: “The central point of the relational focus (...) is that the conception of the teacher and the student is placed in the ontological room between” (2008, p. 192, my translation).

If we observe interaction between a teacher and a student, we note that social relationships are at work; relationships having an influence on individuals’ actions as well as their thoughts, feelings and intentions (see, for instance, Aspelin, 1999; 2006). It is implied in Buber’s thought that individuals can interact without standing in an ontological relation to each other. The reality Buber calls interhuman is “born” in the existential relation and “dies” when this relation ends (Jons, 2008, p. 118). In the social sphere we find group phenomena; cases where the bond between teacher and student leads to common experiences and reactions, where the individuals are included in and influenced by a shared discourse. In the interhuman sphere the teacher and the student relate as persons, becoming *Thou* to each other.

It follows from Buber’s perspective that the focal point of education is found in the brief, unpredictable, immediate occurrence between the teacher and the student, in an event where one person actually co-exists with another. Such events arise against a background of interaction and are also related to a local and extended social and societal context. It includes differentiated subjects – the teacher’s and the student’s attitudes are not identical. Further, it is accompanied by inner processes such as thoughts and feelings. If we want a more complete understanding of what is going on in a specific educational situation, all these levels have to be recognised. Yet, according to Buber, what is of primary importance is the ontological, dynamical relationship: “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 the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*” (Buber, 1923/2000, p. 26). We could say that the focal point of education is the meeting itself. Hence, the interhuman relation is given agency (cf. Jons, 2008, p. 122).

So, from Buber’s point of view it is crucial to recognise the difference between interhuman relations and social relations while exploring the focal point of education. The argument suggests that the focal point of education is located in a personal, existential, momentary meeting.

Of course, in real life the focal point is not a place, either in the physical, psychical or social meaning. It is an exclusive relational event, an irreplaceable moment of co-existence between two differentiated subjects. We could say that the key interest of the educational researcher, as well as of the educational practitioner, should shift towards the short, unpredictable instances where teachers and students are actually present in relation to each other. However, we should not forget that a comprehension of these occurrences requires an understanding of both the individual and the social aspect of the relationship. More importantly, we should not forget that what is authentic about a specific meeting cannot be decided ‘from the outside’. What really matters is between, in a lived relation, and nowhere else.

## Conclusion and critique

This article presupposes that educational theory needs a basic conception of where the focal point of education is located. From an inter-subjective point of view the answer is bound up with the concept of 'between'. Following Buber, but also considering other relational perspectives, two fundamental aspects of the concept of 'between' have been elucidated: one has an ontological nature and the other a socially constructed nature. This idea goes back to Buber's conception of *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships. "The social" is presumably the regular form of sociality in education, as in other institutional settings. Buber shows that the learning subject becomes *I* through the *Thou*. When he/she is immediately present vis-à-vis another person the ontological relation is realised. What really matters is between, in an interhuman event.

In his article *Towards a pedagogy of relation* (2000) Alexander Sidorkin discusses Buber's contribution to relational education. Sidorkin acknowledges Buber's importance for establishing the concept of relationship and the primacy of relationship in education. He notes that Buber introduces a radical distinction between two types of relationship to clarify the great importance of relations. Further, Sidorkin holds that Buber's theory of relationship lacks in nuance. According to Sidorkin there is *I-Thou* or *I-It*, nothing else and nothing in between. In Buber's later work, Sidorkin continues, he develops this binary model and tries to overcome the relational taxonomy and its extreme duality by speaking of "the social" and "the interhuman" dimensions. Sidorkin is not convinced that Buber succeeds in his effort. He says that Buber's binary opposition is simply replaced by another opposition, although less extreme. The pedagogy of relationship cannot be built on Buber's typology, Sidorkin concludes. We need a more nuanced taxonomy of relationship, some sort of graduated scale where different relational qualities can be apprehended.

Let me end with a couple of notes concerning this matter. Buber draws radical distinctions between two relational forms. In spite of this, his philosophy involves considerations of relational nuances, e.g. when he speaks of the world of *It* as more or less "penetrated and fructified by the inflowing world of *Thou* as by living streams" (Buber, 1923/2000, p. 54). Buber's ideal view of education is, in my interpretation (2005), not a pure interhuman relationship but a continuous oscillation between the social and the interhuman. Thus, Sidorkin seems to be too categorical in his interpretation of Buber's philosophy. However, I think his critique offers an important hint: if we intend to explore the focal point of education, we should not look fixedly at one kind of relationship. It might be more productive to think in terms of a "puzzle picture," as Asplund does in his interpretation of Tönnies. As suggested in this article, an answer to the question of where the focal point of education is located needs to pay attention to two basic relational dimensions, one ontological and the other socially constructed. The interhuman events are primary, but they cannot be fully understood without a penetrative picture of its social context, and vice versa. In a sense, the first aspect exists within the second as a constant possibility and as an unexpected break

in the ordinary way of dealing with things. While observing a certain educational process, the question is not how it can be categorised, i.e. if it is a manifestation of one or the other relation, but how the two aspects are interrelated and how they act side by side. Then, even if we are right in saying that the concept of the interhuman holds the key to the question of the focal point of education, this can hardly be more than one side of the truth.

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## **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Biesta also deals with his version of the third space in other texts, such as in (1999) where the “radical intersubjectivity” concept is distinguished from other conceptions of intersubjectivity in which the subject and not the relation is in focus.

