

The other and the intersubjective



In the following write up, my attempt is to explicate the understanding of the 'other' and 'intersubjectivity' vis-à-vis the way people interact with each other. It appears that there are two ways of interactions the 'subject-object' interaction and the 'subject-subject' interaction. The subject-object interaction can perhaps be understood through the method of the positivist, the scientist, the behaviorist, and those of the ilk who divide the universe into the material and the non-material and declare the material to be real. They then create an 'objective' universe of method and thought. The 'subject-subject' interactions can be understood on the differences between the 'inter-subjective' (between two subjects) and the 'intersubjective' (within two subjects thereby avowing continuity), the former is available in the thought and writings of Hegel, Husserl, Levinas and Lacan and the latter through the thought and writings of Buber. Questions that arose in the mind of the researcher from this categorization have become the groundwork for exploration in the direction of developing a research proposal. The understanding of 'I', 'Other' and the ensuing implications for the method of 'Dialogue' in education may become the thrust for this study. What follows is an articulation of the possibilities for developing a research proposal

In today's techno-mechanistic world our object-centered understanding dominates our interaction with not only inanimate things but also in our approach towards beings around us. The interaction with beings is replaced by the inferences based on the outward manifestation of behavior. The world, then, is an object, and by looking at things, empirically, one can understand the truth. This is the approach of the positivist paradigm, in which the content of knowledge consists of objective truths or facts and the

knower can gather these facts as information. The knower then becomes a recipient of information who has to process 'it' to assimilate into the preexisting categories or to make new ones for reproducing that information as and when required. The universe of educational studies is largely dominated by an understanding of the processes and purposes based on the discipline of psychology and the positivist paradigm is the basis of most of the personality theories in Psychology. Nevertheless, psychology has expanded itself with the understanding of philosophies like existentialism and phenomenology to fill this gap. This movement is the response to the cry against the 'objectivity' of science and the psychological theories based on the 'scientific model'.

As we move from the 'subject-object' interaction towards the 'subject-subject' interaction, we realize that the self itself requires the 'other' to define itself. This 'other' is not an object though it may be an inanimate thing. Then everything around one becomes a walking mirror for one to see the image of oneself in all and all in oneself. The interactions, then, are not with persons but with projected images of one's own self, sometimes even to the extent of denying the 'other's existence. With these images, one identifies and because of these identifications, one emotes. Because of this identification one believes that he can understand the 'other', empathize and make predictions about his behavior. Other people are part of one's totality in one's sameness and this primary way of being-in-the-world with others seems to be quite egocentric. It is to say that we are always 'being-in-a-situation', where our being as selves is inseparable from a shared, meaningful life-world.

This 'inter-subjective' of the 'subject-subject' is the focus in the phenomenological inquiry. This intersubjectivity refers to the contents, not the context, of consciousness and addresses the psychological domain rather than philosophical issues and this intersubjectivity is preceded by the subjectivity of the participants. The intersubjectivity refers to the coming together of already existing and experiencing subjects, where they have separate consciousnesses being shaped interdependently by their interaction. This incorporates in itself the notions of self as ego, which is there to experience the world.

Nevertheless, Husserl's idea of the 'other' seems to be quite close to the above elaboration, "The other then is a phenomenological modification of myself, for Husserl, grasped only "within my ownness". This grasping is on the basis of something like analogy. Just as a primary givenness is experienced in perception, memory affords a kind of secondary givenness" (Moran, 2000. p. 177).

Hegel claims that, "such subject-object identity, such self-consciousness, exists perfectly only in love" (Beiser, 1949. p. 113) in which the 'subject' and 'object', 'self' and 'other', realize their natures through one another, they recognize 'itself' only through the 'other'. This is possible because, "there is a single structure of self-consciousness holding between self and other: the self knows itself in the other as the other knows itself in the self" (ibid.).

Levinas, however, uses two different words for speaking of the other; the non-personal 'other' in general and the other person, as the 'Other'.

Levinas claims that the self-other relation is not reciprocal, but rather that there is a priority of the other over the self. This is what he calls the ‘asymmetry’ of the relation between self and other. The ‘Other’ means for Levinas “that which cannot be objectified, the sphere of subjectivity, although not understood in the spirit of mastery, but rather as founded on openness to the other” (Moran, 2000. p. 342). Levinas pays special emphasis on the understanding of the other for the understanding of ethics. For Levinas, “ethics is never an egocentric mode of behaving, nor the construction of theories, but involves the effort to constrain one’s freedom and spontaneity in order to be open to the other person, or more precisely to allow oneself to be constrained by the other” (Ibid. p. 321).

Lacan uses a similar classification in which the other is, “the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the EGO” (Evans, 2006. p. 135) and the ‘Other’ designates, “the radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification” (ibid. p. 136). Lacan explains that the child, during the mirror stage, acquires the sense of ‘self’ at the price of his self becoming an-other that is distinct from him and visible in the reflection of the mirror.

However, the inherent continuity in the relation of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ in ‘intersubjectivity’ as opposed to the distinction of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ emerges through Buber’s writings. This ‘intersubjectivity’ is different from the ‘Inter-subjectivity’ that refers to how the consciousness of participating subjects is in interaction during an experience.

The understanding of intersubjectivity that Buber explicates here is that the intersubjectivity is from the whole being of an individual and this is its most radical meaning. Therefore, intersubjectivity now can be conceptualized as a process of co-creativity, where relationship is ontologically primary. The being of any one subject is dependent on the being of all other subjects in the relationship. Here, intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity. Further Buber (1958, p. 1) wrote, “ There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It.” Here, the I-It refers to the ‘ subject-object’ and the ‘ inter-subjective’ of the ‘ subject-subject’ ways of interaction. The I-It is the primary word of experiencing and ‘ using’ of the positivist paradigm in which the ‘ I’ is distant from the ‘ object’. It takes place within a man; it is entirely subjective and lacking in mutuality whether in knowing, feeling, or acting, it is the ‘ subject-object’ relation. Whereas in I-Thou, the “ inter” in ‘ intersubjectivity’ refers to an “ interpenetrating” subjectivity which is holistically mutual. The I-Thou is not limited to men but may include the whole world.

“ Thus in the silent or spoken dialogue between the I and the Thou both personality and knowledge come into being. Unlike the subject-object knowledge of the I-It relation, the knowing of the I-Thou relation takes place neither in the ‘ subjective’ nor the ‘ objective,’ the emotional nor the rational, but in the ‘ between’ -the reciprocal relationship of whole and active beings” (Friedman, p. 60).

The questions, then which the researcher is left with, after this very preliminary and tentative probe are around the three areas probed so far and may lead to other areas like the ‘ Self’ in relation to the above and to

implications of the ' Consciousness' or ' Self', ' I', ' inter-subjective' and the ' Other'. Some of the questions may be articulated as under: –

How has the movement in the understanding from the ' subject-object' interaction of the positivist paradigm to the ' subject-subject' interaction of phenomenology helped us in our understanding of the ' other'?

What is the relation between the ' self' and the ' other'?

Does the phenomenological entail the merging of the ' I' in the ' other' or does it endanger the other by consumption and annihilation?

How does the understanding of the ' I', the ' other', ' inter-subjective' and ' intersubjectivity' impact on pedagogy?

How does our understanding of ' Dialogue' develop with our understanding of the ' I', the ' other' and the ' intersubjectivity'?

Does our understanding of the ' I', the ' other', ' inter-subjective' and ' Intersubjectivity' affects our understanding of the ' Values', ' Selfhood' and ' Consciousness'?

Will a study of the ' I', the ' Other', ' inter-subjective' and the ' Intersubjectivity' lead us to probe the normalize, i. e. in the realm of ethics and axiology, when contextualized in education,