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I, Thou, and It

A philosophy of education, my vision of it,
and my own burgeoning approach to teaching.

“I, Thou, and It – a three-way relationship in which I and Thou are the people (teacher and student) and It is the content that compels them both.”

Both seek knowledge: the teacher to learn where the starting point is for the student and to facilitate the student’s knowledge and the student to achieve that knowledge, thereby completing the triangle..

<http://www.hawkinscenters.org/i-thou-and-it.html#sthash.R8xKepc5.dpuf>

“Watch yourself when you meet a new person – it is when you find some common ground that the relationship becomes interesting. Watch two children negotiate during play – how easily a conflict can be resolved when the end goal is to continue a mutually interesting game. When two human beings share a mutual interest, the spark and excitement surrounding the exploration of this interest is electrifying.”

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My view of the triangle:

I is the facilitator for *Thou* to be at one with *It*. *Thou* reaches out to the facilitator to provide a path to the incorporation of the essence of *It*. *It* is the moment; place; thing; mood; knowledge; which *Thou* will become one with as *I* accompanies and facilitates the journey into the heart of *It*.



I like to picture *It* as the entire space within the triangle, and *Thou* and *I* meeting there. Knowledge starts when the triangle pulsates from its center. My vision of the concept of *Thou* and *I* meeting at the *It* of commonality and interest is akin to the chaotic nature of space as an expanding continuum. The *I* and *Thou* become connected molecularly, as they explore and incorporate *It*. The triangle bulges from its center, the three points are stretched until they lie along an ellipse or circle and continually encompass, and are moved by, *It*, and knowledge grows.

I see the connectivity of the triangle concept. I question its suggestion - by its structure - that our concept of time is truly quantifiable. I see *I*, *Thou*, and *It* in continuous motion, flowing and weaving among each other in immeasurable space.

Vygotsky's four stages of learning illustrate *I*, *Thou* and *It* in practice. In his description of the infinite movement of the learner (*Thou*) and the teacher (*I*) from the first through the third stages, where *Thou* has a functionally independent amount of knowledge, to the fourth stage, where *Thou* seeks additional knowledge through the help of *I*. In effect, *Thou* returns to any of the previous stages depending on how much knowledge *Thou* seeks, No matter how much deviation *Thou* travels from the foundational knowledge of the original subject, they are continually interrelated. For *Thou*, the *I* may differ, but *I*'s role remains facilitative and *It* remains the focus.

The philosopher and educator, Martin Buber, in his book, “I and Thou:”

“The human being to whom I say You I do not experience. But I stand in relation to him, in the sacred basic word. Only when I step out of this do I experience him again. Experience is remoteness from You.”

Buber, Martin (2011-05-17). *I and Thou*, Trans. Kaufmann (Kindle Locations 737-738). Kindle Edition.

I see this as another way of describing the unity of *I* and *Thou* and *It* in *teaching*. I put “teaching” in italics to emphasize the word as it being charged. The triangle (my ellipse) is the relationship; the relation that Buber describes. The charged-ness of the word “teaching” exemplifies Buber’s definition of experiencing; i.e., being remote: the antithesis of teaching from within the triangle (ellipse).

Because I have never taught language to anyone who was pre-literate in their first language, or had no knowledge of the language to be learned with me, I must examine how this idea might work from the basis of my teaching other subjects completely new to my students, most of them experiential.

Drawing: *Thou* wants to be able to draw. *I* wants to enable *Thou* to draw. *It* is to know how to draw.

I and *Thou* are connected to *It* (hopefully with the same intensity). Our paths develop simultaneously.

Out of necessity, for optimum oneness with *It*, we cannot be ahead or behind one another. This happens within amorphous states, not along equidistant lines.

To teach *search and rescue in the wilderness* (a more complex task): There are three foci:

1. the skill to find
2. the emotional understanding of oneself as the searcher of the lost

3. the emotion upon finding - or not finding - the lost

The searcher will have these emotions to bear as well as the physical task of the search. The three *Its* show foci of *Thou*. Emotional self control is always a factor in any learning situation: it's measure can often be that insidious effective filtering which interferes with optimum learning! In search and rescue, it is paramount that we do not allow this filter to diminish our acuity. *I* and *Thou* work together as a team. *I* works alongside *Thou's* progress, steering and nudging as *Thou* needs - no more than that - so *Thou* is stretched to the point of acquisition of skill and perfect oneness with *It*.

Here is an exercise where *I* can literally be enmeshed with *It* (the continuously bulging ellipse). If *I* plays the part of the person lost, and ensures that *Thou* has an extremely difficult search, *Thou* will feel the panic and insecurity often present in a real search and rescue operation. This lesson will never be forgotten.

I, Thou, It can be a lovely analogy to Chaos theory. If the triangle becomes a pulsating and boundless three dimensional tetrahedron (preferably, my ellipse), it can represent the transition between the order of knowing and the disorder of not knowing.

"...closed spaces without limits are conceivable." Albert Einstein

The manner and form of integration of *I* and *Thou* with *It* is unpredictable, but it remains interrelational.

“As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.” Albert Einstein

<http://fractalfoundation.org/resources/what-is-chaos-theory/>

I use this quotation to suggest the impossibility of **not** learning. As long as the learner breathes, there is no timeline or certainty. Fossilization is impossible.

My hypothetical language classroom:

Creating a powerful connection with the learner requires a three-dimensional, expanding format. I see language as empowerment, and to help the learner communicate effectively requires verbal, tactile, and motile ways toward communicative competence.

I would play music selected by my students. I would encourage them to dance. I would incorporate language into these actions. As my lessons progressed, I would use objects and actions with them to integrate vocabulary and grammar. I would offer the students exercises in self reporting of their interests: eg., through visuals, writing, speaking, or theatre.

With their increasing command of the language, I would expect a concomitant level of discourse.

For me, Dogme, incorporating Suggestopedia and Participatory approaches, seems to give the greatest flexibility in reaching and encouraging the passion and love of learning that students have. It is my job to enable each student become aware of the inherent capabilities of us all.