

Opening up Space for Intersubjective Relationships to Flourish:
A Study of Intersubjective Forms of Education and the Spaces
in which they (may) Occur.

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Abstract

Highlighted against Joldersma's (2004) assertion that Christian higher education should make the world a place of human flourishing, this article seeks to show that certain philosophies about the human can serve to oppress rather than incite flourishing. Drawing heavily on the work of Biesta, it is argued that intersubjective relationships encourage uniqueness and individuality, but also stress the reciprocal responsibility of each human within the relationship. Learning spaces are shown to either oppress intersubjective relationships, or foster their development.

Opening up Space for Intersubjective Relationships to Flourish

“The goal of Christian higher education is to change the world by making it a place of human flourishing. It means nourishing forms of community in which openness and acceptance are fostered...It means keeping before us the faces and voices of those who suffer.” (Joldersma, 2004, p. xix)

Introduction

Joldersma claims that the goal of Christian higher education is to promote human flourishing. Although he is speaking specifically about higher education, this is a lofty and worthwhile goal that is equally applicable in all forms of education, both formal and informal. Most would argue that the work of education in which they are engaged does in fact accomplish, or at least strives to accomplish, this objective. This paper will argue that there are philosophical assumptions and practices within our current educational practice that actually serve to oppress those within it rather than incite flourishing.

It will be argued that the typically Modern conception of the human, which has heavily dictated the manifestations and understanding of education globally, restricts the human from fully experiencing him/herself as a unique individual and, in consequence, denies those whom he/she encounters to experience the same. It will be shown that philosophies of intersubjectivity, drawing heavily on the work of Biesta, can provide us with fresh insight with which to think about education. When intersubjective thought is positioned against the traditionally dominant Modern conception of education, it will become apparent that there are injustices of power, coercion, and oppression woven throughout current practices of learning and the spaces in which they occur. It is only through critically analyzing our current learning spaces and rethinking how they can be

designed, that the principles of intersubjectivity can bear fresh fruit on which to model learning that can truly bring about ‘human flourishing’.

The Subject-Object Dichotomy

It is not difficult to imagine or understand how a Modern conception of the human being has impacted how education has been deployed: one has simply to look at the majority of classrooms throughout the world and/or to reminisce upon the classroom that one grew up in. A Modern conception of the human has been and continues to be the dominant paradigm that shapes education. Standardized testing, teacher-centred classrooms, and uniform curriculum are all reflections of Modernity’s legacy. Behind all practice, however, lies a philosophy shaping that practice. In this case, it is a specific Modern picture of the human that provides the foundation. The Modern conception of the human can be captured in the epistemological assumptions regarding what the human is able to know, and how the human can be known.

What the Human can Know

Biesta (2004) claims that “the educational project of emancipation through the development of reason has been a central element, if not the most central element of modernity and modernization” (p. 308). In this, it is assumed that the individual human is able, through accumulation of prior knowledge and the use of the 5 senses, to reason objectively and to come to rational conclusions about the accumulated knowledge. In this view, knowledge exists as corporeal and definite - an entity that can be accumulated and gained. Against this, Ashworth (2004) counters that “interpretation depends on standpoint, and the meaning 'of something' has to be in terms of the relevance of the thing to the interpreter (or learner) (p. 149). The interpreter, according to Ashworth, cannot

exclude him/herself: “the interpreter cannot be disembodied, de-historicized and a-cultured” (p. 149). In this the tension inherent in an epistemological view wherein there are ‘things’ that can be known objectively outside of experience is clear. If it is impossible for the human to know anything outside of his/her experience, objective thought becomes practically impossible. Empirical thought processes are possible but completely objective conclusions are impossible. However, it must be stressed, as will be shown below, that what is at stake here is not abandoning “scientific knowledge or ethical concerns”, as Gomes (2012, p. 6) cautions, “it is about making room for subjectivities and not producing them.”

How we are Known

The Modern assumption is that each human is like a blank slate on which truth can be written, like an empty vessel into which facts can be deposited. Uljens (2002) contrasts this when he claims that “even the newborn child is already an experienced subject, a cultural being, she is not a tabula rasa, something completely new” (p. 6). The experience of the human must be acknowledged in any attempt to define him/her (if such an attempt can be made). The idea that “we can ultimately know who we are and that we can use this knowledge as the foundation for the way in which we organize our lives...limits and excludes possible other ways of being human” (Biesta, 2004, p. 309). If the human can be known objectively, the end result is fixed and the subjectivity of the human is erased. If, rather, the understanding of the human is formatted to become one which acknowledges that an objective understanding is impossible, it becomes necessary, Biesta (1999) says, to make a shift from “*what* the subject is to the question *who* this subject, as a singular being is” (p. 208).

It is not enough, however, to simply stop at a realization that each individual must be regarded as a subject instead of an object. It must be claimed with Uljens (2002) that the other must also be regarded as a subject instead of an object (p. 4). Without making this important step, the belief is unquestioningly propagated that “the individual by herself constitutes herself and the world, without relation to alterity” (Uljens, p. 4). Instead, it must acknowledge that “the question of who someone is cannot be resolved through introspection but needs an encounter with others” (Biesta, 2006, 47). The human cannot become fully human, fully individual and unique, without the continually reciprocated interrelation with the other. These relationships can be called *intersubjective*. The next section will analyze what philosophies of intersubjectivity have to offer the field of education and indeed, that an educational schema integrating the wisdom of intersubjective relationships can do much to work towards relieving instances of power and coercion in order to bring about ‘human flourishing’.

Intersubjective Education

“In short: in order to have self-love, we need to be loved or to have hope of being loved. Refusal to love – a snub, a rejection, denial of the status of a love-worthy object – breeds self-hatred. *Self-love is built of the love offered to us by others.*

Others must love us first, so that we can begin to love ourselves.” (Bauman, 2009, p. 35)

The above quote captures well the reciprocal foundation of intersubjectivity. Of primary importance in intersubjective relationships is what happens between subjects.

Zembylas (2005) claims that the “the focus of education should not be on ‘knowing’ the Other (since this is impossible, anyway), but on a radical openness in communication and

an attention to the (unknowable) particularity of the Other” (p. 150). The difference between intersubjectivity and a Modern conception of education is, as Biesta (1999) says, that “the point of departure...is no longer assumed to be situated in the *ego cogito*, the individual knowing subject. Instead primacy is given to what takes place *between* subjects” (p. 205). If the point of departure transfers from the individual subject-object relationship to the reciprocal relationship between subjects, what does this mean for education, which is to ask, how does this effect pedagogical situations within a learning space?

In comparing intersubjective philosophies of the human subject to Modern philosophies of the human subject, Biesta (2004, 2006), borrows the term ‘rational communities’ from Lingis. He uses this term to describe communities where the human subject is treated as an object to be known, and where there is a common language and discourse that is used to describe the known objects within the community. This should not be understood as an actual physical group, but rather as a philosophical ideal that is expected of inhabitants within a particular culture. In education, a rational community would be a place where strict, inflexible standards are expected of everyone, such as what is common in most schools. Biesta (2004) says that “it does matter *what* we say” in the rational community, but “it does not matter *who* is saying it because in the rational community we are interchangeable” (p. 315). The rational community is oppressive because it denies the subjectivity of each individual subject involved in interactions and consequently their ability to “come into the world” as Biesta phrases it (2006).

When Biesta uses the metaphor of subjects ‘coming into the world’, he is speaking about the relational character of education and that humans are thoroughly

social in their development as unique individuals. “Coming into the world” is about “entering the social fabric” (Biesta, 2006, p. 28). For Biesta, if someone is denied having a unique voice, and is instead only allowed to speak in the language of the rational community, he/she is denied the opportunity to uniquely ‘come into the world’. He argues that if we “are with others before we are with ourselves” (Biesta, 1998, p. 91), and “we *are* ourselves (with others) before we *know* ourselves” (p. 91), we, consequently, deny others the possibility of ‘coming into the world’ if we are ourselves unable to ‘come into the world’. Bonnet (1999) echoes this when he suggests that “there is a fundamental sense in which I exist in my service to the other; my subjectivity is a subjection to the other” (p. 362). Biesta uses the phrase ‘coming into presence’ to indicate a subject’s involvement in an intersubjective relationship (Biesta, 2004, 2006). Through ‘coming into presence’ we are able to help others ‘come into the world’, or to use another metaphor, allow them to experience ‘new beginnings’ (Biesta, 2006, p. 84). This is the communal nature of intersubjectivity: “coming into presence is... a presentation, not to oneself, but to a community” (Biesta, 2004, p. 212).

Practically, one may ask, how do intersubjective relationships actually happen? In intersubjective relationships, Wiszniewski (2008) says, “it is not what is being said that is important—it is the saying” (p. 183). Smith (1993) describes this as the ‘I-Thou’ relationship, as opposed to an ‘I-It’ relationship. In an authentic ‘I-Thou’ relationship, each subject in the dialogue listen[s] to the other with the expectation that what the other says might actually be *true*” (Smith, p. 383). This is to be distinguished from dialogic relationships where truth is “brought *into* the dialogue”, instead of truth emerging “*out of* the dialogue” (p. 384). This is an important point; the claim here is not a postmodern

argument about whether or not truth is relative or absolute. Rather, the claim is that truth may come out of the relationship with the other. Therefore, it is important that “the voice with which you speak...is not a borrowed or representative voice, but has to be your *own* voice and no one else's” (Biesta, 2004, p. 316). If one speaks with the language of the ‘rational community’ others will be denied the opportunity to ‘come into the world’ because the voice one uses is not one’s own – not an authentic, subjective voice.

A Pedagogy of Intersubjectivity

Because spontaneity and circumstance dictate intersubjective relationships, it is difficult to predict, much less mandate, a pedagogy for intersubjectivity. It should also be considered contrary to intersubjectivity to mandate curricula, per se, as the risk is that a ‘rational discourse’ (the language of the rational community, norms, standards, etc.) will be created. Biesta (1994) notes that intersubjectivity “should not be understood as a means that can be used to bring about individual identity” (p. 316). Instead, intersubjectivity “is the matrix out of [sic] which identity comes forward” (p. 316). Although this is true, there are a number of principles to consider when striving to incorporate intersubjectivity into pedagogical situations. The work of Emmanuel Levinas is important to explore in this regard.

When considering the work of Levinas, it is clear that not only do humans only ‘come into presence’ through intersubjective relationship with the other, the individual subject has an “infinite responsibility for the otherness of the other” (Biesta, 2003, p. 62). Joldersma (2008) claims that “for Levinas, a person’s worth is brought to light in the concrete encounter with the other” (p. 33). My worth is determined by my ‘infinite responsibility’ for others and dependent upon the acceptance by the other of their

responsibility for me. It is clear that the responsibility lies squarely with each individual to respond *to* the other, but also to be a response *for* the other. No one can take my place as “I, only I, stand in the place of the other, being responsible to the point of substitution” (Jodersma, 2008, 37). When one considers the worth of the individual in intersubjective relationships, it is evident that to view the human as a knowable subject, instead of a responsible, or response-able (Biesta, 2003, 67) subject, is oppressive and provides room only for becoming a member of the rational community.

It is also clear that to create space to ‘come into presence’ and for others to ‘come into the world’ requires an approach to pedagogy that allows intersubjective relationships to blossom. In the next section of this paper the role that learning spaces, both tangible and not, can play in prohibiting and promoting intersubjective relationships will be examined.

Space for Intersubjectivity

Palmer (1993) tells us that:

“To sit in a class where the teacher stuffs our minds with information, organizes it with finality, insists on having the answers while being utterly uninterested in our views, and forces us into a grim competition for grades...[is to] experience a lack of space for learning” (p. 70).

This captures well the space that Biesta (2006) is speaking about when he claims that “the responsibility of the educator, is not only a responsibility for ‘newcomers’ – it is...a responsibility to create and keep in existence a ‘worldly space’ through which new beginnings can come into presence” (p. 107). In considering spaces that can serve to allow ‘new beginnings’ and promote ‘coming into presence’, it is important to think both

of the physical spaces that are designed for learning, but also the intangible environments that are created by those occupying the spaces intended for learning. Kornberger & Clegg (2004), in their study exploring what they call ‘generative’ buildings, argue that “a room may have a view, four walls, and a ceiling and floor, but that tells us nothing about it unless we know what meanings it contains, represses, opens up, or resonates with” (1096). Space is not neutral and always embodies philosophies about the human. Certainly it is known from experience that even if the space is designed with certain intentions, the ethos created inside that space can serve to limit or promote its intended purpose. Thus, the philosophy of a space can be oppressive to intersubjective relationships.

Philosophy and Space

Foucault writes extensively of the evolution of power structures in society in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995). Through his comprehensive study, he traces power from what Piro (2008) calls “a vertical axis (top down)” to a “horizontal (equally balanced) conjunction” (p. 41). Power in society has been transformed and has culminated in what he calls self-surveillance which is personified, according to Foucault, in Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon.

Without digressing into too much detail, the Panopticon can be described as a prison where the prisoners were always visible and under the gaze of a guard who may or may not have been present. Essentially, behaviour was modified by the possibility of being under surveillance; thus, self-surveillance. In a particularly poignant passage, Foucault (1995) writes that “whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may

be used” (p. 205). Another important point about the Panoptic structure was that “it did not try to restore or rehabilitate the individual back to the place in society that he had lost by transgression, but sought rather to create a subject who conformed, obeying unquestioningly and unhesitatingly” (Piro, 2008, p. 36). There is a cynical tendency here to over emphasize the ramifications of Foucault’s implications for schools and learning spaces. Provenzo (2008) goes as far as to claim that the emergence of windows in classroom doors is an instance of Panoptic control in schools, while Malecki (2000) maintains that “all teaching is power and the various modalities of teaching are simply variations in the exercise of power” (p. 7). These are oversimplifications and perhaps even exaggerations of Foucault’s conjecture. However, it is not difficult to consider ways that Panoptic control can infiltrate schools and learning spaces. However, another ramification of Foucault’s work is important here.

Piro (2008) provides a different snapshot into the work of Foucault when he states that “perhaps more than any other social institution, schools create a regime of power by defining norms” (p. 41). Norms, as mentioned above, imply that the human subject can be known objectively and further, that what needs to be known can be prescribed for him/her. Norms, in turn, deny the possibility of ‘new beginnings’ and ‘coming into presence’. In many ways, traditional classroom practices reflect this normalizing function of power as Ford (2003) further explains: “the practices by which we divide groups of participants, the practices by which we identify behaviours or people as normal and others as special or deviant, the practices by which we identify success are all as risky as they are pedagogically useful” (p. 22). The real danger is that “part of the practice of norms is their capacity to function, once established, as unquestioned givens” (Ford, p.

23). One of the tasks in creating spaces for intersubjective relationships is to begin actively attempting to recognize ‘unquestioned givens’ that serve as oppressors to ‘beginners’ both tangible and intangible.

While the intangible environments of learning spaces can serve to oppress rather than encourage flourishing, physical spaces can be designed to do either as well. There are two ways to look at learning spaces, however, as can be seen when Biesta (1999) suggests that “we may want to argue that education should be conceived as a space, or perhaps even as *the* space where the subject as a singular being, as a “who,” as some *one*, comes into presence” (p. 215). While this may be true, the semantics here can become cumbersome. Biesta is speaking about the methodological space that intersubjective education could create. What will be focused on in this section is the physical learning spaces that we typically call schools and how they can be designed with the principles of intersubjectivity in mind.

Biesta (2006) cautions that “there is an extremely thin line between the desire to address social problems through architecture and the creation of new forms of surveillance and control that limit the opportunities for human action” (p. 108). In an attempt to ensure that spaces for learning incite ‘human flourishing’, they can actually (un)intentionally become oppressive. Shah and Kesan (2004) are correct when they assert that “architecture is not neutral, but social and political” (p. 14). Further, although their work regarding ‘generative’ buildings contains some helpful principles, Kornberger and Clegg’s (2004) claim that “architecture is always ambiguous” and that “it can neither ensure nor hinder freedom” (p. 1103) contains a problem: architecture can never be fully ambiguous, places are always designed with a specific ethos in mind. Architects are not

exempt from being shaped and molded by their life experience and so their beliefs and assumptions about the human will unfold in their work.

Shah and Kesan (2004) argue that architecture regulates human behaviour in three ways: “first, architecture can play a communicative role by expressing cultural or symbolic meanings. Second, the architecture can affect how people interact. Third, architecture can be biased and treat certain social groups or values more favorably” (p. 3).

It is the second of Shah and Kesan’s argument that will be explored in this section.

Because intersubjective relationships have everything to do with interaction and communication, spaces that foster intersubjective relationships must be places that are designed to encourage interaction. Bonnet (2009) says it well when he claims that schools need to be “built to facilitate such encounters that constitute the ‘worldly space’ in which we can come into presence as unique individuals” (p. 362). This is why Biesta (2006, 1999) borrows terminology from architect Bernard Tschumi and claims that “architecture is *simultaneously* space and event” (110, 210). Architecture cannot be dichotomized between the created space and the events that happen within that space. Rather, events should be seen as “those happenings that can neither be foreseen nor controlled by the architectural program, but that ‘cross’ the program and yet are also enabled by it” (Biesta, 2006, p. 46).

It is here that Biesta (2006) comes to a difficult conclusion in a discussion of the assumed ability to differentiate between the *form* and *function* of architectural space. He admits that there is a problem in designing spaces to be used for a defined purpose (even if that purpose is supposedly to *avoid* defining a purpose). He comes to the conclusion that:

“If architects want to escape functionalism, if they want to give up the desire to control, they have to give up architecture; if, however, architects want to be architects, if they want to take up the responsibility of the architect, they have to be functionalists in one way or another. Both options, in a sense, betray the responsibility of the architect, or at least the responsibility of the architect who doesn’t want to control the way in which people use their buildings.” (p. 114-115)

While he is correct in this conclusion, it is impossible in all things, as argued above, to be able to step outside of one’s experience to make ‘objective’ decisions. Biesta accepts this and concedes that architects must rather “take the contradiction seriously...to give it a central place in one’s understanding of what it means to be an architect” (p. 115). With this understanding, it is helpful to explore a number of principles that will help in considering design for spaces that foster intersubjective relationships.

Kornberger and Clegg (2004) outline what they call ‘generative buildings’. In their discussion, they decide that spaces that are generative must combine flexibility and organization, and must make us creative and passionate instead of docile and knowable (p. 1104). The tension here is that “completely ordered or completely chaotic systems have difficulty evolving, improving, or progressing” (p. 1105). Generative buildings are distinguished from terminal buildings wherein function is already determined in advance. Instead, they claim that generative buildings must embody “(dis)order, flexibility, problem generation, movement, and design” (p. 1107). They are suggesting that spontaneity is a major theme in generative buildings and claim that inhabitants should be called ‘illegal architects’ because they will be “(ab)using and (re)defining space according to the context and situation” (p. 1108).

At the conclusion of their description, they claim that a generative building “organizes the flows of communication, knowledge, and movement” (1108). It is important to note, however, that the word that is used to describe how communication, knowledge, and movement are mapped out is that they are ‘organized’. The fear in fostering intersubjective relationships and the spaces in which they occur is that interactions will be preplanned; preplanning assumes that there is an objective and attainable end goal. Organizing should not be understood as preplanning as such, but should be considered as providing opportunities. Kornberger and Clegg maintain that it is at the intersection of communication, knowledge, and movement that “surprises emerge that cannot be intentionally produced and controlled” (p. 1108).

What becomes clear through the work of Kornberger and Clegg is that spaces designed for intersubjective relationships must be flexible because “what might seem useful today can become the obstacle to tomorrow’s success” (p. 1102). The spaces must be designed for change and spontaneity as it is impossible (and unhelpful) to predict the function for which they will be used. In this way, they are paradoxical in nature and must predict the unpredictable. They must be places where “surprising things may happen” (1107).

Another way to look at learning space and architecture is to regard it with Wiszniewski (2008), as a “space of communicativity”. Wiszniewski argues that architecture is itself a manner of speech and wonders if “architecture can speak to welcome the Other and as interlocutor for the Other” (p. 185). He further clarifies that “as speech, architecture stands for a speaker not there” (p. 192). Taken more simply, if architecture is the product of an architect who has a certain voice, the created artifact

itself will reflect its creator. In this way, the created architecture can represent the speaker (architect) not there and as such can act as interlocutor of the other. The logical conclusion here is that architecture itself can become the reciprocal subject in the intersubjective relationship: architecture does the saying. The problem with this argument is that architecture is static, at least insofar as the actual walls and foundation are concerned. The additional problem is that architecture in itself is unable to reciprocate anything said against it. While the argument is well-taken that architecture speaks forth from its creator, the only application this can have is what has already been claimed: that architecture is not neutral.

Practical Implications

Because of the nature of intersubjective relationships it is difficult to outline any one architectural design that will ‘work’ in fostering these relationships. Any attempt at definitively prescribing the use of a space subverts the nature of the intersubjective relationship by denying its necessity to be spontaneous and malleable – to avoid constructing norms to which the relationship must conform. However, it is obvious that without some manner of deciding upon design, an infinite cycle of indecision would be created. For this reason, it is helpful to outline a few directions for intersubjective spaces.

Montgomery (2008) makes the assertion that “space management requires specific epistemological decisions” (128). While this is partially true, the inverse is also true: our epistemological decisions guide our pedagogies. Consequently, engaging in intersubjective relationships will guide how we approach education and not the other way around. The outlook on how interactions happen between individuals takes on new meaning as does the job description of the teacher. Instead of making assumptions or

prescribing criteria for the human to become *something*, humans need the space to be *someone*. Bonnet (2009) argues that “the basic posture of education should be one of openness to different ways of being human” (p. 361), and consequently that the process must be “experimental and experiential” (p. 362). The space must be such that something new can be created, that something new can occur. The space should not simply be one where reproduction of norms is expected. Learning happens when “someone responds to what is unfamiliar, what is different, what challenges, irritates, or even disturbs” (Biesta, 2004, p. 320). In these instances “learning is an invention or creation, it is a process of bringing something new into the world, namely, one's own, unique response, one's own voice” (p. 320).

Zembylas (2005) calls this a ‘pedagogy of unknowing.’ He posits that “claiming a place for unknowing in educational settings offers hope in opening up to the Other” (p. 156). He reminds us, though, that a ‘pedagogy of unknowing’ can only happen in a place where accumulation of knowledge is not the sole objective (p. 156) and, consequently, where the human is not regarded as an object that can be known. The “best learning environment for approaching the Other and embracing unknowing in education”, he says, is to maintain “attitudes of ‘seeking, desiring and questioning,’ rather than ‘repose’” (p. 157).

It follows that listening must become a necessity in intersubjective learning relationships. Much of the literature on this subject points to just this. Montgomery (2005), in his research regarding managing learning spaces claims that “when persons listen intently and intentionally, they expect the other to say something that might contribute to the emergence of meaning” (p. 392). This is exactly the crux of the

argument. It must be assumed in a relationship of intersubjectivity that the other has something to add, that their contribution has the possibility of meaning-making, of causing ‘new beginnings’. Palmer (1993) says when he describes a listening teacher that:

“to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn – to study with such a teacher is to know the power of learning space” (p. 70-71).

The learning space that truly allows others to ‘come into presence’ will be one where all inhabitants are learners, where the teacher, instead of being the omniscient knower, becomes a fellow listener, and where “every strange utterance is met with welcome” (Palmer, p. 74). This is not to say that all ‘utterances’ are considered to be truthful or that each and every contribution is helpful, but rather that each teacher will allow “a space for the (owned) voice of the student to be heard and respected, such that the perspectives that arise from her own emplaced life-world are allowed to play into the life of the school” (Bonnet, 2009, p. 365).

Conclusion

At the outset of this article, it was suggested that the goal of Christian education is to make the world a place of human flourishing. It has been shown that a Modern conception of the human as an object that can be known and for whom norms have been prescribed is oppressive to the human ability to engage in intersubjective relationships. Because intersubjective relationships are reciprocal in nature, the other is as dependent upon my own ‘beginnings’ as I am dependent upon on his/her beginnings’. If human

subjectivity is taken away by the ‘rational community’, each individual loses his/her own voice and is thus unable to actively engage with the other in creating ‘new beginnings’; effectively, the individual is no longer a subject, but an object. Consequently, the individual is not able to truly flourish and, in turn, the other who is dependent on the individual for a ‘new beginning’ is unable to flourish.

Using the work of Foucault as a backdrop and drawing on others, it has been shown that there are underlying philosophies inherent in society and within schools, especially in the design of learning spaces, that further deny intersubjective relationships from blossoming. An attempt to design spaces that will promote intersubjective relationships can actually thwart them by creating new norms. It is useful to hear Ford (2003) say that “we can, however, actively cultivate an awareness of the dangers” (p. 21). An awareness of the dangers can be cultivated by constantly examining practice, methodology, design for space, etc. He recommends the following introspection:

We can ask, for instance, how narrow are our readings of students qua “the good student”? How dependent are our assessments on established notions of educational success?...Tracing the effects of power too readily made invisible by our organizational practices and assumptions can help remind teachers to bring multiple discourses to bear on classroom activities. It can remind us to ask: “what is the current danger?” (p. 21)

Finally, it was argued that listening is an integral part of intersubjective relationships. It must be assumed that each individual has a unique voice and that this unique voice has the ability to make meaning and to cause ‘new beginnings’. Biesta (2004) concedes that:

“The only thing we can do is to make sure that there are at least opportunities within education to meet and encounter what is different, strange, and other; and also that there are opportunities for our students to really respond, to find their own voice, their own way of speaking” (p. 321).

Acknowledging and critically analyzing oppressive structures created and implied in our learning spaces will help in designing places that allow intersubjectivity to flourish and will thus foster ‘human flourishing’.

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