If we want to understand another human being we cannot treat her as an isolated individual. We must understand her and her actions in relationship to the actual circumstances that surround her.

I will speak briefly about Moira von Wright, professor in pedagogy at the University of Södertörn in the Stockholm’s region. Her book ***What or Who? A pedagogical reconstruction of G.H. Mead’s theory on people’s intersubjectivity*** inspires me very much in my daily work as a teacher.

G.H. Mead (1863-1931) was an American philosopher and friend of John Dewey. Dewey, Mead, C. S. Pierce and W. James were known as the four pragmatists. Dewey and Mead worked together at the University of Chicago. The pragmatism stands for the idea that the world is not a world of things but a world of actions. In the pragmatic tradition knowledge is created in social situations and though experience. John Dewey is often associated with the famous quotation *Learning by doing*, but he never liked that and preferred *Learning by experience*. He also stated that art education is maybe the only totally holistic school subject as far as education is concerned.

The term subjectivity describes the phenomena where we meet and understand other people as concrete acting subjects.

The intersubjectiv perspective points out the fact that a teacher can never categorize student’s subjectivity nor can he/she do this through his teaching. With this perspective we assume that the teaching is a meaningful social situation that creates the participants subjectivity. Intersubjectivity means sharing things with others. It is also about senses and feelings. Husserl used the word intersubjectivity to describe the everyday world as a shared world. Intersubjectivity is also understood as the construction of knowledge not as reduced to the mind of the individual but as a social process. Through communication and dialog we are creating meaning. This takes place in the social world because we are capable of doing many things simultaneously, for example identify our selves in the position of the other. According to Mead the source of the individuality is to be found in communication among people.

von Wright makes a difference between what she calls the *punctual and the relational perspective*. One could understand punctual as the specific: seeing a person as an isolated island; the personality and predispositions are seen as parts of the inner self. Problems can be understood without regarding the social context. A consequence of this perspective is that we try to help children and students who are in need of special support by focusing only on them. Emmanuel Lévinas, the French philosopher, captures well the problem of the punctual or specific perspective:

*It’s when you see a nose, a pair of eyes, a forehead, a cheek and when you describe this, you turn yourself towards the other as an object. The best way to meet the other is not even to observe the colour of his eyes. When you study the colour of his the eyes you are not in a social relationship with the other.*

The punctual perspective is thus focusing on what a person is rather than who she/he is. Even the pronoun she/ he is a problem, it is in fact a way of categorizing us. In Swedish there is now a neutral pronoun “hen” which is being used frequently even in scientific material. Transgender persons, or persons unsure of their gender identity are recognized, could we say, as a third sex? Swedish schools surveys now include the possibility to answer questions without having to refer to your self as a boy or a girl.

The relational perspective on the other hand helps us to change the paradigm of talking about children and students as what they are. Instead we talk about them as whom they really are. This gives us the possibility to solve problems in relation to others. The categorization of the individual is not the results of the subjective characteristics but of the actions in relation with other people.

With the metaphor of the Pragmatic thinking *the living inquiry or what Schön* called *action in reflection* von Wright urges us to challenge the assumption that the relational perspective makes a great difference in education. She actually formulates my own experience as a teacher. Since I started to teach theatre and drama at our school, students with different predispositions for that kind of activity have attended my classes. They are often diagnosed with the Asperger syndrome. This has how ever never been a problem since theatre and drama are focusing on the collective work. The individuality of each one is an advantage to shape a creative atmosphere. The special behaviour of the individual is transformed into action and in relationship with the other players. The play or the scenic situation gives the circumstances where the participants meet. I try to apply some of the theatre didactics in teaching French with some quite interesting results!

Although not always easy, it is quite wonderful to see how quickly students with Asperger are included into the theatre group. Now, one could argue that this is the true nature of theatre and drama, but I claim that this is also the result of an ethic discussion in Swedish schools and that this occurs in other teaching than theatre and drama. There is a lot of emphasis put on inclusive actions in education.

It is certainly so that the intersubjectivity in Swedish schools and the student’s ability for socialising are unfortunately not being taken into consideration in the PISA-programme (Programme for International Student Assessment), but that is an other discussion…

I think what is so challenging with von Wright’s book is that we cannot be sure of the outcome of education nor how the teaching will be, but we can be absolutely confident that there are many solutions of problems and many creative variations of teaching if we work from a relational point of view. Teaching is about pluralism and pluralism is built upon action. Teaching is a social interaction where teachers and students are depending on the active participation of each one, but this should not require us to be anything special. We are all participating even those who are seemingly passive. People are just participating in different ways.

Bakhtin writes that the whole existence of human beings is about dialog and rejects the idea that language should be an individual action; when we speak, read and write, we are constantly in dialog with others. Even when thinking we are dialog with our own selves.

It is the task of teachers to establish a classroom climate where the relational perspective enables children and young people to develop as conscious and responsible individuals with self respect.

*Not Man but Men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth*.

Hanna Arendt

Martin Lange