**Research Article**

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# *Calling and Responding*: An Ethical-Existential Framework for Conceptualising Interactions "in-between" Self and Other

https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2024-0034
received March 30, 2024; accepted August 14, 2024

**Abstract:** In this article, the methodological meaning of listening will be explored as an ethical-existential heeding. Grounded in an understanding of listening as a matter of heeding, *I* present a framework founded on Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy entitled *Calling and Responding*, in which human being's relation to the world is conceptualised as a process of paying heed to a summons from the Other – followed by a responsible response to that summons – and in turn calling the Other. Such an understanding of the interactions in-between self and the Other is based on the premise that one has an auditory disposition when perceiving and dealing with the world. I elaborate the Buberian foundation of the concepts comprising the framework, clarify the method of philosophical conceptualisation, and present practical examples from the context of pedagogical relations.

**Keywords:** *Calling and Responding*, Martin Buber, paying heed, responding responsibly, pedagogical relations, auditory disposition

## 1 Introduction

The framework of *Calling and Responding*[1] was construed by drawing on Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue,[2] and more specifically, on his notion of human being's I–Thou relation to the world. Here, the aim is to apply the framework to human being' s interaction in the sphere of "in-between" and to elaborate on the existential conditions for interacting "in-between" when conceptualised as a matter of calling and responding to the Other. The character of the framework will be expounded by clarifying its dependence on an auditory disposition that asks for a mode of dialogical listening that aims for an ethical-existential heeding, i.e., not merely for communicative hearing, hermeneutical understanding, or ontological being true, thereby touching on the question: "Why does the language of everyday life link phenomena like conscience to the acoustic metaphors of a 'voice' or 'call' rather than visual metaphors?" The question of "the specific methodological meaning of listening in certain concrete practices" will be answered by putting the affordances of a

**1** Jons, "Till-tal och An-svar. En konstruktion av pedagogisk hållning," *Calling and Respons(e)ibility; A construction of pedagogical creed (in Swedish)*, the initial construction of the framework, applied to the teacher–student relation; Jons, "Learning as Calling and Responding," an adaptation of the framework to the student–subject relation. In the present text, the framework is adapted to human being' s relation to one another in a general sense.

**2** Buber, *I and Thou*; Buber, "Dialogue;" Buber, "Education;" Buber, "Distance and Relation;" Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman;" Buber, "Man and His Image-Work;" Buber, "The Word That Is Spoken;" Buber, "What Is Common to All," in *The Knowledge of Man*.

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heeding disposition in the context of the teacher–student relation and the student–subject–matter relation forward.

## 2 The Foundation: Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

According to Buber's ontological writings,[3] human beings choose whether to meet the Other as a Thou or an It. By virtue of that decision, either an I–Thou or an I–It relation is constituted. Moreover, by virtue of that decision, the I is constituted either as an Thou–I or an It–I, and the Other is constituted either as a Thou or an It. This happens in every meeting, be it a meeting with a person, a thing, a phenomenon, knowledge, etc. Two rather radical conditions are at work here; first, the radically constitutive character of the "in-between," which entails the understanding that there is no I in and of itself; the I is constituted in the meeting. Second, that it is the I that makes the choice by taking a stance towards the Other either as a Thou or an It, as such choosing to constitute the Other as either a Thou or an It, meaning that there is neither a Thou nor an It in and of itself. An I–Thou relation pertains to what Buber denotes as "a genuine meeting" or a true dialogue. However, for Buber, true dialogue does not equal speaking. On the contrary, silence is communication, he contends, stating that "just as the most eager speaking at one another does not make a conversation, …so for a conversation no sound is necessary, not even a gesture. Speech can renounce all the media of sense, and it is still speech."[4]

Although the conditions and consequences of the I–Thou and I–It relations are conveyed in Buber's text *I and Thou*, he further elaborates on different stances possible for to enact while encountering the Other in *I and Thou*, *Distance and Relation*, and *Man and His Image-work*. In *Dialogue*, he suggests three different ways of perceiving the Other, all of which affect the I, the Other, and the relation in-between them. He denotes the different ways of perceiving the Other in terms of *observing*, *looking on*, or *becoming aware of*.[5]

To observe means to approach the Other with an intention based on one's own preconceptions and noting nothing but the "traits" of the Other, a way of perceiving that makes the Other appear as nothing but "a sum of traits." Looking on, however, means perceiving the Other without intent and without preconceptions, although in the beginning it might be ruled by a purpose. It is about perceiving the Other freely and awaiting what will present itself in terms of its being, i.e., not its traits. As such, this observing and on-looking ways of perceiving of the Other makes it possible to depict, denote, and describe the one perceived. It also means, as Buber concludes, that the act "neither demands action … nor inflicts destiny"[6] on the part of the perceiver. The third way of perceiving the Other is described as a matter of "becoming aware that the Other says something to me"[7] and is built on an intent to enter into relation with the Other.

This third way of perceiving the Other thus demands action of the I and furthermore inflicts destiny upon her. Here, the normative character of Buber's dialogue of philosophy comes to the fore, manifesting itself as an existential condition of responsibility for the Other, expressed by Buber, for example, in *Education*:

> In our life and experience we are addressed; by thought and speech and action, by producing and by influencing we are able to answer … The kindling of the response in that 'spark' of the soul, the blazing up of the response, … to the unexpectedly approaching speech, we term responsibility.[8]

The conceptual framework of calling and responding is built on this third way of relating to the Other. As such, it postulates that the I becomes aware that the Other "says something to me"[9] and intends to enter into an

**3** Buber, *I and Thou*; Buber, "Dialogue;" also "From I and Thou" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann, 181–8.
**4** Buber, "Dialogue," 3.
**5** Buber, "Dialogue," 10–2; also "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann, 189–205.
**6** Buber, "Dialogue," 11¸ also "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann, 192.
**7** Buber, "Dialogue," 11; also "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann, 192.
**8** Buber, "Education," 109; see also *I and Thou*; Buber, "Dialogue."
**9** Buber, "Dialogue," 10–2.

I–Thou relation with the Other in a manner that demands action and inflicts destiny on both parties to the meeting; in other words, to establish "a genuine dialogue."

## 3 Philosophical Conceptualisation

The process that led to the construction of the calling and responding framework started with the intention to afford a more existential conceptualisation of the teacher–student relation. The choice fell on Buber's philosophy of dialogue, which was followed by a careful and profound study of its ontology in *I and Thou* and *Dialogue*; its anthropology in *Distance and Relation*, *Logos*, and *Man and His Image-Work;* its social bearings in *Elements of the Interhuman*; and it's pedagogical bearings in *Education*.[10] Gradually, in line with iterations of reading, Buber's I–Thou philosophy was applied to the teacher–student relation in terms of the teacher paying heed to their student, responding in a responsible way to the student's callings, and calling on the student to pay heed. The concepts constituting the process of paying heed-responding responsibly calling were framed as calling and responding. Because the concepts that arose from the reading-theorising process turned out to consist of old concepts, albeit with a slightly changed meaning, a methodological approach inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy*[11] was chosen to move forward. According to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophical conceptualisation is about reusing old concepts in new forms in a new context, thereby making it possible to discover, articulate, and discern new aspects of that context; and the chosen concepts are presumed to resonate with each other. These two requirements were acknowledged by turning to the old religious notion of "vocation."

In the framework, framed in terms of vocation, the notion of calling is conceptualised in terms of what Cecilia Nahnfeld[12] conveys as a fundamental pattern in the form of God's address and human being's response; however, in accordance with Buber's "religiosity," it is located in the dealings between human beings.[13] Buber's poetic use of language when he speaks of human beings being addressed by an Other who demands something of them, and the response being given in "responsibility"[14] appears to resonate with the concepts of "summon," "calling"/"vocation," and "responsibility" as conveyed by Nahnfeldt.[15]

The notion of responding holds several meanings within the calling and responding framework. First, it means to respond to a certain call and not merely to provide an answer but to provide an answer that is directed towards the summoning requesting it and which is accommodated to the actual calling. Second, following the Buberian philosophy of dialogue, the idiom responding also means "amounting to no more than a possibility," or rather to, no more than an *ability* to be effectuated, turning response into a freedom of choice. This implies that responding – in fact, even perceiving an experience as a calling – is optional. And this is where the connotation to responsibility appears, as suggested by, for instance, Michael Bernard-Donalds (1990),[16] Mara Scanlon (2007),[17] and Gregory Tague (2004),[18] pointing to the ability-to-take-responsibility

**10** Buber, *I and Thou*; Buber, "Dialogue," 11; also "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann*, 192;* Buber, "Distance and Relation;" Buber, "The Word that is Spoken;" Buber, "What is Common to All;" Buber, "Man and His Image-Work;" Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," all in *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays,* ed. Maurice Friedman; "Education" in *Between Man and Man*; see Buber," Postscript" in *I and Thou*, 87.

**11** Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

**12** Nahnfeldt, "Kallelse och kön: Schabloner i läsning av Matteusevangeliets berättelser," *Vocation and Gender Reinterpreted: Patterns in the Narratives of the Gospel of Matthew (in Swedish).*

**13** Buber, "Jewish Religiosity (1923)" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, ed Asher D Biemann, 115.

**14** Buber, "Dialogue;" also "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed Asher D Biemann; "Education" in *Between Man and Man*; see also *I and Thou.*

**15** Nahnfeldt, "Kallelse och kön: Schabloner i läsning av Matteusevangeliets berättelser," *Vocation and Gender Reinterpreted: Patterns in the Narratives of the Gospel of Matthew (in Swedish)*; see also Dawson, "A History of Vocation."

**16** Bernard-Donalds, "'Discourse in Life': Answerability in language and in the novel."

**17** Scanlon, "Ethics and the Lyric."

**18** Tague, "From Responsibility to Answerability."

meaning inherent in the terms "response-ability" and "answerability," the latter rather denoting the ability to answer for something. Another decisive meaning of responsibility pertaining to the framework has been stressed by, for example, Nahnfeldt; namely, the crucial distinction between the Latin concepts of *imitatio* and *vocatio*, which means that the responsibility framed inside the latter – equating the term "vocation" to that of "calling" – requires that the source of human being's responsibility is self-induced, and the former, "imitation," means that human beings in their morality imitate ready-made moral codes.[19]

In the framework, framed in terms of vocation, calling and responding is conceived of as a sequential process of paying heed, responding responsibly, and calling. Applied to human being's being, the framework delineates the summoning and responding that Buber so poetically conveys as a matter of being subjected to a summons that influences us, and to which we respond by acknowledging responsibility.[20] Comprehended as an existential dialogue, the process begins when the I experiences being summoned by an encountered Other, which, according to Buber, presupposes the I being "at disposal and openly receiving."[21] Remember, the Other might be, for example, a spouse, a stranger, a student, or, for that matter, a work of art, a poem, a machine, knowledge, a theory, or the empirical findings of a research project.[22] It is by being "at disposal and openly receiving" the Other that the summoning is engendered.[23] More concretely, the first step is about paying heed to what the Other says to me, or what she/he demands of me. The second step is about responding responsibly to the Other, or, more precisely, acknowledging the *demands* that the Other imposes on me, and acknowledging that my response will inflict destiny upon me. The third phase – where the I in turn calls on the encountered Other – accordingly entails the I taking action in a way that demands action on the part of the Other and inflicts destiny on both the I and the Other. In fact, each of these three phases of the calling and responding process entails claims and consequences by both the I and the Thou. This will be detailed further, together with the theoretical and practical meanings of the conceptualisation, below. But first, I clarify the premises of its character.

## 4 Auditory Disposition/s

The calling and responding framework, along with the concepts comprising it, rests on the premise of an auditory disposition.[24] The auditory disposition is fundamentally different from the way we usually perceive and deal with the world. Typically, we use a visual disposition. Buber's I–Thou philosophy represents an auditory disposition grounded in the Hebrew *word*,[25] as opposed to, for example, Gadamer's and Heidegger's hermeneutics which are grounded in the Greek *logos*.[26]

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**19** Nahnfeldt, "Kallelse och kön: Schabloner i läsning av Matteusevangeliets berättelser," *Vocation and Gender Reinterpreted: Patterns in the Narratives of the Gospel of Matthew (in Swedish)*, 92–104; Buber, "Dialogue" in *Between Man and Man*, 18–21.

**20** See Jons, "Till-tal och an-svar. En konstruktion av pedagogisk hållning," *Calling and Respons(e)ibility; A construction of pedagogical creed" (in Swedish)*; Jons, "Learning as Calling and Responding."

**21** Buber, "Dialogue," 12–4; Buber, *I and Thou*, 8–9, 22–3, 29–30, 44–5, 66.

**22** See Buber, "Man and His Image-Work;" cf Chretien, *Hand to Hand*; Lyon, "Paul Celan and Martin Buber;" Biemann, "Humanizing the It."

**23** Buber, "From Dialogue" in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, 192.

**24** See Fuyarchuk, "From the Visual to the Auditory in Heidegger's Being and Time and Augustine's Confessions." Alternate or complementary words for "disposition" are, e.g., "approach" or Björk's, "patterns of perception" and "ways of perceiving and relating to the world" (*Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus (in Swedish),* 133–201, 239–53).

**25** See Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58–60; or "Martin Buber's Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics" in Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, 155–71; see also Stewart, "Two of Buber's Contributions to Contemporary Human Science," 173–89; and Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus (in Swedish),* 133–201, 239–53.

**26** See Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58–60; or "Martin Buber's Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics" in Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, 155–71; see also Stewart, "Two of Buber's Contributions to Contemporary Human Science," 173–89; and Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an*

The visual way of perceiving and dealing with the world is found in the Greek tradition,[27] i.e., the tradition that has formed the basis of the epistemological and ethical conceptions that have dominated Western culture. Therefore, we usually rely on principles of sight when perceiving, conceptualising, and speaking about being. According to the visual disposition, to perceive is to "see" and to conceptualise is to "depict." When we speak from this visual disposition, the words we use have both optical and formal bases. We use word stems such as "see," "observe," "illuminate," and "boundary." For example, we say that we "perceive a meaning," that we "observe a phenomenon," that we "enlighten someone about something," or that we "illuminate a problem." And the same problem can be "delimited" and "illuminated" from several angles.

Björk[28] provides an in-depth picture of how what he calls the visual pattern of perception has been incorporated into the Western science tradition. Accordingly, we use tools with which we approach and comprehend (in the sense of "grasping") consisting of rationality and autonomy.[29] From this follows that it is an autonomous subject that, with its consciousness, grasps the Other, i.e., the knowing subject is free and self-sufficient; its knowledge is not influenced by the object, and it does not need anyone else to understand. Even questions of value and morality have become based on visuality, considered from a truth and knowledge perspective.[30] Indeed, even religion was anchored in a Greek visual disposition. Pattison[31] finds an explanation to this in that "[…] [the] biblical emphasis on the word seems to have been lost or, at least, diminished in favour of a more pronounced emphasis on vision […]".

The auditory way of perceiving and relating to the world originates in the Hebrew tradition[32] where hearing, or listening and speaking, questioning and answering, constitute the fundamental principles of perception, conceptualisation, and communication.[33] When using an auditory disposition to talk about being, we employ word stems such as "hear," "sound," "speak," and "respond."

However, there are different auditory approaches: it can be understood as a communicative phenomenon, a hermeneutical one, an ontological one, or – as it appears in Buber's I–Thou philosophy and in the calling and responding framework presented here – as an ethical-existential phenomenon. Crucial to note, however, is that the ethical-existential auditory disposition includes and transcends the other three. Drawing on Mendes-Flohr,[34] different modes of listening might be related to different aims of hearing as they pertain to different auditory dispositions – passive listening to hear; active listening that strives for understanding; and dialogic listening aimed at "[…] the confirmation of the existential presence of one's partner in a dialogical encounter."[35]

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*existential focus (in Swedish)*, 133–201, 239–53; Welz, "Editorial to JBSP Special Issue on the Phenomenology of Listening (52:4) Phenomenology of Listening," 265.

**27** See Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58–60; or "Martin Buber's Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics" in Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, 155–71; see also Stewart, "Two of Buber's Contributions to Contemporary Human Science," 173–89; Welz, "Editorial to JBSP Special Issue on the Phenomenology of Listening (52:4) Phenomenology of Listening," 265; and Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus (in Swedish)*, 133–201, 239–53.

**28** Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus* (in Swedish).

**29** Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus* (in Swedish), 239–53.

**30** Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus* (in Swedish), 156–7.

**31** Pattison, "God Speaks Within," 299. He continues" This both reflects and enhances the influence of earlier Greek, especially Platonic, conceptions of the philosophical ascent from the confused shadows of sense-experience towards a direct vision of the sun of divine truth."

**32** See e.g. Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58; Stewart, "Two of Martin Buber's Contributions to Contemporary Human Science;" See also Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus* (in Swedish), 132–91; Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58; Welz, "Editorial to JBSP Special Issue on the Phenomenology of Listening," 265–7.

**33** See e.g. Chrétien, "Call and Response," in *The Call and the Response.*

**34** Mendes-Flohr, "The Poetics of Listening," 3–5.

**35** Ibid., 4.

As a *communicative* phenomenon, listening aims at "hearing."[36] In this sense, thought, listening, might be part of a monologic or a dialogic communication. Welz points out that "The sense of hearing … is … essential for a human being's openness to the external world,"[37] and Buber[38] advocated for listening and hearing to be part of a dialogue that includes a response, claiming that a monologue lacks the ontological presupposition of conversation, namely, the conversational element of surprise emitted by the Other. Furthermore, Welz[39] draws attention to a phonetic connection between the German words for "reason" (*Vernunft*) and "hearing" or "perceiving a sound" (*Vernehmen*), which implies that listening and hearing, as a passive openness to the world, regardless of its auditory character, relates to the Greek tradition of reason.

*Hermeneutically* speaking, listening is, in Welz's words "[…] not only a reception of soundwaves, but also a hermeneutical process of understanding and interpreting what comes to one's ears."[40] This active[41] listening can be found in interpretative practices[42]; however, practices shunned by the ethical-existential auditory disposition of Buber.[43] The hermeneutical disposition of Gadamer's[44] and Heidegger's[45] hermeneutics comes closer to the ethical-existential disposition in Buber's I–Thou philosophy, in that they both strive for an interpretative practice that sets preconceptions aside in conducting a dialogue with the object. However, in spite of their intention to build on the Hebrew concept of vocation, they both remain within the Greek rational tradition.[46]

As an *ontological* phenomenon, listening is actually related to "belonging"; we listen to – and interpret Being, to which we as Beings-in-the-world belong – to understand our "true being." Here, Pattison[47] draws attention to the fact that the German word for "belong" is *gehören*, incorporating the German verb for "hear," i.e., *hören*. Similarly, in Swedish, the word for belong is *tillhöra*, incorporating the verb for "hear," i.e., *höra*. The ontological version of the auditory disposition can be found in Heidegger's hermeneutics[48] and in Chrétien's[49] understanding of call and response. Pattison[50] affords an elaborated exposition of Heidegger's

**36** Welz, "Editorial to JBSP Special Issue on the Phenomenology of Listening (52:4) Phenomenology of Listening," 265.

**37** Ibid.

**38** Buber, "The word that is spoken," in *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays,* ed. Maurice Friedman, 103.

**39** Welz, "Editorial to JBSP Special Issue on the Phenomenology of Listening (52:4) Phenomenology of Listening," 265.

**40** Ibid., 266; see also Pattison, 299, who writes that" the Hebrew Bible testifies to a range of divine communicative practices, from the burning bush, through Amos's almond branch, to Daniel's dreams and visions. Yet whatever their form their primary function is to be the occasion for articulating a "word of the Lord." The issue then is how we are to listen that we might hear – and hearing understand – that word."

**41** Mendes-Flohr, "The Poetics of Listening," 4–5.

**42** Cf. Ibid., 3.

**43** See Ibid., 4: "[…] dialogue is not an interpretative, cognitive act. Herein, dialogical listening differs from Barthes's notion of "understanding" as a distinctive cognitive procedure of yielding knowledge of the other by "decoding" the voice hidden and veiled in a silence[…]."

**44** Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*

**45** Heidegger, *Time and Being*.

**46** As regards to Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58–60; As regards to Heidegger's hermeneutics, see See Fuyarchuk, "From the Visual to the Auditory in Heidegger's Being and Time and Augustine's Confessions;" Pattison, "God Speaks Within."

**47** Pattison, "God Speaks Within," 309.

**48** See Fuyarchuk, "From the Visual to the Auditory in Heidegger's Being and Time and Augustine's Confessions; "Pattison, God Speaks Within."

**49** Chrétien, "Call and Response."

**50** Pattison: 298–9, clarifies "[…] Heidegger's resort to "calling" as a means of renewing philosophical enquiry. … Heidegger summons us to a deeper attention to the calling that is given in the very structure of human Dasein. However, in Being and Time, this call (described as the call of conscience) seems to imply no caller and no specific content other than that which is given to it by Dasein itself. But if there is no one who calls, then the very idea of calling seems to have been reduced to an empty metaphor. This model seems to be changed in Heidegger's later treatment of poetic vocation. Here it seems as if we are really talking about vocation, as in the Hölderlinian image of the poet as one called by the gods. However, a closer analysis shows that here too calling is a way of speaking about human beings' abandonment and that we have no basis to suppose that our sense of being called implies the existence of one who calls. …The paper concludes, then, that … Heidegger seem(s) to offer a certain rediscovery of the sense of calling, this may be anthropologically suggestive, but of itself it does not go far enough to justify or to reinstate a fully theological idea of vocation."…." To "belong" [to be one who listens] here still means to be in the order of Being. But man's distinctive feature

ontological hermeneutics, clarifying Heidegger's failed attempts to place his philosophy in the auditory disposition of vocation. Chrétien's[51] conception of this ontological auditory disposition comes closer to the vocational, because it is conveyed as "a silence of listening and attention," a disposition that resembles Buber's[52] when he talks of "being at disposal and openly receiving." This ontological auditory disposition is elaborated in the dialogism of Buber and Bakhtin. According to Buber's[53] I–Thou philosophy, listening and responding is tied to being, i.e., to human beings' ontological condition:

> To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. ... Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence. ... 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. ... The existence of I and the speaking of I are one and the same thing.[54]

This conception of human beings' ontological condition is, as Friedman[55] has maintained, close to Bakhtin's notions of dialogicity, in that it stands for the idea that dialogue pertains to being itself. Perhaps Michael Holquist's interpretation of Bakhtin's view of dialogicity comes even closer to the way Buber expresses it:

> Sharing being as an event means, among other things, that we are – we cannot choose not to be – in dialogue, not only with other human beings, but also with the natural and cultural configurations we lump together as 'the world'. The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.[56]

In Buber's metaphorical expression, "it is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe."[57]

The ethical-existential auditory disposition on which the framework presented here rests, encompasses normativity, as such transforming the notion of perceiving and dealing with the world into a matter of heeding.[58] Listening, as conveyed by Mendes-Flohr, is here dialogical, a disposition that entails three decisive meanings. First, that the listening is a listening to silence. Not, as Pattisson[59] clarifies, in terms of a listening "between the silence of the philosophical mystic in face of the impersonal absolute." It is a matter of, as Pattison continues, listening to "the silence of the believer waiting on a God who, it is supposed, has something to say." Second, the listening is characterised by what Buber calls "inclusion," i.e., an approach to the Other's experience that is not empathetic in the sense that we know it because, as Mendes-Flohr[60] explains, "an empathetic identification with the feelings and experience of other as analogous to what one has experienced or imagines as experiencing ... entails a projection of meaning that may not be consonant and consistent with the experience and feelings of others – and thus in effect denies the existential integrity of their experience and feelings." Inclusion, Buber's dialogical alternative, is instead based on experiencing the other person's experience from their perspective. It is a matter of listening to the voice of the Other by being attuned to a shared experience as experienced by the other side. "One," as Mendes-Flohr[61] so eloquently puts it, "actively participates" in the other's experience "without forfeiting anything of [one's own] felt reality ... and lives

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lies in this, that he, as one who thinks, is open to Being, face to face with being; thus man remains referred to being and so answers to [literally: "speaks out from" or "corresponds to" [entspricht] Being, and he is only this."

**51** Chrétien and Brown, *The Ark of Speech*, 39.

**52** Buber, "Dialogue," 12–14; Buber, *I and Thou*, 8–9, 22–3, 29–30, 44–5, 66.

**53** Buber, *I and Thou*, 3 ff.

**54** Ibid., 3–4.

**55** Friedman, "Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin."

**56** Holquist, *Dialogism*, 30.

**57** Buber, *I and Thou*, 28–9.

**58** Björk, *Pedagogik i exil: en bildningsfilosofisk studie med existentiellt fokus/Education in exile. A philosophical study of education with an existential focus* (in Swedish).

**59** Pattison, "God Speaks Within," 305.

**60** Mendes-Flohr, "The Poetics of Listening," 5.

**61** Ibid.

through a common event from the standpoint of the other." Third, this normatively auditory disposition perceives the Other's voice in terms of a calling, as an address that speaks to me and asks something of me, a calling that entails a demand to heed and comply (obey). Fourth, the calling is understood as an address that demands a response and responsibility. Buber[62] writes, "In our life and experience we are addressed; by thought and speech and action, by producing and by influencing we are able to answer. … The kindling of the response in that 'spark' of the soul, the blazing up of the response, …we term responsibility." This ethical-existential auditory disposition can also be found in Bakhtin's dialogism,[63] where it comes forth as an idea that human beings cannot escape engagement, that there is no alibi that justifies not engaging. Holquist explains: "(A)s a human being, I have no alibi in existence for merely occupying a location in it."[64] This becomes clear in Bakhtin's writings, when, echoing the aforementioned Buber quote, he writes that "to live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds."[65] Ultimately, this ethical-existential auditory disposition thus means, in Buber's words, that "[…] speech does not abide in man, but man takes his stand in speech and talks from there,"[66] as such joining the strand of moral philosophy that professes to personal and situational ethics, rejecting codified ethics.[67]

As already clarified, this ethical-existential disposition is based on the Hebrew tradition's conception of the spoken word. The Hebrew word is dialogical because it demands a response and requires a word of response from the Other to be complete.[68] Thus, as Buber[69] says, human life exists in the world because the word comes to human beings and prompts human beings to respond. That it is a dialogue of an existential nature means that it does not necessarily manifest in people speaking, that speaking can even hinder the existential dialogue from occurring, and silence can very well promote it; in fact, silence might allow for the Thou to be, and answering might transform the Other into an It.[70] Furthermore, the Buberian dialogue is not limited to interactions between people.[71] It can occur in all aspects of being when human beings, alone or with others, address what they have to deal with. This is related to the fact that Buber[72] makes a crucial distinction between religion and religiosity, considering religiosity to be the source of meaning in being, located in human beings' interactions with the Other, i.e., not located in their transcendent relationship with God. "I know of no other fullness," he writes, "than the fullness of demand and responsibility in every mortal moment. Far from being equal to the power, however, I know that I am addressed in the demand and that I give my answer in assuming responsibility."

**62** Buber, "Education," 109.

**63** Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 40–5.

**64** Holquist, *Dialogism*, 150.

**65** Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 338.

**66** Buber, *I and Thou*, 28; cf. Biesta, "Radical Intersubjectivity," conceptualising moral as a matter of *who I want to be, or, where I stand*.

**67** Buber, "Dialogue," 18–21, 110; cf. Bauman, "Postmodern Ethics;" Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.

**68** Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 58–9, 62.

**69** Buber, *I and Thou,* 3–4, 20–1; Buber, "Education," 109.

**70** Buber, "Dialogue," 3–5.

**71** Ibid., 9–10.

**72** Buber, "Jewish Religiosity (1923)" in *The Martin Buber Reader. Essential Writings*, ed Asher D Biemann; Buber writes: "I say and mean religiosity, not religion. Religiosity is human being' s sense of wonder and adoration, an ever new becoming, an ever-new articulation and formulation of his feeling that, transcending his conditioned being yet bursting from its very core, … Religiosity is his longing to establish a living communion with the unconditioned, his will to realize the unconditioned through his action, transposing it into the world of man. Religion is the sum total of the customs and teachings articulated and formulated by the religiosity of a certain epoch in the life of a people; its prescriptions and dogmas are rigidly determined and handed down as unalterably binding to all future generations, without regard for her newly developed religiosity, which seeks new forms. … Thus, religiosity is the creative, and religion, the organizing, principle," 115; see also Buber, "Replies to My Critics."

## 5 Paying Heed–Responding Responsibly–Calling

The calling and responding framework was first construed by drawing, as mentioned, on Buber's notion of the I–Thou relation as conveyed in several of his works, and in the same work originally applied to the pedagogical relation between the teacher and their student.[73] The framework has subsequently been applied to the learning relation between a student and the subject matter.[74] Moving forward, I first describe the calling and responding framework as a theoretical conceptualisation, and then follow up by concretising what it entails in the contexts of pedagogical and learning relations, respectively, drawing on the former works mentioned.

The calling and responding framework is conceptualised as a process of paying heed to an address, followed by a phase of responding responsibly to that address, followed by the addressee reciprocating by calling on the addresser.[75] In accordance with Buber's I–Thou philosophy,[76] addressing is said to occur in everyday life, in ordinary personal events, and through people, animals, objects, phenomena, events, etc. Thus, in experiencing something, human beings are subject to an address that happens and befalls them in the form of worldly events that *mean* the one addressed and that implies that an action calls upon the person.

Approaching the Other as a Thou means acknowledging that whatever happens is an existential calling that occurs within the framework of a world order where the Other's address demands something of me. To respond, I must be genuine. In *Elements of the Interhuman*, Buber specifies the meaning of being genuine in terms of an authentic dialogue taking place in "an ontological sphere constituted through the authenticity of being."[77] The authentic dialogue is characterised by three prerequisites: that the conversational partners address each other with complete honesty, that both parties contribute themselves, and that the conversation is free from all pretence.

The requirement to address in complete honesty rests on three conditions. First, the address must come from the depths of my being. Second, what one addresses must be nothing other than the Other as *present*. Buber speaks of the need in the address to *mean* or *intend* the other, or, in other words, of a demand to perceive the personal presence of the counterpart. Perceiving the personal presence of the counterpart requires what he terms "real imagination," describing it as a matter of "boldly and uninhibitedly leaping over to another… making (her) immediately present in her entirety, unity, and uniqueness…"[78] Third, they must accept, affirm, and include their counterpart.

The requirement of unreservedness means that one must be willing to utter whatever comes to mind regarding the subject of the conversation. According to Buber, genuine conversation relies on what needs to be said about the matter at hand, which in turn requires all parties to contribute the part they possess. In other words, there is "something-that-wants-to-be-said" that the matter at hand requires to be said, and that each of the participant experiences within themselves. The attitude of genuine conversation thus requires that each one "deliver one's spirit's contribution unreservedly and without delay."[79]

The third characteristic of a genuine conversation – overcoming all pretence – requires one to appear as a genuine human being. Buber[80] distinguishes between two different types of human existence and calls one *the essential human being* – they who live according to their essence and thus lets their life be determined by what they are – and the other, *the image human being* – they who live according to the image and thus let their life be determined by the impression they want to give. More precisely, this means to regard the Other with a

**73** Jons, "Till-tal och Ansvar. En konstruktion av pedagogisk hållning"/*Calling and Respons(e)ibility; A construction of pedagogical creed (in Swedish).*

**74** Jons, "Learning as Calling and Responding."

**75** Jons, "Till-tal och Ansvar. En konstruktion av pedagogisk hållning"/*Calling and Respons(e)ibility; A construction of pedagogical creed (in Swedish).*

**76** Buber, "Dialogue;" Buber, "Education;" Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman."

**77** Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman."

**78** Ibid., 71.

**79** Ibid., 75.

**80** Ibid., 65–8.

spontaneous, unforced gaze influenced by the intention to understand them, but also, to not "concern oneself with one's gaze" so as not to be influenced by thoughts about what conceptions regarding themself they can or should arouse in the Other. Concerning oneself with one's gaze is what a person does when what they primarily care about is the image their own behaviour evokes in the Other. What is most telling in human behaviour is precisely the gaze. The image human being allows a specific element of their essence to be expressed through the eye and thus tries by means of their gaze to portray a personality worth striving for, in Buber's words "a personality of such and such a nature," and then remembers that natures are something that belong to the Individual.

The second phase, i.e., the response to the particular calling, is said to consist of a response shaped in "the untranslatable language consisting of doings and utterances."[81]

We respond by uttering the foundational word I–Thou with our essence by shaping, thinking, acting, speaking, producing something that influences, etc. The response to addressing can be given either directly or to someone else, in another situation, in another language, somewhere else. Thus, the response is at the same time a responsibility for the response in question.[82]

In the third and last phase, as conceptualised here, the addressee in turn calls upon the addresser in a way that demands action and inflicts destiny upon both the addresser and addressee. In accordance with what has been said about the calling above, this addressing might also occur in everyday life and in ordinary personal events pertaining to the interaction between the addresser and the addressee, thus making the object of the calling subject to an address that happens, *means,* and implies that an action calls upon her.[83]

# 6 Pedagogical Relations; Teacher–Student–Subject Matter

In the project of employing the framework of calling and responding to pedagogical relations, the so-called *didaktical triangle*[84] is used as a model. The didactical triangle conceptualises three pedagogical relations, one of which is maintained between the teacher and their student, one between the student and the content or subject matter they are studying, and one between the teacher and the subject matter they are teaching. In the following, I will clarify the more specific methodological meaning of listening in the concrete practices of the teacher–student relation and the student–subject matter relation, when applied within the calling and responding framework.

## 6.1 The pedagogical teacher–student relation

The aim of applying the calling and responding framework to the interaction in-between the teacher and their student is to contribute to the quite recent movement of relational pedagogy.[85] The more concrete question thus is: How the teacher–student dialogue should be understood when conceptualised as a sequential matter of paying heed, responding responsibly, and calling. According to the conceptualisation, the introductory

**81** Buber, "Dialogue," 12.

**82** Ibid., 18–20, 39–45; Buber, "Education," 109–37; Buber, "Distance and Relation," 206–9.

**83** Buber, "Dialogue," 13, 14–15, 16, 19–20, 39–45; Buber, "Distance and Relation," 210–1.

**84** Important to note is that the word "didaktical" (with a "k") is to be understood as pertaining to the German pedagogical tradition, i.e. to didaktics.

**85** Adams, "Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education;" Bell, "Increasing Undergraduate Student Satisfaction in Higher Education;" Plantin Ewe and Fjelkner Pihl, "Relational Competence in Higher Education – A Systematic Review;" Su and Wood, "Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education;" Aspelin, "Beyond Individualised Teaching;" Aspelin, "Teaching as a Way of Bonding;" Gravett et al., "Pedagogies of Mattering;" Hinsdale and Ljungblad, "Relational Pedagogy;" Ljungblad, "Pedagogical Relational Teachership (PeRT) – A Multi-Relational Perspective."

phase of this existential dialogue is a matter of the teacher experiencing being summoned by their student; more specifically, by the predicaments, needs, strengths, etc., of their student. This means that the order of Buber's I–Thou world turns the educational relationship into a relationship where the student's exposure, vulnerability, and shortcomings do not make them dependent on the educator, but rather gives them the right to demand that the educator pays heed to them.[86]

### 6.1.1 Pedagogical Heeding

Paying heed might, for example, start with the teacher getting to know the student's predicaments even before meeting her; for example, by seeking answers to questions such as "what courses have prepared them for the issues we will work on in my course?" and, "what are their strengths in relation to the learning task that will be issued?"

According to the text *Education,* paying heed requires authenticity and serving in the teacher–student relationship.[87] Being authentic encompasses, in its turn, three things. First, that the I and the Thou approach each Other's true beings, which means for the teacher and the student to both, as Buber puts it, sincerely and in a personalised way approach the Other's true being. Second, to be authentic means to self-contribute unreservedly, which means not withholding anything that one brings to the encounter. And third, being authentic means to appear in one's authentic being, and not, as emphasised by Buber, for example, in accordance with how they would like to appear.[88]

Heeding further presupposes that the teacher serves their student.[89] Buber speaks of serving as a worldly form of asceticism that educators practise because they feel responsible for a part of life entrusted to them, which applies to the student and also to the subject they teach.[90] Buber[91] speaks of serving as a matter of recognising and supporting something that already exists as a potential in the student. He explains that for the educator, every student reveals themself, in a process of actualisation, and the teacher sees themself as an assistant to these actualising forces. Their serving aims to provide the opportunity for the student's potential to germinate and grow through the teacher's influence in a form that is suitable for the student's becoming.[92] The educator serves their student by consciously and deliberately making a selection and by gathering the constructive forces of the world for the one they have in their care.[93] In fact, in the calling and responding framework, serving is understood to pertain to both the student's need to determine themself and the subject's need to enter the world. The teacher can do this by offering the student not only what the student's predicaments require but also their own take on the actual subject, and remembering to recognise and support the student's own potentials as related to the subject. This means that, even though teachers sharing their expertise in a subject has been shown to increase student learning,[94] Buber emphasises that the teacher should refrain from interfering, i.e., while influencing because that would hinder the student from deciding whom they want to be(come).[95]

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**86** Buber, *I and Thou*, 8–12; cf. Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 111–8, who speaks of the vulnerability of the Other as the naked face, and which argues that it is precisely the vulnerability/the naked face that commands me to take responsibility, which is likely connected to his idea of a different world order, an order that rather commands than is temporally and spatially arranged.

**87** Buber, "Education;" and Buber, "The Education of Character," 112–3, 119–20, 126–8; Buber, *I and Thou*; Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman;" Jons, "Till-tal och an-svar. En konstruktion av pedagogisk hållning," *Calling and Respons(e)ibility; A construction of pedagogical creed (in Swedish*); Jons, "Learning as Calling and Responding."

**88** Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," 68–71.

**89** Buber, "Education;" and Buber, "The Education of Character," 99, 104, 112–3, 119–20, 126–8.

**90** See also Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," 73.

**91** Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," 72–5.

**92** Buber, "Distance and Relation," 211.

**93** Buber, "Education," 120.

**94** Pace and Middendorf, *Decoding the Disciplines*; Pace, "Beyond Decoding the Disciplines 1.0."

**95** Buber, "Education," 99.

### 6.1.2 Leading by Love

Here, the second phase of the teacher–student dialogue, according to Buber,[96] is articulated as the teacher supporting the student to *decide themself* by responding to the address that the student's situation might be said to express. The responsible response is accomplished by the teacher *leading* and *being loving*, a notion constructed within the framework of calling and responding, in the context of the teacher–student relation in terms of practicing *a loving leadership*.

Buber's text *Education*[97] proposes an educational stance that rejects the will to power, while simultaneously rejecting what he calls eroticism. In other words, the loving leadership is neither to be characterised by an authoritarian nor an abdicating stance. However, a reclaiming of both authority and freedom is proposed, although this involves a reclaiming of the will to power and eroticism in altered forms, specifically in the forms of leadership and love.

According to Buber, the description of will to power as an educational principle is based on the premise that the traditional educator sees themself as a "messenger of history" whose task is to pass down inherited values; a task accomplished by, as Buber puts it, imposing these values on their students. Will to power is seen here as the old principle of upbringing and education, which, it is said, led the student to become either desensitised or despairing, resigned or rebellious, obedient, or indignant. Another consequence of the will-to-power stance is that the educator's authority will rest rather on the legitimacy granted by the mandate conferred by historical facts.

To be loving also involves a stance that rejects the abdicating attitude that Buber refers to as a position built on Eros. Eros is, according to Buber, said to constitute the new principle for upbringing and education which is based on erotic love.[98] Eroticism is characterised by the desire to enjoy people who are selected based on the educator's personal inclinations. The principle of choosing someone based on personal inclination does not belong in the task of education, although it is not wrong in private life. It is only there that a person may be visited and enthused by Eros, not in their professional capacity. Education, says Buber, is fundamentally opposed to the attitude that Eros produces. If a teacher is guided by Eros in their profession, they suffocate the plant entrusted to them. According to Buber, eroticism is also characterised by self-love: "Many celebrated ecstasies of love are nothing but the lover's delight in the possibilities of his own person which are actualized in unexpected fullness."[99] Eroticism would involve the educator abandoning the student pedagogically by abdicating from all professionally relevant forms of authority to instead use the student to be affirmed and admired privately. Being reliant on the private sphere means that the educator must muster legitimacy for their cause through their private qualities and merits, something I choose to call private legitimacy here.

The transformation of will to power into leadership and of eroticism into love is based on something Buber[100] calls "inclusion" and which he describes as an experience, fundamental to the work of the educator; moreover, the experience in which pedagogy has its origin. Inclusion constitutes the pedagogical relationship, and it only has a regulatory function in other types of relationships. But what does it mean for it to have a constitutive function, and what does it actually achieve?

> By constitutive, I mean … that the realm of education acquires its true and proper force from the constant return of this act and the constantly renewed connexion with it … The person who has the profession of influencing malleable individuals must constantly experience her actions and letting from the other side. The man whose calling it is to influence the being of persons that can be determined, must experience this action of his … ever anew from the other side.[101]

**96** Buber, "Education;" Buber, *I and Thou*, 37–8.

**97** Buber, "Education."

**98** Buber, "Dialogue," in *Between Man and Man* makes a distinction between "the dialogical strong-winged Eros of dialogue" and "the monological lame-winged Eros." He conveys the former as the two-sided love between two persons, and the ground for pedagogical love, but with the difference that pedagogical love is one-sided.

**99** Buber, "Dialogue," 6.

**100** Buber, "Education," 113–22.

**101** Ibid., 118.

It involves an experience of what it feels like to be in the other's situation, of how the more active party in a two-person relationship also experiences their own activity as if they were the other, without perceiving themselves as less active than before this moment arose; in other words, experiencing the situation from the opposite side and thereby getting a feel for the full reality by experiencing the duality in their actions.[102] Inclusion is one sided. The pedagogical relationship is disrupted if the inclusion is not one sided. It is only the educator who should experience how the student experiences their own upbringing. The student should not experience how the educator perceives the situation. A mutual inclusion would transform the relationship into friendship. It is precisely the one-sidedness of the inclusion that constitutes, clarifies Buber, the uniqueness of the pedagogical relationship.[103]

In Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the notion of love that pertains to the loving leadership is composed of an I's responsibility for a Thou.[104] The second notion involved in the concept of loving leadership is conceived of as a "conscious purposelessness," i.e., "… to act consciously he must nevertheless do it 'as though he did not'," in fact[105] "almost imperceptible, most delicate approach, the raising of a finger, perhaps, or a questioning glance."[106] Thus, the teacher approaching their student in terms of a loving leadership, as conceptualised inside the calling and responding framework, is to be understood as the teacher acknowledging responsibility for the student while influencing them in a most subtle way, bringing about an ontological in-between characterised by love and subtle influencing, the consequence of which is the student's trust in the teacher's judgement and in them as a person. This trust in the educator is crucial in the lovingly guiding educational approach.[107] Buber says that trust is something that constitutes the very core of the pedagogical relationship. He speaks of this trust in terms of trust in the world because this person exists. And trust creates confidence, which in turn leads to the student learning to ask.

### 6.1.3 Pedagogical Provoking

The third phase in the teacher–student dialogue in the calling and responding framework is conceptualised as a matter of the teacher calling their student in ways that have the potential to produce educational effects. The teacher is to address the student in a way that challenges the student's way of being, which requires them to provoke the student's dormant potentials while daring to put themself at stake.

According to Buber, one can only be provoked by what is different and therefore foreign. It is the foreign and the different that offer resistance and thereby ensure that the encounter is enriched by the fertility found in provocation. There are two different types of resistance that act provocatively – either when a person encounters "factors [that] exert their influence by stimulating agreement, imitation, desire, effort; others by

**102** Buber, "Education," 114–5; Buber is careful to distinguish between *inclusion* and *empathy*. Inclusion means to "[…] 'transpose' oneself over there and in there. Thus it means the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure æstheticism of the reality in which one participates. Inclusion is the opposite of this. It is the extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfillment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates."

**103** Buber, "Education," 117–9, talks about three main types of dialogical relationships that represent the dialogical relationship in different ways: those based on abstract but mutual encompassing experience, the nurturing relationship, and the friendship relationship. All of these are based on encompassing experience, but in different forms. The first is based on a mutual but abstract reciprocity. 'related to man only as a spiritual person.' It involves two people who are very different in terms of disposition, worldview, and calling, who, through the encompassing experience, recognize the legitimacy of each other's standpoint, as well as that 'its representatives bear the insignia of necessity and meaningfulness without changing one's own truth or the power to convince, one's own standpoint.' The second – the nurturing relationship – is based on a concrete and one-sided encompassing experience. And the third – the friendship relationship – is based on a concrete and mutual encompassing.

**104** Buber, "Education," 116–7; Buber, *I and Thou*, 11–3.

**105** Buber, "Education," 107.

**106** Ibid., 105.

**107** Ibid., 116–26, 168–9; cf. Bollnow, "The Pedagogical Atmosphere," who argues that the legitimacy of the teacher rests on both their factual expertise in the matter and on the student's trust in their judgment.

arousing questions, doubts, dislike, resistance."[108] In the former case, it is the resistance offered by something foreign that one is not but desires to become, and in the latter case, it is the resistance to something foreign that one does not strive for but feels doubt about. This means that the teacher must ensure that the content of a course, lectures, assignments, and so on address the student in a way that both *demands actions* and *inflicts destiny* upon them.

The requirement for the teacher to dare to put themself at stake is invoked by a requirement for sincereness characterised by a personal and influencing stance when calling the student.[109] For such a stance to be accomplished, the teacher must refrain from, as Buber puts it, interpreting the signs of existence and instead receive these, which means seeing the signs as addresses directed towards them and which are meaningful to them, and allowing the signs to affect them; this is a matter of daring to give one's heart to something grounded in a certainty that is based more on faith than on knowledge.[110]

More concretely, to Buber,[111] when a teacher dares to allow their student to address them, this leads to the student (or rather their predicaments, needs, strengths, and so on) demanding action from the teacher. Daring to respond involves having the courage to see responsibility as an existential personal burden instead of as a codified responsibility that offers relief from one's own commitments. "The idea of responsibility," Buber writes, "is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an 'ought' that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding."[112] It is about responding to an address and taking responsibility for the response. Daring to address the student involves influencing the student's being with one's own being, albeit consciously purposelessly. In concrete terms, daring to address with the intention of provoking means, for example, "from the inmost recesses of the personal life,"[113] while exposing and utilising such personal aspects that are relevant for the students *deciding*.[114]

Thus, if we understand the pedagogical relation between the teacher and their student as a matter of paying heed to the student's calling – responding responsibly in terms of a loving leadership – and provoking the student to learn, we discern newer, more existential aspects of the educational practice than, for example, aspects illuminated from a social or cultural perspective. Another pedagogical relation pertaining to educational practice is, as mentioned, the one between the student and the subject matter they are studying. This practical application of the calling and responding framework has been published elsewhere. I will lay this out briefly here, concentrating on the main affordances.

A crucial difference between these two pedagogical relations is, however, to be found in the second phase, the one where the I responds responsibly to the one encountered. In the teacher–student relation, the teacher is more knowledgeable and also responsible for the student's learning. Although the former is characterised by a one-sided experience of inclusion, the learning relation between the student and the subject matter is to be understood as an encounter on equal ground.

## 6.2 The Learning Student–Subject Relation

When applied to the notion of learning,[115] the framework of calling and responding contrives to discover, discern, and articulate other aspects and meanings of learning than those that appear when applying behavioural, cognitive, or social perspectives. First, when the student encounters content in the subject matter they

**108** Buber, "Education," 126.
**109** Buber, "Dialogue," 12–4.
**110** Ibid., 12–5; Buber, *I and Thou*, 66; cf. Biesta, "Against Learning."
**111** Buber, "Dialogue," 10–2; Buber, *I and Thou*, 21–3, 37.
**112** Buber, "Dialogue," 118.
**113** Ibid., 106.
**114** Buber, "Education," 106, 116.
**115** Jons, "Learning as Calling and Responding."

are studying, they face the choice of approaching it as a Thou or as an It. It is thus the student who determines whether the encounter becomes a learning experience or simply an on-looking encounter.

A student might encounter the subject matter, for example, in a textbook, a lecture, or a course assignment, and if they choose to approach the epistemology, the ontology, the values, the structure, etc., which is conveyed in and through these sources as a Thou, the summoning is engendered. Buber, however, contends that for the student to feel the urge to approach the encountered content as a Thou, the learner has to experience the content as foreign and provocative, or at least new. For the student to be receptive and openly receive the subject matter encountered, it must represent something that they either want to incorporate or dispute because it conveys something foreign, because that which is foreign provokes us by "stimulating agreement, imitation, desire, effort" or by "arousing questions, doubts, dislike, resistance."[116]

In other words, the learning process is to be understood as initiated when the subject matter urges the learner to pay heed to its predicaments and needs, the latter understood in terms of the truths held by the subject, the anomalies it suffers, the theories it relies on, the ideologies it holds, or the practice enacted. Furthermore, learning only follows if there is desire, questions, or doubts, or even an aversion awakened in the student by the subject matter encountered.

Like the relation between the teacher and their student, it is only when approached as a Thou that the call from the subject matter is experienced as personalised in such a way that it causes the student to pay heed to its calling. This requires the teacher to present the subject in such a way that the subject matter causes a calling and causes the student to pay heed. Conversely, because a genuine dialogue arises within the relation, it can neither be planned nor controlled, leaving the teacher to accept learning as ultimately unpredictable. As in the case of the teacher–student relation, the genuine dialogue builds on the student and the subject matter approaching each other in their true beings. How is this achieved on behalf of the subject matter? Here, it is crucial to remember that it is the student who constitutes the subject matter as a Thou, thereby enabling the subject matter to appear in its true being. There is also a reciprocal serving in terms of recognising and supporting potentials within each other, meaning that learning is a matter of the student discovering new aspects of the subject matter and new aspects of themself. Thus, the first phase of the learning dialogue is when the student and the subject matter pay heed to one another's predicaments and needs by having a genuine dialogue, thereby serving each other in the process of each part deciding for itself.

The second phase of the learning dialogue is about the student responding in a responsible manner to the summoning of the subject matter. The student responds exactly to the very predicaments and needs of the subject matter that awaken their desire, curiosity, or aversion. My own encounter with pedagogy, for example, revealed to me a subject elaborated in accordance with several perspectives, albeit not so much in accordance with an existential one. Intrigued by this "need" of the subject, I felt a curiosity towards what pedagogical implications Buber's philosophy of dialogue had to afford in that way. One might say that I perceived an implicit philosophical framework calling me, as it were, to be worked out. My response, i.e., the construction of the calling and responding framework and applying it to the teacher–student relation, thereby contributed to the discipline of pedagogy and myself adding dimensions to/enlarging our beings, i.e., deciding ourselves by realising potentials that up till then were dormant.

I have already touched upon the third phase of the learning dialogue, namely, the phase where the student summons the subject matter, provoking it and requiring it to pay heed and respond. As scholars, we provoke the subjects we engage according to who we are and where we stand, awakening dormant potentials within it. In a teacher–student relation, for the student to call the subject matter, they need to have courage, to dare to be truly affected by the predicaments and needs of the subject, to commit themself in a "personal and penetrating manner," as Buber puts it.[117] Within the dialogical framework employed here, this is to be conceived of as the phase that completes the process of learning.

**116** Buber, "Education," 126.

**117** Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," 65–8.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

Thus, although the construction of the calling and responding framework was initially prompted by a desire to discover, articulate, and discern more existential aspects of the pedagogical relation between the teacher and their student, the project has developed and the framework subsequently applied also to the learning relation between the student and the subject matter. The next step will be to apply the framework to the third relation that pertains to the so-called didaktical triangle, i.e., to the relation between the teacher/researcher and their subject matter. So far, the project has allowed for aspects such as a student's condition actually summoning the teacher, entailing a demand that the educator pays heed by being ontologically true and serving their student, practising a leadership characterised by love and inclusion, and provoking the student with that which is different and foreign – while daring to put themself at stake – to awaken the student's dormant potentials. As regards the learning relation between the student and their subject matter, the calling and responding framework has been able to discern that aspects of subject matter are able to summon the student into a learning experience, i.e., provocative in a way that makes them want to either incorporate or dispute it. Furthermore, the student's responsible response to the subject matter was discerned as a matter of addressing the predicaments and needs of the subject matter that had awakened their desire, curiosity, or aversion, and that the student in turn provokes the subject in accordance with who they are and where they stand, and through this awakening dormant potentials within the subject.

The intention to construct the framework, the concepts it encompasses, and the framework's application to the teacher–student relationship and the learning relationship, was to take part in a dialogue that complemented the work of other studies in advancing an understanding of relational pedagogy in general, and the affordances of Buber's philosophy in dialogue in particular. Others who have employed Buber's philosophy of dialogue and the framework and studies presented here afford new perspectives on various dimensions of educational theory and practice. Aspelin's research has, for example, developed conceptualisations of different aspects of educational theory that build on Buber's philosophy of dialogue; in 2010,[118] Aspelin elaborated on what they contend to be the focal point of education, i.e., the "between"; in 2014,[119] Aspelin presented a relational construction of pedagogical attitude, building mainly on Buber's concept of inclusion, in which it is suggested that there are three different types of teacher–student relationship, namely, an asymmetric intersubjective relationship, an asymmetric subject–object relationship, and an asymmetric object–subject relationship, of which only the first includes "a genuine pedagogical attitude"; in 2017,[120] Aspeline outlined a framework for teachers' relational competence that combines an attitude of natural care with an attitude of ethical care; and in 2021,[121] Aspelin suggested a conceptualisation of the teacher–student relation as a matter of bonding. Other educational theorists who have contributed significantly to the development of a Buberian and relational perspective are Sidorkin and colleague Bingham,[122] and Magnusson and Rytzler.[123] An interesting contestation amongst readers of Buber is whether the teacher–student relation can be "genuinely dialogical," i.e., an I–Thou relation, or not.[124]

**118** Aspelin, "What Really Matters Is 'between' – Understanding the Focal Point of Education from an Inter-Human Perspective."
**119** Aspelin, "Beyond Individualised Teaching."
**120** Aspelin, "In the Heart of Teaching," based also on the philosophy of Nel Noddings.
**121** Aspelin, "Teaching as a Way of Bonding."
**122** Bingham and Sidorkin, *No Education Without Relation*; Sidorkin, "Toward a Pedagogy of Relation;" Sidorkin, *Pedagogy Of Relation*.
**123** Magnússon and Rytzler, *Towards a Pedagogy of Higher Education*.
**124** Sidorkin, *Pedagogy Of Relation*; and Magnusson and Rytzler, in the chapter "The Morphology of Teaching. Troubling Didaktik with Relational Philosophy," *in Towards a Pedagogy of Higher Education: The Bologna Process, Didaktik and Teaching*, argues against that possibility; Aspelin, "Beyond Individualised Teaching," argues for the relation to shift between I-Thou and I-It-relation; while the conceptualisation of the teacher-student relation as it pertains to the *Calling & Responding* framework joins e g Friedman, "Reflections on the Buber-Rogers Dialogue," arguing that Buber, in his dialogue with Carl Rogers and in his essay Education (1947/2004), advocated for asymmetrical relations to be truly dialogical by means of the inclusion.

Although empirical studies that have employed Buber's perspective to study educational practice remain scarce, Welz, Ikonen, and Kristiansen[125] published an article based on a study that investigated the epistemological and pedagogical significance of different modes of listening, asking, and responding, and the role of trust in dialogical learning in local and online learning communities. Weltz and colleagues employed an age-old Jewish form of dialogical learning called *havruta* and were able to discern "a listening with the heart," wherein the participating students could perceive otherwise undetected voices and perspectives in texts and utterances in and through the voices of their peers. This study adds significantly to the discernment and articulation of dimensions of relational practices as they play out concretely in educational contexts. To advance the insights in relational education, we need also the theoretical and conceptual suggestions mentioned earlier to be applied in empirical studies.

However, the framework of calling and responding presented here could also be applied to other relations in-between self and Other; especially, I imagine, in caring professions where the outcome depends on the quality of the relationship. It would also be interesting to explore the consequences of conceptualising other areas of work and life from the perspective of relating to an Other – be it a person or perhaps a thing or an event – as a matter of conducting an existential dialogue between a self and the Other. What would this perspective, for example, afford if a craftswoman's relation to their work were understood as a matter of the material calling the craftswoman, the craftswoman paying heed and re-sponding to that calling? And of course, there are also questions pertaining to our life with friends, colleagues, and family that would be interesting to explore within the calling and responding framework.

**Acknowledgements:** The author would like to thank special issue editors Claudia Welz and Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen who, along with two anonymous reviewers, contributed to improving earlier versions of the text.

**Funding information:** The author states no funding involved.

**Author contribution:** The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

**Conflict of interest:** Author states no conflict of interest.

**Data availability statement:** Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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**125** Welz et al., "Learning through Listening and Responding."

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