

Learning from the other

In *Att lära av den andre (Learning from the other)*, Sharon Todd (2008) moves in the field of tension between psychoanalysis and Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy. Here she discusses ethics and the encounter with the Other in educational contexts. Todd writes about how higher insight has the risk of changing parameters for one's self-understanding and one's place in the world, losing aims and conventions.

[...] this risk-taking is manifested through the dynamics of affect that are mobilized in a learning encounter, for example to defend oneself against, identify with or disavow the Other.

(Todd 2008, 27 *my translation*)

In her discussion, she uses the psychoanalytic concept *otherness* and Levinas' concept of *alterity*. Todd moves between these two to clarify an understanding as a psychological relationship to the Other and philosophy that is about the ethical approach in a non-violent relationship. She highlights these two elements of learning, reasoning about ethics as an affective disposition, affect and the approach to the Other as a sensual pre-reflected event. Todd describes how psychoanalysis sees the affect something that stands in the way for the preservation of the Other's alterity.

[...] when affect disrupt the ego of the one that is learning and when boundaries between outer and inner become blurred. For Levinas, on the other hand, affect is not about the baggage that is brought to the meeting but about the possibility of being moved so that the self becomes egoless before the Other.

(Todd 2008, 28 *my translation*)

Todd asks how these radically different discourses can be brought together into a conversation (ibid). She writes that superficially, it may seem that a choice must be made between them in order to consider the possibility of ethics in education. But she chooses instead to consider how she can “maintain the tension between these two approaches – without blurring their significant differences” (Todd 2008, 29 *my translation*). Todd believes that both discourses offer education a way of reflecting on the relationship between the self and the Other without ignoring the significance of the affect for learning as well as for the encounter with difference (ibid).

With references to Bauman Todd discusses the modalities *being-side-by-side*, *being-with* and *being-for*. She describes these as modalities in pedagogical contexts to scrutinize the maintaining of the Other's alterity as an opportunity for learning. The concept, *to-be-for-someone*, is examined in relation to togetherness; from *being-side-by-side*, via *being-with*, to *being-for*. She describes these as modalities in pedagogical situations. She says that many educational situations are spatially and communicatively organized as *being-side-by-side*, and that there are also interaction as *being-with* but that this modality has the consequence "that aspects of the self are engaged in ways that are normative and safe" (Todd 2008, 75 *my translation*). Todd writes about how the reasoning of *being-for* echoes very strongly of Levinas. "To transcend the limitations of being-with requires attention to the alterity, to the 'unique character' of the Other, in a responsible gesture" (Todd 2008, 77 *my translation*). She asks if it is possible to provoke, demand or encourage this excessive attention, and I ask myself how I can relate to it in my dancepractice. To me, this also concerns thoughts about structures of educational institutions. How structural constructions can work side by side, be with each other with the risk of maintaining established norms and conventions. I can see opportunities for mutual development by being for the Other.

This being-for-the-Other is a togetherness born of the immediacy of interaction, a communicative gesture that has no other purpose than its own ability to communicate, its own response. It is in this moment of transgression that the convention has no meaning, is not valid within the boundaries of the relationship.

(Todd 2008, 77 *my translation*)

Todd, Sharon. 2008. *Att lära av den Andre, Levinas, psykoanalys och etiska möjligheter i undervisning och utbildning*. Studentlitteratur.