Bateson and Durkheim on mind, learning and society

Jørn Bjerre,
The Danish School of Education,
Aarhus University
“All sciences pass through a long analytic period before reaching the synthetic stage. Sociology is still in its analytic period..., in which a great army of really honest and earnest workers is wholly without organization - an army, it might be called, all the members of which are officers having the same rank, and none subject to the commands of any other....”

Lester F. Ward, Pure Sociology (1903, p. 12)
The synthetic stage

Fundamentals

Teoretical concepts

Data
Identifying the central models of thought on which the different schools of educational sociology rests
What are the fundamental ideas about mind, learning and society
Debating the assumptions about the relation between mental and social reality
The relation between biology, cognition, symbolic interaction and social structure
“The sociological tradition and its enemies”
Infant cognition, brain science, language philosophy, STS, and system theory

FOCUS -> Bateson versus Durkheim
A sociology of sociological knowledge

Assumption of progress: Does theory develop?
Does system theory constitute a progress of our understanding?
What are the consequence of one theory dominating within a field?
How and by what principles should sociological knowledge be organized?
Modes of critique: How do we conduct a critique of sociological knowledge, which contribute to the development into the synthetic state?
“an almost total change” in the field of epistemology realized by the introduction of cybernetics and system theory (Bateson, 1958, p. 280)

Durkheim had a “stranglehold in Brittish anthropology”

The earliest attempt at founding a science on a communication-theoretical base
Bateson: Mind = Life = Form

- Cybernetics
  - “We can now…begin to say, what mind is” (p. 456).
- Life / Mind
  - Bateson finds “the unit of evolutionary survival” to be “identical with the unit of mind” (p. 491)
- Substance / form:
  - “mental process, ideas, communication, organization, differentiation, pattern, and so on, are matters of form rather than substance” (xxxii).

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- A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components.
- The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, difference is a nonsubstantial phenomenon not located in space or time; difference is related to negentropy (order) and entropy (disorder) rather than to energy…
Ecology of mind: A new way of thinking about ideas and their interaction (Bateson, 2000, p. 1); the term “ecology” suggested that we were talking about “aggregates of ideas”.

THE CENTRAL IDEA:

Freudian psychology expanded the concept of mind in-wards to include the whole communication system within the body—the autonomic, the habitual, and the vast range of unconscious process. What I am saying expands mind out-wards. And both of these changes reduce the scope of the conscious self.

(Bateson [1972] 2000, p. 467)
Mind as evolutionary phenomena

Herbert Spencer

- super-organic phenomena - something more than the parts, resulting from their interaction.
- “the Spencerian analogy between Organism and Society”.
- “the pervading unity of the phenomena of the world” (p. 75).

For many peoples, their thinking about the social system of which they are the parts is shaped... by an analogy between that system of which they are the part and the larger logical and biological system in which the animals and plants and the people are all parts.

Progress by restating earlier ideas, without debating the critique
Bateson’s matrix of ideas

- Cybernetics
- Russel's theory of logical types
- Evolution
- Behaviorism
- Neo-platonic mysticism

Progress by combining conflicting ideas
Zero learning is characterized by specificity of response, which —right or wrong—is not subject to correction.

Learning I is change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives.

Learning II is change in the process of Learning I, e.g., a corrective change in the set of alternatives from which choice is made, or it is a change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated.

Learning III is change in the process of Learning II, conversion of perspective / reorganization of character / beyond the reach of language.

Learning IV would be change in Learning III, but probably does not occur in any adult living organism on this earth... The combination of phylogenesis with ontogenesis, in fact, achieves Level IV.
From learning 0 to Learning II

- An analysis of behavior:
  - stimulus / response / reinforcement

- Learning III: a type of learning which takes the form as a ‘profound reorganization of character’ (p. 301).
  - Learning III is what happens in religious conversion, therapies and other types of processes, which stops regulating the mode by which the environment is reacted upon, while beginning to view the internal organization of the organism as the object of change, in order to change the principles by which the organism relates to itself and the environment.
During a level III-learning the “identified self is no longer in charge of organizing the behavior…” and the resolutions to the contraries on a lower level, “reveals a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetics of cosmic interaction” (p. 306).

At this level, the structure of the whole reveals itself in the part; the world in a grain of sand, a ‘Heaven in a Wild Flower’, as Bateson writes, quoting William Blake (p. 306). This process is taken a step further, with Learning IV, a process which implies a “combination of phylogenesis with ontogenesis”. However, Bateson does not explain how this should be understood.

**Beyond the self**
Wisdom is a matter of thinking, not from one’s own perspective or more general, from the perspective of conscious purposive, but to take the larger system, as point of departure for one’s own thinking – accepting that the part can never control the whole, and only by transforming the mental part of the unit of the whole, so that it operates in accordance with the whole, does the part realises its true purpose and thus the right guidelines for behaviour.
THE TWELVE STEPS

1) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4) Made a searching & fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5) Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.
By joining AA, this mindset of symmetrical competition between two parts of the self is substituted for a complementary relationship to a superior being.

By complementary, Bateson refers to a relationship between parts that have an asymmetrical power relation but fits into the same system as is the case in the relationship between behaviours of dominance and submission (Bateson, [1972] 2000, p. 323).

By submitting one’s will to powers stronger than oneself, the process within the self changes: it is no longer a matter of being ‘the captain of the ship’ but a matter of seeing oneself as ‘part of a much larger field of interlocking processes.’ And it is by realizing that it is this larger system, rather than the individual itself, which does ‘the thinking, acting, and deciding’ that the individual is cured from his addiction (p. 331).

As Bateson writes: ‘the religious conversion of the alcoholic when saved by AA can be described as a dramatic shift from this symmetrical habit, or epistemology, to an almost purely complementary view of his relationship to others and to the universe or God’ (p. 327).
Bateson’s perspective helps people, who have “grown up under the Western mindset” to acknowledge that our “mindset (paradigms) limit our perspective on a situation”

It is by changing ones mindset, paradigms, and modes of learning that it becomes possible to “take the organization to a new level”.

Bateson teaches “us” how organizations should be perceived, as “living systems or semi-bounded ecologies, where individuals contribute to the shaping of the whole organization but are also shaped by the system they inhabit” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 409).
Durkheim

On Mind, Learning and Society
Life >> Mind: Natural and social facts

Social reality follows different laws than biological reality

Social science needs its own epistemology
AA is a modern ritual

Not a matter of understanding but a matter of creating solidarity

“The conventional character of a practice or an institution should never be assumed in advance”
Cybernetics stops being a scientific theory, and begins taking the form of a belief system

Cybernetic is a social fact
- a guides of conduct in the form of norms, mores, and folkways
- A system of collective representation
In social life “everything consists of representations, ideas and sentiments”, (1982, p. 47), therefore “all sociology is a psychology”, but a psychology of the “collective ideas and actions” (Durkheim, 1981, p. 1061).
Durkheim: downward causation: Fundamental idea 2

- **Society**
  - Structure / institution
  - Social representations
    - Social interactions

- **Mind/body**
  - Cognitive structure
  - Affective dispositions

- **Brain / Neuronal processes**
But if they are collective representations, first and foremost, they add to what our personal experience can teach us all the wisdom and science that the collectivity has amassed over centuries.

To think with concepts is not merely to see the real in its most general characteristics but to turn upon sensation a beam that lights, penetrates, and transforms it. To conceptualize a thing is to apprehend its essential elements better and to place it in the group to which it belongs.

Each civilization has its own ordered system of concepts, which characterizes it. Before this system of ideas, the individual intellect is in the same situation as the *nous* of Plato before the world of Ideas. He strives to assimilate them, for he needs them in order to deal with his fellow men, but this assimilation is always incomplete. Each of us sees them in his own way. Some escape us completely, remaining beyond our range of vision, while others are glimpsed in only some of their aspects. (p. 437)
Education according to Durkheim

Ib Sørensen's arbejdsskema. Han havde 7 overlæg. Gymnastikken begyndte dog først den 1. april.
Agreements between Durkheim and Bateson

- Mind is form, not matter - not necessary enclosed in the brain, but in systems of signs, modes of interaction – symbols.
- The foundation of mind is categories/difference
- Try to account for the interplay of organic, mental and social reality
- Mind should essentially be viewed as a collective structure
  - which was first developed as religion (phylogenetic), and then developed into systems of ideas and knowledge such as science
  - corresponds with the category of totality and
- **learning** is a question of aligning the structure of the individual mind with that of the totality expressing social reality
- Mind is part of the system it seeks to explain (recoursive)
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