

Research Down the Bone

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By education most have been
misled:
They believe, because they were
so bred.
The priest continues what the
nurse began,
And thus the child imposes on
the man.

—John Dryden, "The Hind and the Panther"

In a recommendation offered to the Regents of the University of California in 1978, the acclaimed anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1979) stated that the basic premises on which all our teaching is based are obsolete, and that one of the most egregious errors is:

...our anti-aesthetic assumption borrowed from the emphasis which Bacon, Locke, and Newton long ago gave to the physical sciences, viz. that all phenomena (including the mental) can and shall be studied and **evaluated** in quantitative terms. (p. 235)

He suggested, instead, that in examining biology and behavior “systems theory, cybernetics, holistic medicine, ecology, and gestalt psychology” (p. 236) offered much more fruitful approaches.

One Educational Reconstructionist’s View of Research

The educational philosopher, Theodore Brameld (1950), had written prolifically 30 years earlier about this lag in educational thought. Indeed, he had carried out two intensive studies of educational systems using an action research approach. It was his contention that the means and ends of education needed to be brought into consonance with the conclusions reached by modern research:

... the behavioral sciences are beginning to prove, really for the first time in history, that it is possible to formulate human goals not for sentimental, romantic, mystical, or similarly arbitrary reasons, but on the basis of what we are learning about cross-cultural and even universal values. Though studies in this difficult field have moved only a little way, they have moved far enough so that it is already becoming plausible both to describe these values objectively and to demonstrate that most human beings prefer them to alternative values. (p. 425)

In what Brameld (1977) described as his “prolonged effort at self-education” (p. 73), he made plans to study a culture using the qualitative technique of participant-observation. As a visiting professor at the University of Puerto Rico, he spent three years studying the people and their schools. In 1959, *The Remaking of a Culture* (1959) presented his conclusions. Several years later, he used this same approach in examining two minority communities in Japan. Through these immersion experiences, he began to develop the concept he called “anthropotherapy.” As Nobuo Shimahara and David Conrad (1991) point out, “Brameld used anthropotherapy...as a complement for psychotherapy—whose focus exclusively is personality—in order to concentrate on culture and its ailments” (p. 256). It, therefore, broadened the intent of psychotherapy by encouraging community self-examination and subsequent action toward change.

At about this time, Brameld (1977) began to describe his outlook as an anthropological philosophy of education: “I like to believe that my field studies, although almost ignored by most educational theorists, contributed to what may be considered a more mature expression of reconstructionism itself” (p. 73).

The Teacher as Researcher

It is heartening to note that halfway through the decade of the 1990s, the legacy of Brameld has not been lost. In the article “A Teacher Researcher Model in Preservice Education,” Nancy Farnum and Leif Fearn (1992) describe a program in which prospective teachers learn about collaborative inquiry through engaging

in it themselves. Agreeing with Harste's statement (1990) that "learning is the premise underlying the teacher as researcher movement" (p. vii), the authors began to encourage their preservice teachers to study real problems and collect data in the most suitable environment, the classroom. In examining approaches to reading instruction, for example, these prospective teachers interviewed elementary school children across grade and ability levels. Sometimes they recorded isolated responses of the children and at others they taped entire interviews. According to the authors, their students found this approach rewarding and insight-producing. The students felt that they had gained information that would have been unavailable to them otherwise. They also stated that this approach made them more attuned to observing actual behavior rather than relying on second-hand interpretations.

It is not always possible, however, for teacher educators to explore this model, because so few have had the requisite training. As in quantitative research, the methodology requires a development of expertise, which can best be attained by modeling a master researcher. Patience and endurance are two of the key ingredients. Yet, the benefits far outweigh the inconveniences, and there are those rare occasions when the data reveals principles which will have impact over a wide range of disciplines. Such was the case of four men who embarked upon the study of communication patterns that was later to influence operations as different as talking to a terminally ill patient and managing a classroom.

A Model of a Qualitative Researcher

In 1956, a groundbreaking article was published in *Behavioral Science* entitled "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" (Bateson *et al*, 1956). The way in which this theory emerged can serve as a classic paradigm of qualitative investigation, and John Weakland of the Mental Research Institute can serve as the model of a highly skilled action researcher. His story has much to tell us, too, about the importance of mentoring in learning this process. In a series of interviews with the authors (1992), Weakland described his training. His initiation began when, after a brief attempt at engineering, he found himself taking a course in anthropology with Bateson at the New School for Social Research. From the beginning, he was "enamored with the richness of Bateson's material," and over time they become close friends (Weakland, 1992). After several courses with Bateson, Weakland moved on to graduate study at Columbia University, but they maintained contact and one day Bateson suggested:

You know, Ruth Benedict has just gotten funds from the Office of Naval Research to study culture at a distance, an outgrowth of work that was done during World War II. Why don't you go up and get a job on her project?

Weakland demurred, feeling that he was still a fledgling anthropologist, but Bateson insisted, "Go anyway. She won't bite you."

According to Weakland, Benedict not only didn't bite, she actually hired him

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as a student assistant. He was then given the choice of researching Czechoslovakia or China, which he claims was one of the easiest decisions he ever made. He investigated Chinese culture, using written materials, interpreting films, and interviewing a variety of informants—one of whom later became his wife. In 1953, Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux co-edited the book, *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (1953), which described the project, and to which Weakland contributed several articles. In her commentary, Mead made mention of two themes which have been integral to Weakland's approach to research throughout the intervening years. The first was a positive distrust of conventional wisdom and a zest for entertaining all possible interpretations of a situational context:

Ability to see and hear and, finally, to fit the new into a pattern is thus a function of natural ability plus training, knowledge, and a disciplined capacity to hold in abeyance partial perceptions...all those who do exploratory work in this field are continually constructing schemes of analysis that fit all the material to date, but that must be held in readiness for reorganization when new material is presented. (p. 15)

The other continuing influence in Weakland's professional life was his commitment to group research. Mead claimed that this form of investigation had been the innovative contribution of English and American scientists in the 1930s. She differentiated this approach from the research seminar in which students in a specialized field gather together to present individual findings and exchange views. Rather, she regarded group research as men and women "all working with the same problems or the same materials, the concrete details of which are shared among them" (Mead & Metraux, 1953, p. 85). The group was most often multi-disciplinary and its purpose was to enlarge upon the talents and abilities that each researcher brought to the task. This required an environment which encouraged a participant to welcome new interpretations of her or his work and to apply these insights in ways that might never have occurred when working alone. The effectiveness of this approach was so apparent to Weakland that, throughout the years with Bateson until the present time at the Mental Research Institute, the group has met for a minimum of 5 hours weekly.

According to Weakland, after that research project with Ruth Benedict "one thing just followed another." Bateson moved on to Harvard University and then to the Langley Porter Institute. He was eventually hired by the Veterans Hospital in Menlo Park, California, to serve as their hospital ethnologist and in the same year he was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to investigate "Paradoxes of Levels of Abstraction in Human Communication." Weakland states that this topic could cover anything, and often did. When Bateson came to New York to receive the grant, he immediately asked Weakland to join him in Menlo Park. Although Weakland was in the midst of his doctoral studies, his enthusiastic "yes" was to begin a 40-year commitment to qualitative investigation.

The Original Group

The original group was composed of Bateson, Weakland, Jay Haley—who was then engaged in master's studies in communication at Stanford University—and William Fry, a psychiatric resident at Stanford. Haley (1976) was later to comment:

This group was not dealing with pedestrian ideas or methodology, but with highly charged material examined in innovative ways and so disagreement was inevitable. Bateson...kept us focused upon significant ideas in a way so productive that three group members and two consultants produced some 70 publications. (p. 109)

At first, the men functioned by pursuing Bateson's leads, but, as time went on, Bateson was quite open to considering others' contributions as well. Bateson was interested in observing communication whether animal, human, or mixed, wherever it presented itself. If they found a particularly interesting example, they would examine it first hand, sometimes recording it on film or tape. Then, as a group, they would review the material and discuss it. Although the framework always remained the same, the subject matter was highly variable. By the time Weakland arrived on the West Coast, Bateson had already observed and filmed the monkeys and the river otters at the San Francisco Zoo. Bateson was quite proud of a film he had made entitled, "The Nature of Play, Part I: River Otters." He hypothesized that the otters must be exchanging messages on more than one level. For example, it became obvious from his observations that the otters were somehow communicating, "This bite is not a bite, but a playful nip."

Bateson viewed some of his actions with the otters as prototypical of therapeutic intervention. Although he was, by training, an anthropologist, he had many contacts in the psychoanalytic community. Earlier he and Jurgen Ruesch co-authored a book called *Communication, the Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1968), in which they made the following assertion:

The study of interaction is concerned with the effect of communication upon the behavior of two or more interacting entities. This study therefore always involves making statements at two, if not more, levels of abstraction: there must be statements about the participating entities, and there must also be statements about the larger entity which is brought into being by the fact of the interaction. Even in the relationships between a person and a thing, interaction occurs: the person is self corrective as a result of his observations of the effect which his actions seem to have upon the thing. (p. 286)

So, while he was learning from the otters, it seemed only reasonable to make them the beneficiaries of his therapeutic expertise.

The group's investigation into communication took other forms as well. Bateson, Weakland, and Haley interviewed a doctor who had great success in treating voice problems in opera stars, using particular types of dialogue. Bateson made the training of guide dogs a special study. He noticed that an important

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element in this discipline involved the dog's ability to process contradictory commands. This was a crucial lesson because it was necessary for the dog to disobey a command if the blind master told him to cross an intersection against a light or in traffic. It was through these observations that Bateson and his group began to gather data on levels of communication.

The team's theoretical stance evolved from a wide variety of sources. Standard anthropological research was given scant attention. Rather, they attempted to observe and study anything that had relevance to the general topic of communication. For example, Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica* was an enormous influence on the project because the work dealt with the problems engendered by different levels of organization or classification. Alan Watts (1958), an expert on Zen Buddhism, also brought to the group his ideas on paradox, which provided them with alternative views of bringing about change. If people operated at several levels, then paradox could be produced by inner or outer communication that was contradictory.

A Dialogue

The four researchers would meet for an hour every morning and, according to Weakland (1992), at least once a week, Haley or he would initiate the following dialogue: "Gregory, what is this project all about?"

"It ought to be obvious," Bateson would reply. If either young man had the temerity to push the questioning further, Bateson would come forth with his standard reply when he was angry: "That's boring!"

One morning, Haley commented that while they had been studying the area of communication quite broadly, there seemed to be some very interesting dialogue going on right around them. "What do you mean?" asked Bateson.

"Well, we've got all these schizophrenic patients talking in strange ways. Why don't we study that communication?" replied Haley.

"Why not?" said Bateson, and they proceeded to use the same natural history approach with the patients as they had with their earlier investigations. They talked with the patients in the hospital, taped their conversations, and then repeatedly reviewed the recordings and discussed what they'd heard. This was a radical departure from the accepted approach to research at that time. People were interested in thought and language in schizophrenia, but Weakland claims that most researchers weren't really studying it at all. They would have a general idea of what a person suffering from schizophrenia might talk like, but they would never record what the patient actually said. Then, they would compare this alleged schizophrenic speech to normal communication, but they never recorded everyday conversation, either. Actually, they were using—as one element of their comparison—an ideal of speech that rarely occurs. Then, with little groundwork laid, these researchers would leap from language to thought and speculate on the kind of thinking that would produce that speech. The issue of what people were saying to the schizo-

phrenic was completely ignored, as was the context of the conversation.

So, the members of the group actually talked with the patients, and since they recorded the conversation they were able to analyze their own comments in relation to the patient. They also began to note the impact of the context on the conversation. For example, one day Haley interviewed a patient who insisted that he had come from Mars and that his mother's name was Margaret Stalin. On this afternoon, the patient entered the room, sat down and said, "My stomach is full of cement."

Rather than argue about the unreality of the statement, Haley, realizing that the meeting was taking place immediately after lunch and that the patient had been eating institutional food, remarked, "I imagine the food is not all that good here." His response seemed to satisfy the patient and they went on with their talk.

Experiences such as this led the group to suspect that schizophrenic communication could be understood a good deal better if it were regarded as metaphorical. With this particular population, the metaphor was not labeled. In most conversation either the speaker makes the comparison explicit or it is a commonly understood figure of speech. No one would think it strange if a schizophrenic patient said, "I've got butterflies in my stomach," but when he declares, "I've got concrete in my stomach," it is considered aberrant. Yet, the two statements are perfectly parallel.

Even after the team began to make some sense out of schizophrenic speech, their approach to research continued to veer away from the traditional. Whereas some experts were hypothesizing that schizophrenia was precipitated by some specific event, the Bateson group turned their attention to the dynamics of family interaction. Obviously, it was impossible to recapture the original social milieu of the family, but it **could** be fruitful, they felt, to examine the family in the present. So, they invited the parents and siblings of the patient to come for joint interviews, and they suggested that some of their findings might be helpful to the families. Thus, family therapy was born on the West Coast! In the East, researchers and therapists came to see the value of conjoint family therapy through other avenues. Weakland claims that there was never a great creative insight that led a clinician to say, "I need to see a family." Rather, step by step the practice evolved.

As the group began to work more intensively in the area of schizophrenia, they realized that it would be beneficial to bring in a consultant from the medical establishment. Don Jackson was head of psychiatry at the Palo Alto Clinic, and he was already teaching in a residency program at the hospital. Since he was very interested in their progress, he set aside time several days a week to meet with them and discuss their findings. In the earliest days of their research, there had been no contact with the mental health community. Later, however, Weakland and Haley were invited to Chicago for the opening of a new psychiatric hospital. One evening they went to dinner with the chief administrator of the hospital and several of his residents. Weakland took this opportunity to play a tape of a family interview. "They just thought I was plain hell to meet with that family and behave in such a free-swinging fashion," he reminisces. "Actually, I thought it was a fairly mild

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interview.” On the whole, people were curious, but “they thought we were wild men,” Weakland continued.

At meetings of the American Psychiatric Association, Jackson reported that no one presented papers on the topic of family therapy, but in private conversation a psychiatrist might mention that he had seen a few families, and others might quietly admit that they had seen some family members, too. An underground movement was developing. In the meantime, these issues did not deter the group members from carrying on their work in the hospital. Difficulty in obtaining funding was their only obstacle.

It was around this time that Weakland began to be intrigued by the possibilities of hypnosis, and he and Jay Haley took a number of trips to Phoenix in order to interview the great hypnotherapist, Milton Erickson. As Weakland (1992) describes him, “He saw people as tough and full of potential rather than as poor, weak, helpless, and sick creatures.” Erickson challenged the two men to think about people’s behavior rather than concentrate on their intrapsychic processes.

While the interviews with Erickson were taking place, the group was also beginning to film some families in their homes. Some of these had family members who were schizophrenic and in others the diagnosis was less clear. These films and interviews formed the background material for the structured interviews that were later to be used. By now, they had gathered so much data that Jackson suggested that the time was ripe for them to publish their findings. Bateson disagreed because he felt that there was still work to be done in understanding the complex communication patterns. However, the group consensus was that the writing should proceed and the controversial article, “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,” was published.

To this day, Weakland feels that much of their success can be attributed to their qualitative approach. When an anthropologist goes into the field, everything looks aberrant, but he or she is not allowed to dismiss it by labeling it as pathology. Instead, the anthropologist’s task is to understand how it makes sense. Also different is the way in which he or she seeks to understand the phenomena. A qualitative researcher does not look for internal explanations, but rather for social learning. How, the researcher asks, do people learn to behave in this strange way and how do they maintain this behavior through their interactions with others? Psychiatrists and psychologists were locked into a particular mode of perceiving the reality because they were not trained to start with the raw data.

As for the long-term results of the research, Weakland (1976) has this to say:

...“Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia” did present a new general viewpoint on communication and behavior and the statement of this viewpoint has led to much other useful work, both practical and theoretical. In this connection, the various writings that have taken off from, and gone beyond, the original article whether by expanding on matters merely touched on there or by seeking quite new connections to consider other “pathologies,” therapy, creativity, and even evolution do not appear as disqualifications. Rather, they represent developments consonant with

the basic aims and framework of "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" and testify further to its usefulness and influence. And the end is not yet. To me, this seems the main thing, and enough. (p. 314)

Two Recent Studies

It is worth noting that only one of the four authors of "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" was trained in psychiatry. Two were anthropologists and one a communications specialist. Through their prior observations, they had evolved a grounded theory which they tested at the Menlo Park Veteran's Hospital. Although this theory on different levels of communication shed light on schizophrenia, it had applications to every aspect of behavior. In fact, Bateson had originally opposed the publication of "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" because he felt that the theory had so much potential that it was premature to narrow its focus. He would have been gratified to know that his research has laid the groundwork for studies in so many other disciplines.

One very interesting study was published by Longhofer and Floersh (1980). They hypothesized that the double-bind theory pioneered by the Bateson group might apply to cancer patients who often gathered clues to the stark reality of their situation from those around them. In observing patients at a Boston hospital who were to receive bone marrow transplants, they noted that the physicians often described the experimental procedure as standard treatment. In analyzing the messages of the staff involved in the procedure, however, it was found that they often communicated the tension and uncertainty normally experienced when asking a patient to undergo an experimental technique. It was concluded in this study that these paradoxical communications could serve as barriers to an effective physician-patient trust relationship and trigger increased anxiety and depression on the part of the patient. The authors recommended that medical personnel be alert to these double messages and develop strategies to avoid them.

Of more relevance to our day-to-day operation as teachers is the book written by Ellen S. Amatea entitled *Brief Strategic Intervention for School Behavior Problems* (1989). Amatea spent a considerable amount of time studying at the Mental Research Institute and she credits their theories on problem resolution for her success in dealing with cases of persistent temper tantrums, sporadic stealing, and school refusal. The approach, based upon the early work of the Bateson group and developed by Paul Watzlawick, Weakland, and Richard Fisch, takes the view that human problems are interactional: "Problem behaviors are viewed in relation to their wider, ongoing contexts (for example, a student's home or school) rather than in isolation with the individual" (p. 1).

The teacher, then, is encouraged to intervene in such a way as to influence the student to discontinue non-productive patterns of behavior. A direct approach would appear to be warranted, but in the realm of human behavior very little is as

simple as it seems. In the case of Connie, a seventh grade student who complained that she was unable to remain in her science class, the counselor worked with the mother who was unwittingly supporting her child's behavior. When the mother was persuaded that her sympathetic approach was not helping her daughter, she changed her tactics and, miraculously, her daughter remained in class. How helpful it would be to prospective teachers if they were trained to gather information about a concrete problem, listen to what the student believes about the particular event, and then plan an intervention that would change the process.

Other Educational Implications

School reforms in the 1990s have led to additional decision making responsibilities on the part of teachers, and concomitantly, an increased need for data to inform these decisions. Teacher-as-researcher, an anomaly when Brameld was conducting his studies, is now more frequently discussed in educational literature (Carr, 1986; Dana, 1993; Elliot, 1988; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). In schools throughout the country, teachers are asking how they should proceed in studying the educational processes of most interest to them, and teacher educators are inquiring how they can best support the teacher research movement.

There is a real need to explore the range of possibilities by examining successful research practitioners. Calkins (1985) draws an analogy between the teacher researchers and such psychologists as Erickson and Bettelheim who were practitioners as well as theory builders. Brameld, an exemplar in the field of education, continually developed educational theory as he evolved his practice of anthropotherapy. We have investigated the processes through which Bateson, Weakland, Haley, and Jackson constructed their theory of schizophrenia while engaging in action research, or as they termed it, therapeutic intervention. There are a number of themes in their work which can be of interest to teacher educators as they fashion pre-service and in-service education to support teacher research.

First, the research that they embarked upon was qualitative, inductive, and involved grounded theory building. In the problem solving process, the Bateson team exhibited a healthy distrust of conventional wisdom and an openness to all possible interpretations of their data. They were engaged in an ongoing exploration in which even remotely connected events were considered.

The project utilized group research techniques and its participants were multidisciplinary. They met regularly, and as the research progressed other experts were asked to join the investigation. Bateson acted as research director and he contributed his own ideas toward the solution of the problem.

They took a natural history approach as they studied the context of the actual event. They did not manipulate variables, but rather they tried to make sense of naturally occurring events. They questioned how people learned to behave this way and how this behavior was maintained through their interaction with others. Their

goal was understanding, not prediction. Their work included therapeutic intervention, and they were subjectively involved in helping people and their families. They were also observing their own interactions with subjects, a process known as intersubjectivity.

If we consider the implications of these themes, it is possible to envision the expansion of educational research far beyond the stultifying positivist paradigm that has limited university-based researchers and contributed to the gap between them and the educational practitioners in the schools. To support this expansion, preservice education should contain a thorough study of qualitative research techniques and clinical or field experiences should provide opportunities for students to engage in small research projects. Experienced educators should have the opportunity to work with university-based researchers in partnerships. In our own experience working with urban educators, it is evident that many are strongly motivated to engage in their own studies, but they are puzzled as to which data to collect and how it should be analyzed. Teacher educators can serve as guides: teaching courses, running workshops, or providing in-service programs on research methodology. They can also participate as research directors or facilitators of research teams. In fact, they might wish to follow the example of Brameld and Bateson in arranging multi-disciplinary groups which include social workers, psychologists, anthropologists, business experts, and scholars in the humanities.

Above all, teacher educators are certain to benefit from an examination of eminent research practitioners, such as Bateson. In recalling that era, Haley (1976) was to say of his experience:

Few men were given the opportunity that Weakland and I had in that decade. We not only enjoyed each other's company, but we were able to do full-time research on whatever we thought important with Bateson as teacher and guide. When we were struggling in the dark with unformed thoughts, Bateson offered us an expectation that we would work at our maximum ability, a confident attitude that a problem could be solved, and often an idea to solve it. What more could one ask of a research director?" (p. 110)

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