



Gregory Bateson

From *On the Self-Renewal of Teachers*: J Vet Med Education, 2011

Gregory Bateson would turn the classroom upside down with his advice on how to make sense of the world. He would teach what he calls the successful raid of the random—the ability to separate the stimuli that one should pay attention to from the noise that does not count. He would insist that context determines meaning and that it is the responsibility of the recipient to provide context. It is the recipient alone who can truly communicate. The rest is just noise. And Bateson would have something else creative to say to students. Students equate creativity with “thinking outside the box.” Bateson would instead argue: Grow your box. Grow it big, because a bigger box provides richer context. Bateson’s blueprint for box growing would likely hinge on gathering information, which he defines as a difference that makes a difference. Bateson’s information is special information indeed. Mastering the art of seeing the similar as different, the different as similar is an enviable achievement. That is why training in comparative religion, comparative economics, comparative medicine, or comparative anything is such a good idea. It trains us in the art of spotting connections.

Are you preparing your students for a life of discovery, for finding what’s hidden? Shouldn’t you be teaching a course on comparative something?

Suggested Readings:

1. Bateson G. Mind and nature: a necessary unity. London: Wildwood House; 1979.
2. Bateson G, Bateson MC. Angels fear: towards an epistemology of the sacred. New York: Macmillan; 1987.

Learn More about Bateson:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_Bateson