Education in the interregnum: an evaluation of Zygmunt Bauman's liquid-turn writing on education

In his liquid-turn writings, Zygmunt Bauman has come to identify liquid modernity as a period of interregnum. Education has a central role to play within the contemporary interregnum by opening up a new public sphere for dialogue. However, the processes of liquefaction manifest themselves in conditions that severely limit a person's ability to exercise their human agency. Bauman provides no indication of how the educators can escape the processes that limit agency, nor does he explain how educators can combat the seductive consumerism that students need to overcome before they can engage in a reconstruction of the public sphere.

The work of Zygmunt Bauman appears to be increasingly influential in the field of education. From Bauman's 'liquid turn' in 2000 to 2014 there were 52 papers and reviews in the British Journal of Sociology of Education alone that have cited Bauman's work. Bauman has been used to support such diverse topics as inclusive education in times of austerity (Veck 2014); school inspection (Courtney 2014); education reform and social class (Luttrell-Rowland 2014; Smyth 2014); adult learners' identities (Busher et al. 2014); problems in higher education (Lum 2014); consumerism and personalisation (Bragg 2014); mothering and educational care (Golden and Erdreich 2014); social enterprise and self (Kelly et al. 2013); and middle-class social mobility (Collet-Sabé and Tort 2013). All of these papers listed accept that liquid modernity 'militates against the very essence of school-centred education' because it undermines 'stiff curriculum and predetermined succession of learning' (Bauman 2005, 316).These papers draw on an uncritical account of Bauman's theory of the transition from solid to liquid modernity and how the process of liquefaction has impacted

upon identities, making them much more fluid and flexible. In addition, Bauman's liquid-turn writing that directly addresses education is largely ignored by these authors. A common approach is taken by Wayne Veck (2014), for example, who draws upon Bauman's metaphors of the gardener and the hunter to explain changes in public policy. For Bauman the gardener 'assumes that there would be no order at all in the part of the world in his charge were it not for his constant attention and effort', and thereby embarks upon the task of 'encouraging the growth of the right type of plants and of uprooting and destroying all the others', whilst the hunter 'could not care less about the overall "balance of things", whether "natural" or contrived' (Bauman 2005a, 306); individualisation and austerity within the liquid-modern condition generates mass indifference and an absence of care and responsibility. Care and responsibility become privatised; no longer in the hands of planners or gardeners. Bauman argues that 'liquid-modern culture' is 'a culture of disengagement, discontinuity, and forgetting' (Bauman 2004, 71), in which the art of learning has become the consumption of 'knowledge' and 'is eminently disposable, good only until further notice and of only temporary usefulness' (Bauman 2012, 18). Education is characterised by a 'gradual yet relentless' pressure to move away from 'the orthodox teacher–student relationship' and in its place teaching and learning are understood in terms of 'the supplier–client, or shopping-mall–shopper pattern' (Bauman 2005a, 316; Veck 2014, 789–790).

Educational researchers need to engage with Bauman's work much more critically; not only his writings that specifically address educational themes, but the underpinning assumptions about the transition from a solid to a liquid modernity. The process of liquefaction of a solid into a more liquid form may be a well-established and well-researched natural process in the physical sciences but is Bauman's attempt to apply this conception to the rapid process of social change at a global level appropriate and/or convincing? Bauman's liquid moderns have little control over this global process and their passions become increasingly erratic and know no limits or boundaries. Liquid moderns become fixated with consumption and the 'pursuit of happiness' identified by Bauman (2008a, 30) as the prime psychological factor in the transition from solid to liquid modernity. Liquid moderns have become 'involuntary/compulsive choosers' (Bauman 2004, 86); however, in the field of consumerism, as in the liquid modern's other life choices, Bauman places the emphasis on 'external conditions' leaving human agents with little or no ability to resist or defy liquefaction.

This article outlines and evaluates Bauman's liquid-turn writings that directly address education and the underpinning argument about the transition from solid to liquid modernity.

Liquid modernity is characterised by, above all, 'the divorce of power from politics, and the shifting of functions once undertaken by political authorities sideways, to the markets, and downward, to individual

life-politics' (Bauman 2010, 398). Liquid-modern society is perceived as a 'network' rather than 'structure', a matrix of random connections often out of control and always unpredictable. Consumerism and the 'pursuit of happiness' that accompanies consumption is identified by Bauman (2008a, 30) as the prime psychological factors in the transition from solid to liquid modernity. At a conceptual level the idea of 'liquefaction' refers to a collection of moving objective processes external to the individual; these processes have an independent existence, independent of people and context; a substance that moves in a uniform manner, that structures reality and shapes the behaviour of human agents including their activities, ideas and emotions. The human agent is not responsible for creating the vague global processes by which solids become saturated and are transformed into a liquid form. There is a subservience of human action at a psychological level to the properties of liquefaction in that individuals can merely respond to the processes of liquefaction and are powerless to shape or determine the global process within liquid modernity. However, Bauman's work is not a celebration of liquid modernity, nor is Bauman's work a plea for a return to the stability of solid modernity; rather, liquid modernity is identified to be a contemporary interregnum.

Why did Bauman choose the term liquid? The metaphor liquid is an abstraction that cannot be physically observed by Bauman's reader. Clearly there is no physical basis for the liquid metaphor because social change is not literally a liquid, and neither is cultural change. Bauman's liquid-turn writings retain the idea that human behaviour is determined. The rhetoric may have changed and Bauman may have attempted to distance himself from Marxism; however, the logic of his 'liquid turn' is one of determinism. Individuals have little capability to resist the logic or force of the process of liquefaction as it structures the thoughts of the liquid moderns and shapes their conformity. Bauman's liquid conforms to a material or physical entity that determines the behaviours of the liquid moderns and as such it retains an essentialist and totalising nature that was present in Bauman's pre-postmodern/liquid-modern Marxian view of the world. The process of liquefaction functions as a physically real material that generates difference in the world; a process that is external to the individual with the capacity to exercise a constraint upon people. The property of a liquid for Bauman is in large measure that of an external physical reality that resists human agency (Best 2013, 2014).

In Bauman's liquid-turn writings, education is seen as having a central role to play within the contemporary interregnum. Potentially education provides the hope of redefining the public space in terms of new forms of communitarian politics that can emerge, allowing people some control over the consequences of liquefaction. The term interregnum was first used to describe the crisis following the ascension of king Romulus to heaven. Romulus had ruled Rome for 38 years and the majority of Romans had never known any other form of rule. Without clear direction and after a

series of people who unsatisfactorily attempted to rule in the fashion of Romulus, a republic was formed. The period of transition is described as the interregnum in which the old ways of working are no longer effective but the new ways of working have yet to be devised. What Bauman is searching for is an alternative to the contemporary interregnum; in which people can come together in a newly defined public sphere.

The task of creating a new public sphere is all the more difficult because 'culture' has been transformed by market forces from its original Enlightenment-inspired form within solid modernity in which there were 'people' to 'cultivate', into a form within liquid modernity which consists of 'offerings', a 'warehouse of meant-for-consumption products' not 'norms', and is described as something that is 'willingly pursued'; and within which choice is unavoidable; regarded as both a 'life necessity' and a 'duty' for the individual consumers (Bauman 2009, 157, 2010, 399). Choice is characterised by 'seduction, not normative regulation; PR, not policing; creating new needs/desires/wants, not coercion' (Bauman 2009, 157, 2010, 399). This liquid-modern culture allows the individual clients to be seduced without 'stiff standards'; a culture that serves all tastes while privileging none; a culture that encourages fitfulness and 'flexibility'. Unlike solid modernity, there is an abandonment of the attempts at assimilation of the stranger into the dominant culture in an effort to take away the strangeness of the stranger. Culture within liquid modernity is characterised by difference but not necessarily a celebration of difference.

Within solid modernity, different age groups looked at the world from a different perspective and had differing evaluations of their common life conditions. In solid modernity, education was concerned with regulating society by 'instilling universal skills and, above all, a habit of universal and continuous discipline' (Bauman 1991, 110). However, children and young people were always viewed as 'miniature adults' or 'would-be adults' who would come to view the world in a similar fashion to their elders once they were more experienced and had a greater understanding of the world. In liquid modernity, young people need to acquire a different set of life skills. Essential liquid-modern skills stress the interactive capacity of 'surfing' rather than the increasingly old-fashioned 'sounding' and 'fathoming':

> Surfing benefits from the lightness and sprightliness of the surfer; it also helps if the surfer is not choosy about the waves coming their way and is always ready to cast their former preferences aside. All that goes against the grain of everything that learning and education stood for through most of their history. (Bauman 2009, 160)

There is an emphasis on withdrawal from physical proximity and physical interaction with other humans, an emphasis on virtual relations and an avoidance of 'going in depth':

> What matters most for the young is the retention of the ability to reshape 'identity' and the 'network' whenever a need to reshape arrives or is suspected to have arrived. The ancestors' worry about identification is increasingly elbowed out by the worry of re-identification. Identities must be disposable; an unsatisfying or not-sufficiently-satisfying identity, or an identity betraying its advanced age, needs to be easy to abandon; perhaps biodegradability would be the ideal attribute of the identity most strongly desired. (Bauman 2009, 165, 2010, 406)

The central elements of the world of lived experience that for the older generation were conducted face to face and in person have given way to a lebenswelt (lifeworld or the world of lived experience) in which interpersonal relations are electronically mediated, including 'contacts', 'dates', 'meeting', 'communicating', 'community' and 'friendship'.

Bauman does not provide a comprehensive or systematic philosophical approach to education. However, Bauman looks at the difficulties faced by educationalists in the contemporary world in terms of exercising their critique and political agency in the public sphere; firstly in solid modernity there were totalitarian pressures exercised by the state, and secondly in liquid modernity there are nihilist pressures on intellectuals to view everything in individual and market terms with no reference to a public sphere. In 'Education in the Liquid-Modern Setting' (Bauman 2009) and 'Educational Challenges of the Liquid-Modern Era' (Bauman 2003) Bauman presents an outline of liquid-modern culture and explains the issues that liquid modernity raises for education and educationalists. In the transition from solid to liquid modernity there are changes in the nature and role of education. In solid modernity, education is concerned with 'cultural prohibition'; in liquid modernity, education is concerned with navigation of the interregnum. Bauman is very critical of the social engineering role of education within solid modernity and wants to avoid the human consequences of such an education. In 'Modernity and the Holocaust', for example, he argues:

> the damaging 'otherness' of the Other. One could indeed point out that – in our age of artificiality of the social order, of the putative omnipotence of education and, more generally, of social engineering. (Bauman 1989, 64–65)

Bauman is very critical of the way in which educationalists have come to view lifelong learning within liquid modernity. There has been a shift, suggests Bauman, from a conception of paideia, the ability to intellectualise or reflect upon culture and ideas in relation to their position in the world, into a pleonasm with a meaningless content not wholly dissimilar from 'buttery-butter' or 'metallic-metal' (Bauman 2005, 116, 2008b, 181, 2012, 16). Education in liquid modernity does not have a rational backbone, it is not concerned with changing individuals to make the economy more competitive in a global market place; in contrast, liquid-modern education is about

identity construction. Unlike the culture of Bildung which Jaeger argues
gave a clear focus and purpose to the pre-Nazi Prussian university, the role
of the university today is unclear: 'The principles which in the past seemed
to legitimize beyond doubt the centrality of the universities are no more
universally accepted, if not dismissed as obsolete or even retrospectively
condemned' (Bauman 1997, 49). Information provided by teachers, texts
and other resources is understood today as something that students can
consume if and when they deem them to be appropriate to their needs.
Oxenham (2013, 18) suggests that in Bauman's work on liquid modernity
there is no common telos, no utopia for a good life on a global scale; an
'absence of bonds with others' (Bauman 2008b, 160); no agora or other
form of 'assembly' or meeting place for spiritual and political life.

  Reflecting on his time at Warsaw University in the 1950s, Bauman
(2003) opens his paper 'Educational Challenges of the Liquid-Modern Era'
with some contemplation on the nature of learning within the different and
opposing theoretical positions he encountered. The competing theories
agreed on several important, points. First, that the 'human way of being-in-
the-world is the process of learning'. Second, that learning is activated by
the 'organism's urge to satisfy its needs', which will generate anxiety if not
resolved. Third, 'learning consists of the re-forging of the world's regularity
into the routine behavioural pattern of the learning organism'. Fourth,
education allows the 'organism' to adapt to the world and acquire the ability
to successfully pursue its purposes:

> In short: to survive in the world the organism must surrender to its rules. The
> assumption underlying all those points was an essential regularity of the
> world, that could be challenged only at the living organism's peril and never
> successfully. (Bauman 2003, 15)

Education was seen as a product rather than a process; Bauman explains
how he felt uneasy when taught about how the behaviours of dogs, rats and
sticklebacks were used to explain the behaviours of humans. Bauman and
his classmates did accept that the world around them was immovable,
intractable and regular, in a similar fashion to world created for the experi-
mental conditions. It was also assumed that, like the animals in the experi-
ments, the classmates' role was to learn their positions by heart and then
like the rats and the dogs be rewarded for those actions that followed the
design. A solid-modern education was based upon the assumption that
'what we have to learn to do, we learn by doing' and that once learned such
knowledge would serve people for the rest of their lives. The world of solid
modernity was durable and regular, and if any changes did take place, such
change was based upon the scientific belief that the world would be made
more durable and lasting by the imposition of greater rationality upon the
world.

Education provided the knowledge that reflected this commitment to the modern agenda:

> Knowledge was of value since it was hoped to last, and education was of value in so far as it offered such knowledge of lasting value. Education, whether seen as a 'one off' episode or a life-long endeavour, was to be an activity aimed at the delivery of a product which like all other possessions could, and would be desired to, be held forever. (Bauman 2003, 19)

Human beings have the gift of memory which allows us to accumulate knowledge and life skills. However, this is only true if the world around us is stable and predictable, so that the same knowledge and skills can be applied day after day. If the world is in flux the benefits of acquiring such knowledge and skills disappears. Just imagine, argues Bauman:

> what havoc would occur, if, for instance, the meaning of the colours of traffic lights were changed without warning. In a randomly mutable world, memory and learning would turn from blessing into a curse. To learn, to go by past experience, would be truly suicidal. (Bauman 1990, 147)

In the 'liquid-modern' world such durable possessions and knowledge are now more likely to be viewed as liabilities. The prospect of being left with one set of assets or one body of knowledge for the length of one life is viewed as 'repulsive and frightening. And no wonder, since even the most coveted things are known to age fast, to lose their lustre in no time and to turn from a badge of honour into a stigma of shame' (Bauman 2003, 19, 2009, 159).

Bauman (2005, 116–118, 2008b, 181–184, 2012, 16–19) develops this argument with reference to the use of missiles. In solid modernity, teachers viewed their role as that of launching ballistic missiles; providing people with the information and knowledge that they required to achieve a fixed and given target that was central to their life project. When a ballistic missile is fired its direction is determined. However, when targets start to move the effectiveness of such missiles is limited, and what are required are smart missiles that can change direction to seek out the location of the target. Such missiles learn as they go and forget what they previously knew. They do not cherish information but always regard it as disposable. In liquid modernity, education should be ongoing and help people to refashion their selves and identities, to change direction as targets change. Educators have become over-concerned with providing an education that they feel allows people to enter labour markets that are becoming increasingly uncertain, but at the same time self-directed, lifelong learning allows the state to abdicate any responsibility for providing education services. Such provision is left to the market to provide; it is up to the individual to rise to the challenge of the market situation. Lifelong learning should not only be about employment

skills, but also about enablement, giving people the skills, abilities and confidence to enter the public sphere and be empowered.

Liquid modernity then undermines the essence of the idea of education as it has been traditionally understood. Liquefaction undermines the solidity of things such as human bonds. Such forms of solidarity become resented by liquid moderns as a threat. Any long-term commitment or similar obligations are seen to constrain freedom and reduce a person's ability to take advantage of known and still unknown openings as they present themselves. Consumerism is about 'one off' enjoyment, not the accumulation of things as an end in themselves, and the 'knowledge package' that students acquire by attending college and university is viewed in the same way. Knowledge is not immune from consumerism, and just as consumerism is no longer about the accumulation of things but about 'one off' enjoyment. So too the 'knowledge package' that provides instant pleasure from 'one off' use and then becomes disposal is much more attractive. Knowledge in liquid-modern culture has also changed and this is reflected, argues Bauman, in the content of television quiz shows, in which people are rewarded the same number of points irrespective of the topic of the questions:

> Swift and thorough forgetting of outdated information and aged habits can be as much or more important for success than the memorizing of past moves and building one's strategies on the hardened and lasting sediment of previous learning. (Bauman 2005, 304)

Modern parents would promise their children that learning had a value. However, the erratic and essentially unpredictable nature of liquid modernity means that knowledge acquired in school can no longer be valued for its ability to make sense of the world; in liquid modernity even the 'best informed' people can be taken by surprise. We experience life in liquid modernity as one in which we move: 'from one confusion, we immediately land in another. We do not learn much in the process, except the need to brace ourselves for more dubious, precarious situations and bear the consequences of new false steps' (Bauman 2003, 22; 2009, 161).

Bauman took his starting point from a rejection of Gregory Bateson's (1987) concept of proto-learning, which is primary, first-degree learning within a planned curriculum, and deuteron-learning, which is a subterranean process that Bateson later developed into a concept of 'tertiary learning' that took the form of: 'leaning how to break the regularity, how to get free from habits … to rearrange fragmentary experiences into heretofore unfamiliar patterns' (Bauman 2001, 125). Such an approach to learning was viewed by educationalists with a 'mixture of bewilderment and horror, as a pathological growth or a portent of advancing schizophrenia', argues Bauman (2001, 127), but this approach to learning has become common within liquid

modernity because it allows the learner to undo their mental patterns at short notice, allowing the person to live with ambivalence and uncertainty. In favour of 'tertiary learning', Bauman suggests that the role of education should be to assist people develop the 'ability to dissemble and rearrange the prevailing cognitive frame or dispose of it completely' (2012, 13).

The purpose of learning in liquid modernity is not to '"build upon a firm foundation," adding new knowledge to the already acquired volume and thereby enabling the pursuit of the selected trajectory' (Bauman 2005, 312). Rather, learning in liquid modernity leaves 'no lasting sediment, no firm foundation on which to build, and no knowledge fit for accumulation and growth over the course of study'; with tertiary learning we are faced with an 'unending succession of new beginnings, moved more by a swift forgetting of the previously acquired knowledge than by an acquisition of new knowledge' (Bauman 2005, 313).

In liquid modernity, learners are unwilling to make long-term commitments; a situation that has a negative effect on the essence of school-based education and the traditional role of teachers as 'gatekeepers of knowledge'. The role of education is now to assist people to develop the 'ability to disassemble and rearrange the prevailing cognitive frame or to dispose of it completely' (Bauman 2012, 13), something which was viewed by Bateson as pathological or counter-educational.

It is surprising that Bauman dismisses the role of deutero-learning because one would imagine that in the conditions of liquid modernity the 'learning to learn' aspect of deutero-learning, in which the individual learner attempts to gain an understanding of the context in which learning processes take place, would be a valuable skill for the liquid modern.

Paideia

Bauman also draws upon the work of Werner Jaeger (1939) on pedagogy and learning. For Jaeger, paideia is understood as a way of conceptualising 'civil society' as a space for individual autonomous thought within a public sphere. A form of humanism which is based upon an education that enables the individual to position themselves in the world as people did in ancient Greece. For Jaeger it was the ancient Greeks who created the human ideal upon which the culture of the western world is based. Greek culture emphasised how individual people should discover themselves without the need for gods, kings or spirits. According to R.W. Livingstone's (1939) review, Jaeger's thesis can be outlined in three sentences: 'Without Greek cultural ideals … the culture of the western world would never have existed' (1939, xvii); 'the culture of the present … needs illumination and transformation by that ideal [the Greek form of culture], in order to establish its true meaning and direction' (1939, xviii); and 'by discovering man the Greeks … realized the universal laws of human nature' (1939, xxiii). Greek culture is

a permanent standard to which European culture (and not only European) must continually recur for self-examination and inspiration (Livingstone 1939, 364).

Jaeger's book was written against the backdrop of the rise of Nazism and the ways in which Nazi ideology attempted to undermine civil society and open dialogue. According to Anderson (1993), paideia can mean an education into the culture of the society including its literature, religion, athletics and civilisation. Reflecting on his work, Jaeger explained in the 1960s that:

> All my work during those years was conducted by what my generation was striving for, by the quest for a new humanism that would restore their true significance to school, university and all education by helping to understand their beginnings. The inclusion of humanism within the forms of the historically orientated study of antiquity was the final step in the process of transforming what had once been a humanistic study of the classics. That this humanism was rooted in the structure of Greek thought itself was demonstrated in my Paideia. (Jaeger 1966, 70–71 cited in Elsner 2013, 140)

Taking this starting point from Jaeger, Bauman (2012) suggests that the way forward though the interregnum is by developing and supporting active citizenship, in particular by educating people with skills to engage in dialogue with the other. It is by dialogue with the other that we come to understand the other and make it possible to come to some 'fusion of horizons':

> I admit that I am here making virtue out of necessity, because the ability to dialog – the ability to live profitably with others holding to different views, others holding to different predilections, different preferences, different values and so on – that is effectively required. The problem with liquid modernity, since I've already used this term, is that it erodes the social or the foundation or morphology of solidarity. (Bauman 2014)

For Bauman, people have lost the ability to engage in dialogue with the other because of the one-sided nature of interaction on the Internet. However many people might question Bauman's optimism about the trouble-free nature of interactions online:

> It is childishly easy to switch to another website and forget about all of the differences in the world. You are closing yourself into what can be called an echo chamber. The only sounds that you hear are the reflections of your own voice … You listen only to like-minded people. Therefore Internet, the network, is a trouble-free area. You don't have any trouble. You don't have to dialog. There's no one to dialog with. You just go on through the rules of repeating the same views, the same slogans, the same ideas of what is interesting, and so on. (Bauman 2014)

Many people have found that their life becomes not wholly theirs when information about them appears on the Internet.

Bauman's argument on dialogue and the public space is very similar to Giddens' (1994) conception of dialogic democracy with a discursive domain; a way of creating a public arena so that controversial issues in relation to life politics, a politics of individual self-realisation, can be discussed. On the far side of modernity, tradition has lost much of its power and influence, generating uncertainty and ontological insecurity; however, the loss of tradition opens up 'dialogic spaces' that allow people to discuss issues that were unable to be discussed previously. Dialogic democracy for Giddens has an important role to play in the 'reconstruction of social solidarity' (1994, 112). However, unlike Giddens on dialogic democracy and Habermas on the ideal speech situation, Bauman appears to be of the opinion that democratisation is built into dialogue.

For Bauman (2008b) the Reagan–Thatcher administrations destroyed the public sphere by stripping it of most of its assets and making democracy impossible. If anything, for Bauman there has been an 'aestheticization of politics' or a privatisation of public life in which the private lives of celebrities or stars are transformed into media scandals that come to dominate public discourse (Bauman 2001a, 108):

> It is no more true that the 'public' is set on colonising the 'private'. The opposite is the case: it is the private that colonises the public space, squeezing out and chasing away everything which cannot be fully, without residue, expressed in the vernacular of private concerns, worries and pursuits. (Bauman 2000, 39)

Global capitalism is hostile towards 'social contract thinking' as it represents possible resistance against the wholesale privatisation of profits and assets:

> the international institutions of free trade prevents the establishment of a public sphere where individual choices could congeal into public choices, citizenship and democratic self-government could take root, and the principles and institutions of collective protection against individually suffered risks could be negotiated into political practice. (Bauman 2004, 105)

Although Bauman does not spell out what the newly defined and reconstituted public sphere will look like, we can expect to see a reversal of the micro-political aspects of 'liquid life' where individuals have personal responsibility for dealing with the human consequences of global processes. Bauman provides a short outline of the skills that educational institutions need to provide individuals to rebuild the public sphere:

> the skills of interaction with others – of conducting a dialogue, of negotiating, of gaining mutual understanding, and of managing or resolving the conflicts inevitable in every instance of shared life. (Bauman 2008b, 190)

Also contrary to what Bauman suggests, Jaeger's work has come under some criticism. Firstly, Jaeger's work is clearly based upon thorough scholarship but it does not explain how to apply knowledge gained from paideia to concrete situations; how reflection can change social and economic relationships or institutions. In addition, given that the focus was on Ancient Greece, Jaeger made no reference to 'slavery' or 'slave'. Also, although Jaeger clearly despised what he assumed to be the uneducated Nazi thugs, according to Elsner (2013) he wrongly assumed that Bildung could not be corrupted by the crimes committed by the Nazi state. Saul Friedländer has investigated some of the Nazi sympathies contained within the original German edition of Jaeger's book including the sentence from the last pages of the book which Jaeger cut from the English-language edition. However, rather than exploring the pedagogical aspects of Jaeger's work, what Bauman draws from Jaeger is the assumption that underpinning human experience is an 'immutable order' based upon or related to 'eternal nature of laws that govern human nature' irrespective of the 'superficial variety' of actions and behaviours that we observe. This assumption provided a strong justification for acquiring knowledge by staying on in formal education. In addition, this assumption gave teachers the confidence to transform pupils' minds and personalities.

In contrast, the liquid-modern world favours forgetting rather than knowledge acquisition, and as such not only is 'memory' no longer an asset but: 'In our volatile world of instant and erratic change, settled habits, solid cognitive frames and stable value preferences, those ultimate objectives of the orthodox education become handicaps' (Bauman 2003, 21, 2009, 160).

Liquid-modern culture values 'unusual ideas' or 'exceptional projects' and above all 'the cat-like inclination to walk one's own solitary ways'. These liquid-modern virtues are not likely to be learned from textbooks or from taking advice from educators on which is the appropriate path in life. Bauman argues that little, if anything, can be done about liquid-modern culture or its impact by reform of the education system, no matter how ingenious and thorough it may be. Bauman includes in this lifelong learning which he dismisses as having a focus on improving 'professional information'.

Adiaphoric education

The link between the individual and modernity is always a mediated relationship in Bauman's work; in solid modernity the link between the individual and society is mediated by rational institutional relationships, whilst in liquid modernity the link between the individual and modernity is mediated by consumerism – both forms of mediation make it difficult for the individual to engage with their innate moral impulse. Both the processes of rationalisation and the processes of liquefaction are external to the

individual and exercise a constraint; these processes are also identified by Bauman as the source of the adiaphoric state.

The adiaphoric state is a common explanatory mechanism in Bauman's analysis of modernity, including both Nazism and Stalinism, postmodernity and liquid modernity; it is the concept that Bauman draws upon to explain what it is that makes 'ethical considerations irrelevant to action' (Bauman 1999, 46). Adiaphoria is central to a condition that is the opposite of a state of individual autonomy and responsibility.

The role of education is to facilitate a communal moral engagement; bringing together the individual with their own moral impulse. Education allows the individual to understand that they have both physical and close communal proximity with their fellow liquid moderns, by giving liquid moderns the skills and confidence to engage with each other within the public sphere.

Modernity, when free from forms of mediation that dampens the innate moral impulse of the individual, is essentially communitarian in nature; in both solid and liquid modernity to be moral is to be 'with and for the other'. However, the proximity of self and other does not lead to the arbitrary imposition of one individual's belief of what is best for the other in terms of a personal assessment of the needs of the wishes of that other. Engagement in the public sphere is important for Bauman because it is this engagement that prevents adiaphoric indifference towards the other and allows the individual to identify appropriate ways of behaving towards the other which are communal based upon what they are seen to share.

Solid modernity does not celebrate difference but makes us fearful of the stranger or uninvited guest; as Bauman explains, solid modernity becomes a 'gardening state' in which the state maintains the borders and if a weed is found attempts will be made to assimilate it into the garden design, by making it lose many of its weed-like qualities so that it can be incorporated, but if this attempt at assimilation was to fail, the weed will be up-rooted and excluded from the garden. What Bauman does not specify is why there is always hostility towards difference within solid modernity and why it is that some plants are defined as stranger or uninvited guests. Solid moderns were aware that there is more than one way to live as a human. The solid moderns were also aware that we live in a world of cultures not one single given culture. Through education and learning both formal and informal solid moderns became cultured people. The role of culture is to fight ambivalence. The Other's way of behaving in which they took their point of reference from a different culture tended 'to be portrayed as bizarre, inferior and vaguely threatening: acceptable perhaps for other, less demanding people, but certainly not for us, people of distinction' (Bauman 1990, 159; original emphasis). When cultures manifest themselves in the differing behaviours of self and other in close proximity there will be some form of intolerance, argues Bauman, and the innate moral impulse both generates

proximity for some and at the same time generates otherness for others. People like us should be treated in the way we would like to be treated; we know what they want because we know what we want. The role of education is to provide people with the skills and abilities to identify difference, to use the public sphere to establish a 'we-relationship' between self and other so that the communal public sphere incorporates some individuals as people like us and allows one to view others as diasporas, or groups of individuals who are different, for whom we cannot have the same quality of proximity. However, even within liquid modernity there are restrictions to acceptance of difference; the other has to accept a communal social contact which Bauman has referred to as the European Social Contract, and in addition there remains a threat to the communal identity contained within the process of cultural mettisage or hybridisation:

> which the influx of newcomers is bound to trigger; mixing of cultural inspirations is the source of enrichment and an engine of creativity – for European civilization as much as for any other. All the same, there is but a thin line separating enrichment from the loss of cultural identity; to prevent the cohabitation between autochthons [indigenous inhabitants] and allochthons [those arrived from elsewhere] from eroding cultural heritages, it needs to be based therefore on respecting the principles underlying European 'social contract' … The point is, by both sides! (Bauman 2011, 2012, 4)

Hence, even in social conditions post solid modernity there is the scope for conflict between self and other if the other is unwilling or unable to accept the communal contractual arrangements between members, as such:

> none of the societal conditions that made Auschwitz possible has truly disappeared, and no effective measures have been undertaken to prevent such possibilities and principles from generating Auschwitz-like catastrophes. (Bauman 1989, 11)

Bauman (2008b) returns to the same themes. Liquid modernity is described as a consumerist economy that driven by excess and waste: 'The consuming life is a life of rapid learning – and swift forgetting. Forgetting is as important as learning, if not more' (Bauman 2008b, 146). Civilised human togetherness is under threat because the 'reality principle' now comes second to the 'pleasure principle'. In the liquid-modern society of consumers: 'the only genuine and worthy satisfactions amid the multitude of seductive but false, deceptive, contrived, and degrading "pleasures of the moment"' (2008b, 150). In addition, 'the power of the individual' has replaced the 'power of community': 'human conduct no longer subjected to the homogenizing pressures of self-reproducing premodern institutions' (2008b, 154). The tendency identified by Simmel in the early years of the twentieth century that the urban population often adopted a 'blasé attitude' toward 'knowledge, work, and lifestyle' (indeed, toward life as such and everything

it contains) has developed into a form of melancholy, characterised by Bauman (2008b) as 'disentanglement' from 'being attached to anything specific'. The melancholic has a 'sense the infinity of connection, but be hooked up to nothing', reflected in a compulsion/addiction of choosing and at the same time an inability to choose. The society of consumers' happiness-generating capacity is empty of cognitive value; the liquid-modern consumer engages in 'consumption for consumption's sake' which Bauman describes as an autotelic activity and a source of happiness in its own right:

> The skills required to meet the challenge of the liquid-modern manipulation of identity are akin to those of the famous Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, a juggler, or – even more to the point – to the artfulness and dexterity of a prestidigitator. (Bauman 2008b, 176)

How do we educate the self-obsessed, surfing, tourist given that:

> we have been transported from a civilization of duration, and for that reason of learning and memorizing, into the civilization of transience, and thus of forgetting. Of that seminal departure, memory is the prime victim, disguised as its collateral casualty. (Bauman 2008b, 181)

For Bauman (2008b) education should be about genuine empowerment and the acquisition of skills that would not simply allow the liquid modern 'to play well the game designed by others, but also the acquisition of such powers as would allow one to influence the game's objectives, stakes, and rules – in short, not just personal but also social skills'. For genuine empowerment to be created there needs to be reinvention or recreation of inter-human bonds that will give the liquid modern the ability to engage with others that they have lost. The liquid modern also needs to engage in a 'continuous effort to make human cohabitation into a hospitable and friendly setting for the mutually enriching cooperation of men and women struggling for self-esteem, for the development of their potential and the proper use of their abilities' (2008b, 11). Lifelong learning, if it can empower the liquid modern, should allow people to rebuild what has become a deserted public space: 'where men and women may engage in a continuous translation between individual and common, private and communal, interests, rights, and duties' (Bauman 2008b, 189–190).

For Bauman the relationship between self and other is a relationship of being-to-being mediated by culture, making the relationship both being-to-being and knowledge-to-knowledge. We perceive the other through culture, the very thing that others the other. Making Bauman's other both particular and abstract; an individual human being and a generalised other. Culture provides the tools for consciousness – knowledge, cognition, language. To think beyond culture is beyond a person's cognitive power and ability. Culture also provides ontological solidarity, a foundation to the 'we'

experience that allows us to view people like us, who share our culture, as the same and not as the other. The appearance of the other is never a pleasant surprise because it damages the perception of the world as 'our' world. We now know that the other also exists in the world but they are not part of the 'we' relationship. They have knowledge that we do not possess and that is the source of the threat they pose. Being with the other and for the other can only be conceived on the basis of the knowledge we possess, within the context provided by culture. The role of education is to encourage us to think beyond our culture, to stretch the limits of our knowledge, cognition and language. This process is in the first instance one of intra-subjective separation from our ontological framework as the first step in allowing us to think of the world that is different from what we previously imagined so that a possibility for non-antagonistic inter-human relationships with the other emerges. However, this raises the issue of trust. How can we trust a person who is not one of us? The Other who has knowledge and expertise that may be potentially threatening to us? It is for this reason that Bauman expects reciprocity from the Other; as reflected in his comment about the European social contract.

Conclusion

Even if we accept Bauman's argument that modernity has experienced a process of liquefaction and even if we ignore that there is a distinct lack of engagement by Bauman with the literature and debates on current education policy and practice, Bauman's contribution to our understanding of education in the contemporary world is still problematic. The global processes of liquefaction manifest themselves in conditions such as adiaphoria, ambivalence, fate, swarming, the seductive nature of consumerism and above all a culture that has a central role in contradicting our innate moral impulse and othering the Other; all of these factors severely limit a person's ability to exercise their human agency. Simply stated, it is not possible to educate people who lack agency. Bauman provides no indication of how the educators can escape the processes that limit agency, nor does he explain how educators can combat the seductive consumerism that students have to overcome before they can engage in a reconstruction of the public sphere.

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