



An Indigenous Community Leader's Self-Directed Life-Long Learning Encounter

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Abstract

This paper, employing a qualitative approach, is based on an interview of an indigenous community leader's life-long learning encounter with a view to garner information that would shed more light to both practice and theory of adult learning. A variety of themes were drawn from the information derived and these were related to theories of learning in adulthood. The findings of the paper identify key concerns and assumptions in adult education based on the theory of Andragogy developed by Malcolm Knowles which attempts to describe how adults learn. His hypothesis was that adult learning could not follow the traditional Pedagogy in which teachers were responsible for making decisions about what should be learned, how, where, when and why it should be learned. In a nutshell, it can be generally assumed that adults are more self-directed and therefore, should take full control and accountability of their learning.

Keywords: Andragogy, Life-long learning, Self-directed, Community leader

1. Introduction

As Malaysia is caught up in the throes of the need to change or be left behind in this Information Era, where the playing field is one and the rules may not be fair to all, it has become more imperative that the focus on Adult Learning be given more emphasis and thrust so as to equip the adults with new and fast changing skills and flexibility to view change as constant.

Education for adults was incorporated in the 7th Five-Year Plan by the Malaysian Government and extended to the 8th and now the 9th with the prime purpose "to improve accessibility to education and to increase participation at all levels through the expansion of physical facilities and distance learning programmes".

This would certainly augur well for the country as retooling in the present economy will ensure a continual source of wk-workers (wise and knowledgeable) in the fast changing global economic scenario from an industrial to an information era: changing managerial styles; consumer demands and values in the new borderless market.

Needless to say, there exist pockets of communities who are unperturbed by their surroundings or are resistant to change by adopting an attitude of aversion to change itself. The change is definitely there but it is so slow that it may appear to be non-existent. The strong traditionally inclined primitive mode of learning may override modern development but on the other side is development and modernization healthy for the individual, community, country and the world at large?

With globalization and the so-called panacea to bring about change is for the betterment or worse for the human race? Are the developing and under-developed countries going to benefit from this trend or be left behind in the rat race? Are all the Principles of Adult Learning geared towards the future well-being of the individual and the community?

These are some of the unanswered questions that many nations are reluctant to ask or have no say but to just jump on to the bandwagon and leave their fate to the directions the winds of change would lead them to. The aim of this paper is to interview a leader of an indigenous group of aborigines in order to:

- a) ascertain **what** ignites and propels the person to learn
- b) find out **how** the person learns
- c) know **why** the learning is sought
- d) seek **where** the learning takes place
- e) know **when** the learning is initiated

The objectives would proceed to identify the issues, assumptions and illuminate the need that to pursue life-long learning is imperative to make the Malaysian economic more viable, vibrant and competitive so as to move forward and etch a niche in the region and the world at large.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory of Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Bandura (1977) elucidates: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do.

Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action". Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, an environmental influences.

The component processes underlying observational learning are:

- a) Attention, including modeled events (distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, functional value) and observer characteristics (sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement),
- b) Retention, including symbolic coding, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal),
- c) Motor Reproduction, including physical capabilities, self-observation of reproduction, accuracy of feedback, and
- d) Motivation, including external, vicarious and self reinforcement.

As a result it encompasses attention, memory and motivation, social learning theory spans both cognitive and behavioral frameworks. Bandura's theory improves upon the strictly behavioral interpretation of modeling provided by Miller & Dollard (1941). (Table 1).

Table 1.

	NEED LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	
	Highest-Level Needs	Self-actualization needs	The needs to realize one's full potential as a human being.
		Esteem needs	The needs to feel good about oneself and one's capabilities, to be respected by others, and to receive recognition and appreciation.
		Belongingness needs	Needs for social interaction, friendship, affection, and love.
		Safety needs	Needs for security, stability, and safe environment.
Lowest-Level Needs (most basic or compelling)	Physiological needs	Basic needs for things such as food, water, and shelter that must be met in order for an individual to survive.	

Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, proposed that human beings have five universal needs that they seek to satisfy: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Maslow proposed that these needs can be arranged in a hierarchy of importance, with the most basic or compelling needs – physiological and safety needs – at the bottom. These basic needs must be satisfied before an individual seeks to satisfy needs higher up the hierarchy. Maslow argued that once a need is satisfied, it is no longer a source of motivation.

Based on Knowles, Andragogy, is premised on at least four centralized assumptions pertaining to the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners on which traditional pedagogy is based. A fifth assumption was adopted later.

1. Self-concept:

As a person matures, his self- concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards one of being a self-directed human being.

2. Experience:

As a person matures he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource or learning.

3. Readiness To learn:

As a person matures his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles.

4. Orientation To learning:

As a person matures, his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject- centredness to one of problem-centredness.

5. Motivation to learn:

As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal. (Knowles 1984:12).

3. Profile

The interviewee hails from the Temuan Clan, an aborigine group of indigenous people, in Malaysia.

Name: Mr YC (Tok Batin/Leader).

Age: 92 years

Sex: Male.

Address : Bentong, Pahang.

Employment : Self- employed.

Status: Married

No. of Children: 1 (deceased) with 5 grandchildren and 79 adopted children and grandchildren.

Academic Qualifications : Nil, Education: Informal (incidental).

4. Findings

The trips to Bentong was an eye-opener to the researcher ,who himself was the instrument, and worked at getting the respondent to freely express his thoughts around the Principles of Adult Learning. After the initial salutations and polite introduction by our guide En. M.A (a representative for Orang Asli affairs) a cordial relationship was established between the researcher and the respondent. (Table 2).

Table 2.

NO	QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	THEMES
1.	<p>Q: Tok Batin , did you go to a school?</p> <p>A: Never. There was no school in those days. Actually, we were once upon a time residing at Bukit Tinggi but the government came and bought our land for RM25,000.00. Then my community moved to Janda Baik.</p> <p>Q: Were you instrumental in naming this place?</p> <p>A: No, of course not. As the story goes, there was once this British Resident in Bentong whose wife was plagued by a terrible skin disease. It was so disgusting that he invariably divorced her. The poor lady was left to fend for herself in the jungle. Many years passed by and one day they</p>	<p>What He learned</p> <p>That there is a higher local authority.</p> <p>That the country was occupied and ruled by the British</p>

	<p>paths crossed. The officer was shocked to see a younger version of his wife and this time she had a flawless complexion. Gone was the disease and he quickly remarried her.</p> <p>Thus the name ‘Janda Baik’ (the divorcee has been healed!)</p> <p>Q: Tok Batin, I admire your ability to remember all these details so vividly.</p> <p>A: I take herbs that have kept me healthy and strong all these years.</p> <p>Q: What is your main preoccupation?</p> <p>A: I have ventured into the jungle all my life and the jungle is my source of livelihood. My survival hinges on the food that the jungle provides me.</p> <p>Q: What has the jungle taught you?</p> <p>A: I have picked up the basic rudiments of gathering valuable herbs from the jungle, brewed a concoction to heal many modern afflictions of the common people in my community and from around the country.</p> <p>Q: Did you make a lot of money?</p> <p>A: No, because this is a service I render to mankind. The people who seek for remedies need to pay me only a token fee as appreciation. This is the unwritten understanding from my forefathers and the spirits that teach us the secrets of jungle knowledge.</p>	<p>The jungle was his source of survival.</p> <p>He learned to make traditional herbs. That herbs could be commercialized.</p> <p>The knowledge of using herbs should not be abused.</p> <p>Greed was not right.</p> <p>Respect for elders and the ruling spirits of the jungle.</p>
2.	<p>Q: When did you begin to learn all these?</p> <p>A: At the age of 18 years old. This is the period that a person in my community is considered to be an adult and is ripe to marry and raise a family.</p> <p>Q: Was there any specific period or special form of instructions that you had to undergo in the learning of survival in the jungle?</p> <p>A: No. Even before I was 18 I often follow my father, grandfather and other adults of my community into the jungle to look for fruits, roots and to capture wild animals.</p> <p>Q: Were you allowed to use any weapons?</p> <p>A: Yes, crude spears and wooden clubs. I learned how to use the blowpipe when I was a bout 12 years old but always under the eagle eyes of my father.</p> <p>Q: When did you venture into the jungle on your own?</p> <p>A: When I got married and had to fend for my family.</p>	<p>When He Learned.</p> <p>The age of maturity in the Orang Asli community</p> <p>Incidental learning took place before the age of adulthood.</p> <p>When he learned to use the blowpipe.</p> <p>Self-directed learning began upon marriage</p>
3.	<p>Q: Were you taught the theories of hunting and collecting fruit?</p> <p>A: Not really. I picked a lot of valuable tips when the older generations gather around a campfire to drink a specially-brewed tea and talked about their adventures in the jungle.</p> <p>Q: Where was your ‘school’?</p> <p>A: The jungle, home and environment.</p>	<p>Where he learned.</p> <p>Informal gatherings of the adults after a trip into the jungle.(By word of mouth)</p> <p>School was the jungle, home and environment.</p>
4.	<p>Q: Tok Batin, how did you learn all the things you know?</p> <p>A: I learned by listening, observing, and doing.</p> <p>Q: What about from tasting, experiencing etc.?</p> <p>A: Yes, of course.</p> <p>Q: Did you write all these things in a book?</p> <p>A: (Gives a low chuckle) No, everything is stored in my memory.</p>	<p>How He Learned</p> <p>By using all his senses.</p>

	<p>Q: Who is your greatest teacher?</p> <p>A: My grandfather. It was from him that I learned about ‘Tongkat Ali’ and ‘Kacip Fatimah’.</p> <p>Q: How did you learn this?</p> <p>A: By watching him closely. I had this very strong urge in me to want to know the secrets of ‘manhood’. You see I had only one child while my father and grandfather had many wives and children. They were very ‘subur’ (virile).</p> <p>Q: Tok Batin. Did you any encounter any barriers in your quest for knowledge?</p> <p>A: Yes. Sometimes we would be so engrossed picking herbs and fruit when suddenly we would come across a herd of elephants, tigers, wild boars and even snakes. We just leave and run for dear life.</p>	<p>By observation.</p> <p>Intrinsic motivation</p> <p>Experience</p> <p>Barriers of learning</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Q: Why did you want to learn all these?</p> <p>A: I was very interested in these things mainly for survival. Besides that, I wanted to be a role-model for my community.</p> <p>Instinctively, I felt that all these knowledge will give me the power when I took over from my father the post of ‘Tok Batin’.</p> <p>Q: Besides that why did you want to learn?</p> <p>A: I was curious and interested in traditional medicine. I also wanted to earn a living and to upkeep my family.</p>	<p>Why He Learned.</p> <p>Role-model</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Innate interest</p>

5. Analysis and Conclusions

This group of aborigines was sheltered from the onslaught of economic woes of the rest of the world because they were unfazed by the goings-on in the nearby village that was a contrast to their way of life-style.

They clung on to traditional method of survival and refused to change to the signs of the times. There was a strong clannish influence within the clan. The in-breeding nature of the group retarded the development of the genes of the Temuan people. The income of the people was mainly derived from the jungle.

The learning was mainly central to their needs. The motivational factors were intrinsic and instinct driven.

Tok Batin took full responsibility of his learning and was primarily instrumental for his vast knowledge of the jungle and what it could provide for his subsistence.

Although their thinking pattern had changed over time, it was albeit slow. Their primitive nature of life-style was still predominant.

According to Clark (1993 b) transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize.” In Tok Batin this had rung true because of the cognitive processes of learning, the mental construct of experience, inner meaning and reflection.

Every minute detail that Tok Batin shared was unique. He had an elephant’s memory and could remember almost everything that had transpired in his lifetime.

Tok Batin and the Temuan people can only change if the desire were to come from them (Freire, 1970).

The ‘teachable moment’ as termed by Havighurst (1972), emerged in Tok Batin’s life as when he matured as an adult, married, started a family and assumed the post of a leader of his community. These developmental tasks were viewed by Knowles (1980) as producing a ‘readiness to learn’.

The rich, colourful life led by Tok Batin is indeed a notable factor differentiating formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Kidd (1973) states that “Adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences, and adults’ experiences are organized differently. The respondents knowledge of sex , its implications, shortcomings, strengths and weaknesses had given rise to his yearn to help the community with his own recipe of the famous Malaysia ‘Tongkat Ali’ a herbal variant of the Viagra. The ‘Kacip Fatimah’ is another potent formula for sexual dysfunctional disorders among the women.

Tok Batin is well-known and his vast and in-depth knowledge and rich experience is a prime assumption “that can arguably lay claim to be viewed as a ‘given’ in the literature of adult learning” (Brookfield, 1986).

Knowles. (1980) terms it as a “growing reservoir of experience” that performs as “a rich resource of learning”. In the same context it has established and enhance the identity of Tok Batin as a community leader and a solutions provider to all those who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Truly “adults derive their self-identity from their experience... and because adults define themselves largely by their experiences, they have a deep investment in its value (Knowles, 1980, p.44).

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