Who is in the centre?: Interaction patterns in traditional informal learning events in Kampung Pueh

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Abstract

Since the emergence of learner-centred teaching, instructors are required to create learning environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning where learners actively participate in their learning process. It is assumed that the practice of peer correction and teamwork, where learners engage with each other in their learning process, are effective techniques. This paper describes interaction patterns among a group of preliterate women in a traditional learning environment. These patterns were observed on two selected spontaneous and uninitiated learning events, *nyusup atap* 'making thatched roofs' and *nganyam katupat* 'weaving rice cake casings', in which proficient/skilled women taught other women their skills. The grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to generate a "thick" description with keywords in order to provide an inductive method of discovering patterns. A few interesting learning interaction formations emerged, which elucidate the Salako women's preference to learn from a proficient "teacher" rather than from peers. Some plausible interpretations for this observation are suggested. Finally, this paper concludes with implications for adult educators who employ the learner-centred approach in their classrooms.

Keywords: traditional learning styles, learner-centred teaching, peer correction, Borneo studie, Salako

Introduction

Background of the study

The study was part of the Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP), which is a language revitalization project initiated by the leaders of the Bidayuh community in Sarawak (including Salako) and planning to mobilize adults of the local community to run the program. The BLDP intends to use a learner-centred approach in training adults to provide a supportive learning environment that enables the learners to achieve their educational goals.

The study was conducted between November 2003 and June 2004 in Kampung Pueh, Lundu district, located on the southern tip of Sarawak. This village was founded when the first group of Salako people migrated to Sarawak from Indonesian Borneo (Kalom and Hudson, 1970). It is currently considered to be the hub of their religious practices. A 20 door longhouse remains there, the village's social system is still intact and the language exhibits strong vitality. Approximately 10,000 Salako people live in the Lundu district overall, but of these only around 650 people live in Kampung Pueh, which is reckoned to be the largest Salako settlement (Awang Hasmadi, 1994). Ethnically and politically, the Salako consider themselves to be a sub-group of the Bidayuh. The language, however, belongs to the Malayic family (Adelaar 1992).

The Salako women of Kampung Pueh are in need of an adult literacy program, but most attempts to establish adult literacy programs have apparently failed[1]. Formal education systems were introduced in the late 1960s but the growth and spread of schools was slow, making formal education relatively inaccessible to the rural communities until recently. As a result, adults in this indigenous society have one of the lowest literacy rates in Sarawak[2].

Purpose of the study

In most traditional societies, on the other hand, skills are passed down from one generation to another in an efficient and sustainable manner. This is especially true in oral societies like the Salako, where there are few or no written records of their traditional knowledge and skill.

In view of the need expressed by the Salako community for adult literacy programs as well as the BLDP's aim to revitalize the language, the study was initiated to find out the Salako women's preferred and natural way (teaching and learning patterns) in passing on skills as a

[1] The need for an adult literacy program for women was expressed by some of the women themselves in informal conversation with the researcher.
[2] This information was obtained from interview findings. However, official facts and figures pertaining to school drop-out rates of various regions is classified.

precursor for developing effective learner-centered adult training programs. In order to discover these patterns, learning events which foster intergenerational and peer skill transmission among preliterate and semi-literate Salako women were documented and analyzed.

Subsequently, a detailed explanation of the method of data gathering and analysis is provided first. The major portion of the paper is then devoted to reporting from observation how Salako participants in learning groups interact with each other. The findings are then elucidated through various group formations and some plausible interpretations for these behaviours within learning groups are given. Finally, some implications are suggested to those who aim to implement learner-centered training programs for adult learners in indigenous societies.

Methods

Data collection

The first task in conducting the research involved identifying traditional patterns of general skill transfer among Salako adults, specifically women, with the assumption that these patterns would be revealed through observations of skill transfer events. The researcher was a participant observer of the events in Kampung Pueh. Five video recordings were made and of these, two were spontaneous video recordings of teaching/learning events. For the purpose of this study, these two spontaneous recordings were selected for analysis. They were made during the final week of the observation, and by this time the participants were used to being observed and video recorded. In order to minimise recording awareness, the video recorder was placed in an unobtrusive spot and the zoom lens was used to record the events. The "unobtrusive spot (measure)" is a "social science method which do[es] not disturb the social environment" (Kellahear 1993:2).

The first recording, which is named *nyusup atap* 'making thatched roofs', shows a group of 15 women who were involved in making a new thatched roof to repair an old construction. The women were not all doing the same subtask (within the whole process) nor were they doing it at the same time. This recording was made on 19 January 2004 on the veranda of one of the participants. The entire event took approximately four hours to complete. For the observation and write-up of this article, a 30 minute except was used. There are many stages in the process of making a thatched roof; this observation was somewhere in the 2nd hour of the process.

Recording number 2, labelled *nganyam katupat* 'weaving rice cake casings', was made on 19 January 2004 in the living room of one of the participants. Here, the participants were learning how to weave rice cake casings using young coconut leaves. The reason they were learning this skill was to make *katupat* 'rice cakes' for visitors and tourists who were going to visit the village. This group of women were often involved in catering food for such guests. The participants were *Kak A* (the teacher), *Kak R* (a new learner), and *Kak U* (a semi-proficient woman wanting to learn new patterns for weaving). More details on the participants are given in the appendix (see Appendix 1). At one stage, the researcher became a participant observer in the event. The researcher (referred to as *Mayang* by the Salako participants) was learning the skill for the first time at the invitation of the other learners. Besides documenting the events by videoing, the researcher also made field notes of the various teaching and learning events through journaling.

Just before these recordings began, final permission was obtained for the recording, although provisional approval was obtained weeks ahead. Verbal permission was obtained from the participants and written approval was obtained from the village supreme chief Pemanca Mina, in line with the guidelines of the ethical clearance committee at Charles Darwin University where the researcher was enrolled at the time.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

For the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the video data, a software program called Transana (version 1.22) was used. This program allowed the video recordings to be reviewed while developing a thick descriptional transcript. A thick description or a close description is when "in qualitative research, detailed description seeks to describe an event, situation or phenomenon with as much information as possible" (Richards and Schmidt 2002:77). Portions of the video were meticulously reviewed over and over, sometimes up to a dozen times, and the use of this program made such a task less tedious.

Thick descriptions are an essential aspect of Glasser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory. This method was introduced as an effective mode of carrying out qualitative research. Its approach is "grounded" in observations, hence the name of the theory. A non-confining or static research question is raised to help guide the research. From the raw data, open coding (in which the data is considered and described in minute details) is done to produce an initial list and so develop some categorization. Meanwhile, the researcher also identifies core theoretical concepts (the process is called memoing) which finally allow

him/her to develop linkages between the concepts with the data. This inductive method of analyzing data is most suitable in qualitative research, since the researcher is open to discover social phenomena that one would otherwise overlook. Based on the findings, the researcher then may engage in more verification and triangulation of findings. "Eventually one approaches conceptually dense theory as new observation leads to new linkages which lead to revisions in the theory and more data collection. The core concept or category is identified and fleshed out in detail" (Trochim 2002). Transana allowed for the application of the "grounded theory approach" to the analysis and interpretation of the digital video data. Coding various video clips (using the *Keyword* feature of Transana) facilitated the breaking down of the data to bare observations. Then, using the *Search* feature, varied sets of *Clips* which shared the same raw observation were amalgamated, thus permitting an investigation of relationships which might exist.

In order to triangulate the findings, an inter-rater was requested to watch the video recording independently. The inter-rater was requested to make observations on the interaction between participants and was asked to produce independent feedback. As it happened, his observations and feedback were consistent with that of the researcher, thus increasing the reliability of the findings.
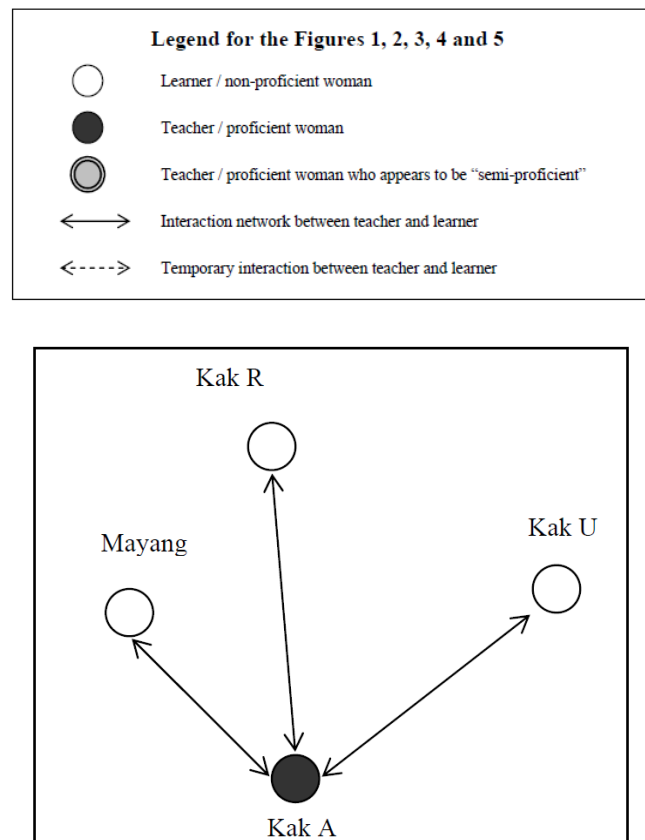
Findings

There were several observations made from the two video episodes which contributed to some basic interaction patterns. The diagrams that follow the explanation illustrate some of these interaction patterns.

Group formation

In the case of both events, the groups were formed based on a shared goal of the community members. In *nyusup atap*, the goal was to make a new thatched roof to repair an old building which the members of the group used on Saturdays to sell their garden produce. Similarly, in *nganyam katupat*, the participants wanted to make rice cakes (*ketupat* – in Malay) for dignitaries and tourists who were going to visit their longhouse. However, both task groups were comprised of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled members. Thus, small learning groups formed within these larger groups. When the groups came together to work, subgroups for learning the task emerged. The subgroups seemed to consist of members who wanted to contribute to the group task and in order to do so, they realized the need to learn the task.

Interaction between one teacher with more than one learner: teacher teaches one student at a time

It was very revealing to see how a group would organize itself with regard to seating arrangements and interactions between members. In *nganyam katupat* a small group formed with one proficient woman passing on weaving skills to three learners. Figure 1 shows the actual seating position of the group members for this episode. All participants were seated on a bamboo mat on the floor approximately 40 to 60 cm away from each other. The teacher sat in a place that made her accessible to all the students. The diagram of teaching interactions can be seen in Figure 5, and this pattern of interaction is called the **"clock-hand formation."** This formation was also observed in the episode *nyusup atap* where there were two small groups with the same formation. Figure 2 shows two small groups within the bigger group of 15, making similar interaction patterns. Again, the actual seating arrangement and distance between participants are presented on a downsized scale. In both episodes the learners, who are non-proficient women, were not interacting with each other.

Legend for the Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

○ Learner / non-proficient woman

● Teacher / proficient woman

◉ Teacher / proficient woman who appears to be "semi-proficient"

⟷ Interaction network between teacher and learner

⬸---⟩ Temporary interaction between teacher and learner

Kak R

Kak U

Mayang

Kak A

Figure 1: Actual group seating and interacting positions for the nganyam katupat episode
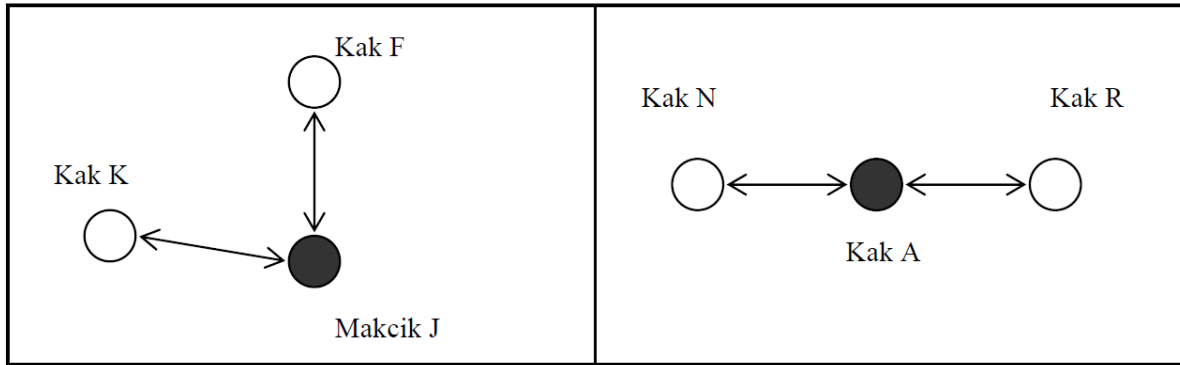
Figure 2: Actual group seating and interacting positions for two small groups in the nyusup atap episode

Interaction between one learner and more than one teacher: authoritative role given to older women and one teacher at a time teaches

It was found that a proficient woman became "semi-proficient" in the presence of an older and more experienced woman. An example of this was observed in *nyusup atap*. A learner was seated near a proficient woman (Makcik I) but another proficient and older woman (Makcik C) approached the learner. The allegiance of the learner passed from one teacher to another depending on who was present. In the presence of an older, more experienced and proficient woman (Makcik C), the younger proficient woman (Makcik I) became "semi-proficient". She behaved as though she was only semi-proficient even though her level of ability to make a thatched roof may have matched the older woman's skill/proficiency. Figure 3 sketches the actual interaction pattern. In this group, where there was one learner but two teachers, the interaction was with one teacher at a time, as illustrated in Figure 5 and labelled the "**pendulum formation.**"
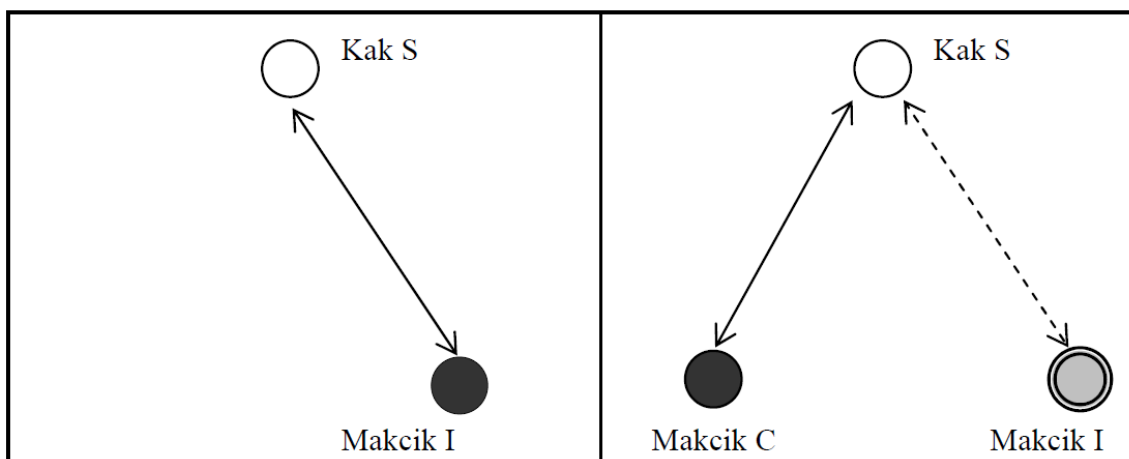
Figure 3: Actual group seating and interacting positions of one learner with alternating teachers in the *nyusup atap* episode

Interaction in large groups (many learners and many teachers): head teacher is most proficient

In a large group such as was exhibited in the *nyusup atap* episode, the most proficient person (Makcik B) was regarded as head teacher, especially since she was older than the other participants. She positioned herself in the middle of the group, while the others formed a circle around her (see figure 4.) Though there were other women in the group who were equally proficient, as observed earlier, they became "semi-proficient" in her presence. Again, non-proficient women (the learners) were not interacting with each other during skill learning events. This observation was further verified by a recorded conversation. When the question of "who was teaching?" was asked, the others pointed to the head teacher. But the head teacher herself, when asked, refused this recognition by acknowledging that they were altogether 10 teachers (referring to the now "semi-proficient" women and herself). However there are some limitations to this study, as the researcher did not observe how the head teacher was exerting her influence and how she intervened. In conversations with participants the researcher was able to establish that the most proficient weaver was regarded as the "head teacher". Actual interactions are shown in Figure 4. This kind of interaction is termed the **"daisy wheel formation"** (see figure 5).
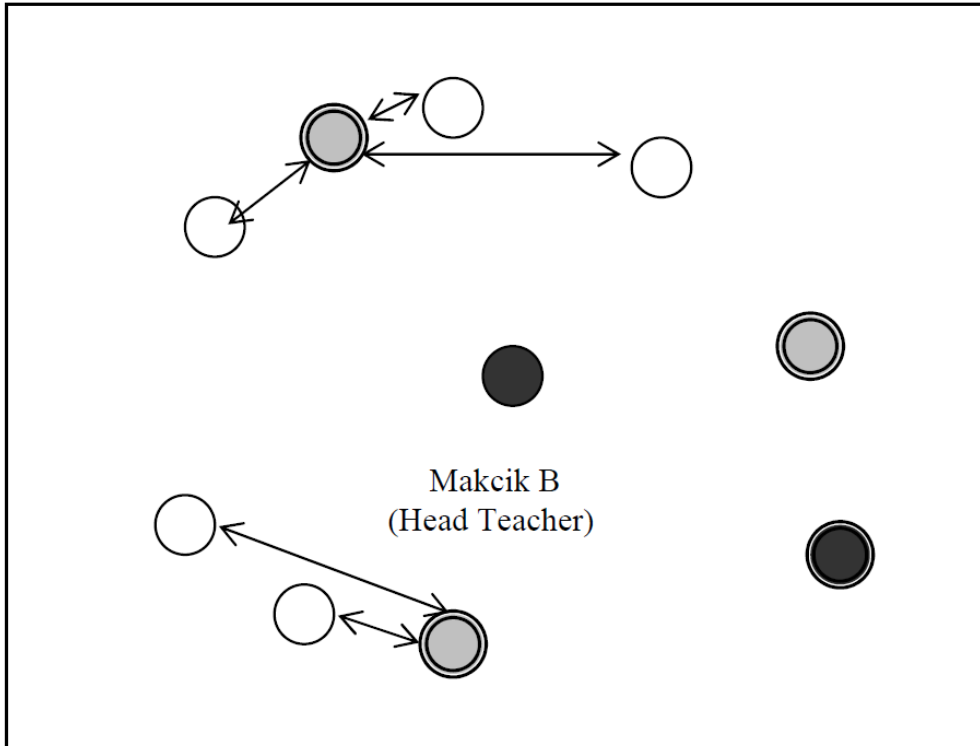
Figure 4: Actual group seating and interacting position of the large group during the
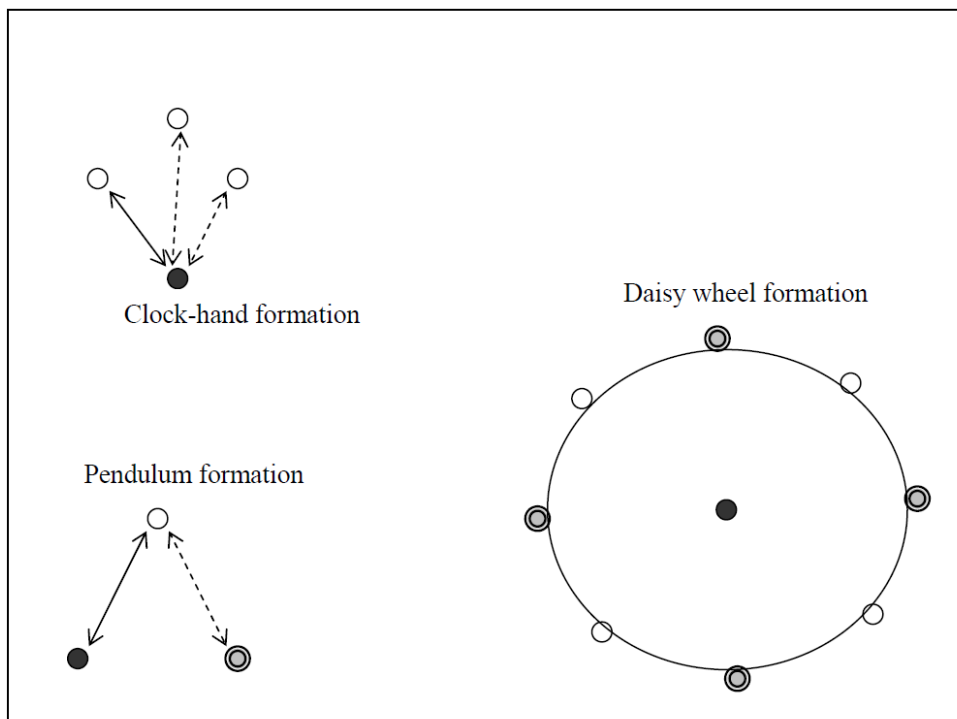

Figure 5: Group interaction formations

Interaction between learners: no peer learning

While learners came with a shared goal and worked together in a group, they were not interacting with each other on the subject matter. This was observable in all the learning groups shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. In taking this observation a little deeper, it could be said that there was no evidence of peer learning. Learners were not learning from each other and were not interacting in relation to their learning activity. Their interactions were merely social. Even when the learners were learning the same skill or the same pattern of weaving and were seated at a close proximity, they did not show evidence of learning from each other. Even with a semi-proficient woman, such as *Kak* U in *nganyam katupat*, there was no peer learning within the group. Only the teacher interacted with individual learners.

Teaching one on one

A further observation is that while the learning was taking place in small groups, the teaching itself was not directed at the group as a whole. The teachers preferred to teach individual learners, one at a time. The teacher gave individual attention to the learner according to the ability and interest of the learner. Learners were treated individually, not as a group of learners. Even the style of teaching differed for each student; some received more instruction than modelling while others received more coaching than instruction. Faster learners were not held back for the slower ones to catch up. For example in the *nganyam katupat* event, the weaving patterns taught and pace of teaching for *Kak* U (who happened to know some basic weaving patterns) were not the same as for *Kak* R (a nonproficient woman). Moreover, *Kak* R received more coaching than instruction, which provided more scaffolding[3] to the learner than if only instructions had been given. Even in larger groups, the teacher always related to one learner at a time, often encouraging the learners to be independent. When the researcher became a participant observer during the same event, the teacher (*Kak* A) encouraged her to try a new weaving pattern after she had completed the first pattern to the teacher's satisfaction. The teacher seemed to aim to make herself redundant at all times so that the learners would mature more quickly and be weaned of teacher dependency.

Seating arrangement: physical closeness versus influence

The distance between the teacher and learners was between 50 and 60 cm when they were seated opposite each other. This may have been due to the need to make allowance for leg shifting, which is necessary when one is seated on the floor. However, there were many instances where the women were seated side by side, and in this case the women were quite

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[3] Scaffolding is a term used in the model of cognitive apprenticeship, developed by Collins-Brown-Newman in 1989 (cited by Winnips 2001).

close, almost touching each other. However, despite being in such close proximity, two learners seated together rarely seemed to influence each other. There were examples where the teacher moved closer to the learner to explain or instruct, as well as the learner moving closer to the teacher to ask for help. When two people moved closer, they were opposite each other but within arm's reach only.

Error corrections, negative reinforcements and positive reinforcements

In some instances, the teacher corrected the learner immediately by saying *salah* ('wrong'). At other times, the correction was delayed until another portion of work was corrected. At times, the error was corrected by someone else, which could be either another teacher or an observer who is probably is proficient. This happened for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the teacher had not noticed the error in the first instance. In other cases, the teacher had not yet established a close enough relationship with her learner, and was therefore reluctant to correct her on all errors. A third reason could be that the particular step in the process was not the most important one. A form of negative reinforcement was seen in the *nganyam katupat* recording when the slower learner was not given any new patterns or skill to learn. She was expected to learn the simplest pattern well before moving on to new ones. However, a successful student was often given positive reinforcement by being given autonomy and independence. In contrast to the slower learner, a fast learner was immediately challenged with learning a new pattern. Since the fast learner was a first time learner and was uncomfortable about taking on the new challenge, the teacher immediately retracted her challenge and allowed the learner to continue weaving using the first pattern, which the learner felt more confident practicing. However, this time she was neither coached nor supervised. This was evident when the teacher told her student, "Now you can do it independently. I am only going to watch you". Positive words such as these gave the learner confidence and encouraged her in her work. On the other hand, the slower student was left to do her work over and over again. She was not given independence but was just left alone. After some time, the teacher returned to her to guide her a little bit more, so she was not totally ignored.

Discussion

Based on the above observations some likely interpretations are suggested in this section, however, they do not purport to be exhaustive. Some of the observations appear to point towards a similar interpretation; thus the interpretation may give the impression of being

repetitive, but they are looking at various facets that point to an important feature in the Salako women's skill transmission patterns.

Learning group within a task group

Learning groups, as has been observed, formed within task groups during both events. This has also been seen happening in other instances as well in the lives of the Salako people. It was recorded in the field notes of the researcher, that a neighbour, who was cooking with the host family, was taught how to make a particular dish. In another recorded event when there was an abundance of durian, an older woman started preparing *tempoyak* (fermented durian) and two younger women in the house rushed to see how it is made. Learning groups almost always arise spontaneously and are incidental to task groups, rather than being deliberately formed. The primary purpose of the group's formation is to accomplish the task at hand, which is the task goal. In learning groups, there are dual goals. The primary goal is to accomplish a high quality task whereas a secondary goal is to learn the task while being engaged in the group. It is the primary task goal that causes the formation of the group and sustains it.

Teaching one on one

The proficient women in all of the observations were engaged in teaching their learners individually. They demonstrated an appreciation of individual learners' interest, need, ability and style of learning. Besides fostering learner-centred teaching, dealing with individual learners was also aimed at developing highly skilled apprentices through accurately passing on skills. The learner's acquisition of accurate skills was also constantly monitored by teachers. Finally, the teacher's correction of learners' errors was dealt with on a one by one basis.

While they were in a group, the teacher always related to one learner at a time, often encouraging the learners to be independent. This indicates that in this society, the teacher recognizes individual differences between students, as mentioned in the previous section. Learners are encouraged to be independent or to take on new challenges.

Absence of peer learning

In the previous section, it was mentioned that learners within the learning groups were not interacting with each other in matters relating to the skill being learned. One plausible interpretation for the absence of peer learning is the high value placed by this society on accuracy of the local knowledge and skill. Therefore, learners look up to the expert in

traditional knowledge and skill, who will take time and effort to pass it on accurately. This appears to be the result of a pragmatic approach taken by the community, given that these skills are not recorded in written form. The knowledge and skill of the older members of the society are entrusted to younger members by accurate transmission of the same. Their weaving patterns, their methods of making thatched roofs, the quality of their songs, their music and dance have stood the test of time.

Skilled women and older women wield the position of head teacher

The observation that the most skilled woman was given the position of head teacher indicates the high value the Salako women place on accuracy when learning a skill. In a large group, as in *nyusup atap*, the most proficient person was regarded as the highest authority, even though she was not actively involved in teaching any of the students. Her influence in the group was beyond her physical interaction or proximity with others in the group, as she neither taught anyone (during the observation) nor did she sit close to anyone. It is the influence her skill wields rather than her close physical proximity that brings cohesiveness to the group, as seen in the "daisy wheel formation."

Age is another salient feature of the authoritative head teacher. Older members are generally expected to teach younger ones. The only exception to this is where the older member is unskilled. In that case, a younger person can teach.

Correlation between roles and error correction

Roles and relationships played an important part in the learning events observed. Most of the women observed have been friends since childhood and some of them are related to each other. Some of the older women were mothers, aunts and even older sisters of the others. In a way that might seem strange to an outsider, the researcher was also related by the virtue of her quasi-informal adoption into that family. A good firm relationship is often the prerequisite for error correction in Salako society, and learners almost always learn from somebody with whom they have established a relationship. Furthermore, there seems to be some authority given to the role that is taken by a more proficient person in a concrete learning context, and this authority defines the measure of error correction one is able to make. In a previous teaching event, when the researcher took on the role of a teacher and taught the women to write their names, they did not mind the researcher correcting them. There were times when they insisted that the teacher tell them when they were wrong. However, that role was directly related to a particular teaching context.

When the context changes, the roles also change. One is not given authority to correct another in every area of life; only in those areas where ones' role is clearly defined as the expert or most proficient person is such correction allowed. A person who is not the expert within a certain learning context is not authorized to correct errors. If she does try to correct another person she will be called *sibuk* 'busybody'. In the *nganyam katupat* episode, a non-proficient person, who was not a participant of the learning task, tried to correct an error made by one of the participants. This was immediately brushed off as unnecessary interference by the error making participant. She preferred the correction to be made by the teacher.

Error correction and accuracy

Some of the error corrections were considered more important than others, and this has to do with the level of accuracy required. If the work requires absolute accuracy and if the teacher considers the task to be achievable, she will not permit her learner to move to another process until she gets it right. This may be due to the Salakos' desire to produce highly skilled apprentices.

Conclusion

The behaviour of a small group is constitutive of the community[4]. The behaviour of many small groups generates the behaviour of a community. So, studying the behaviour of one small group is representative of the whole community. This paper reportes the findings from two video recordings as well as the author's experience living in a Salako *kampung*.

Penland and Fine's (1974) statement, "A group is a system within a system within a system" was demonstrated in the Salako women's group events by the observation that there was a learning group(s) embedded within a task group which functioned within the wider Salako society.

One task group had the goal of making a thatched roof (*nyusup atap*) for their Saturday flea-market and the other one, seen in the second video recording, was making rice cakes (*nganyam katupat*) for breakfast. The task group goal was shared by all members of their respective groups. The goal was the stimulus for the formation of the task group.

Another observation made about learning groups, which is in line with what Penland and Fine (1974:58) say, is that they are incidental to any group formation. Lave and Wenger

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[4] Oral communication by Dr. Brian Devlin, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Health and Science, Charles Darwin University, Australia

put forward the notion that learning is inherent in a "community of practice" (cited by Smith, 2004:1). The learning group was incidental to the task group activity in both cases. This means that learning will automatically take place in every group formed and that their formation is natural. The observations on which this study is based support Lave and Wenger's claim that learning is authentic and is a social activity which relates to the Salako people's daily life.

A few patterns of interaction were expressed through three formations, namely the clock-hand, the pendulum and the daisy wheel formation. These patterns have been plotted and coined by the author of this article based on observed learning and teaching interactions. Bany and Johnson (1964:32–34) state that influence rather than physical closeness is a mark of interactional cohesiveness. While the Salako learners were in close proximity with each other, the interactional cohesiveness was caused by the influence of the teacher, who may or may not have been in close physical proximity to the learner. She (the teacher/head teacher) wielded a tremendous amount of influence on the group of learners even when she appeared to be uninvolved (as in the daisy wheel formation).

Role definition and spatial arrangements were also observed. Shaw (1976:131, 187) reports that leaders will often seat themselves in accordance with their perceived position. Moreover, he reports, quoting Stogdill, that group leaders are usually older members. In both of the video episodes, the person with authority sat in the middle of the group. It was further observed that the age factor pre-determined leadership in so far as preference was given to older women.

The Salako women pass on skills to other women who are keen to learn. Their spontaneity in organizing themselves to teach each other indicates that they value the knowledge that they possess. The women's passing on of their skill is accurate and of high quality. They demand that learners acquire skills to the same degree of proficiency. Activities connected to error correction were often related to the Salako women's intention of turning their learners into highly skilled apprentices. It appears that they consider their traditional knowledge as "high stake" by maintaining quality and accuracy. McClay (1988) captures the essence of this in his principles by saying that evaluation of a program should be done to foster a permanent identity system. Error correction is a vital part of maintaining accuracy and is a process which puts high value upon exact knowledge.

Another indication of how the Salako value knowledge is seen in their readiness to pass on to outside-learners skills that presuppose a substantial amount of knowledge. This was demonstrated by their enthusiasm to pass on to the researcher information for documentation. This willingness to teach outsiders and the passing on of skills to other eager native learners shows that teaching and learning activities are not new to the Salako society. This society embraces education as part of its lifestyle. It is therefore important for outside educators to be aware of and appreciate the high value placed on education in the Salako society. Only then will they be able to offer education in fields that are not part of traditional Salako knowledge, in an appropriate and culturally sensitive way.

Collaborative learning is a good idea when we look at the holistic aspect of learning and the professional development of teachers as well. McClay mentions that the role of non-native educators is one of mutual cooperation and mutual education. Malone (1998:43) qualifies this by pointing out that "formal and informal training for learner-centred literacy builds on the knowledge and experiences of the trainees as well as on the expertise of the trainer and encourages dialogue in which each facilitates the other's learning". This kind of co-learning involves all teachers, educators and trainers whether native or non-native. The patterns set by earlier trainers will be followed by successors. However, mutual learning and mutual teaching might not work within a singular teaching event if the teacher/trainer says: "Let's learn together." The reason this might fail in the Salako society is the authoritative role that needs to be given to the teachers.

While Salako women enjoy the group as a whole in accomplishing tasks, the general pattern shows that teachers do not broadcast teaching to a group of learners simultaneously but they do it one-on-one instead. The teachers work with individual students, probably naturally reflecting the "each one teach one" model introduced by Dr. Frank Laubach. The teacher attends to the learners individually at their level of proficiency. Peer learning was not observed in the videos recorded. This was a surprising discovery, as it was expected for all good learning experience to take place in teams with learners learning from each other. Vella's (1994) principle of using teamwork as a learning platform might not be well received by this society, if peer learning is not favoured.

Since in this study on the Salako, there is no peer teaching or team learning evident and the individual learners are attended to by teachers, this might cause a problem for adult educators with limited resources. However, there is an established pattern where older members teach the younger members of society. It might be worth considering training the

older members of the society to teach the younger ones. In this way, an adult literacy program would not only fit with their respect and role system, but it would also provide teachers who would then teach the young people.

Malone (1998) says that in the learner-centred approach the planning and implementing of training programs uses a "bottom-up" method, which is in contrast to the traditional "top-down" method. In the traditional method, a team of experts plan, implement, fund and evaluate a program. Development work and training, broadly considered, inevitably includes education. Such development should uphold and foster the people's identity in contrast to "sociocide" (the destruction of a society). This destruction typically occurs when external forces impinge on the society in an uncontrolled way with intentions to bring development (Shkilynk 1985 cited in McClay 1988:409).

A "bottom-up" approach, which is reflected in learner-centred training programs, needs to start from the learners. The first step is to get to know the learners, their needs, their ways and their motivation. Outsiders should never be more motivated than the community, as they will be at risk of running the program and treating the people as objects of their programs instead of subjects. The next step in running a sustainable training program is to involve the learners in all facets of planning, implementing, evaluating and funding of that program. Where possible, the teaching approach adopted should be consistent with core social values and established patterns of skill transmission of the target community.

Finally, the Salako identity and traditional knowledge are interwoven with the vitality of their agriculture, fishing, life-skills, art, music and dance. They place a very high value on this knowledge as they are often under the threat of assimilation, living as a minority group in a multi-cultural society. A society which does not value its knowledge will not pass it on to others, and new learners will not learn those skills accurately. This non-appreciation of their traditional knowledge may become a catalyst to indigenous societies abandoning their identity and assimilating into dominant groups. This does not seem to be the case with the Salako community in Kampung Pueh, which evidently values its cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Profile of participants

The participants were all women of the Dayak Salako descent group who reside in Kampung Pueh, Lundu district, Sarawak state, on the Malaysian side of the island of Borneo. They volunteered to participate and my selection criteria specified that they should be: adult women – ages 21 years or above; residents of Kampung Pueh; and engaged in activities of teaching or learning at the time the recordings were done. *Kak* R, age approximately 47, is a native of the village and daughter of the village supreme chief. She has spent a substantial amount of her adult life outside of the village in Peninsular Malaysia. As such she says that she is not very proficient at weaving and traditional skills. She is literate but has not completed her secondary school education. She is able to read and write in Bahasa Malaysia (BM) but not in Salako or English. A mother of four, *Kak* R runs a small grocery shop in the village. *Kak* A, age approximately 52, is married to a resident of the village and has lived in the village since her marriage. She is recognized by others as an expert in many traditional skills. She is somewhat literate but was not able to establish her level. A mother and grandmother, *Kak* A is a subsistence farmer and housewife. *Kak* U, age approximately 51, is a native of the village and is married to the son of the village supreme chief. She is preliterate and says that she has never been to school. She has never mastered the skill of weaving, although she has made several attempts to do so. A mother of two, *Kak* U is a subsistence farmer and housewife. Profiles of the other participants in the *nyusup atap* recording are tabulated in table 1 for easy reference, in their order of appearance. Most of the information is only estimated and what is unknown is indicated with a question mark.

Name	Approximate age	Role	Literacy	Occupation	Relationship
Makcik B	> 75	Head teacher	Preliterate	Farmer	*Kak* U's sister
Makcik C	> 65	Teacher	Preliterate	?	?
Kak S	> 30	Learner	?	?	*Kak* U's cousin
Kak D	> 25	Learner	?	?	?
Makcik E	> 65	Learner	Preliterate	Farmer	*Kak* U's sister-in-law
Kak H	>30	Teacher	Preliterate	Farmer	?
Makcik G	> 45	Teacher	?	?	?
Kak F	> 30	Learner	?	?	?
Makcik J	> 55	Teacher	Preliterate	?	?
Kak N	= 40	Learner	Preliterate	Farmer, fishing person	*Kak* R, *Kak* A and *Kak* U's close friend.
Kak K	> 30	Learner	Preliterate	?	*Kak* U's cousin
Man	> 40	?	?	?	?
Makcik I	> 50	Teacher	?	?	?
Mayang (Jey)	37	Learner	Literate	Researcher	Outsider

Note: *Makcik* 'aunt' is an honorific term of address to older women, and *Kak* "sister" is an honorific term of address to middle-aged women.