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Unit 6—Learning Along the Way

“Lifelong learning is the "lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability.” [1]

Learning is a lifelong experience that we all trek through. Even if we aren’t formally taking classes or learning from a teacher/professor, there are experiences that we encounter that teach lessons that make us who we are. We are all constantly expanding our knowledge of the real world in order to better ourselves and become more successful in our endeavors. In Bateson’s “Peripheral Visions” we follow her through the many experiences she has encountered; experiences that she has grown through and that make up whom she is as a person. It is upon these experiences that she has expanded her knowledge and advanced her overall social self.

Improvisation in a Persian Garden

“Looking at the place of learning in other societies and times from this vantage point, it is reassuring to know that everywhere most of *learning occurs outside the settings labeled as educational.*” As I read this line from Bateson’s first chapter, I was hooked on the last 8 words. It is so true that so much of our learning and our education truly happens outside of the school setting. It is in our everyday lives that we learn and grow about the people around us, the different cultures that exist in the world, the ideas and opinions of others. There is so much beyond our academic education that allows us to learn so much more about the whole world. No amount of education in the traditional sense can teach all of the incredible information we are able to learn as we “learn along the way”.

The story about Bateson and her daughter attending the Feast of Sacrafice was one in which not only did her daughter see and learn from the experience, so did Bateson. Bateson realized how one cultural norm and experience can bring out the different roles one can play in learning. She was a learner, outsider but also a teacher, an authority. These skills are all learned from just being in situations unfamiliar to us and learning as we go.

Composing Our Differences

In Chapter 11, Bateson goes to Iran. When she first gets there she lives with a very traditional family. One of her first encounters is when the mother of the household made sure she looked appropriate. She bought her more traditional cotton prints for her chador to replace the black one she had shown up wearing. This lone experience that started out her stay in Vanni, showed Bateson proper etiquette according to the traditional Vanni people. I’m not sure that even with some research that Bateson could have known that the family she was to stay with was going to be so traditional. In this case she wasn’t prepared but was able to “learn along the way” by learning the properness of the family. By the time she left she spoke the appropriate words, hence, she had learned to adapt to this families culture.

It is so important to remember that in a given culture, there will always be those who are less willing to grow accustomed to all the cultural norms. There will always be people to challenge the ways while others will succumb to what is acceptable just to fit in. In this sense too it is just a matter of learning from those around us and being flexible in our own acceptance of others. It is important that everybody learn to accept differences of people, places, and things around us.

Bateson also shares that when she met her husband she had to look Armenia up in an encyclopedia in order to learn more about her husband and his culture. In this sense it was all too natural for her to do this to aide in the cultural transition for marriage. These are the cases in which the new learning from a new experience comes so naturally. It is nothing we prepare for as we are growing up, it's just something that happens "along the way".

Learning along the way is not something that can be taught. There is so much that goes into our learning that we cannot truly be prepared. As we live our lives, we are constantly observing, changing, adapting, and learning from the people and the world around us. Whether we consciously know it, we are always learning, learning along the way.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelong_learning