

**Group interaction patterns as observed in informal learning events  
among pre-literate/semi-literate Salako women**

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## Abstract

The Sarawakian Salakos, numbering approximately 10,000, predominantly live in the Lundu district. Ethnically and politically, they are categorized as a sub-group of the Bidayuh while linguistically they are Malayic. Conducted in Kampung Pueh, the hub of this indigenous society, my study focused on describing informal education practices as observed there. This study was done to enquire how Salako women traditionally passed on their skill, in order to find out their preferred and natural way of learning.

The paper describes my observation on the interaction patterns of learning groups. I selected two video recordings of 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. I then employed the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to generate a "thick" description with keywords in order to provide an inductive method of discovering patterns. Some interesting learning interaction formations emerged, which elucidate the Salako women's preference to learn from a proficient 'teacher' rather than to learn from peers. Some plausible interpretations for this observation are suggested. The paper concludes with some implications for adult educators who aim to implement a learner-centred approach in training members of indigenous communities.

## Introduction

This study, carried out between November 2003 and June 2004, was concerned with how to conduct adult training programs most effectively and was undertaken on the assumption that learner-centred programs would prove to be the most effective way. I embarked on the study with the aim of extending existing knowledge of the Salako society and their learning patterns, focusing on preliterate and semi-literate Salako women.

The paper describes my observation of Salako women's interaction patterns as they are learning in groups. First is some background information about the indigenous group where the research was conducted. Second is a detailed description of the method of data gathering and analysis. The major portion of the paper is then devoted to description of how participants in learning groups interact on the subject matter. I then describe various group formations and attempt to give some plausible interpretations to this behaviour within learning groups. Finally, I suggest some implications for those concerned with the offering of training programs for adult learners in indigenous societies who aim to implement their programs using a learner-centred approach.

## Background

This study was conducted in Kampung Pueh, Lundu district, located on the southern tip of Sarawak. This village was initially settled 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 social system is still intact and the language exhibits strong vitality. Approximately 10,000 Salako people live in the Lundu district, but of these only around 650 people live in this village, which is reckoned to be the largest Salako settlement (Awang Hasmadi, 1994). Ethnically and politically, the Salakos are a sub-group of the Bidayuh. The language however belongs to the Malayic family.

The Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) is a language revitalization project initiated by the leaders of the Bidayuh community in Sarawak. They have planned many activities to revitalize Bidayuh (including Salako) and plan to mobilize adults of the local community to run the program. The BLDP intends to use a learner-centred approach to train adults, which is likely to be successful, as it provides a supportive learning environment that enables the learners to achieve their educational goals.

The Salako women of Kampung Pueh are in need of an adult literacy program,<sup>1</sup> but most attempts to establish adult literacy programs have apparently failed. 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.<sup>2</sup>

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, I embarked on this study to explore the existing traditional education practice and to find out from the Salako women their preferred and natural way of passing on skills. In order to do this, learning events which foster intergenerational and peer skill transmission were documented and analyzed.

In most societies, 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. It was with this assumption in mind that I started to observe and study patterns in skill transmission events among adult women in the Salako community.

Through the agency of a local state assemblyman and a former resident of Kampung Pueh, the BLDP introduced me to the people of Pueh on 15 February 2003. During a period of five months in 2003 I spent weekdays in the village, returning to Kuching city at the weekends. At this time I made a lot of progress in getting to know the residents as well as judging the feasibility and ethnological potential of Kampung Pueh as a research site. I explained my interest clearly to the people of the village and especially to the supreme chief of the Salako community and the local assemblyman. In the course of time in the village I was adopted into the supreme chief's household as his daughter and since then I have addressed him as *bapak* 'father' and his wife as *indu* 'mother'. They in turn affectionately call me *Mayang*. During semester break from my MA program, from November 2003 to February 2004, I returned to Malaysia from Australia, and I took the opportunity to return to Kampung Pueh to do data collection and visit my host family. While in Sarawak, I alternated residence between Kuching and Kampung Pueh. However, when in the village, I lived in the longhouse as a resident in unit number 10 of the 20-unit (door) longhouse for 20 days. All video recordings and fieldnotes were made during this period, and this also gave ample time to interact and renew ties with the residents in the village. Living in the longhouse gave me greater access to the

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<sup>1</sup> The need for an adult literacy program for women was expressed by some of the women themselves in informal conversation with the researcher.

<sup>2</sup> This was obtained from general observation and interview findings. Information on school drop-out rates of various regions is classified.

community, and language learning became a normal exercise for integration and communication with the local people. I have many fond memories of feasting with them as well as farming, fishing, and working with the women. On a personal note, I had the most wonderful time with my “family” and the women took me in as their little sister, always warmly calling me Mayang.

## Method

### *Data collection*

The first task in conducting the research involved identifying traditional patterns of general skill transfer among Salako adults, specifically women. I hoped that these patterns would be revealed through observations of skill transfer events.

While in Kampung Pueh, I took numerous photographs and made five video recordings. This included the rare opportunity to make two spontaneous video recordings of teaching/learning events. For the purpose of this study, I decided to focus on the two spontaneous recordings; both were made during the final week. By this time the women were used to my being around and making video recordings. Whenever possible, I placed the video recorder in an unobtrusive spot and used the zoom lens to record the events. The “unobtrusive spot (measure)”, I refer to here are “social science methods which do not disturb the social environment” (Kellahear 1993:2).

The first recording, which I have 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 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 *Kak R*’s veranda. (*Kak* [*kakak* ‘older sister’] is an honorific term of address to women in general.) I did not participate in this event and was merely an observer. I was holding the video recorder from a distance as the cord was rather short, and I also did not want to interfere with their learning process. However, I was unable to video the entire event as it took approximately four hours to complete. There are many stages in the process of making a thatched roof; this is a complete recording of some of the early stages.

Recording number 2, named *nganyam katupat* ‘weaving rice cake casings’, was made on 19 January 2004 in *Kak R*’s living room. 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 dignitaries 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 section below. In this event, I did most of the recording by placing the video recorder in an unobtrusive place so that it did not become a hindrance to the learners or the teacher. At one stage, I became a participant observer, learning the skill for the first time myself at the invitation of the learners. At that time, a friend helped by holding the video camera in place. Besides videoing, I also took some field notes on other minor teaching events.

Just before these recordings began, a final permission was obtained for the recording, though 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.

### *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 I am 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 with a question mark (?).

Table 1: Participants' profile

<i>Name</i>	<i>Approximate age</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Literacy</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Relationship</i>
Makcik B	> 75	Head teacher	Preliterate	Farmer	<i>Kak U's sister</i>
Makcik C	> 65	Teacher	Preliterate	?	?
<i>Kak S</i>	> 30	Learner	?	?	<i>Kak U's cousin</i>
<i>Kak D</i>	> 25	Learner	?	?	?
Makcik E	> 65	Learner	Preliterate	Farmer	<i>Kak U's sister-in-law</i>
<i>Kak H</i>	>30	Teacher	Preliterate	Farmer	?
Makcik G	> 45	Teacher	?	?	?
<i>Kak F</i>	> 30	Learner	?	?	?
Makcik J	> 55	Teacher	Preliterate	?	?
<i>Kak N</i>	= 40	Learner	Preliterate	Farmer, fishing person	<i>Kak R, Kak A and Kak U's close friend.</i>
<i>Kak K</i>	> 30	Learner	Preliterate	?	<i>Kak U's cousin</i>
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

### ***Analysis and Interpretation***

For the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the video data, I used a software program called Transana (version 1.22). This program allowed me to review the video recordings while developing a thick descriptive transcript.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first introduced the Grounded Theory method as an effective mode of carrying out qualitative research. This 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<sup>4</sup> allowed me to apply 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, I was able to amalgamate varied sets of Clips which shared the same raw observation, thus permitting investigation of relationships which might exist.

In addition, this program facilitated the process of determining which samples to include to illustrate the desired points. For more information about this program, readers can refer to the website, [www.transana.org](http://www.transana.org), which offers a free download of the program with a user manual and tutorial.

In order to triangulate the findings, I requested another rater to watch the video recording independently. He did that and provided his feedback through a personal teleconversation in April 2004. He was requested to make observations on the interaction between participants. His observations were consistent with mine, thus increasing my confidence in their reliability.

## **Observation**

In this section, I list a series of observations made from the two video episodes. There were also some basic interaction patterns observed in these episodes. The diagrams that follow 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 members of the community. 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 Bahasa Malaysia) for dignitaries and tourists who were going to visit their

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<sup>4</sup> Transana also gave me the possibility of analyzing the data in a deductive as well as an inductive way. In the deductive approach, video recordings were broken down into Clips that were organized into theoretically associated Collections. Multiple samples were collated into these Collections exemplifying a particular phenomenon.

longhouse. However, both task groups were comprised of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled members. Thus small learning groups formed within these larger groups. When a group came together to work, a subgroup for learning the task emerged. The subgroups seemed to consist of members who wanted to contribute to the task group and in order to do so they found a 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. I choose to call this pattern of interaction 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.

***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 were only semi-proficient even though her level of ability to make a thatched roof may have matched the older woman’s skill/proficiency. See Figure 3 for the actual interaction pattern. In this group, where there was one learner and two teachers, the interaction was with one teacher at a time. In Figure 5, I call this the “**pendulum formation.**”

***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 is older. She positioned herself in the middle of the group, while 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 I asked who was teaching, the others pointed to the head teacher. But the head teacher herself, when asked, refused this recognition by acknowledging that they were all

teachers (referring to the now “semi-proficient” women). Actual interactions are shown in Figure 4. This kind of interaction, I have termed the “**daisy wheel formation.**” (See Figure 5.)

### ***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. I would like to take this observation a little deeper and say 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. They were treated individually and 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 and pace of teaching for *Kak U* (who happened to know some basic weaving patterns) were not the same as for *Kak R* (a non-proficient woman). Moreover, *Kak R* received more coaching than instruction, which provided more scaffolding<sup>5</sup> to the learners than if only instructions were given. Even in larger groups, the teacher always related to one learner at a time, often encouraging the learners to be independent. When I became a participant observer during the same event, the teacher (*Kak A*) encouraged me to try a new weaving pattern, after I had completed the first pattern to her 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 vs. 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 legs 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 close, almost touching each other. But 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

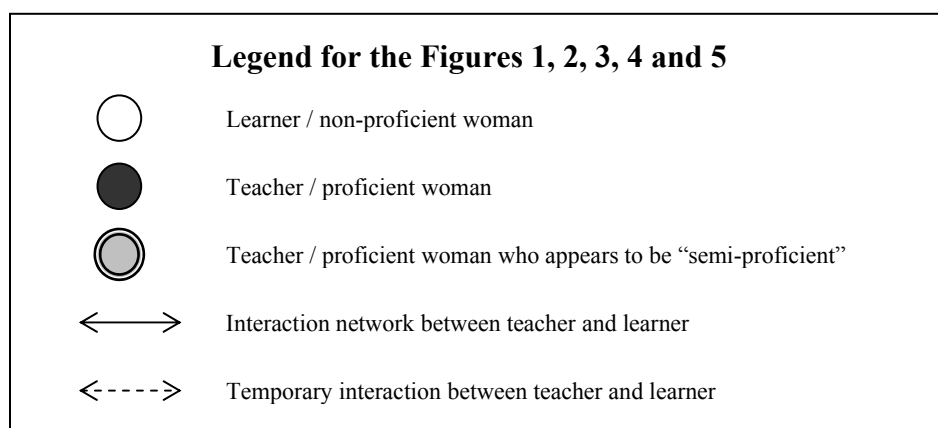
<sup>5</sup> Scaffolding is a term used in the model of cognitive apprenticeship, developed by Collins-Brown-Newman in 1989 (cited by Winnipis 2001).

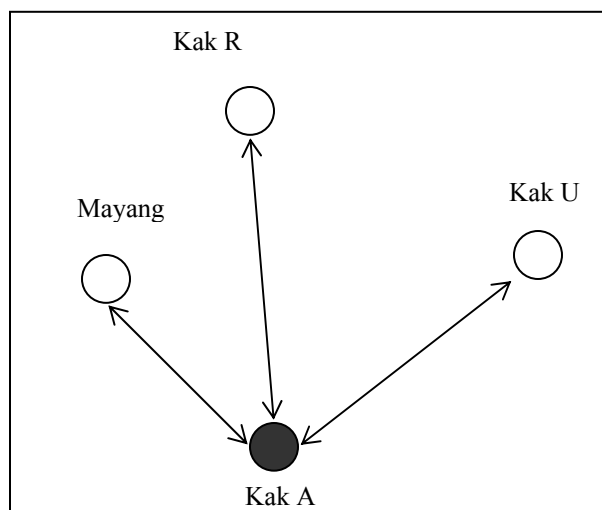
moving closer to the teacher to ask for help. When two people moved closer, they were opposite each other but within arm's reach only.

***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. 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.

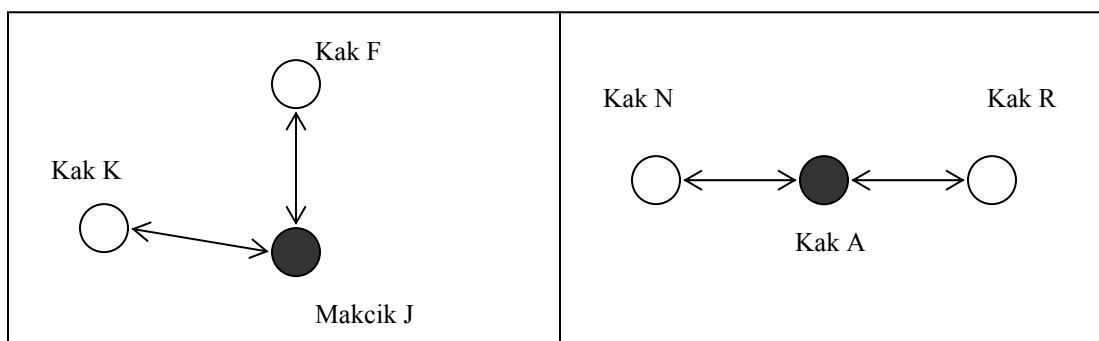
A form of negative reinforcement was seen in the *nganyam katupat* recording when the slower learner was not given any new patterns or skill to learn. She was expected to learn the simplest pattern well before moving on to new ones. However, a successful student was often given positive reinforcement 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.



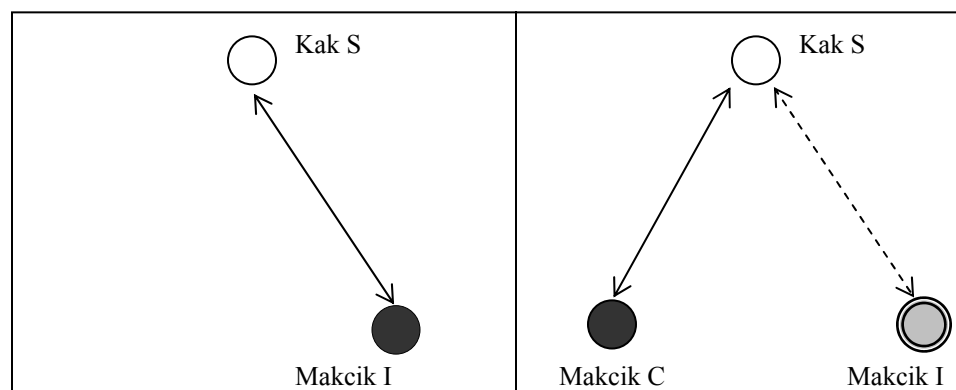


**Figure 1: Actual group seating and interacting positions for the *nganyam katupat* episode**

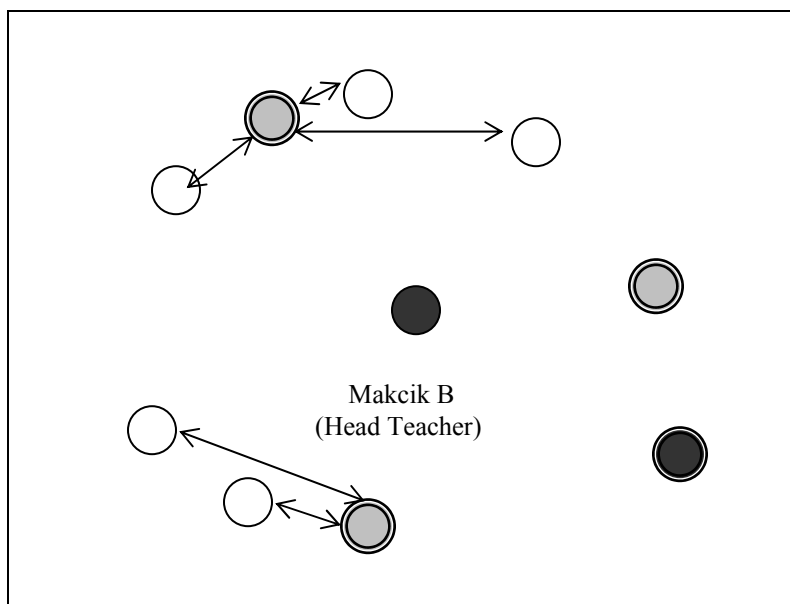
Figure 1: Actual group seating and interacting positions for the *nganyam katupat*



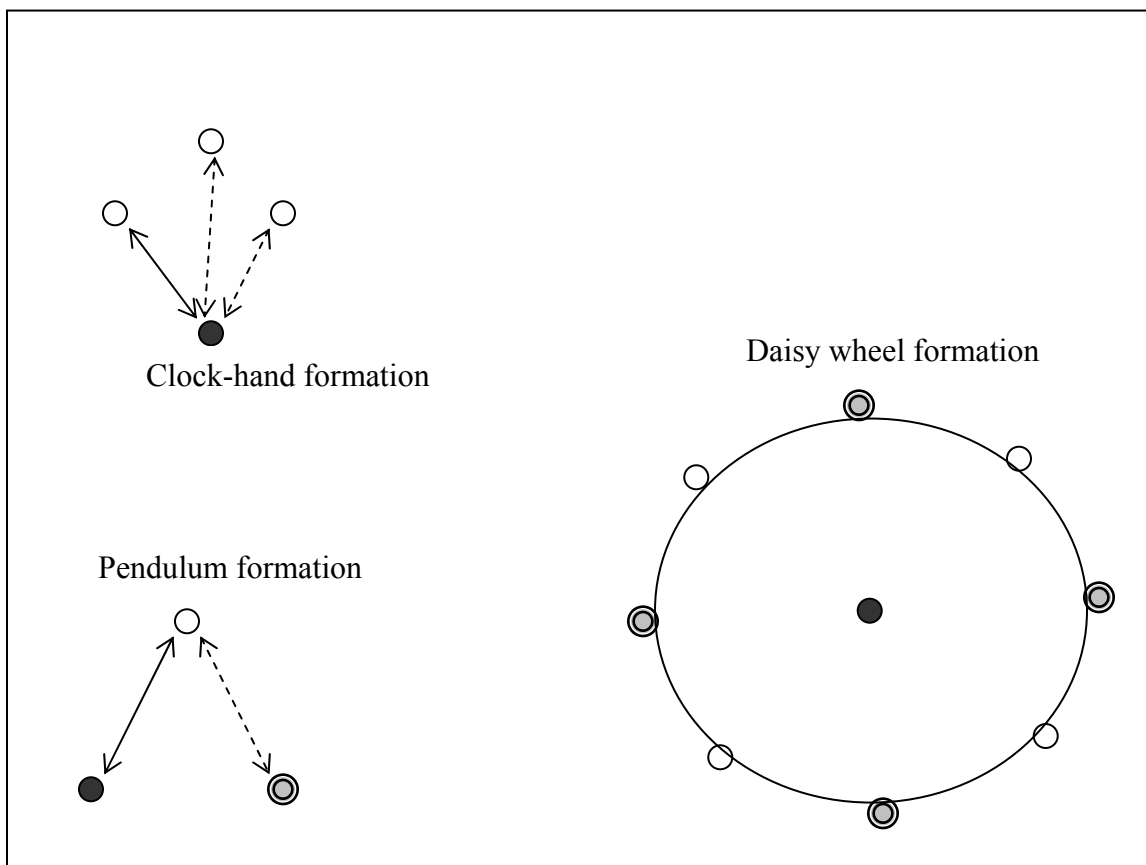
**Figure 2: Actual group seating and interacting positions for two small groups in the *nyusup atap* episode**



**Figure 3: Actual group seating and interacting positions of one small group with alternating teachers in the *nyusup atap* episode**



**Figure 4: Actual group seating and interacting position of the large group during the *nyusup atap* episode**



**Figure 5: Group interaction formations**

## **Interpretations**

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. I have seen this happening in other instances as well in the lives of the Salako people. 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 first is high quality task accomplishment but a secondary goal is to learn the task while being engaged in the group. It is the 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 is also aimed at developing highly skilled apprentices through accurately passing on skills. The learner's acquisition of accurate skills is also easily monitored by teachers. Finally, with individual interactions, error correction is 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, I 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 to the expert in traditional knowledge and skill, who will take time and effort to pass it on accurately. I think that this is 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, music and dance have stood the test of time.

### ***Skilled women and older women wield the position of head teacher***

This may be due to the authority given to skilled women. It also 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. The influence of the teacher rather than her close proximity 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 I 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, I was also related by the virtue of my 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, and this authority defines the measure of error correction one is able to make. In my time of teaching the women to write their names, they did not mind me correcting them; in fact they insisted that I 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 the roles are clearly defined is such correction allowed. A person who is not given the role, or is not within the context of teaching and learning, is not authorized to correct errors. If she does try to correct another person she will be called *sibuk* ‘busybody’.

### ***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 their desire to produce highly skilled apprentices.

### **Conclusion**

The behaviour of a small group is constitutive of the community.<sup>6</sup> The behaviour of many small groups generates the behaviour of a community. So studying the behaviour of

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<sup>6</sup> Oral communication by Dr. Brian Devlin, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Health and Science, Charles Darwin University, Australia.

one small group is representative of the whole community. In this paper I have reported the findings from the two video recordings as well as my experience living in the Salako *kampung*.

Penland and Fine's (1974) statement, "A group is a system within a system within a system" was demonstrated clearly in the Salako women's group events. 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 a 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 put forward the notion that learning is inherent in a "community of practice" (Smith, 2004a:1). The learning group was incidental to the task group activity in both of the cases. This means that learning will automatically take place in every group formed and that their formation is natural. My observations 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. I plotted these patterns 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 be 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 usually group leaders are 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 predetermined leadership in that 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 them 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 this value of 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 me (an outsider<sup>7</sup>) 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 actually came to me as a surprise, as I candidly expected all good learning experience to take place in teams with learners learning from each other. Vella’s principle of using teamwork as a learning platform might not be well received by this society, if peer learning is not favoured.

Because 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

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<sup>7</sup> While I was adopted into a Salako household during the time the research was conducted, I consider myself an outsider in relation to my lack of native knowledge while socially an insider.

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 run the 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.

Finally, the Salako identity and traditional knowledge are interwoven in the vitality of their agriculture, fishing, life-skills and in their art, music and dance. This is what makes them different from other societies and 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 is not the case with the Salako society, which evidently values its cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge.

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