

# livelihoods

*today and tomorrow*

**January 2019**

**‘7L’ - Life, Living,  
Leadership, Learning and  
Love**

## ‘Learning Naturally’

Every living creature learns through corresponding with the surrounding environment. But human beings have the most complex cognitive and flexible behaviour compared to other living creatures. This extraordinary element facilitates human beings to learn and adapt to the specific environment across the planet. Learning is as natural as breathing for us. It is an inbuilt process that starts from birth and continues life-long, with death being the only thing which puts a stop to the learning process of a person. Learning has no limits or boundaries. Human beings try to understand the world in which they live and make it better. They want to understand - governing world laws, get involved with the world and make changes for survival and to also lead a more prosperous life. Human beings continuously acquire skills and knowledge and in this process also mould their attitudes. These are essential elements to meet the demands of life. Most of the time, human beings’ learning happens in a natural way without any structured syllabus, time bound limits and systematic curriculum. The learning happens at a conscious level and unconscious level. This is the method of “Learning naturally” that we are going to discuss this month!



Learning is a life time activity for everyone. Our existence reflects our learning. Everyone wishes to lead a successful and prosperous life without any hardships and miseries. Mostly, evaluation of our lives and undertaking possible interventions depends on these questions - what we have? Where we are? How we are? The life facilitates learning from each and every movement. In this process, people learn by dealing with things, walking with fellow human beings, interacting with systems and mechanisms. They earn valuable experiences which need to be put into practice for achieving further development. For instance, when children burn their hands while trying to touch a burning candle, they immediately withdraw their fingers from the burning candle, and with this experience, they learn that touching a burning candle causes them harm, so from the next time, they learn not to touch a burning candle and also anything which is burning. This change brought about in the behaviour is what we call learning. It evolved through direct and also indirect experiences from the things, persons, incidents or surroundings we meet, interact and touch.

Learning starts first in the family. The kids start learning just after being born from the mothers' womb, by looking at their mothers, fathers, siblings and others and listening to their sounds. Gradually, the kids start using their five sensory organs such as eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue. Children are curious; they want to make sense out of things and find out how things work. They never feel shy of doing experiments and learning new things. They are open-minded, perceptive and experimental. They observe things continuously and don't shut their eyes or ears to the new or complicated things. They touch it, taste it,



move it, bend it, shake it, pound it, and break it to find how things work. They are bold and not afraid of making mistakes and they wait with patience to make things. They don't know about ego or other complexities of human nature yet. They do what they want and say what they want. They are rational and never depend on irrational things. They want to know everything by experiments or reasonable questions. They can tolerate unimaginable amount of uncertainty, confusion, ignorance and suspense.

Children are highly motivated and intelligent learners and they want to learn from their surrounding environment. They never sit idle. Everything in the world is worthy of exploration for the children. In their world, everything is for learning and experience. It may be tasting a carrot, sight of sunlight, sound of music made with materials, wet with water, observing animals, playing with dolls etc., and they have inbuilt exploratory tendency and they actively participate with all their senses to investigate the things. They prepare tools and use the tools in the investigation. In this process, they strive to know about the things and develop skills and knowledge. They strive to discover things and the interconnection between the things. Most of the learning happens through direct experiences, experiments and explorations. Children develop at different levels and they have different interests based on their social, cultural, economical conditions and their upbringing.

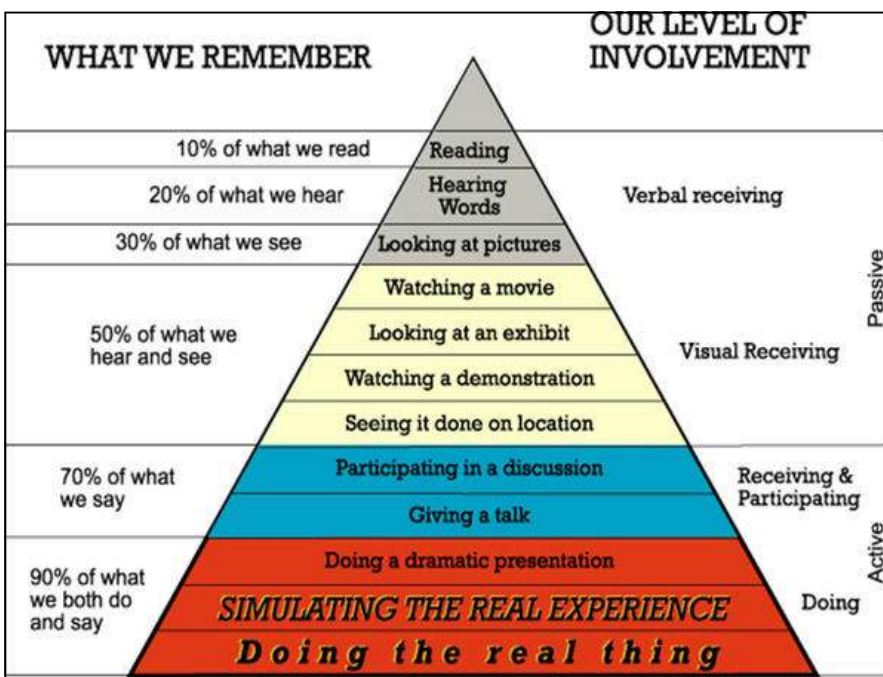
Learning requires a minimum of four elements such as stimulation or exposure, values, beliefs and opportunities. The first element- providing right stimulation at the right time and facilitating engagement with natural and social environment is a vital element in learning. For instance, travelling across the country and watching diversified regions and people's different social, economical and cultural aspects. The second element- persons must value what is to be learnt and they have to prepare a comprehensive plan, invest time and efforts for the desired learning.

Mostly, values are learnt by watching parents' actions instead of their words. The third element- persons have belief on once learning capacity and success. Belief or ability is designed by the persons' self-definition, their understanding about the world and their place in the world. The fourth element- opportunity, which means persons must have required time, space, resources and control.



Learning naturally happens within the broad limits, in a secure and facilitating environment. Children have a right on their own learning and their life. This environment is more important than acquiring knowledge and skills. The factors such as freedom and control on their lives are vital in the natural learning. Overall, learning naturally requires love, trust, respect, time, encouragement, support, recognition, praise and guidance. These elements play a critical role behind learning. In learning naturally, imitation plays a vital role particularly in the case of children. First, children start learning in the family. They keenly observe the parents' talks, acts, styles, habits, attitudes etc., and whatever they watch and observe from their parents, close relatives, friends, neighbours and other people. Mostly, parents are the role model to their children in many aspects. They are not confined only to listening to their parents' words, but also watch the relation between their words and actions. In their own way, they try to understand the difference between parents' words and actions, and practice those learnings in their later life. In this way, the child's learning is highly influenced by the parents' personalities.

Learning is not confined to only watching the demonstration skills of others and listening to people's knowledge and wisdom. Primarily, learning is engagement and involvement in various continuous activities. The activities which we are involved or engaged in help us earn experiences and learn some skills and knowledge. Most importantly, desire to learn has to come from self first; it should not be an assigned task by others. Natural learners trust the learning ability of themselves, with their level of learning depending on the deep observation, focussed efforts, past experiences and maturity levels. One should to practice our learning continuously otherwise it fades out over time. Learning is NOT rote-learning and memorizing topics, without understanding the concept, for the purpose of the examination. If persons do not use the learning in practice, there are chances we will forget them. Learning

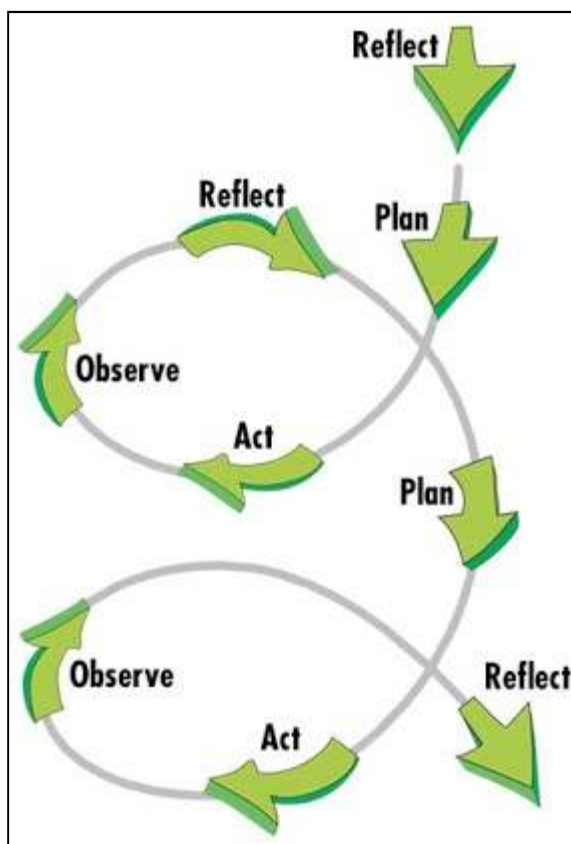


naturally is different. In learning naturally, persons participate actively with full interest, concentration and full engagement of their body and mind. Learning naturally is always contextual and should be practiced regularly according to the need. This method ensures them to not only remember topics but provides guidance in the concerned activities in future throughout our life.

In the childhood stage of life, kids tend to perform activities with more freedom in the families. They do not face any restrictions; as whatever activities

children do, parents allow them while ensuring a safe environment to the children and their activities. This freedom and independence are crucial in learning naturally. Gradually restrictions are placed on children's activities and movements by the parents and later by relatives and others in the society. After entering into school, it appears that a complete paradigm shift has taken place from freedom and independence to structured, time - bound and restricted domain.

Learning naturally involves mainly four steps - making guesses, coming to approximations, practice and getting things done. This is the logic of learnings. One should make approximations which may reflect the reality. But these approximations, practice and outcomes depend on the persons' skills, knowledge, experience, expertise and wisdom. Approximations may go wrong and outcomes might not be as expected. These mistakes may be natural in learning process and may give positive learning and even facilitate new ways of thinking. Observation and reflection are the critical things in the learning process. Most of the times, we may not notice learning process which we have undergone in a subconscious manner. We learn



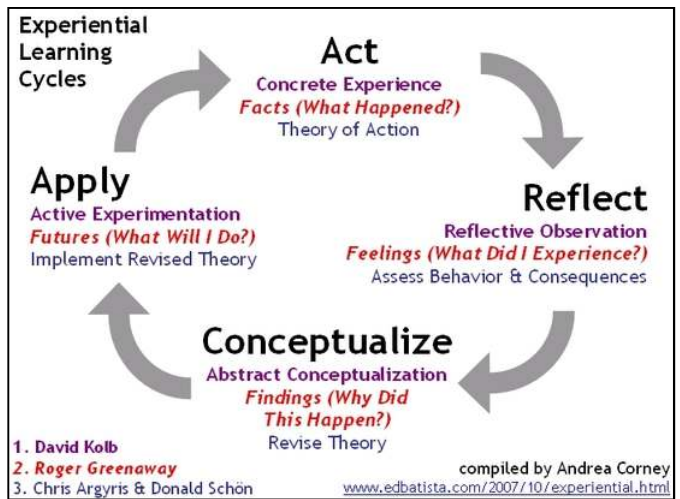
what we need to develop success and survive. Raising questions has its value in finding answers in the learning process. In learning naturally, persons may not need certificates, ranks, rewards and punishments. They require continuous feedback on their plans and acts.

The primary purpose of learning naturally is not job orientation, acquiring ranks and socialization. It is not an obligation or taking responsibility assigned by others. It is not for job but is a part of life and is motivated by the desire, pleasure and engagement. In this method, others don't worry about the persons' learning. They learn from things by trial and errors method and by continuous efforts. What is needed, however is just to ensure a safe environment, encouragement and guidance. While the rest of the things are taken care of by learners. This is the essence and beauty of learning naturally.

Largely, one can say that, people are a product of their environment. The impact of environment is a key factor in the learning process. It influences learning capacity, direction and speed etc.. Facilitating a suitable environment is critical in learning at home. A learning environment should encourage children's curiosity, independent exploration, problem solving and appropriate risk taking. Children's choices and interests play a vital role in learning. At homes, adults have to ensure freedom, protection of self interest, safe environment, care and appreciation of knowledge. The truth of the matter is that children are more interested in finding answers themselves instead of receiving answers from adults.

Learning travels from simple things to complex things and lower level to higher levels. At the beginning, children learn most of the things from direct experiences. In later stages, along with their activities, they start understanding and learning from others' activities in similar conditions. Learners always want to participate actively; as finding answers by themselves gives them a lot of enthusiasm instead of receiving answers. In Indian culture, people find answers through questions. It is the important mode of learning. Finding right answer by themselves and developing an idea is more important to the children than receiving the right answer or an idea. Even if those ideas may be wrong, they facilitate in-depth learning to the children.

Learning includes various ways such as - fieldwork, following families, induction and apprenticeship. In our country, most of the livelihoods are family based livelihoods. All of the family members involve in different activities at various stages of the livelihoods. In this process, children gain knowledge and skills of the particular livelihoods by assisting the elders in the livelihoods activities. It takes years, as it is a slow and gradual learning process without any specific structured and time-bound frame. Later, they start to do the activities independently with the guidance of the elders in the family. We can see this process in artisan activities, business activities etc.



In learning, particularly in children's learning, most of the time parents play a negative role. As by the time they are old they have stopped learning new things and are unable to tolerate the thousands of questions from children. If required, parents have to invest time on learning new things along with children to teach them. But they are unable to invest that time for their learning. Moreover in poor families, children have to do many household related things such as bringing water, cleaning, cooking, brining things and participating in livelihoods activities. Most of their time, they are engaged in activities assigned by the parents. Although they do learn skills and acquire knowledge from those activities, the children have little time to learn new, higher level things, and different things in creative ways as they wish. They do not have space and time for learning new things through trial and error method which gives them an in-depth understanding unlike any other method. The parents in the poor families prevent children's potentiality of learning. Conversely, in rich families, parents provide everything and make sure each everything is done by others for children. These children do not a get chance to do household related activities.

Confidence and arrogance are other important elements in the learning. Confidence is the ability to make judgements about what we can do? What we should do? What life is? What life might be? Confidence indicates the willingness to question and courage to appreciate our ignorance. But arrogance, on the contrary, is the fear to recognize ignorance. Dogma prevents learning naturally and makes life almost stagnant. No happenings and changes appear at a large scale and it makes us sit in a comfortable and safe place far from risk. But learning happens at the edges, where ideas, concepts, generalizations and understanding challenged and transformed.

Learning naturally requires freedom and exposure to diversified things and places. But one should remember that - freedom should always be practised albeit with some amount of restriction. Children cannot be allowed to do harmful things, which may hurt them severely or may attract more dangerous results. At the same time, practicing coercion on children also tends to damage the natural learning process of the children. The key to this problem is balancing freedom and restrictions. Usually people think that learning is a joyful activity. But in a practical sense, learning may not always be joyful. Learning requires disciplined, time bound and systematic efforts and one also has to go through hardships, pains and difficulties. Only after making a journey on the rough, difficult road and reaching the destination, that the results may appear sweet and joyful. ❖