Linking Mentoring within a Community of Practice to Positive Youth Development among Participants of a Youth Leadership Program in Malaysia

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Introduction

Youth development is described as an ongoing process to meet the physical needs and social demands in building youth competency (Delgado, 2002), which in turn, promotes positive youth development (PYD) (Lerner et al., 2005). According to Li and Wang (2009), youth involvement in leadership activities is one of the approaches in the PYD concept as it involves youth development process. The focus on PYD process serves as the basis for developing positive youth elements in self potential (Lerner et al., 2015), which principally require empirical understanding to reveal the potential of youth leadership talent on PYD through mentoring. However, Hastings, Human, and Bell (2011) discovered that as leaders, youths often fail to see themselves as decision-makers because some adult leaders do not really pass on the skills, experience, needs and motivation on how to be leaders systematically to them. The continuity of guiding youth leadership, if not well planned, may cause the young leaders not being able to participate actively within the existing community development process, which will then, lead to having youths who are not strongly connected to the community (Christens & Dolan, 2011). This situation can be seen in Malaysia, whereby the youths' readiness to lead is found to deteriorate, as there is a decline in the 2015 index score in the leadership category (Malaysian Youth Index, 2015). Based on the situation, there are concerns involving the ability of more Malaysian youths to lead, what more when the definition of a youth's age ranges between 15 to 40 years old as mentioned in the National Youth Development Policy 1997 and in the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act 2006 is being reduced to 15 to 30 years old as suggested in the Malaysian Youth Policy 2015.

Unleashing the potentials and abilities of youth to develop their readiness to take the lead will contribute directly to positive youth development (PYD). However, youth leadership development requires participative learning and role models that can be emulated. Thus, mentoring has the

potential in providing that kind of learning process. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the process of mentoring towards PYD and how protégé learned in the mentoring process? Therefore, the question addressed in this paper is how COP contributes to the process of mentoring youth to develop their leadership ability and eventually fulfilling the overall PYD needs.

Literature Review

Theories and approaches in leadership mentoring

Leadership mentoring highlights learning input at one-on-one basis, especially in traditional mentoring (Reagan-Porras, 2013), with the more senior and experienced individual as the mentor who supports the protégé's career development (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Eller et al, 2013). Chaudhuri and Ghosh (2012), assert that traditional mentoring builds normative impression towards the suitable age to become a mentor and protégé, so as to ensure in-depth mentoring.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) in the mentoring process

From the youth leadership aspect, knowledge formation process, behavior and positive attitude of the participants cultivated from the leadership development programmes may be an indicator of the production of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005; Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007; Lerner et al., 2011). Through mentoring, youths are given the opportunity to develop individual asset through skills, build youth leadership and its continuity, and maintain the relationship between youths (protégé) and adults (mentor). The advantage obtained by the youths through leadership mentoring is associated with the criteria of effective youth development. Other than that, it provides the opportunity for youths to gain access using the ecological asset in the community they are involved in. This will directly develop each of the '5Cs' elements in developing positive youths, which in the end may be the contribution made by the youths (Lerner et al., 2013).

Mentoring is an approach guided by an enabler to encourage innovation, learning and continuous development (Kiltz et al., 2004). The dynamic mentoring theory explains that the principal of mentoring learning involves the relationship between mentor and protégé, whereby the protégé's learning is based on the observation of demonstration and learning support by the mentor (Balcazar & Keys, 2013). Hence, to explore the process of leadership development skills, the mentoring

technique (Reagan-Porras, 2013) provides the perspective of acquiring knowledge and social skills, which also incorporates the process of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) noted that learning happened through participation and 'the sense of becoming' involved in the continuous construction of one's identity within various COP. Learning in COP involves the acquisition and recognition of one's identity as a participant. It is not solely about acquiring cognitive knowledge and skills but also a learning process that enable novices to become members of a community which have been explained as a form of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Legitimate peripheral participation enables new practitioners to take part in the actual everyday work practice despite having a 'peripheral' or a 'limited' degree of contribution and responsibility for the outcome of the task. From this process, the learner gains recognition as a member of a community and this community membership allows one to have the sense of belonging, engagement, inclusiveness and identity as a participant (Ismi et al., 2011). Legitimate peripheral participation refers to a route or a way in which the new member may or in some situations must follow in order to engage themselves with the community's established members (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2002).

Methodology

The study was conducted through qualitative approach informed by case study using Perdana Leader Fellowship Program (PLF) and Perdana Fellows Program (PFP) as a context for data collection. A total of 13 informants were involved in this study, which consisted of mentors, protégé, and the organizer and training providers using purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and supported with relevant information from focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis and field notes. Data were collected until achieving saturation point of information. Transcription of the interview session has been viewed and examined several times. The data were further analyzed through coding, categorizing and sub-themes for the development of the main theme using the NVivo as data managing software to answer the research questions.

Results and Discussion

From verbatim transcripts and significant statements were extracted, this study will be able to identify how protégé learned in the mentoring process. There are several things that can be discovered from the informants on the causes of their involvement, which is protégé keep referring their practices with organizational members. Based on participant observation, mentoring provides opportunity to communicate directly between protégé and mentor. Meanwhile, the study found that protégé is not only limited to the mentor, but learning process also occurred through organizational members. Organizer 1 stated that "... protégé is not only direct to their mentor, but the officers involved in the ministry operation such as Senior Private Secretary, Private Secretary and Special Officer. ... ".. He added that:

> "... Usually Senior Private Secretary will get minister's special officer and political secretary to involve in mentoring process. There were few protégés had opportunity to work with the minister. Most of protégés were facing that kind of situation. In reality, any mentoring program does not mean protégé get in all the time with mentor. ... ".

Under these circumstances, protégé's learning through the organizational members is a learning through activity system that allow the COP to translate something on practical experience from group activities and also influence the descriptive thinking and human behavior. Individuals involved in a group of community can be influenced by the effects of the past experience to form the activity (Lofthouse & Leat, 2013). Thus, the activity system has strong relationship on what they have been practiced in a community as a community of practice (Singh, Hawkins & Whymark, 2009). Community in organization also enhanced protégé's learning during the process of mentoring. Therefore, protégé is easy to adjust the mentoring process to be more comfortable in learning community.

Guidance of learning through community of practice will facilitate the transfer of knowledge from the perspective of the protégé. As a result of the matter, Protégé 5 also said the same thing about leadership learning through organizational community:

> "…feel like a family. Because all this people are like my parent, like my sisters. One day they can be like a brother and sister, like a dad and mom. So how closed we are. If you have the problem, you tell. If you feel like you can solve it, you will solve it. If you

not, what should I do. Go and talk to this people. If you don't get to the minister, senior officer also like him (mentor). Get to speak to them and also get to learn. …".

According to Armstrong, Allinson and Hayes (2002), protégé are more likely to seek encouragement from organizational members based on interpersonal relationships in an informal mentoring system. Based on data, learning in group occurred indirectly where transfer of learning was happened from the communities of practice to individual. According to Handley et al. (2006), COP is practical for creating knowledge, providing interpretive support to establish novice to play the role. Therefore, participation in cultural practice in any form will enhance knowledge from the epistemological principles in learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Therefore, what is being done by community members in organization during mentoring process can stimulate and encourage other individuals to try and experience on what they are doing? This is because the COP is also giving the place where they develop, consult and share with each other (Wenger, 1998).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The previous discussions suggest that the influence of mentoring is one of the factors that assist in the formation of new leadership potentials among youths. More efforts should be made to explore the Malaysian youths' involvement in leadership development via mentoring, which may contribute to positive youth development. Efforts made on youth development through leadership process could elevate positive values within youths. Generally, positive values discussed from the PYD perspective have also reviewed traditional youth services, which also include services for the community and organization. Therefore, it can be seen that the PYD values have strong relationship with leadership values shaped through mentoring. Based on these findings, social learning through the COP also occurred in the process of leadership mentoring. Protégé's learning occurs in the locus of mentor's organization and not limited only to the learning between mentor and protégé. In fact, learning also occurred through mentor's organizational community. Thus, empirical research related to the learning in mentoring through the COP has the potential to be expanded in order to explain how the process of learning occurs in the form of reversed mentoring (Harvey et al., 2009; Murphy, 2012), group mentoring (Mitchell, 1999), team mentoring (Rhodes et al., 2008) and peer mentoring (Ensher et al., 2001).

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