

The focus of Mary Catherine Bateson's *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way* is the idea that learning, like life, is not a linear process and that it is not always the result of direct instruction in a classroom setting. "Learning along the way" means that throughout our lives we have encounters with differences, different cultures, different ideas, different points of view, and it is through our recognition of and reaction to these differences that we learn. Because we are encountering something new, we do not immediately know how to respond. Since the encounter is new and different, we do not have any prior experience to rely on. We improvise a response and then incorporate the response into our learning. This type of learning is not the focus of our lives, but happens while we are living our lives.

A telling example of "learning along the way" for Bateson came with her experience of how Filipino people respond to death. During one example, she was listening to two women talk about the death of one of the women's sons. Even though one of the women was weeping, the other woman continued to ask her questions about the death of her son. While writing her description of the event, Bateson struggled to separate her description of the event from her feelings because of cultural differences about the interaction. Bateson says, "Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding." Bateson's discomfort about the situation led her to try to further understand the Filipino response to death.

Another example of "learning along the way" for Bateson came in the chapter titled "Turning into a Toad." She had found a toad in the garden and decided to leave it in a jar by her daughter's bed as she left for a trip to Europe. After leaving the house, she became concerned that her daughter may wake up, her mother not around, and see the toad in the jar and assume that her mother had been turned into a toad. To prevent her daughter from becoming alarmed, she had the jar removed from her bedside. This situation led Bateson to think about the similarities between humans and amphibians and how what humans do affect, not only our own environment, but also the environment that toads and other animals live in. She also considered the lessons that her daughter did not learn, for example about death, because she had the jar removed.

These two examples only scratch the surface of the "learning along the way" outlined in Bateson's book. There are several other examples in the book that show how learning is a life long, adaptive process. When we encounter differences in our lives is when the most learning occurs, and these differences are not always planned. To quote Bateson, "Learning to transfer experience from one cycle to the next, we progress like a sailboat tacking into the wind."