



"Training of Trainers"



Introductory course to facilitating social learning and stakeholder engagement in natural resource management contexts



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Module 1 - Topic 6 Handout

Introduction to Social Learning and Reflective Practice

Purpose: In this topic, we introduce the concept of **learning** in the context of professional development or work-based training. We will explore different reasons for learning, different types of learning and the fundamental principles for social learning and stakeholder engagement in the NRM context. This topic also introduces participants to the practice of reflection as a learning process (i.e. tools for reflection in the course). In the next module participants will learn more about the role of reflection in learning-by-doing and specifically, the role of reflection in professional development (see figure below).



Key guiding questions in exploring learning:

- What is learning and what kind of learning is required?
- Who are the learners?
- When do they learn?
- Why do they learn purpose/ objective?
- How do they learn?
- To what extent has the learning taken place?

What is learning?

- Facts; Concepts and constructs; Values; Practices, behaviours and habits; Skills and techniques; Agency, capability, capacity; Learning to learn; Unlearning...
- Learning is always socially and culturally 'situated, whether it is the learning of individuals or groups

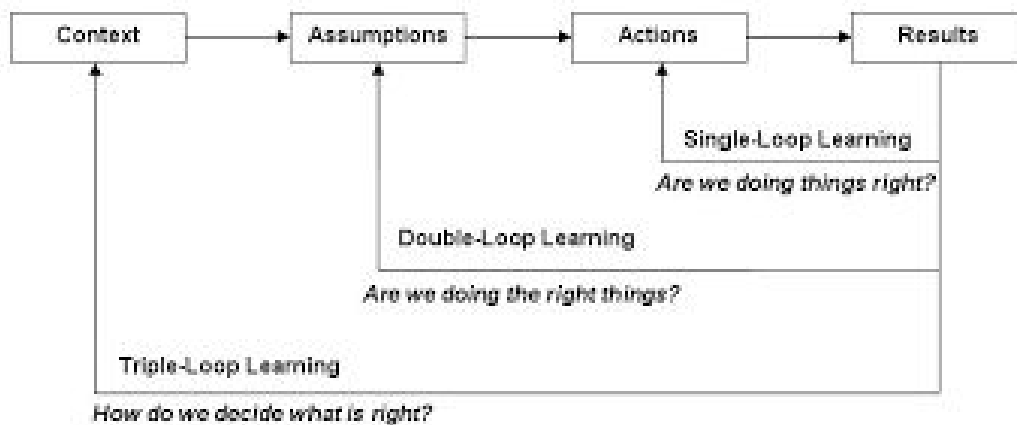


Figure 1: Single loop learning, Double loop learning, Triple loop learning. (Argyris & Schön, 2002; Bateson, 1973) “learning as corrective change in the systems of sets of alternatives from which choice is made”

Who is learning?

- Individual,
- Social units (e.g. communities, organisations),
- System wide learning



Individual



Community & organizational

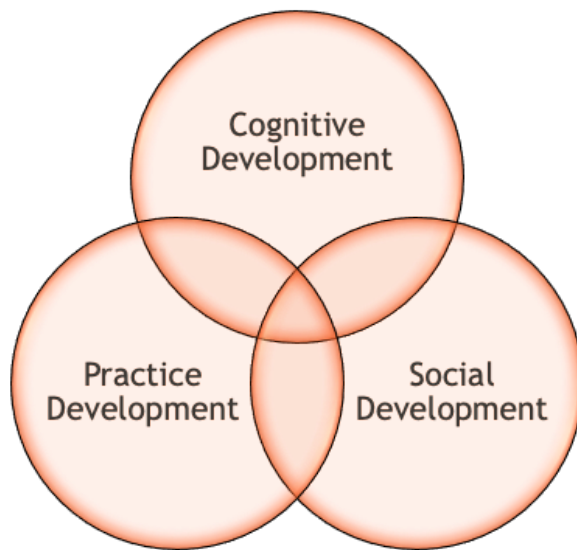


Systems



Why? The multiple purposes of learning

- Cognitive abilities (related to understanding)
- Including learning to learn
- Skills, know-how and mastery
- Whole person development
- Action competence and agency formation
- Human and social development
- Preservation of society (socialisation)
- Conservation of values and traditions
- New values and practices
- Emancipation from oppressive ideas
- Transformation, paradigm shifts and radical change

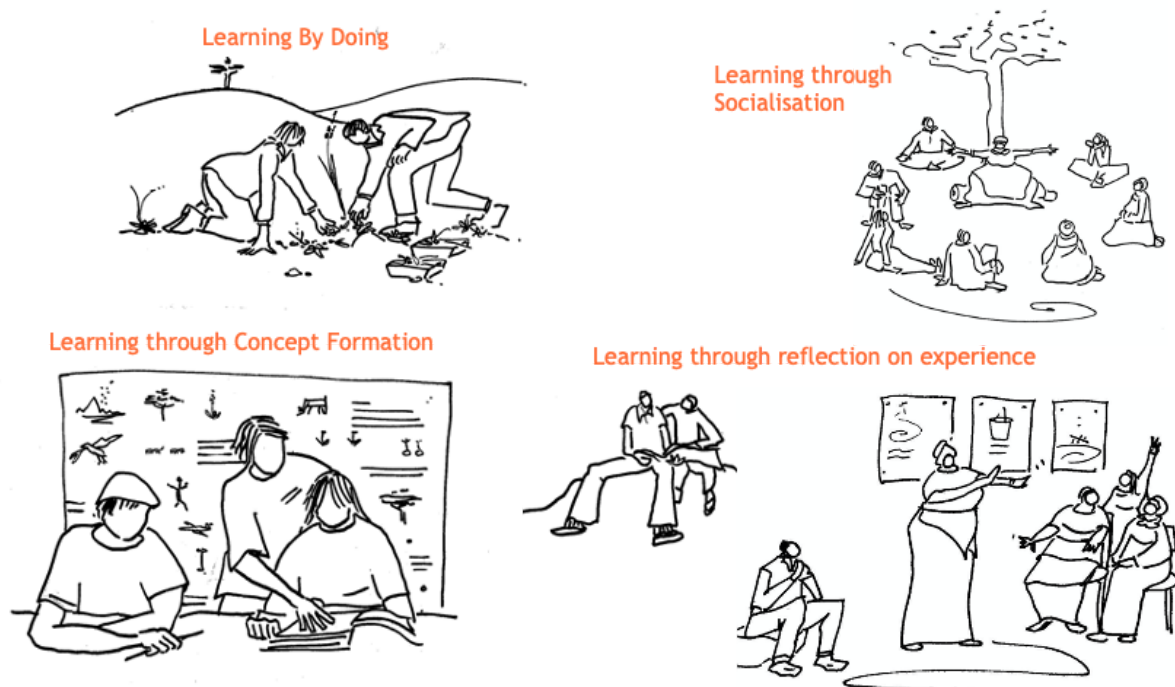


How is learning happening?

- Learning through Transmission and instructive teaching



- Participating (in the co-construction of meaning)



Why social learning? Focus on collective learning

Social learning is a **process** that (1) demonstrates that a **change in understanding** (ideas, meanings, values) and practice change (organizational, institutional, social, cultural, systemic), has taken place in the **individuals** involved; (2) this change transcend beyond the **individual to collective** and becomes **situated within wider social units** (communities of practice); and (3) occur through **social interactions and processes** between actors within a social network(s).

Principles and concepts of facilitating social learning

To facilitate the exploration of co-inquiry and transformative social learning process, we have identified some of the key principles from the social learning body of knowledge, and these include amongst others: diverse stakeholders engagement, active facilitation, and co-production of knowledge.

- *Stakeholder diversity*

This involves mapping and identifying all relevant stakeholders from local, regional, and national networks in relation to the object of inquiry (multileveled stakeholder analysis), to develop a shared understanding of the objective, ownership and responsibilities (shared object and division of labour in the expansive learning cycle).

- *Active Facilitation*

This involves identifying facilitation needs and providing active facilitation processes that allow for learning (interventionist researcher). I.e. meaningfully engaging people in collective exploring matters of concern. Social learning takes place through deliberative processes involving sustained interaction between individuals, and the sharing of knowledge and perspectives in a collective environment (community of practices or learning networks). Although social learning may take place in the absence of active facilitation, there is more evidence that active facilitation is fundamental to effect change/transformation (expansive) in a social learning process.

- *Co-production of knowledge*

Collaborative design of learning processes in relation to context, issues and challenges in practice under inquiry. Jointly identify risks and gaps for improvement (examining and testing the expansive learning pathways or potential new transformative solutions).

- *Contextualization and institutionalization*

This involves situating the social learning process into stakeholders' context, through collectively exploring issues that are relevant to their practices. This process is critical in continuity and sustainability of the social learning processes as stakeholders will institutionalize and adopt the learning process into their everyday practices. Institutionalization also involves exploration of tools and policies that regulate stakeholders practices/ activities. I.e. how will the practice be managed and implemented, who produce the governance and learning tools, what gaps can we identify in these tools, what are resources and skills required, who are the custodians, what are the guiding principles, etc?

- *Co-learning and co-engaged participation*

In a social learning process, learning occurs through participation (as opposed to acquisition and co-construction, and we are all learners and educators. This involves a co-inquiry process in which all stakeholders involved (facilitators & participants) are engaged in addressing the problematic situation/ context/ challenge, etc. This process provides an opportunity for collectively conceptualization of matters of concerns and potential solutions.

- *Multivoiceness, diversity, and reflexivity*

Social learning is a social process in which the learning takes place when there are divergent interests, norms, values, and when constructions of reality meet in an environment that is conducive to meaningful social interaction. This process is supported through community of practice (CoPs) or

learning networks, although social learning can still take place in the absence of CoPs. Respect for people and reciprocity (give and take), as well as valuing different knowledge sources from all stakeholders are key fundamentals to ensure diversity and reflexivity in a social learning process.

- *Transformative and generative*

Not all social learning processes always lead to collective transformation of practices, although most social learning normally supports change in individual understanding (e.g. Bandura's modelling, 1977). However, in a complex natural resource management context, we need a generative social learning process that supports transformative and transgressive forms of learning together in order to enable the emergence of collective capacity that is specifically aimed at exploring new sustainable solutions or best management practices. This type of approach is called Expansive Social Learning and it focuses on co-learning of what is not yet there (Engeström, 1987) in order to challenge and transgress norms, habits, cultural and institutional practices, systems and structures that hold unsustainability and inequalities.

- *Process oriented*

Social learning is an iterative and dialectical process over a period of time. Although in some cases an event-based social interaction such as an awareness raising campaign may trigger the emergence of a social learning process.

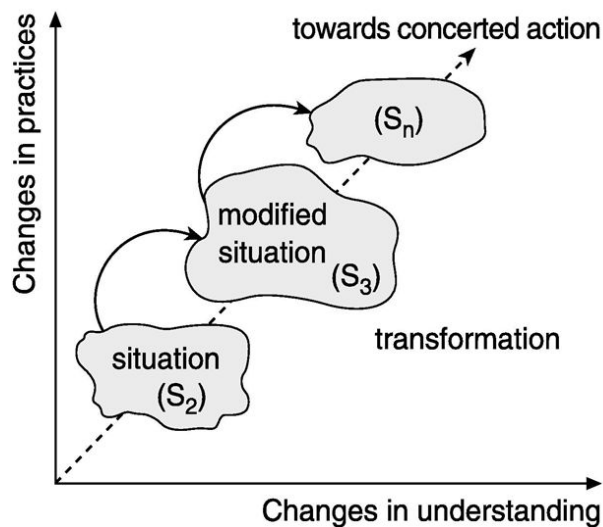


Figure 3: Facilitating transformation through collaborative co-inquiry processes for concert action
(Ison et al., (2004, p. 10)

Common misconceptions on facilitating expansive social learning

- *Stakeholder engagement as social learning*

Social learning is frequently confused with the conditions or methods necessary to facilitate social learning, such as stakeholder participation. You need a group of participants, networks or CoPs in order to facilitate social learning, and the process of engaging such stakeholder groups is not social learning until the group collectively works together in transforming a problematic situation (change in understanding or cognitively and/ change in actions or practices). E.g. If an NRM manager wants to work with communities on a project, s/he must engage necessary stakeholders to discuss the project, their concerns and interests, etc., but this is not social learning yet until they collectively start working together. There is evidence that stakeholder participation may stimulate the emergence of social learning but it cannot be assumed that participation inevitably implies that social learning takes place.

- *Social learning cannot be pre-conceive*

Social learning is an approach that does not seek to tell people what they should know or be able to do, but rather encourages an understanding of how people learn, and what they want to learn in order to help them recognize, evaluate and think innovatively around existing ways of doing things, social norms and personal experiences. It helps people to build on their existing knowledge and skills, and is seen to be a broader, more open-ended approach to learning that is more responsive to a variety of contextual situations, is reflexive in orientation, and is able to support transformation of practices in complex socio-ecological systems (Lindley 2015, Wals 2007).

- *Social participation*

This is another form of stakeholder engagement that involves consultation of a wider audience as a way to get their consent to implementation of certain activities or projects, but this form of participation has little to no influence on the conceptualization and outcome of the process. E.g. stakeholder consultation workshop after an Environmental Impact Assessment is conducted. Here the learning process (conceptualization, design, implementation) is not collectively developed and in some cases the process is pre-conceived, and stakeholders are only engaged on the outcome of the process. In extreme cases stakeholders are just engaged for their approval to conduct the activity with no intentions of actively involving them in the learning process.

- *Individual learning*

Early work conceptualized social learning as individual learning that takes place in a social context and is influenced by social norms, e.g. the behavioural modelling of Bandura 1977. This conceptualization is not particularly useful for social learning in complex socio-ecological systems, as learning is dependent on many variables beyond just the social context. A different school of thought has emerged, that argue for social learning as a process beyond the individual level towards collective concerted action (Ison & Watson 2007; Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007; Wals 2007; Reed et al., 2010; Rodela 2011; Engeström & Sannino 2010; Lotz-Sisitka 2012; Lindley 2015, etc). In complex NRM systems, learning is context driven and dependent on a number of variables including multi-stakeholder and governance dynamics, institutional arrangements, capacity needs (individual, collective, organizational), socio-economic and political factors.

Introduction to reflection and reflexivity

This section introduces participants to the practice of reflection as a learning process. It is important to note that reflection and reflexive learning is not an academic process. It is about reflecting not only on the content of the academic or training activity (in this case the Introduction to Social learning & Stakeholder engagement course), but also on the broader context, including the **personal experiences (e.g. personal growth, career development), and social interactions which form part of the whole learning experience.**

The purpose of developing **reflective practice**’ (i.e. developing a regular habit of reflection in work and life) is summarised usefully by Bolton (2010: 3):

“Reflection is a state of mind, an ongoing constituent of practice, not a technique, or curriculum element. Reflective Practice can enable practitioners to learn from experience about themselves, their work, and the way they relate to home and work, significant others and wider society and culture. It gives strategies to bring things out into the open, and frame appropriate and searching questions never asked before. It can provide relatively safe and confidential ways to explore and express experiences otherwise difficult to communicate.”

Reflection process in the course:

- We **encourage** participants to keep **individual journals/ notebooks** to track their own learning process- *see T-page example below*
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- **Weekly & bi-weekly contact session** for all participants & for tutors (incl. dual-participant tutors)
- **Assignments & Assessment** – Assignments will form an important part of participants’

reflections, and different formats can be used including written document and short videos, etc.

Reflection and Active learning: T-page Example

T-page is a tool to help learners engage with and *reflect* on course content in relation to their own work (situating it). They use the T-page while working on their own and bring their notes to ‘class’ so as to connect their reflections into the discussion, through reflection more deeply connecting the work of the course and their own situations

Here write the title of the presentation you watch or the hand-out you are reading, and the date	
• Here jot down things that stand out for you – what seems very important? Interesting? Useful? Difficult? • This is not a summary of the presentation or reading. • Use bullets or numbers for each short point	• Here make notes about how each point is relevant. • Can you use it in your work? In your assignment? • Should you discuss this with your tutor or peers? What is significant about this, for YOU?

NB: for more details on the reflection process please refer to ToT course principles.

Next steps in module 2 & 3

In module 2&3 of the course, participants will learn more in detail **how these social learning and stakeholder engagement principles play out in action, and how to design a reflexive learning process**. Facilitators will support participants with in- depth information and examples of different social learning initiatives across different NRM contexts. In designing the social learning process (part of assignments), participants will further evaluate their own context in a reflexive learning process, to explore how social learning can and should be designed, what gaps have they identified, and how they plan to adapt their existing learning processes. In doing so, we will collectively explore different methods and process that support transformative oriented social learning in NRM context:

- Stakeholder engagement for social learning process

- Facilitation and co-learning
- Co-production of knowledge
- Reflexivity and learning oriented Monitoring & evaluation

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