PARTICIPATION AND RESEARCH

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Connects with:
Power and equity – Complexity - Gender

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Suggested citation

Module 6: Participation and Research
**Module Introduction**

**Description**
This module examines relationships between participatory processes and research. The emphasis on participation and research is especially relevant to learning about ‘multi-stakeholder participation’ and ‘knowledge to action’ as central aspects of an ecohealth approach. This extends beyond a methodological emphasis on ‘participatory research’ and acknowledges that not all ecohealth approaches involve ‘participatory research’ processes per se.

To explore the theory, practice and examples of both participation and research this module draws on concepts and literatures related to participatory (action) research (PAR), participatory learning & action (PLA), participatory development (PD), knowledge translation and exchange (KT&E) and other relevant fields.

A guiding principle of this work is the idea of reciprocity between researcher(s) and research participants, which challenges us to go beyond the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘who’? of research or practice to explicitly ask ‘for whom?’ and/or ‘with whom?’ is the ecohealth research, activity or initiative being conducted? The module therefore includes a series of sessions that prompt critical reflection on the role and nature of ‘participation’ of researched, or affected, individuals and communities. This participation requires attention to different types of relationships between and among different groups including (more conventionally defined) researchers, ‘ecohealth’ professionals or practitioners (spanning ecosystem, health, development concerns) as well as various agencies and communities of concern.

Recognising researchers as having an active role in these relationships also demands critical reflection on the role of the researcher as a participant in a research process, with explicit links to the processes of reflection and the careful negotiation of roles, responsibilities and ‘rights’ of different types of research participant. The module therefore addresses issues that are not unique to ‘ecohealth’ research, but are pertinent to research, participation and knowledge exchange and the associated demand for the scholarship of integration, application and engagement.

**Directions**
A key aspect of this module will be getting the students to ‘walk the talk’ as much as possible by drawing on and reflecting upon their existing experience, and/or linking with the case-study of the specific module. Along similar lines, many of the specific activities could be used in other modules as examples of tools and activities that model different dimensions of the ‘principle’ of participation.

The module is closely linked with the idea of Reflective Journal [See Transversal Activities].
Aims/Goals
The collective aim is that, at the end of the module, participants will be able to:

− Explore ‘participation’ and ‘research’ as interrelated concepts, and their relevance to ecohealth research and practice.
− Experience practical exercises that demonstrate the links between participation and research, including practical ‘how-to’ strategies.
− Demonstrate critical thinking and reflection on ecohealth research and practice.
− Build skills to develop and reflect upon one’s ethical practice such as respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility.
− Describe and critique the requirement for and nature of ‘multi-stakeholder participation’ and ‘knowledge to action’ as guiding principles of ecosystem approaches to health (see Charron, 2012).
− Compare and contrast different approaches to participation and research, proposed by different scholarly and knowledge traditions.
− Demonstrate how principles regarding participation and research could be helpful in their own work.

Guiding Questions
The following over-arching questions are relevant across all sessions/sections in this module, and could also be adapted to develop reflective questions in addition to, or complementary with, reflective journal questions (see Transversal Activities):

1. What are some of the opportunities, challenges and characteristics you have experienced at the interface of ‘participation’ and ‘research’?
2. Informed by your particular experiences of the interaction between participation and/or research;
   − What roles have you played? Articulate this in terms of ‘researcher’ and ‘participant’.
   − How do your experiences compare what the literature assigned for this session?
   − What have been your best experiences of the combination of participation and research? Can you identify principles that might help to build on or seek to reproduce these successes?
3. What are the ‘stories behind the stories’ of participatory research? Where do you get to read about these and/or discuss these dynamics?
4. Can you provide an example of “learning by doing” in relation to participation and research?
   − Can you give an example of how your ‘theoretical’ understanding (e.g. from the literature) was enhanced by the practical experience of a failure, challenge or successful experience in the context of participation and research?
   − How did this experience inform your future work?
5. How could interactions between a researcher and another research participant contribute to the 4R’s: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (see Kirkness 1991) during the process of research and/or publication?
6. What are your preferred approaches to reflection? How does reflective practice contribute to your understanding of participation and research?
7. How is your work informed when you:
− Challenge assumptions including those of authors or peers in relation to your or their work?
− Ask yourself “what if” questions as a means to put yourself into a scenario to consider consequences and actions?
− Shift your focus from ‘participation’ to a focus on integration (what knowledge counts, how are we joining the dots?), engagement (who is involved and how?), and application (including how and when knowledge can be applied)?
− Value and integrate different types of knowledge or ‘knowledge cultures’ in your work – see for example Brown’s approach to collective learning with ‘individual’, ‘community’, ‘specialised’, ‘organisational’ and ‘holistic’ knowledge (Brown 2010);
− Ask ‘sub-questions’ about participating, to identify the ‘type’, ‘mode’ and ‘place’ of participation, (see Parkes et al 2012), by asking who is participating? How are they participating? Where are they participating?

**Key Concepts**

− Participation and its variants (including multi-stakeholder participation, participatory learning and action)
− Research (and its variants in the context of this module, including Participatory Research/ Participatory Action Research/ Participation Research, Evaluation and Monitoring/ Participatory Rural Appraisal)
− Knowledge Translation/Knowledge to Action
− Critical Reflection/Reflexiveness, and Reflective Practice
− Different types of Scholarship (especially participation as it relates to the scholarship of integration, engagement and application (see Boyer 1997, Woollard 2006)

**Keystone Activities**

This module commences with a description of two keystone activities (see below) that are considered integral to whichever subsequent sessions are used.

It should be noted that these keystone activities:

− Do not have to be associated with the themes or modules of participation and research, and could be used in any module relating to the principles of ecohealth.
− Are most useful when conducted in conjunction with reinforcing activities e.g. transversal activities such as poster exercises and rich-picture map, that examine similar themes in an applied way.
− Provide a focus of link for linking with reflective journal questions, which provide good opportunities for personal reflections on the group dynamics involved with these keystone activities.
− Can be usefully trialled by the teaching team as a warm-up to the course.

*Keystone Activity 1: Uncommon Commonalities Activity*
This activity serves as an excellent activity to introduce collaborative work, appreciative thinking and foster group cohesion. If there is time, it can be conducted directly prior to the “Rules of engagement session” (Keystone Activity 2, below). The uncommon commonalities exercises is adapted from Kagan’s (1994) *Cooperative Learning* and is well known as an ice-breaker activity that establishes a foundation for future cooperation, collaboration and working together.

**Learning objectives**
At the end of this exercise students will be able to:
- Identify areas of common interest.
- Describe a range of unusual experiences, preferences and surprises from within their group.
- Propose ways in which future team-work could build on existing areas of commonality.

**Process and dynamics**
**STEP ONE:** Orientation to the exercise. (5 minutes)
Assign participants to work in groups of four or five (preferably groups would include both members of the teaching team and students)

**STEP TWO:** Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)
Ask each small group to determine what unusual attributes or experiences they may have in common. The goal is for them to generate a list of the most unusual (uncommon) attributes or experience that they have in common. It can be very helpful for the teaching team to have ‘trialed’ the exercise in advance to provide ‘live’ examples. Some examples of uncommonalities that have come-up in the past iterations of these exercises include that everyone in the small group:

- Likes making fire-works
- Has survived a near-death experience
- Is an only child (or middle child etc).

Typically the small group discussions encourage appreciative brainstorming that tends to emphasize humour and dynamic interactions. It also serves as a concrete example of a “group work” task that can be used as a point of reference when discussing the “Rules of Engagement” later on. The tone of the activity is often lighthearted with laughter.

**STEP THREE:** Plenary Discussion (10 minutes)
Each group shares their list with the entire class, identifying if there was similarities with other groups or notable observations from the exercise.

**STEP FOUR:** Plenary Discussion (If time allows)
Spend a few moments extending the exercise further to:
• Discuss how future team-work could build on the areas of commonality and other unusual experiences or preferences among the group.
• Share the most surprising or informative examples from their small group discussions.
• Try to determine one commonality that unites the entire group.


**Keystone Activity 2: Rules of engagement session**

This keystone activity offers a powerful pre-cursor to group work in ecohealth training initiatives, giving students a sense of volition and ownership over their learning experience, especially in groups.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of the class, students will be able to:

− Describe specific features that enhanced and optimised their participation and learning with others in the past.
− Explore how factors that enhanced and optimised their participation and learning compared with other’s experience.
− Discuss common or emergent features that arose from the list generated by the group;
− Refer to the co-created list in future exercises and activities.

**Timing**

This activity is planned to take ~30-40 minutes depending on group size. If time is limited, it could be initiated at the outset of the course. A collective effort to develop common rules of engagement has been observed to work very successfully as the basis for a ‘first class in a semester’, especially when group work will be involved. In a longer course it can be a useful exercise to reflect on the students’ experiences to date, to re-orient to ideas introduced in earlier parts of the course and, perhaps most importantly, to provide the foundation for upcoming group work.

**Process**

The exercise involves the students working in small groups to identify ideas that will be synthesised (in plenary) into an agreed list of ‘rules of engagement’ for the upcoming course and group activities. It should be emphasised throughout this process that this list will be used to guide their future work and (if relevant) inform future reflective learning exercises. (See Reflective Journals in Transversal Activities).

**STEP ONE:** Introduce session and ask and students form groups of 3-4. (5 minutes)

**STEP TWO:** Small groups (10 minutes)

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Ask students to reflect on, identify and share specific features about past experiences that have enhanced and optimised their participation and learning with others. Examples may be drawn from this course, or previous group learning experiences.

**STEP THREE:** Plenary (10 minutes)
Ask each group to share the most notable features and skip ideas that other groups have mentioned. Sharing the features that have helped participation and learning generates a list of ideas for ‘optimising participation and learning with others’. (*10 minutes*)

**STEP FOUR:** Present a set of ‘rules of dialogue’ or ‘rules of engagement’ from another source. (5 minutes)

A well known list is provided below, but you may prefer to identify another list, or simply refine the list provided by the students.

**STEP FIVE:** Ask students to compare their list with the list you have presented, and to make any adjustments or clarifications to their list. (*10-15 minutes*)

**RULES OF EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE**
Throughout the dialogue:
- Commit yourself to the process.
- Listen and speak without judgement.
- Identify your own and others’ assumptions of reality.
- Respect other speakers and value their opinions.
- Balance your need for any particular outcome.
- Listen to yourself and speak when moved to.
- Take it easy, go with the flow, enjoy.


SECTION 1: Participation, Learning and Action - Orienting to Different Relationships and Roles in Research

Description
The complex dynamics between participation and research have been central to the development of ecosystem approaches to health. ‘Multistakeholder participation’ was described as a central pillar of ecohealth approaches (Forget and Lebel 2001; Lebel 2004, see also Charron 2012). The participation of involved individuals and communities is intrinsically relevant to the complex disciplinary, sectoral and cultural terrain that characterises ecohealth issues. It is essential, therefore, to recognise the wealth of knowledge and scholarship associated with participatory research, learning and action, and to consider the relationship of participation and research as part of long-standing and ongoing debates.

In this module we introduce some of the origins and theories of participatory learning and action, explore their relevance to ecohealth, and use case study examples and activities to illustrate and emphasise key points and concepts. Although participatory learning and action may be considered a ‘priority’ for ecohealth initiatives, many of the challenges that it poses for different researchers, practitioners and institutions are common to many other fields of endeavour – especially those that span health, equity, environment and development concerns. The importance of critical perspectives and reflective practice are developed in Section 3.

Learning Objectives
At the end of this session, participants should be able to:
- Articulate the difference between traditional research and intervention projects, and various kinds of participatory projects.
- Contextualize participation in research as a historically rich and constantly evolving body of knowledge, and discuss origins of this knowledge.
- Relate participation to related concepts such as equity, transdisciplinarity, and knowledge-to-action or praxis.
- Distinguish between ‘stakeholders’ and ‘participants’ and discuss this in relation to the ‘stakeholder-participant transition’.

Key Questions
- How and when did participatory learning and action approaches emerge?
- What are some reasons for using participatory approaches?
- What are your experiences of participation? Participation and research? Participatory learning and action? How do your responses differ based on the linking of ‘participation’ with ‘research’, or with ‘learning and action’?
- What are some of the challenges that arise by trying to distinguish:
  - Who participates? (“types” of participant)
  - How are they involved or how do they participate? (“modes” of participation)
  - Where does this take place? (“place” of participation”)
  - Also see overall questions for this module.

Module 6: Participation and Research
KEY CONTENT
Participation in research has been a key component of ecosystem approaches to health in its various guises. Use of participatory approaches is motivated by a number of different considerations, and has been extensively applied in health (Cargo and Mercer, 2008) and environmental management (Kapoor, 2001). An important feature of participatory research is the shift in role from those involved in the research being ‘subjects’ of research and action through some kind of data collection (e.g. recipients and respondents in a survey, sharing their knowledge in a focus groups), to a more active role in defining project priorities, methods and goals, sometimes to the point of carrying out research and intervention activities in collaboration with researchers and practitioners.

Many authors have identified and classified the range of participatory practices. Arnstein’s (1969) “ladder of citizen participation” ranging from ‘manipulation’ to ‘citizen control’ provided a foundation that has informed many descriptions of participation and research. Other categorizations link different types of relationships among people and researchers from co-option where research is conducted ‘on’ people, to co-learning and collective action where research is conducted ‘with’ and potentially ‘by’ people other than the researcher (Parkes & Panelli 2003; after Cornwall 1995 and Pretty et al 1995). Cargo and Mercer (2008) describe a spectrum from simple consultation aimed at making community-involved research and action run more smoothly (i.e. achieving ‘buy-in’) to radical empowerment-based approaches in which ‘consciousness-raising’ activities are facilitated by researchers with the goal of challenging inequitable power dynamics. While participatory learning and action is often associated with qualitative methodologies, it has been applied to very quantitative processes, such as government budgeting (e.g. in Brazil) or quantitative health research (so-called ‘popular epidemiology’, San Sebastian et al., 2005).

Participatory research, learning and action can be seen as a reaction to traditional ‘top-down’ research approaches where research priorities and orientation originate from outside of the affected communities – sourced primarily from the academic literature or other forms of specialised or institutional knowledge rather than from those directly affected by the issue. Participatory learning, action and research often requires challenging prior assumptions regarding the superiority of knowledge brought to communities by researchers and other ‘experts’ from outside (Freire, 1970) and connecting explicitly with other knowledge cultures (Brown 2011).

The need for engagement with other forms of knowledge remains a pragmatic and ongoing motivation for a critical examination of the dynamics of participation and research in ecohealth. Growing recognition that complex environment-health systems behave in ways that are not predictable by scientists working within narrowly-defined knowledge systems (e.g. academic disciplines) has led to awareness that managing such complex systems demands research approaches that can meaningfully engage with and be informed by other forms of knowledge, especially knowledge held by those most familiar with local ecosystems (i.e. the people who live there) – often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge, local knowledge, place-based knowledge etc. (see Berkes 2000; Waltner-Toews and Kay, 2005; Brown 2011).

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The engagement of Indigenous scholarship in the emergence of participatory learning and action has led to considerable methodological innovation and also critique. Many researchers are wary of traditions of research that have compounded and contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples worldwide. These research traditions can be seen as instruments of ongoing colonization (e.g. Tuhiway Smith, 1999; Denzin et al 2008; De Leeuw et al, in press). Amidst these challenges and debates the development of guidelines for research with Aboriginal peoples, such as the National Aboriginal Health Organization guidelines (Schnarch, 2004) and CIHR Guidelines for Health Research involving Aboriginal Peoples (CIHR 2004), have made a strong case for principles such as community control, benefits and capacity to be built into research with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The development of these guidelines and ‘best-practices’ have encouraged the emergence of new kinds of critical conversations and approaches to examining the relationship between participation and research, with relevance far beyond Indigenous peoples. Yet across the board there remains a need for ongoing critical reflection and debate, not least regarding the potential hazards of ‘good intentions’ of participatory research (Kapoor 2001; Cargo & Mercer 2008; De Leeuw et al in press).

While there is a general ‘participatory mindset’ has the potential to achieve good outcomes by trying to ensure that community-university partnerships (for example) are characterized by humility, trust, equity and good communication, those seeking to learn about the relationship between participation and research should be aware of the extensive range of specific participatory methods and tools that have been developed and documented in both academic and other literatures (e.g. Stringer, 2007; Pretty et al., 1995). In general, methods drawn from social sciences such as anthropology and sociology are helpful in systematically eliciting community priorities (for example ethnographic methods, Schensul and Lecompte, 1999), while methods such as participatory rural appraisal (Mukherjee, 2004) and participatory monitoring and evaluation (McAllister, 1999) have been influential in international development practice. Appreciative or asset-based inquiry is another powerful approach to participatory learning and action, in which community strengths and successes are used as a starting point for discussions of how to define and achieve common goals (see Section 2, below). These methods must all grapple with persistent challenges to the equitable and effective achievement of participatory processes, and the importance of critical practice in building awareness of these dynamics, as emphasised in Sections 3 and 4, below.

Examples and Connections
Finding, reading, discussing and profiling real examples of the interaction between participation and research (and/or participatory learning and action) is a key component to this module, and most of the activities outlined below. Identifying and selecting examples should preferably involve a combination of:

- The students' experiences of participation and research.
- Critical reflection on the instructors' own experiences.
- Identification and critique of examples from the literature.

Where possible, try to identify an example of an ecohealth project that was not initially participatory, but had to evolve in that direction because it was not working. Ideally find an example that illustrates
the overlap between participatory research, learning and action and transdisciplinarity, equity, gender, and knowledge-to-action.

If you do not have examples from your own experience, you could draw on papers and examples, such as:

- “A Cleaner City and Better Health in Kathmandu”, is a case-study from Nepal that reflects on how a traditional scientific approach failed to address the complexity of disease causation, necessitating a (participatory) ecohealth approach. This case-study has been described as one of the IDRC Case-studies, profiles at: http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-29131-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html. Related work has been profiled in Waltner-Toews (2004) and Waltner-Toews et al (2005)
- Other IDRC case-studies might provide examples that are especially relevant to the specific course or context. See: http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-27268-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html
- If you have developed a case study as part of the course learning activities, then you can make connections with it and in this section. [See How to Use and Develop a Case Study in your Ecohealth Teaching.]

Activities

Activity 1: The experience of Participation and Research (the ‘stories behind the stories’)

TOTAL TIME: 90 Minutes

NOTE: This interactive activity draws on the experience of researchers in the teaching team who have been involved in initiating participatory and collaborative research in different settings as an ‘entrance’ to cultivating critical reflection on the students' own practice or experiences.

Prior to the session, students will have read at least one paper or document written by the teaching team that shares their experience of participation and research. The purpose is not for these to be ‘perfect’ papers, but to create a sense of ‘journal club with the authors’, to model critical reflective practice and to demonstrate the principles of ‘learning by doing’ as well as the fact that there is always room to learn and develop one’s approaches to participation and research. The teaching teams’ papers will serve as a platform to examine the role of researcher as participant in a process of collaborative learning and exchange with others.

STEP 1: Introduction (20 minutes)
Teaching team member(s) will provide a brief introduction to participatory and collaborative features of their research project(s) – providing critical reflections to complement those represented in the papers that the students should already have read.

STEP 2: Small group discussion (25 minutes)
Explore the “stories-behind-the-stories” of participatory and collaborative research described in the papers and presentations. Assign each group one of the two papers presented, and ask them to compile
reflections to share back with the whole group.

Ask each group:

1. To distinguish and discuss the “types of participant” (what kind of stakeholder group do they represent) and “mode of participation” demonstrated in the research process (how are these different types of participant involved in the project – what is their ‘role’? interviewee, assistant? advisor?). Pay particular attention to the roles the researcher plays, and how this informs the research process and outcomes;

2. To identify an example from within their group that demonstrates participatory dynamics comparable to the example. What types of participant and modes of participation were involved? Did the types of people involved or roles they played seem to influence the process of participation or research?

3. To identify one researcher-participant relationship in the paper and discuss it in the context of the 4R’s of: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). How did the 4R’s play out during the process of research? And/or the process of publication. How, in hindsight, could it have better contributed to the 4Rs?

4. To pose a question or clarification that their group would like to ask one of the researchers about the “story behind the story” of their research?

**STEP 3:** Plenary sharing (20 minutes)
Ask each small group to share their reflections on questions #1-3.

**STEP 4:** Plenary discussion (15 minutes)
Facilitate a discussion focused on the group’s questions to the researchers #4.

**SPECIFIC READING**
The session leader(s) identifies one or more papers that reflect their experience of participation and research.

**Activity 2: Role Play Activity**

Role-play a community-university (or community-health system, or community-industry, or community-consultant) interaction involving a researcher, one or more grad students, one or more community members (pick appropriate gender, class, race roles to achieve particular learning outcomes as per group and facilitator goals). A good example is the exercise where members of the group start a situation and then someone declares ‘stop’ at which point a new person/character enters to carry on the scenario.

**Activity 3: Identifying roles and relationships among researchers and participants: Defining**

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TOTAL TIME: 60-80 minutes

This activity is best conducted with students who have a specific project, and can usefully be conducted in conjunction with the ‘poster’ exercise [see Transversal Activities]. The activity is intended to help students to engage with some important questions that will influence their ‘research design’, including making the transition

- From ‘listing’ stakeholders (often the list of ‘everyone involved’ provided on student posters)
- To ‘distinguishing’ the type of participation (who?), the mode of participation (how?) and the place of participation (where?).

A flip-chart or powerpoint slide that outlines the following differences may be helpful.

![Diagram of mode, type, and place of participation]

Figure 1.1: Type, mode and place of participation as three axes influencing the development of participatory processes. The current citation has been approved by the copyright holder.

**STEP 1**: (15 minutes)
This session could begin with a brief introduction to the difference between ‘stakeholders’ and ‘participants’, making reference to Figure 1.1, Parkes et al (forthcoming) or Brown 2012 (different types of knowledge: individual, specialised, community, organisational, holistic).

**STEP 2**: (10 minutes)
Ask individual students to work on the ‘for and with whom’ part of their poster, differentiating between ‘stakeholders’ and ‘participants’. Start with the different ‘types’ of stakeholder they have identified, in response to the questions:

- **WHO** is involved? Once this has been defined, for each ‘type’ of stakeholder ask the questions:
• **WHO** will participate? What roles and responsibilities will they have in your research? (Consider: If they don’t need to sign a consent form, are they ‘participants’ in your research?)
• **WHERE** do they participate i.e. take part, share and exchange in your project?

STEP 3: (20 minutes)
Divide the students into groups of 2 or 3 and give each students 5 minutes to present to the ‘for & with whom’ section of their poster, distinguishing the different aspects from above.

STEP 4: (10 minutes)
After presenting to each other, get them to discuss and identify one common dilemma or query arising from this exercise.

STEP 5: (20 minutes)
Return to the large group for discussion of these queries and/or guiding questions.

**Specific Reading**


**Other works cited in Section 1**


**Module 6: Participation and Research**


Schensul, J; LeCompte, M (1999) *The ethnographer’s toolkit: Designing and conducting ethnographic research*. Rowman Altamira, Walnut Creek CA.


**SECTION 2: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND ASSET-BASED APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION AND RESEARCH**

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**Module 6: Participation and Research**

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In this session learners and teachers will both explore and apply an *appreciative inquiry* approach to current issues and projects. This approach, when applied with some rigor, has proven more effective than the standard SWOT analysis (Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) in addressing *complex* as opposed to *complicated* problems. Gouberman and Zimmerman (2002) elaborate important differences between complex and complicated problems, highlighting why many of our institutions and modes of inquiry have proven inadequate to address today’s complex problems. Brown (2010) builds on the work of others to describe these challenges in relation to ‘wicked’ problems, and highlights the importance of collective, asset-oriented approaches to learning and inquiry.

Since ecohealth challenges are invariably embedded in complex systems, the approach we use to analyse the context is a prime factor in determining how well we will be able to understand and address particular issues and concerns. The stance of *appreciative inquiry* proposes an alternative to traditional problem-oriented approaches to understanding context and identifying pathways to address complex problems. A central assumption of appreciative inquiry is that in any system or organization, no matter how unhealthy it may seem, *something* is working well. This ‘something’ is embedded in a complex series of non-linear feedback loops that are can be examined to identify how we can “grow” this success to “infect” the rest of the system with - if nothing else - an enthusiasm for positive change. This is in marked contrast to the traditional approach of trying to isolate what is wrong and then further analyzing the “barriers to change” that prevent positive adaptation. Few of these barriers are readily susceptible to change since, as Berwick reminds us, “every system is perfectly designed to get the results it produces” (Berwick, 1996).

In this module students will learn and trial how an appreciative approach offers a rigorous process that leads to positive change in ways that analytic and problem-focused approaches are rarely, if ever, able to achieve. The focus on ‘appreciative inquiry’ provides one example of what can be considered to be a ‘family’ of appreciative and asset-based approaches, some of which are described in Section 1.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Apply an understanding of appreciative inquiry and asset-based approaches in simulated and real life situations.
- Demonstrate the contrast between appreciative and problem-oriented approaches to addressing complex challenges.
- Describe the theory and give historic examples of successful use of appreciative approaches to complex organizational and ecosystemic challenges.
- Describe the hazards of the phrase “barriers to change”.

**Key Questions**

- What is the theoretical basis for the appreciative approach to analysis and planning in complex situations?

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- What is the historical and organizational evidence for the utility of an appreciative approach?
- What are the practical steps and activities (the “Four Ds”) involved in the application of appreciative inquiry?
- How can this approach be applied to one or more of the learner’s current projects, theses or activities?

**Key content**

Appreciative inquiry is particularly useful in addressing complex problems and their relationship to health. It offers an opportunity for an alternative approach to solving complex problems. Central features of an appreciative approach are worth re-iterating from above:

- That in any system or organization, no matter how unhealthy it may seem, something is working well.
- The something working well is embedded in a complex series of non-linear feedback loops.
- Examination and analysis of these feedback loops can identify potential opportunities to influence to “grow” what is working well, and to “infect” the rest of the system with this success and an enthusiasm for positive change.

Facilitating a session on appreciative inquiry requires specific attention to *key definitions and concepts*. Diagrams and figures that have been found to be extremely useful in communicating these ideas are included here for reference and explanation, with due acknowledgement to valuable references and online resources such as the Appreciative Inquiry commons (http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/).

“Appreciative Inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is an organization development methodology based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams is itself transformational. It is founded on the following set of beliefs about human nature and human organizing:

- People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills and contributions to bring to life.
- Organizations are human social systems, sources of unlimited relational capacity, created and lived in language.
- The images we hold of the future are socially created and, once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective actions.
Through human communication (inquiry and dialogue) people can shift their attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals and productive possibilities for the future. In short, Appreciative Inquiry suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation.” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003, Corporation for Positive Change)

Explicit attention to the definition of both Appreciation and Inquiry help to orient to the important differences in this approach (from Cooperider and Whitney, 2007): **Appreciation has to do with recognition, with valuing and with gratitude. The word “appreciate” is a verb that carries a double meaning. It refers to both the act of recognition and the act of enhancing value. Definitions include:**

- To recognize the best in people and the world around us.
- To perceive those things which give life, health, vitality and excellence to living human systems.
- To affirm past and present strengths, successes, assets and potentials.
- To increase in value (e.g., the investment has appreciated in value).

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Figure 2.1 : Traditional Approach vs. Appreciative approach

The current citation has been approved by the copyright holder.
**Inquiry** refers to the acts of exploration and discovery. It implies a quest for new possibilities, being in a state of unknowing, wonder and a willingness to learn. It implies an openness to change. The verb “inquire” means:

- To ask questions.
- To study.
- To search, explore, delve into or investigate.

Inquiry is a learning process for organizations as well as for individuals. Seldom do we search, explore or study what we already know with certainty. We ask questions about and query into areas unfamiliar to us. The act of inquiry requires sincere curiosity and openness to new possibilities, new directions and new understandings. We cannot have “all the answers,” “know what is right,” or “be certain” when we are engaged in inquiry. The spirit of inquiry is the spirit of learning. (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003)

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**Figure 2.2** : Magruder Watkins, J., Stavros, J.M. Practicing Organization Development: A Guide for Leading Change, Chapter 7 Appreciative Inquiry: OD in the Post-Modern Age, 2009, page 171, Figure 7.2, 2009. This material is reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

**Examples and connections**

The ‘Uncommon commonalities’ exercise (Keystone Activity 1) has been found to be a very useful orientation to the ‘appreciative’ thinking behind this module. Some of the thinking around Appreciative and asset-based approaches should also have been introduced in Section 1. Targeted reflective journal questions [Transversal Activities] can be very helpful in encouraging students of ecohealth to explore and reflect on the difference between appreciative approaches and traditional problem-oriented approaches.

Sessions and activities on **Appreciative Inquiry** can be usefully complemented with sessions on Reflection and Critique which help students to discuss and go beyond the idea that appreciative
approaches are ‘all positive’. Students should be encouraged to experience how critique and reflective practice complement almost all efforts that traverse the complex relationships of participation and research.

ACTIVITIES
Where possible, this activity should have been preceded by the Keystone Activity: Uncommon Commonalities.

Activity 1: Appreciative Inquiry exercise “Think back to a time….”

TOTAL TIME: 50-90 minutes (depending on class size)

This is an important exercise to start with since it will help to develop the appropriate group stance and attitude essential for the approach. Otherwise the deeply engrained desire to analyze what is wrong will carry into the rest of the work.

STEP 1: Set-up. (5 minutes)
Have the students pick a partner for a pairs exercise (or go through the group “numbering off”).

STEP 2: (15 minutes)
Ask the students to briefly tell their partner about the most successful/satisfying day in their research, project or learning career. The partner is then asked to explore the reasons why this was so (“the roots of success”). They are allowed 5 minutes for this exercise and then switch roles for a further 5 minutes. Ensure each student is prepared to go back to the class to describe their partner’s success.

STEP 3: (15-20 minutes)
Each pair reports back.

STEP 4: (10-20 minutes)
Facilitator presents the four-D cycle (see below) and asks the class to reflect on how this might have enriched their analysis of how to understand the factors for success.

Four “Ds”

1. Discovery – asking positive questions, seeking what works, what empowers, what gives life to our community or group, when have we felt particularly energized
2. Dream – visioning of what could be, where we want to go
3. Design – making an action plan based on what we can do, and making personal commitments
4. Delivery – start taking actions now
**Step 5: optional (20 minutes)**
A full class activity can take any relevant or current issue and be facilitated through a general exercise to brainstorm through the 4 Ds.

At the close of this activity, emphasise the opportunities in other activities and/or field exercises to apply this approach (see activities below).

**Activity 2: Appreciative/Asset-based Planning for group fieldwork**

This activity is most usefully deployed to reinforce the lessons from previous activity, and to apply them in the context of planning for community interaction. The following questions are designed to encourage relating to, and engaging in, fieldwork in an appreciative way, rather than the traditional approach to problem identification and problem-solving.

Ask the students to work in groups or individually to discuss:
- What assets do you have in your group to orient yourselves to and conduct the days’ tasks?
- Make a list of group assets in relation to ‘head’, ‘hands’ and ‘heart’.
- What resources are available?
- What ‘roles’ are available to your team in designing this discussion?
- Who should do what? and when? as the day progresses?
- When does your responsibility for the afternoon discussion begin and end?
- How do these questions relate to the reflective questions of What? So what? Now What?
- How does reflecting on your own group assets contribute to your understanding of assets in the community you are about to interact with or visit?

A valuable resource for this activity can be the Asset-based Community Development work of McKnight & Kretzman (1996) that offers a practical and applied approach to identifying and mapping community assets.

**Specific Reading**


SECTION 3: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Description
This session will explore the role of the researcher/practitioner in participatory learning and action, and builds directly from the orientation and activities described in Section/Section 1. The session draws heavily on concepts of reflexivity and reflective practice, as well as the personal experiences of session participants, to highlight and constructively approach some frequently-occurring challenges in participatory practice. Space should be made to apply the themes to ongoing research and action projects.

Learning objectives
- To practice critical thinking and reflection with regard to one’s view of the world, choice of conceptual frameworks, roles, methods and actions.
- To reflect upon elements of one’s ethical practice such as respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility (see Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991).
- To engage with critical theory in a way that is constructive and meaningful for students working on individual research and action projects.

Key Questions
- How can multi-stakeholder participation address complex ecosystem-health challenges in equitable and effective ways?
- What pre-established ways of looking at the world are inherent in our disciplinary, professional, class, gender, racial and national identities?
- How can biases and assumptions be identified and addressed in positive and constructive ways?

Key Content
While participation is sometimes endorsed as an unqualified good, the goals of true, equitable or effective participation are often elusive, with both unforeseen obstacles (Cooke and Kothari 2001) and unintended consequences, despite good intentions (De Leeuw et al, in press). Sometimes allegedly participatory processes can in fact reproduce or deepen inequities. Examples of this range from when community meetings are dominated by powerful individuals whose opinions are then taken to be representative of the ‘community’, thus marginalizing certain voices; or when claims to overcome difference and distance may actually retrench extractive and colonializing research relations (De Leeuw et al, in press). Participation is sometimes used as a way of facilitating acceptance of top-down priority-setting while maintaining a sense of community ownership, especially in institutionalized forms of participatory practice (the World Bank has been criticized in this respect). Furthermore, since participatory research often crosses lines of power and privilege (i.e. Northern researchers interacting with peasants in Southern countries, or even with communities within Northern countries), there remains a strong risk that prevalent assumptions about the way the world works – e.g. class-, gender-, or race-based assumptions (Heron, 2007) – will influence how a participatory project unfolds (Kapoor, 2005). De Leeuw et al (in press) also highlight that framing of particular participatory methods as “best
practices” runs the risk of closing down the necessity for ongoing critique regarding power differentials that are so often intrinsic to researcher/participant relationships.

Response to these possibilities include growing attention to approaches, practices and orientations that can foster a more nuanced, and less naive approach, and a healthy critique of the grand goals of participatory research and participatory learning and action. One approach is to explicitly recognize pitfalls experienced in other participatory projects, and design research accordingly (e.g. Klassen et al., 2008). Processes to formally and methodically guide reflection on the part of researchers and practitioners (e.g. Boutilier and Mason, 2007) can help to guide productive identification of researcher positionality, as can critical theoretical perspectives - feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theories, for example (see ‘Reflexive Journal Club’ activity below). De Leeuw et al (in press) also contemplate the role of friendship, unfolding outside the context of participatory, community-based research projects, as a space within which to develop and articulate a more critical and nuanced understanding of ongoing tensions intrinsic to participatory and community-based research.

In one such analysis Kapoor (2005), suggests the following approaches to participatory international development projects, with relevance to participatory learning and action more generally:

- Publicize the ways in which our participation can be self-serving.
- Link community-scale projects on topics like health and the environment with changes to the economic and political structures that often constrain the results that can be obtained at the community level.
- Link participatory research and learning processes with broader democratic social movements to make society (and not just a single research project) participatory.
- Be aware that truly empowered communities or individuals might ‘hijack’ or ‘control’ how a particular participatory process may unfold, but that this could ultimately represent success. A key challenge in engaging with critical perspectives on participation – or on research more generally – is to do so constructively and in a non-paralyzing manner (see also Appreciative Inquiry Session 2).

**Examples and connections**

**Examples:** The Classen et al. (2008) paper demonstrates a project in Honduras that is informed by critical perspectives and incorporates them into the methodology – although it is not explicitly reflexive, it could be the basis for a couple of good discussion questions. Cooke and Kothari (2001) provide numerous critical perspectives on participation, complete with examples, in Participation: The new tyranny? (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Another possibility is that students and teachers explicitly reflect on their own experiences with participation – since it is almost certain that students will have been troubled by inconsistencies in projects (research, volunteer, etc.) they have been involved with in the past. This activity may be linked with, or build on the activity ‘Stories behind the stories’ described above.

**Connections:** Since the themes of critical perspectives and reflexiveness are 'cross-cutting' (i.e. they are relevant to every possible dimension of an ecohealth project, whether it is related to trandisciplinarity,
complexity, scale, gender, watershed management, etc.), connections can be made between this section and any other module.

One suggestion is that facilitators/teachers observe the group and the progress of the course, and draw on the specific course context to explore issues from this module in a situated manner. Designing reflective journal questions, field work and case-studies that link with the particulars of class discussions can provide students the opportunity to explore these themes further. Scheduling this session to follow the activities of Session 2 on Appreciative Inquiry can provide a valuable opportunity to explore the important idea that Appreciative approaches are not ‘all positive’ but, rather, are complemented by critique and reflections that help to gain a more nuanced understanding of participation and research relationships.

Making connections with the Gender Module can stimulate valuable discussion around particular ways of looking at the world, power, privilege, etc. The section in this module on collaborating with indigenous communities (below) has clear relevance as well. Finally, the forthcoming module on policy/political ecology/political thought will have clear resonance with this section, in that it will provide a deeper exploration of the power structures that tend to divide 'researchers' from 'participants', and structure the way different actors in an ecohealth collaboration perceive the world and their place in it.

**Activities**

**STEP ONE:** Discussion (35 minutes)

Facilitate a “journal club”-type discussion of the required reading (Kapoor, 2005), guided by the following questions:

- What does the article say? (i.e. quick summary as a reminder and clarification of any confusing terminology, etc.)
- What is the justification the author makes for his claims? Is his reasoning sound? How does the article's methodology relate to the disciplinary backgrounds present among the group of students?
- What reactions does the article provoke, intellectually or emotionally?
- What relevance do the themes raised in the article have to ecohealth research?

**STEP TWO:** Overview activity and break into *groups of 3* (5 minutes)

You could introduce the next part of the activity by linking the themes from the article with your own experiences in trying to link participatory research and action.

**STEP THREE:** Small group discussion (35 minutes)

Ask groups to relate the themes discussed in the article with their individual research projects and/or personal experience. The overarching questions to guide their discussion are “now what?”, or “how to?” move forward in a constructive way from the critical perspectives raised in the reading.

- Laptops or flipchart paper can be used to record key points so that they can report back in plenary.

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**STEP FOUR:** Plenary discussion (20 minutes)
Groups share key points raised during the small group work. Of course, in keeping with the theme of “hijacking participatory development” discussed in the article, the session structure will be flexible.

**SPECIFIC READING**


**OTHER WORK CITED**


SECTION 4: COLLABORATING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THE TRADITION OF CIRCLE WORK

DESCRIPTION
This session explores the complexities of collaboration with Indigenous communities. It invites participants to consider their own positionalities and their relationality to Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous communities globally. Participants are introduced to circle work (Graveline, 1998), an Aboriginal tradition that may be used for collective dialogue and conflict resolution. Space should be made to apply themes emerging from the reading and discussion to ongoing research and action projects.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- To develop an increased awareness and understanding of the complexities of historic and contemporary: a) socio-ecological realities of Indigenous peoples; b) relationships amongst Euro-western and Indigenous peoples; c) ongoing socio-ecological colonization and Indigenous resistance movements.
- To examine one's own identity and positionality in relation to Indigenous communities.
- To describe the experience of engagement in an Anishnaabe cultural practice of circle work.

KEY QUESTIONS
- Why are intercultural alliances important in an ecohealth context and what challenges exist in establishing collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities?
- How are our personal positionalities and worldviews implicated in the process of building intercultural collaborative relationships?
- In what ways do historic and contemporary Eurocentrism and systems of colonization influence collaboration with Indigenous communities?
- How might we incorporate other cultural ways of knowing in ecohealth practice, and do so in ways that don’t lead to intellectual appropriation that mainly benefits non-indigenous researchers?

KEY CONTENT
Towards Intercultural Collaboration: Addressing Eurocentrism
Susan Dion (2009) posits that one of the explanations for the prevalence of ongoing ignorance, racism, and Eurocentrism is the fact that many non-Aboriginal peoples position themselves as “perfect strangers” to Aboriginal peoples: a position of unapologetic ignorance where non-Aboriginal peoples (mistakenly) believe that Aboriginal peoples have nothing to do with them. To the contrary, all Canadians live on traditional Aboriginal territories in relation to Aboriginal peoples and have been influenced by them and their cultures. Dion’s perfect stranger phenomenon describes how many non-Aboriginal Canadians fail to recognize, or choose to ignore, this positionality. Those who claim the
perfect stranger stance often do so because they are aware of the pitfalls of reproducing inaccurate stereotypes, yet are fearful about making cultural mistakes, offending Aboriginal peoples, or challenging the status quo.

Yet, while White Euro-Canadian researchers and other mainstream ecohealth professionals do need to be aware of the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism, it is equally important for us not to retreat from the colonial problem since “Eurocentrism is a consciousness in which all of us have been marinated” (Battiste, 2000, p. 124). Joanne Tompkins (2002) made a significant contribution to the discourse about respectful intercultural collaboration as she worked with rural educators from Eastern Canada, studying their processes of “learning to see what they can’t” (p.1). Her research found that this process involves intrapersonal and interpersonal work in an atmosphere of trust and openness. In this setting participants learned to name power and privilege, listen to voices that are typically silenced, and build relationships through a process that requires taking risks and positioning oneself as a continual learner. Similarly, Root (2010) found that decolonizing for White people is a complex process that involves learning to recognize and confront personal and systemic Eurocentrism and White privilege, experiencing Aboriginal culture and pedagogies, building positive relationships with Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peers, and spending time on the land.

Complexities of Intercultural Collaboration and Alliances
A number of internationally respected Indigenous scholars do suggest that there is a role for non-Indigenous people in the process of seeking justice for Indigenous peoples. For example, Maori scholar Graham Smith (2009) calls for collaboration amongst all contributors whose work is respectful of Aboriginal knowledges and Russel Bishop (2005), also Maori, argues that an alternative to thinking of insiders and outsiders would be to address the concerns of Indigenous peoples by involving all those whose work operationalizes self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, Leanne Simpson (2010) states that alliances, partnerships, and solidarities have long been (and will continue to be) a tool of Indigenous movements for justice.

Intercultural collaboration that attempts to navigate and understand the interconnected perspectives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is no doubt fraught with tension and poses significant ethical dilemmas for ecohealth researchers and practitioners. Celia Haig-Brown (in Fitznor, Haig-Brown, & Moses, 2000) describes the challenge she faces as a White researcher:

As a white woman I continually question the possibility of working respectfully ...
Ever conscious of the risk of merely “colonizing better,” I ponder the possibilities of decolonizing: the interstices of appropriation and learning, of reciprocity and exploitation. (p. 76)

Similarly, Alison Jones (2008) ponders whether her White/settler enthusiasm for collaboration might be “an unwitting imperialist demand – and thereby in danger of strengthening the very impulses it seeks to combat” (p, 471). Yet rather than rejecting collaboration she calls for critical rethinking of Indigenous- non-Indigenous collaboration, suggesting a more “unsettled relationship that is based on learning (about difference) from the Other, rather than learning about the other” (p, 471). Such complexities may be part of the reason why Simpson (2010) argues that it is important to consider the
nature of collaborative relationships, various roles and responsibilities, so as to be able to avoid tensions and misunderstandings.

In her seminal 2002 book, ‘Becoming an Ally’, Anne Bishop defines ally as “a member of an oppressor group that works to end that form of oppression which gives him or her privilege” (p. 12). She argues that potential allies need to understand both the systemic and personal nature of oppression. She states that the process of becoming an ally involves becoming conscious of the interrelatedness of all oppressions as well as healing from personal experiences of oppression and from feelings of guilt associated with inherited legacies of oppression.

A number of scholars have begun to expand discourses specifically about Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances. Examples include Jen Margaret (2010) who examined the experiences of North American non-Indigenous people working as allies; Margaret Kovach (2010) who explored the integration of Indigenous knowledge-friendly pedagogies by non-Aboriginal educators; and Lynne Davies (2010), whose recent book *Alliances* provides an extensive collection of articles by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors that attempt to re-envision Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships. More studies are underway, including Greg Lowan’s (2011) doctoral work, which explores the concept of “ecological métissage” and seeks to understand historic and contemporary examples of positive intercultural collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Jen Margaret’s study (2010) explored the experiences of 18 North American individuals who were “working as allies supporting the struggles of Indigenous peoples and/or undertaking anti-racism work”. Her participants worked in a variety of contexts including university Indigenous studies programs, as well as church, community, and human rights organizations. Margaret found that the process of building alliances is a complex task and posits that, “Being an ally is a practice and a process - not an identity. It is an ongoing practice that is learned and developed through experience”. She states that alliances are relationship-based and contextual. A key finding of her study is that non-Indigenous allies need to recognize and understand the dominant White colonial mindset. This is congruent with Root’s (2010) findings that learning to recognize increasingly more subtle examples of Eurocentrism is a significant component of building respectful intercultural relationships. Similarly to Tompkins and Dion (personal communication) and Root (2010), Margeret suggests that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples need to work through decolonizing processes both together and separately. This is echoed by De Leeuw et al’s proposal on the value of friendship, external to collaborative and research relationships, as a “space for grappling with the ethical, political, intellectual dimensions of participatory, community-based research, especially as it gains prominence... as a means of conducting research with Indigenous Peoples (in press).

It can be challenging to figure out when to work together and when to work separately. Graveline (1998) distinguishes the different purposes of working at times together and at other times separately: “While homogeneity may encourage self-disclosure, heterogeneity in the group allows the experience of difference necessary to challenge hegemony”. These findings seem to indicate that critical self-awareness and reflexivity are important traits of potential allies.
Kovach (2010), a respected Aboriginal scholar studied non-Indigenous faculty who are working as allies in a university setting by integrating “Indigenous knowledge friendly pedagogy” in their classes. Her participants were 11 non-Indigenous faculty members from the University of Saskatchewan. She examined their motivations for including Indigenous knowledges in their courses as well as the personal and systemic challenges they faced. She explored the ways that these faculty members were able to assist both Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing and what, if any, assistance or support they felt they might need in order to do this. Kovach found that mentorship by Elders or cultural advisors as well as through relational co-teaching experiences with Aboriginal faculty was an important avenue of learning for the non-Indigenous participants. Her participants indicated that their processes of adopting IK-friendly pedagogy involved learning about Aboriginal issues, taking responsibility to learn about Aboriginal cultural traditions and gather resources, and actively engaging with Aboriginal peoples.

The studies of Margaret and Kovach help to conceptualize what it means to be a non-Indigenous ally to Indigenous peoples and to identify challenges and pitfalls of this endeavor. For the most part, individuals in their studies seemed to be working in respectful relationships that had been fostered over time. Yet having an intention of becoming an ally does not necessarily ensure respect (Gorski, 2008). Attempts at alliances can sometimes unintentionally perpetuate colonial relationships since coalitions or alliances exist within a wider society that is dominated by Eurocentrism and on-going colonialism. Those from the dominant culture who strive to be allies may be unaware of ways in which they interact with their Indigenous colleagues that disregard Indigenous values, traditions, and social norms (Davies and Shpuniarsky, 2010). Davies found that relationship building requires extended time in which respect and trust are fostered. She writes that respect needs to be exemplified through daily interactions such as by:

- following opening protocols when entering a community; participating in opening ceremonies and prayers at the beginning of a meeting; thanking and recognizing the Nation in whose territory the meeting takes place; remembering to provide an honorarium to an Elder who has been asked to participate in a meeting; and observing local protocols of interaction...

Furthermore, Davies and Shpuniarsky found that as well as collaboration, allied relationship building also involves respecting difference, understanding privilege, learning about historic Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships and acknowledging colonial legacies.

Examples and connections
As in the sections above, the teaching team is strongly encouraged to identify examples from their own experiences to help demonstrate or explore key themes that could be raised in the context of this topic. It is not expected that ‘answers’ be provided to these complex issues. Given the potential sensitivity and concerns around these issues, there is benefit in anticipating and considering responses to the questions below in advance of facilitating a discussion with the students.

- How can a given academic/graduate student can “work to end that form of oppression which gives him or her privilege”?

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• What can ecohealth approaches contribute to going beyond cultural sensitivity and respect for indigenous knowledge, to actually challenging the political and economic power structures that marginalize indigenous people, and privilege the kinds of people who end up in academia?
• How can academics meaningfully challenge those power structures that they have benefitted from and are part of, but which perpetuate the issues and injustices that are under ‘inquiry’?
• Does pursuing a graduate degree, and career in academia or the public sector in Canada, inevitably imply support for the power structures that marginalize indigenous people?

Exploring questions like those above could be linked to the previous section on critical perspectives, for example Kapoor’s (2005) suggestion that participatory development be linked to broader democratic social movements, and De Leeuw et al’s proposal of cultivating friendships and peers with whom is possible to actively engage in challenging, questioning and exploring these kinds of tensions.

Activity: Circle Work for Community Building (by Kaaren Dannenmann)*

NOTE: For the purposes of the Ecohealth course, after the first introductory circle, subsequent circles might continue to discuss reactions to readings, talk about participants previous experiences collaborating with Indigenous communities, or to talk about participants’ own identities and/or relationality with Aboriginal peoples. Circle work takes time and is most meaningful when not rushed. In this context, with a group of 15-20 people, two or three rounds of circle work could take an hour or two depending on the amount of sharing that takes place.

Dannemann writes that:

Circle work is an important tool for group meetings, an important way of communicating so that consensus may be achieved. In a circle, there is no one who is more important or less important than others, everyone is equal. If someone joins the circle, the circle is merely shifted to make room for another.

I like to begin circle work by holding a sage, sweetgrass, or cedar ceremony, explain its purpose, and allow everyone to participate if they choose to do so. This ceremonial time is a time of preparation for the work ahead, a time for prayer. I usually pray for an open mind and an open heart, for the ability to articulate well, to speak, to hear, and see in a good way. In order to avoid cultural misrepresentation or appropriation, those people who are unfamiliar with sage, sweetgrass, or cedar ceremonies could invite a local Elder or other Aboriginal community member to lead such an opening ceremony. This invitation should be preceded with an offering of tobacco. Additionally, you may find your own way of inviting open minds and hearts and wishing for an atmosphere where everyone is able to speak, listen, and participate in a good way.

It may be conducive to start with an exercise at this point where the facilitator/teacher/leader sits in the middle of the circle and has everyone draw him, giving the group 5 - 10 minutes. Then, the drawings are taped on a wall or on a table and everyone can look at them and share
comments and chuckles. Some people are kind. Others can be more realistic and catch those parts and angles that are not very flattering! It can be explained that the lesson is that while none of the pictures are the same, they all represent one thing, and each drawing represents the subject according to each person’s perspective and talent. And NONE of them is wrong. It is all about having had a different perspective. Our opinions, beliefs and views are like that - they are different because we all have had different life experiences in different places at different times. The group is then asked to remember this exercise while circle work is being done.

How circle work is conducted has to be explained. A “talking” rock or stick is used, and only the person who is holding the rock or stick can talk. The others listen carefully and respectfully. There can be no commenting or cross-talking or side-talking. People are asked to try not to formulate what they are going to say but to just listen, to have faith that when the time comes for them to talk, when the rock reaches them, they will say what has to be said. The rock will travel around the circle in the clockwise direction when on Anishinaabe Land, but counterclockwise when they are on Haudenosaunee Land. In this way, everyone gets to hold the rock, gets a chance to speak, to be heard. Everyone is encouraged to participate, but no one is forced to, the stone can be passed onto the next person. The participants are encouraged to speak from their own experiences, to share their feelings so that people won’t be judging or trashing anyone else or anyone else’s views. At this time, it is a good idea to do a fast exercise by writing on a flip chart all the different feelings we may have. We usually fill the whole sheet quite easily.

The first Circle is for everyone to introduce themselves and sharing what they are feeling at that moment. This is simple, and everyone starts to understand how it works. At the end of the first circle, I usually give some examples of how Circle Work has worked for me. One example I like to use is the time I asked for a family meeting to present a plan I had for a short project. We used a circle to conduct the meeting. After a sage ceremony and a prayer, I began the circle by outlining my plan and then passing the rock to the person on my left. I listened carefully as everyone described their concerns and suggestions. By the time the rock came back to me, the plan was unidentifiable as having been my plan, but I was perfectly happy with the new plan.

The way that it evolved had everyone’s participation, and in the end, everyone was happy and excited about it. We were all of one mind. We had reached consensus. This is the magic and the wonder and the promise of Circle Work.

Specific Reading


Module 6: Participation and Research
Other work cited


SECTION 5: MOVING FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION: “SO WHAT?”, “NOW WHAT?” AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM

DESCRIPTION
In this session students are challenged to consider ecohealth research in terms of how it is contributing to the broader goals and to re-position their work back into its socio-ecological context. Whereas earlier sessions raised questions of the “what?”, “why?”, and “how?” of participation in relation to research, this session offers students of ecohealth new ways to consider the questions “so what?” and “now what?”

The session challenges students to concisely communicate the importance of their research in the context of social-ecological systems. Since focus on participatory processes often creates a ‘social bias’, the emphasis in this session is to position and contextualise student’s ecohealth research at an ecosystem level. By attempting to link their research with other ecosystem level processes, students will be able to see how their work might be adapted or expanded to consider implications and relevance at different ecosystem levels. For example, students might consider how their particular research issue related to the ‘big picture’ ecosystem level processes and social-ecological systems, or to consider whether there may be merit in future phases of work moving from a social and/or ecological context to a laboratory setting to obtain mechanistic information that might later become relevant to applied contexts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
At the end of the session, the student will be able to:
- Explore the relevance and implications of graduate research across different ecosystem levels.
- Communicate effectively and concisely answers to the questions: “who cares?” “so what?” and “now what?” in the context of these different scales.
- Examine the implications of your work in terms of different forms of scholarship (especially the scholarship of integration, application and engagement).
- Discuss ways in which research projects may not incorporate all principles of ecosystem approaches to health simultaneously in order to be considered ‘ecosystem approaches to health’.
- Explain why the health and resilience of social-ecological systems extends beyond the health of the human species and domesticated species upon which we are directly dependant.

KEY QUESTIONS
- What species are affected by the different ecosystem levels that your project influences?
- How do humans interact with this species, directly or indirectly?
- How does this influence your answer to the question – so what? And who cares? And now what?
- What tools can be used to ‘zoom-in’ and ‘zoom-out’ on your research?
- How can you communicate key aspects of your research succinctly?
Key content and concepts
By moving to consider the questions “so what?” and “now what?”, this session explores themes raised by Charron (2012) in relation to ‘putting ecohealth principles into practice’:

“The preceding principles form the basis for implementing research using ecosystem approaches to health. They are couched in an understanding that humans, and our social and economic systems, are embedded within ecosystems, and that these coupled social-ecological systems behave as complex systems. To achieve positive and sustainable changes in people’s health through better interaction with ecosystems, a variety of actors and processes are needed in research.” (Charron, 2012)

With this in mind this session - and activity below - makes an explicit turn toward the ‘ecological’ as a way of challenging the ‘social bias’ and orientation that tends to dominate when we focus on participatory processes.

Note: The design of the session was informed by alumni feedback on previous CoPEH-Canada ecohealth courses. Alumni raised the concern that it is too easy to ‘lose sight of the ecosystem’ in ecohealth work, and that consideration of ‘participation’ and ‘knowledge to action’ in ecohealth work can – and should - explicitly engage with ‘involvement’ of and implications for non-human species.

To foster this ecological orientation, one of the required readings is a chapter from an Environmental Health text that seeks to introduce basic ideas of biological organisation and ecological hierarchies to readers who may not be familiar with these ideas (Parkes and Weinstein 2004).

The ecological hierarchy refers to interacting organisational levels that range from molecules and cells, to individual organisms, populations of individuals of a single species, communities of many interacting populations, as well as whole ecosystems. Such hierarchies are characteristic of all living systems. They are not only essential to the study of ecology but, when considering human ecology, are also familiar to our understanding of health. Whereas doctors and other healthcare professionals are used to considering the systemic interactions between cells, organs, and the health of individuals, it falls to public health research and practice to understand and respond to the determinants of health at the level of communities and populations (Rose 1985). However while ecosystems are a fundamental aspect of the ecological hierarchy, the role of ecosystems in the relation to the health of populations and communities (and associated social systems) has often been neglected in our understanding of the ‘big picture’ of health... A systems approach to the ecological hierarchy is based by the premise that “the findings at one level aid in the study of another level, but never completely explain the phenomena occurring at that level” (Odum 1971, p5), leading to the concept of emergent properties, complex systems and a view of science which tends toward synthesis rather than reduction (Bertalanffy 1968; Simon 1974). Systemic concepts and systems thinking are widely represented by the expression that ‘the whole is more than the sum of its parts’. (Parkes and Weinstein 2004).
The idea of encouraging reflection on the social process and context of participation through consideration of ecological hierarchies and systems-thinking, re-iterates how interrelated the principles of ecohealth are. This approach also highlights the practical and ethical implications that arise when zooming in and zooming out on any study to gain new and different perspectives. Charron embeds this kind of thinking into a schematic used to describe the different stages of ecohealth research; ‘understanding systems relationships’ as part of knowledge development, and the challenge of ‘scaling up and out’ in the process of systematization.

**Figure 5.1** Research process using an ecosystem approach to health – the case studies in this book illustrate how research generally proceeds through four main phases, allowing for back and forth among them, and over a number of iterations. Ecohealth research could be initiated in any quadrant, but tends to start in the top left with a participatory design phase.

**Figure 5.1**: With kind permission from Springer Science+Business Media: Charron, D. Ecohealth Research in Practice: Innovative Applications of an Ecosystem Approach to Health, Chapter 1: Ecohealth: Origins & Approach, 2012, page 21, Figure 1.1, 2012 IDRC.

The activity below challenges students to think of participation and research in a way that explicitly considers scale and nested hierarchies – noting the potential to zoom in and out on almost any topic, and recognising relevance from the cellular level to the global. The different phases of the activity offer some new ways to explore the idea of inclusion and exclusion through transdisciplinary and participatory design, knowledge development, systematization and intervention and/or action.
EXAMPLES AND CONNECTIONS
This session connects with the defining health session in the Health Module that engages with different aspects of social-ecological systems by including multiple species, considering non-use species, and biotic/abiotic aspects of (social-) ecological system in the definition of health. Considering both “who cares” beyond humans and the larger systems connections engages notions of reciprocity and interrelatedness taken up in other modules [Health, Complexity, Social Networks, Gender]. The elements of communication in the activity below could be usefully linked with related activities around communication of research.

Activity

The session would be enhanced by having done prior readings (e.g. Parkes 2004, Woollard 2006, Kidd 2007).

STEP 1: Introduce activity and model task. (5 minutes)
Introduce the objectives of this session, and succinctly communicate the main ideas and objectives of your research as an example to be discussed by the group, and to model the task to be completed in small groups.

STEP 2: Plenary discussion (10 minutes)
As a group, brainstorm the “so what” and “who cares” of the research presented, with explicit attention to different levels of the ecological hierarchy and non-human species. Make links with the Parkes and Weinstein, 2004 reference. After the example is explored, create an opening for the group to ask questions related to the purpose of the exercise and to discuss the core concepts – including ecological hierarchy.

Note: In the pilot of this work at the 2011 ecohealth summer course, this involved discussion of how cellular level laboratory research might relate to different levels of the social-ecological system.

STEP 3: (5 minutes)

STEP 3: Group formation (5 minutes)
Ask students to locate the 2 people with whom they have had the least amount of contact during the course, to form groups of 3.

STEP 4: (20 minutes)
Each member of the group take turns succinctly presenting their research. The other 2 group members listen and offer suggestions as to how the themes presented can be adapted or expanded to consider ‘smaller picture’ or ‘bigger picture’ aspects of their work at different levels of the ecosystem.

MODULE 6: PARTICIPATION AND RESEARCH
STEP 5: Plenary debrief (10 minutes)
Revisit the purpose of the activity. Ask people to keep in mind how they might scale their research from one level of biological organization to another, either up or down in terms of complexity (i.e. different levels of biological organization). Questions to discuss collectively:

- What types of words are useful when talking to a broad audience having varying experience in the area that you are studying?
- Has communicating your research in basic terms helped you to link your research with the ‘bigger picture’?
- Was it easy for you to concisely communicate your main research objectives?
- Could you distil your research into a newspaper style headline to be read by a general audience?
- What do these lessons mean in terms of valuing different forms of scholarship (e.g. Scholarship of integration, application and engagement)?

Specific Reading
Required pre-reading


References Cited

