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Charles Darwin University

## Lenses for learning

### Visual techniques in natural resource management

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1 **Lenses for learning: Visual techniques in natural resource**  
2 **management**

3

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26

27 **ABSTRACT**

28

29 In this study, we explored the use of selected visual techniques (e.g. video,  
30 photography, diagramming) in facilitating learning among Indigenous communities  
31 living in remote protected areas at sites in Vietnam and Australia. The techniques  
32 were employed during interviews and workshops aimed at accessing and enhancing  
33 local peoples' perspectives on their landscape and on specific natural resource  
34 management issues. The effectiveness of the different techniques for enabling  
35 learning varied markedly with the context, highlighting the need for facilitator skill  
36 and flexibility in application of techniques. Visual techniques helped to engage  
37 participants; encourage unrestrained and lateral thinking; provide opportunities for  
38 self-expression and reflection; and to expose participants to perspectives of other  
39 community members. Valuable insights emerged on broad aspects of learning and  
40 these were incorporated into a simple model that highlights three types of  
41 conceptualisation found to be important in these processes.

42

43

44

45

46 **Keywords:** visual methods; participatory communication; social learning; Indigenous;  
47 protected areas

48 **1 INTRODUCTION**

49

50 **1.1 Visual techniques in research**

51

52 Visual techniques such as film and photography have long been used in human based  
53 research disciplines, for example sociology (Becker, 1974), psychology (Laing,  
54 1980), human geography (Aitken and Wingate, 1993), education (Williamson, 1987)  
55 and especially anthropology (Bateson and Mead, 1942). Despite this history over  
56 several decades, the recognition of visual techniques as credible research tools has  
57 been rather slow in some areas – particularly sociology, where there has historically  
58 been a ‘barrage of criticism’ of visual methods (Harper, 2004:232). However, a  
59 number of texts have appeared from various disciplines recently on visual methods  
60 (e.g., Banks, 2001; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 1998) and on analysis of visual  
61 representations (e.g., Evans and Hall, 1999; Rose, 2000).

62

63 The way visual methods have been used is highly diverse and their employment  
64 across the disciplines has been underpinned by a range of theoretical concepts. In  
65 earlier work, visual methods were commonly seen as tools for documentation and  
66 dissemination, and this is often still the main emphasis. However, visual approaches  
67 have broadened over time to include concepts such as visual ethnography (in  
68 anthropology, e.g., Stadhams, 2004) and visual elicitation (in sociology, e.g., Collier  
69 and Collier, 1991; Harrison, 2002). And following a general trend in development and  
70 social research towards more ‘bottom up’ approaches, researchers from various  
71 disciplines have also been developing numerous participatory visual techniques.  
72 Examples are participant generated photography (or ‘photo voice’ e.g., Wang *et al.*,  
73 2004) and participatory video (e.g., Kindon, 2003).

74

75 The employment of participatory visual techniques has expanded also among  
76 practitioners in development (e.g., Braden, 1999), community health (e.g., Kesby,  
77 2000), rural and agricultural development (Chambers, 1994), and to a lesser degree in  
78 natural resource management (NRM: Bussink, 2003). Visual techniques became  
79 particularly popular within approaches such as participatory rapid appraisal (PRA –  
80 e.g., Chambers, 1999) and participatory learning and action (PLA e.g., Busza and  
81 Schunter, 2001). These include participatory mapping and geographic information  
82 systems (e.g., McCall, 2003), photography (e.g., Kolb, 2008), video (e.g., van Mele,  
83 2006), theatre (e.g., Mavrocordatos, 1997), timeline and seasonal calendar analysis  
84 (Chambers, 1994) and diagramming (e.g., Umoquit, 2008) techniques. Some  
85 researchers and practitioners are now starting to employ sophisticated (and generally  
86 expensive) visual technology, software and support in development and NRM. Their  
87 methods include ‘visualizations’, in which pictures displaying important features of  
88 landscapes or future landscape scenarios are shown to participants to elicit responses  
89 (and preferences) and/or to communicate concepts. (e.g. Lewis and Sheppard 2006;  
90 Williams *et al.*, 2007). Digital 3D gaming environments are also being used, where  
91 images of landscapes are recreated in consultation with local people, to record their  
92 features and associated Indigenous knowledge (Leavy *et al.*, 2007). In the study  
93 described in this paper, the focus has been on using much simpler, cheaper and more  
94 accessible visual techniques.

95

96 The growth in use of digital visual methods – especially participatory techniques – by  
97 community development and NRM practitioners has flowed partly from the  
98 ‘explosion’ in information technology and greater accessibility and ease of use of  
99 equipment, such as cheap and disposable cameras, digital cameras and camcorders.

100 Documentation of this type of work has grown in manuals, reports (e.g., FAO 1999;  
101 Lunch and Lunch 2006) and some practitioner and academic journals and texts (e.g.,  
102 Braden, 1999; Frohman, 2005; Johannson, 1999; Pink, 2008; Shaw and Robertson,  
103 1997; White, 2003). Various benefits of visual methods are widely advocated in  
104 community development literature, but reference to theory has been lacking, and  
105 limited connections have been made between field practitioners and research.  
106 Research has usually focused on single techniques, and there have been very few  
107 studies within the context of NRM, especially on combinations of visual techniques,  
108 or on the use of less expensive equipment and tools.

109

## 110 **1.2 Research context, intention and process**

111

112 In this research we studied the use of various visual techniques, as supporting tools in  
113 two larger projects designed to help understand Indigenous perspectives on two rather  
114 different and complex NRM issues, in two countries. The study set out to explore the  
115 effectiveness and versatility of techniques across very different contexts, in promoting  
116 learning about NRM issues. One project was based in Vietnam and was concerned  
117 with assessing the potential for Payments for Environmental Services (PES) for  
118 Indigenous communities in Cat Tien National Park. The other was in northern  
119 Australia and aimed to improve understanding of Indigenous community preferences  
120 for adaptation to climate change.

121

122 In this paper we explore the strengths and weaknesses of selected visual techniques in  
123 facilitating learning for deliberation on these NRM issues. Deliberation is viewed here  
124 as a process of discourse with the public, in which citizens are encouraged to

125 *'discover latent public values that they have in common with others, and in the*  
126 *process to create new public values'*. (Schusler *et al.*, 2003:312). The process at each  
127 site involved iterative cycles of activities – 'discussion', 'interaction' and 'reflection'.  
128 and the arrival at some form of collective understanding and vision on the topics of  
129 interest in NRM. The ability to support (or enhance) these activities was built into the  
130 criteria used in assessing the visual techniques (see Section 5.1: *'Features important*  
131 *in facilitating learning*). The key activities of discussion, interaction and reflection are  
132 further outlined under Section 2: *'Conceptual framework'*, and are incorporated in the  
133 core of a model developed as a guide for facilitating learning and communication (see  
134 Section 6: *'Discussion'*).

135

136 The visual techniques used were selected for their practicality and accessibility, i.e.  
137 availability, reasonably low cost and ease of use by non government organisations,  
138 land managers and communities in remote regions. We aimed to develop  
139 understandings of features and concepts important in facilitating learning processes,  
140 and hence the ways visual techniques can be used to strengthen these processes. A  
141 second part of the overall project was to examine how 'visual products' derived from  
142 these local learning processes might be used to communicate local perspectives to  
143 policy stakeholders (reported elsewhere – in Petheram *et al.*, unpublished Although  
144 the context of the two study locations differed markedly, a common feature of the  
145 research in Vietnam and Australia was the overall purpose of the projects in which the  
146 study of visual techniques was embedded, i.e., the enhancement inquiry with remote  
147 communities on specific NRM issues.

148

149 A main rationale for the design of this study was the contention that NRM is most  
150 effective if: (1) it is well informed about local residents' preferences, and (2) the

151 residents are empowered to voice opinions and have opportunity and capacity to  
152 influence decision making (Bessette, 2006; Lorenzi *et al.*, 2007). The intent was for  
153 the researchers<sup>1</sup> and participants to develop deep understandings of each other's  
154 perspectives, and ways that local views could be incorporated into the planning of  
155 NRM. Much literature suggests that participatory inquiry can assist in the facilitation  
156 of learning and communication processes and hence in working towards such goals  
157 (e.g., Burke, 1968; Schusler *et al.*, 2003).

158

159 Three further assumptions underpinned the research at all sites: (a) that a fundamental  
160 requirement in NRM is sound communication within and between communities and  
161 with other stakeholders (Bessette, 2006); (b) that facilitation of effective 'learning'  
162 can lead to improved communication within communities, and vice versa (Upreti,  
163 2001), and (c) that well designed learning processes can help community members  
164 develop a collective perspective and vision – which is important in communicating  
165 and negotiating with other stakeholders (Schusler *et al.*, 2003).

166

## 167 **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

168

169 The research drew on constructivism (Bodner, 1986), an epistemology which holds  
170 that knowledge and meaning is constructed within people's social interactions and  
171 experiences. This informed the research, especially in terms of the practice of  
172 facilitating learning processes during the fieldwork. We outline below some  
173 theoretical aspects of these processes, under the sub sections: '*Social learning*

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'researcher' is used interchangeably with 'facilitator' in this paper



174 *theory*’; ‘*Communicative vs strategic rationality*’; ‘*Key activities – discussion,*  
175 *interaction and reflection*’; and ‘*The place of visual techniques in this study*’.

176

## 177 **2.1 Social learning theory**

178

179 We adopt the definition of Schusler *et al.* (2003:11) who view social learning ‘as  
180 *learning that occurs when people engage one another, sharing diverse perspectives*  
181 *and experiences to develop a common framework of understanding and basis for joint*  
182 *action*’. Social learning is seen here as a process that occurs naturally, but which can  
183 also be encouraged and deepened through skilled facilitation (Leeuwis, 2004). In this  
184 project, we employed various visual techniques to help facilitate learning. The  
185 intention was for the process to continue among the participants after the fieldwork  
186 ended. This would result in the participants’ continued practice in reflexive thinking  
187 (learned in this project) about their own behaviour and perspectives, as well as those  
188 of others. Thus an important social learning paradigm adopted in framing this research  
189 was that peoples’ behaviours stem from their perspectives, which are developed from  
190 their interactions with their community, environment and experiences. As Groot and  
191 Maarleveld (2000:4) suggest, the type of active learning that occurs in collective  
192 processes such as social learning can lead to ‘... *a deeper understanding about how*  
193 *complex issues work and why. It improves people’s capacity to make sense of and*  
194 *adapt to an ever-changing world*’.

195

196 One theory that is used to help distinguish between different depths of learning is  
197 ‘single, double and triple loop learning’, which is derived from theories on  
198 organisational behaviour by Argyris and Schon (1978: 2). They maintain that learning  
199 involves varying degrees of the ‘*detection and correction of error*’. Single loop

200 learning occurs when learners modify errors by adapting habitual behaviour. Double  
201 loop learning is said to involve more creativity and critical thinking than single loop  
202 learning. It occurs when learners modify errors by questioning and analysing the  
203 ‘*governing variables*’ behind their underlying values, norms and behaviours. Triple  
204 loop learning, which is sometimes termed ‘learning about learning’ or ‘higher level  
205 learning’, occurs where approaches and techniques of learning are questioned and  
206 analysed. King (2002) claims that these various depths of learning are useful for  
207 different purposes in resource management projects.

208

## 209 **2.2 Communicative vs strategic rationality – in facilitation of learning**

210

211

212 Some authors imply that facilitators of goal-oriented projects tend towards ‘strategic  
213 rationality’ (from Huber 1998:95), rather than follow the more idealistic principles of  
214 ‘communicative rationality’. Others argue that there has been excessive dependence  
215 upon Habermas’ (1984) theory of ‘communicative rationality’ in previous literature  
216 on social learning (Leeuwis, 1995; Pijnenburg, 2002). Proponents of communicative  
217 rationality hold that people communicate best when they have equal power and are  
218 allowed opportunity to reach reasoned consensus on issues of disagreement. In  
219 contrast, in strategic rationality, people are thought to act strategically in their own  
220 self interest. Like Leeuwis *et al.* (2002) we argue that communicative actions can at  
221 the same time be strategic and the boundary between the terms can often be blurry: at  
222 times facilitator action needs to be strategic for effective and ‘deep’ learning to occur.

223

224

225 **2.3 Key activities – discussion, interaction and reflection**

226

227 The activities – ‘discussion’, ‘interaction’ and ‘reflection’ – were identified early in  
228 our experience of community inquiry process, and from literature (e.g. Keen *et al.*,  
229 2005; Bessette, 2006) as important in facilitating learning on NRM issues. The  
230 process at all research sites therefore involved using visual techniques to support these  
231 ‘key activities’, particularly during group work. The three activities are incorporated  
232 into an emergent model that we present in Section 6: ‘*Discussion*’.

233

234 **2.4 The place of visual techniques in this study**

235

236 In this study visual techniques were utilised (and their effectiveness assessed) as  
237 supporting tools to enhance researcher and participant understanding of local context  
238 and participants’ perspectives and preferences on NRM issues.

239

240 In this research we see visual techniques and images as ‘*mediums*’ for the  
241 development of new knowledge – not as ‘*neutral reflections of reality*’ (Buckingham  
242 2009:635) This new knowledge is constructed through a process of deliberation  
243 between researchers and participants – involving discussion, reflection and  
244 interaction.

245

246 **3. RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS**

247

248 **3.1 Vietnam research site**

249

250 Cat Tien National Park ('CTNP') is located in southern Vietnam about 150 km north  
251 of Ho Chi Minh City. Fieldwork was conducted in the Park at two sub sites on three  
252 field trips between 2008 and 2009. The larger project under which this study was  
253 conducted in Vietnam was focused around options for NRM, and more specifically on  
254 understanding the potential for implementing Payments for Environmental Services  
255 (Petheram and Campbell, 2010).

256

257 Fieldwork entailed individual interviews and workshops in which visual techniques  
258 were used to promote discussion, interaction and reflection in a community inquiry  
259 process. Forty-one participants were Indigenous (and eighteen non-Indigenous  
260 people) living in and around the Park. Initially, views were sought on a wide range of  
261 issues, and subsequently attention was focused on people's preferences in the event of  
262 a PES scheme being introduced.

263

### 264 **3.2 Australian research site**

265

266 The Gove Peninsula lies on the east coast of Arnhem land, northern Australia.  
267 Fieldwork was conducted over five visits between 2008-2010 to the Dhimurru  
268 Indigenous Protected Area, working primarily with participants from two  
269 communities. Research entailed interviews and three workshops with a total of nine  
270 Indigenous Rangers, and interviews and two workshops with a total of twelve  
271 Indigenous women from the two communities. Views were sought on a wide range of  
272 issues, including changes in participant's landscape, as well as views on climate  
273 change, and preferences for community adaptation (Petheram *et al.*, in

274 2010). Questionnaires and visual choice modeling experiments were also administered  
275 in a related study (Zander and Petheram, unpublished).

276

## 277 **4. RESEARCH APPROACH**

278

279 Visual techniques were used during the interviews and workshops with community  
280 participants at the research sites in Vietnam and Australia. The selection of techniques  
281 was made by researcher/s but influenced by participant's needs and preferences. The  
282 following sub-sections describe the techniques used and the way their strengths and  
283 weaknesses were assessed.

284

### 285 **4.1 Visual techniques used**

286

287 The literature provides information on a suite of visual techniques from visual  
288 sociology, anthropology, community development, health and NRM practice. The  
289 techniques selected for this study were used in a variety of ways at the sites in the two  
290 regions, to allow exploration of their efficacy in remote but widely differing  
291 situations.

292

293 It is important to emphasise that the visual techniques were used in conjunction with  
294 more standard verbal research techniques (in-depth interviews and workshops) to  
295 deliberately enhance discussion, interaction and reflection on NRM topics. Translators  
296 were usually employed, except in the case of some Australian participants who had  
297 proficiency in English. The main visual techniques and the way they were used at the  
298 two sites are summarised in Table 1.

299 *Table 1: Summary of visual techniques and their use in Vietnam and northern*  
 300 *Australia. Note: Darker shading denotes more frequent use of the technique than lighter*  
 301 *shading (blank boxes indicate no use of the technique).*  
 302

Visual technique	Description	Vietnam	Australia
<b>Visual elicitation:</b> display of photographs or video on camera, laptop or screen (e.g., Banks, 2001)	Photos/video collected by researcher (or taken by participants) were used to explain or demonstrate a concept; or to elicit feedback about particular landscapes/ practices, or to generate discussion about a particular topic. Used in interviews and workshops		
<b>Hypermedia DVD</b> including photos, video clips, photos and text	Created with participant input to help summarise collective ideas and opinions. Also useful for communicating results to other stakeholders, verifying participant perspectives and building rapport among participants. Used in interviews and workshops		
<b>Participant generated photography or video clips</b> (e.g., Frohman, 2005)	Participants were given a still or video camera and asked to take images of features of their landscape (that have positive or negative implications to them) and to explain these. Some photos and video were used later in interviews and workshops.		
<b>Video statements:</b> clips of participants talking about issues	Used to summarise participant views, seek feedback and/or verify perspectives on particular topic, e.g., reoccurring themes, controversial opinions, workshop synthesis etc. Used in interviews and workshops (video taken by participants and/or researchers).		
<b>Rich picture diagramming (RPD)</b> (e.g., Chambers, 2001)	Participants drew on sheets of paper, features of their landscape that are important to them (positive or negative). Also used to build future scenarios. Used in interviews and workshops		
<b>Visual summaries:</b> short video/photo presentations on issues and topics	Created (1) by researcher to help communicate research topics and (2) by researcher with input from participants to summarise collective ideas and opinions. Used for verifying perspectives, generating discussion, building rapport among participants – in interviews and workshops		
<b>Historial analysis</b> (Chambers, 1997)	Timelines were drawn with participants, with pictures (and words) representing different historical events		
<b>SWOT analysis</b> (Chambers, 1997)	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats were drawn with participants		
<b>Matrix ranking exercises</b> (Chambers, 1997)	Participants visually ranked NRM options with pebbles or pen		
<b>Participatory sculpting</b> (Fig 2)	Participants sculpted play-doh in an extension of RPD (to modify aspects of diagrams, or add other elements to diagrams). Used only in workshops		
<b>Seasonal calendar analysis</b> (Chambers, 1997)	Participants drew elements from their traditional seasonal calendar and described recent changes to the calendar.		
<b>Visual choice modelling</b> (Reported in Zander and Petheram, unpublished)	Computer drawn images were used to elicit responses from participants about preferences for future scenarios and general discussion. Used in interviews and workshops.		

303

## 304 4.2 Applying the visual techniques

305

306 Some techniques were used more frequently than others, and the combinations varied  
307 at each site. The choice of techniques depended on the purpose, context, timelines and  
308 participant preferences. Practical considerations were often important. For example,  
309 during inclement weather it was difficult to take photos or video outdoors – so more  
310 diagramming was used, or greater emphasis placed on verbal communication. Time  
311 for participation in workshops was often restricted by participants' commitments,  
312 such as child-rearing, farming, community activities, work, and ceremonies. Over the  
313 course of the community inquiry, greater insight into the effectiveness of different  
314 techniques for different purposes was gained, and the types and application of  
315 techniques were modified.

316

317 Although the conditions and (NRM) topics of interest varied across the field sites and  
318 sub-sites, three main stages emerged as important in the use of visual techniques.  
319 These stages became incorporated into the inquiry process at each site, using the  
320 visual techniques as outlined below:

321

- 322 • Stage 1. In-depth interviews and workshop/s were conducted on general  
323 aspects of people's livelihoods and landscape. Here we used one of (or  
324 a combination of): rich picture diagramming (RPD); participant  
325 generated photography (PGP), participatory sculpting; historical  
326 analysis (Vietnam only); SWOT analysis (Vietnam only); and visual  
327 elicitation – to engage and interest participants, and to explore people's  
328 general perspectives.

- 329           •       Stage 2. In later workshops and interviews – we used RPD; PGP;  
330                   visual elicitation; seasonal calendar analysis (Australia only); visual  
331                   choice modelling (Australia only); video statement (recording) and  
332                   hypermedia DVDs for generating discussion on specific NRM topics.
- 333           •       Stage 3. In interviews and workshops – we used video statements and  
334                   summaries; hypermedia DVD creation; and matrix ranking exercises –  
335                   to negotiate issues, and develop ‘collective perspectives’ relating to the  
336                   specific NRM topics.

337

338   Some activities during the field work required a greater degree of interaction with  
339   community participants than others. And the level of participation depended on their  
340   desire to become involved, time constraints, resources available and other factors.

341   Thus, photographs or video footage were sometimes collected from secondary  
342   sources, or ‘taken’ by the researcher, or sometimes by participants. Editing of video  
343   was mostly done by the researcher. The results of editing were shown (as video clips)  
344   to individuals and community, to allow feedback, reflection, verification and re-  
345   editing or deletion. It was useful at later stages of the inquiry process for community  
346   members to consider together the type of visual products (and the messages) that they  
347   would like to communicate to other stakeholders, and especially to government  
348   agencies.

349

#### 350   4.2.1   *Clarifying the uses of video*

351

352   At the end of interviews, participants were sometimes asked if they wanted to talk on  
353   video about a prominent theme or issue arising, or to summarise a common view or  
354   argument for other community members. Such statements were captured by video



355 camera, or a webcam on a laptop computer. After obtaining consent, these clips were  
356 later placed on VCD<sup>2</sup> or DVD – to allow participants to review the main themes  
357 arising from the research, and to replay for participants in later interviews or  
358 workshops for further discussion and reflection. Similarly in workshops, before  
359 conclusion the participants were recorded where they wished to do so, summarising  
360 the main collective perspectives that arose from discussions. These recordings were  
361 compiled on VCD or DVD, and then replayed to participants for further discussion  
362 and reflection. Later in the research, participants recorded video clip messages  
363 specifically for other (e.g. policy) audiences, based on themes that arose from  
364 interviews and workshops. The video clips and other visual images (e.g. photographs,  
365 and images of rich diagrams, sculptures, music and video summaries derived from the  
366 community inquiry) were incorporated into interactive, hypermedia DVDs. These  
367 DVDs were created with input from (and verification) by participants for the purpose  
368 of communicating local messages to other stakeholders.

369

### 370 **4.3 Assessing the visual techniques**

371

372

373 The research process in the overall study involved continuous gathering and analysis  
374 of data on the use and effectiveness of the visual techniques, as well as on peoples  
375 perceptions of the NRM topics . This paper is concerned with the first set of data – i.e.  
376 on the use and value of visual techniques in supporting learning. Results of analysis of  
377 data on NRM topics has been reported by Petheram and Campbell, (2010) and  
378 Petheram *et al.* (2010). Visual techniques were used in a range of situations, so as to  
379 allow general assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in facilitating different  
380 aspects of learning. This assessment was carried out by two means: (1) researcher

---

<sup>2</sup> Video Compact Disc. (In Vietnam one of the village's main hall, and a few individuals had VCD players, but none had DVD players)

381 observations of practicality and participant reactions to techniques, and (2) feedback  
382 from participants and research partners during interviews and workshops – on the  
383 effectiveness of techniques. Researchers kept notes on the usefulness and difficulties  
384 experienced while using each visual technique in the field, and participants’ opinions  
385 of the usefulness of each technique were sought and recorded during field activities.  
386 The assessment could not rely entirely on participants’ opinions of the techniques, as  
387 all visual techniques were new to them and they had no basis for comparing visual  
388 techniques with other techniques. No pre-set criteria were used in assessing  
389 techniques; rather, the data and analysis were used to seek features that arose as  
390 important in using, selecting or rejecting techniques for various circumstances.

391

#### 392 **4.4 Data analysis**

393

394 In our study we drew from grounded theory, where theory is seen as emergent from  
395 data grounded from the field (Glaser, 1992). Analysis of data (i.e. ‘words’ derived  
396 from notes on researcher observations and on participant responses) involved  
397 ‘substantive and ‘theoretical’ coding (Fernandez, 2004). Substantive coding led to  
398 the identification of main themes and categories, and also became the basis for  
399 development of theories and frameworks through theoretical coding. During coding  
400 we used the constant comparison method, i.e. constantly comparing emergent, new  
401 information with previously identified information (Carpenter Rinaldi, 1995). This  
402 was designed to identify categories, relationships between and within categories, as  
403 well as core category (Glaser, 1992).

404

405 **5. RESULTS**

406

407 The results are outlined under subheadings relating to five main themes that arose  
408 from analysis of data on the visual techniques, i.e. '*Features important in facilitating*  
409 *learning*'; '*Effectiveness of visual techniques*'; '*Use of visual techniques in group*  
410 *versus individual settings*'; '*Visual techniques to encourage 'unrestrained' thinking*';  
411 and '*Conceptualisation in social learning*'.

412

413 **5.1 Features important in facilitating learning**

414

415 From the data gathered in the process of discourse with individuals and groups, we  
416 identified three main features as important generally in facilitation learning in inquiry  
417 with communities on NRM topics. The first of these, 'Engaging and Scoping', relates  
418 to establishing preconditions necessary for creating an appropriate and comfortable  
419 space and frame for participants to be inspired, confident, positive and willing to work  
420 together with the facilitator in learning. It also entails the initial encouragement of  
421 'active listening' (Engel and Korf, 2005) and 'unrestrained' thinking (Schusler *et al.*,  
422 2003:317) by participants and researchers in the general context and broad  
423 perspectives and values held by participants. The second, 'Focusing on specific NRM  
424 topics', relates to the encouragement of deep reflection on specific NRM topics, and  
425 relationships to background perspectives and values. And the third feature,  
426 'Negotiating and Communicating', relates to the development of a collective vision  
427 and perspective (which could be communicated to other stakeholders). These three  
428 features can be further broken down into a total of seven components, as summarised  
429 in Table 2.

430

431 *Table 2. Important features (and their components) in facilitating learning in*

432 *community inquiry*

<b>Feature number</b>	<b>Main features important in facilitation of learning, and their components</b>
1	<b>ENGAGING AND SCOPING</b> a. Enhancing researcher engagement (e.g., building rapport, engaging participants in dialogue).  b. Strengthening community spirit, and capacity building (e.g., confidence building, empowerment).  c. Improving researcher/facilitator and participant understanding of general local issues.
2	<b>FOCUSSING ON SPECIFIC (NRM) TOPICS</b> d. Facilitating group learning to focus on the specific NRM topics – through participatory activities and providing feedback.
3	<b>NEGOTIATING AND COMMUNICATING</b> e. Enhancing communication with and in community, and with other stakeholders (e.g., breaking down barriers between different ethnic groups, status levels).  f. Helping develop a collective community perspective.  g. Providing an avenue to communicate to other stakeholders.

433

434 The seven components from Table 2 were identified from early field research and

435 literature review, and were utilised later in this study as criteria in assessing the

436 properties and effectiveness of the visual techniques used. The identification of these

437 criteria and their later use to assess the visual methods is consistent with an action

438 research approach whereby emergent data helps guide later research processes.

439

440 **5.2 Effectiveness of visual techniques**

441

442 At later stages of the research, the effectiveness of the visual techniques was assessed  
443 over their continuous use in the two countries, on the basis of the researcher  
444 observations and participant comments, using the features (and their components)  
445 described in Table 2, as general assessment criteria. Results are summarised in  
446 Appendix A and described in greater detail in Results and Discussion. Flexibility in  
447 choice of techniques arose as a vital feature of the research process. Different  
448 techniques were found to be useful for different parts of the study, and for different  
449 purposes and stages of learning at research sites.

450

451 Overall, rich picture diagramming, video statements and hypermedia DVDs were the  
452 most effective and versatile techniques, and were therefore used most frequently.

453 Experiences using the techniques were similar across the field sites within each

454 country. However, some techniques were more effective than others in each country

455 For example RPD was more effective in Australia than Vietnam (where less educated

456 women did not have familiarity with pencils/pens), but video statements were more

457 effective in Vietnam (where video was more of an engaging novelty than in

458 Australia).

459

460 RPD appeared to be the most versatile technique, for a range of purposes – from

461 helping to engage participants to encouraging deep thinking. Video was particularly

462 valuable when encouraging discussion on specific NRM topics during the facilitation

463 of learning. Techniques like SWOT, historical, seasonal calendar and visual analysis

464 and choice modelling were useful only for specific purposes. We expand on the

465 results in the following sections

466

467 *5.2.1 Participant responses and views on visual techniques*

468

469 All participants indicated that visual techniques had been useful and had added value  
470 and enjoyment to the inquiry process, although some people were more enthusiastic  
471 than others. A few participants were initially hesitant to be captured on video or on  
472 still camera, or were anxious about damaging the equipment while entrusted with it  
473 for use.

474

475 Participants indicated that they particularly appreciated watching video clips, as part  
476 of the inquiry process. In northern Australia, where people were quite accustomed to  
477 sketching and drawing, participants particularly enjoyed RPD. Some participants  
478 stated that this process was relaxing, and *'helped us get to know you [the*  
479 *researcher/s] better too'*. All participants responded that they would like to be  
480 involved in the use of visual techniques if they were involved in future  
481 research/projects. Northern Australian participants – particularly male rangers who  
482 had experience of using video – indicated they would like greater involvement in  
483 filming and video production in the future. They were enthusiastic about the idea of  
484 being able to create visual products (e.g., short videos) and sharing these with other  
485 stakeholders, and they had ideas about presenting video (on climate change issues) at  
486 an Indigenous festival, to others in their community and to children at schools. After a  
487 workshop in northern Australian a participant said: *'Listening and seeing each other*  
488 *in this way is important. When we learn to think in these ways we can understand*  
489 *these better and then also explain to others'*. Many participants in both Vietnam and  
490 Australia were enthusiastic about video as a medium for expressing their views to  
491 other stakeholders (especially those not normally accessible to them). Some

492 participants in Vietnam suggested their video statements should go on National  
493 television to reach the wider community, which may influence policy makers.

494

495 Several participants in Vietnam who held positions of authority (informal and formal)  
496 were very enthusiastic about using the VCDs and video statements during village  
497 meetings, to further generate discussion and refine development of ideas among the  
498 local resident population and to continue refining their perspectives, with a view to  
499 communicating these to National Park management and government officials. This  
500 demonstrates the way that some participants naturally adopted the visual projects  
501 (especially at the Vietnam site) for future self reflection, information sharing and  
502 advocacy.

503

### 504 **5.3 Use of visual techniques in group versus individual settings**

505

506 Participants in both countries clearly enjoyed using visual techniques in workshop  
507 settings, more than on a one to one basis. After a workshop involving visual  
508 techniques in Vietnam, a participant said: *'I have been in other workshops with*  
509 *researchers and I am always bored. But this was really fun and interesting, and I*  
510 *really liked watching video of us talking. It helped us talk to each other more'*

511

512 In such group contexts, where people had opportunity to interact and reflect with  
513 others, the visual techniques allowed facilitators to promote deeper thinking on NRM  
514 issues (i.e. questioning underlying behaviour and perspectives ), and thus we assume  
515 social learning, than in individual interviews. However, in-depth (oral) interviews  
516 played other important roles – in providing background information, empowering

517 people to voice their opinions, and exposing and negotiating sensitive issues. Some  
518 visual techniques, such as PGP and RPD, were quite effective in individual in-depth  
519 interviews, as a means of encouraging ‘unrestrained’ reflection and expression, and  
520 from a different perspective from which they were familiar. However, some people  
521 (particularly women and participants with less formal education in Vietnam) were too  
522 shy and reticent to be involved in RPD during in-depth interviews, but were more  
523 willing to be involved working with groups during workshops.

524

#### 525 **5.4 Visual techniques to encourage ‘unrestrained’ thinking**

526

527 When rich picture diagrams (‘RPDs’) and participant generated photography (‘PGP’)  
528 were utilised to seek understandings of peoples’ perspectives, most participants  
529 revealed their views on their natural surroundings first and foremost (see Figure 1). In  
530 some cases, religious or spiritual views were also expressed through these exercises –  
531 topics that were seldom mentioned during only verbal interviews. For example,  
532 images of a specific hill, island, tree, or other places with strong spiritual or cultural  
533 significance, were often depicted in diagrams or photos. It seemed that visual  
534 exercises provided a better means to communicate deeper, intrinsic and tacit values  
535 than verbal interview and conversation alone would normally permit. Visual  
536 techniques often made it easier for people to ‘see in a different way’, and also express  
537 (abstract) topics that they found difficulty expressing verbally (e.g., due to political,  
538 cultural or religious taboos in Vietnam). In the northern Australian sites many  
539 participants – particularly women – commonly used metaphors to express their  
540 perspectives. It seemed that images often tended to take the place of metaphoric  
541 speech – especially when dealing with topics that traditionally could not be stated



542 directly or easily. For example, a participant may be uncomfortable talking of  
543 religious or spiritual concepts, but would (in preference) photograph scenes of  
544 spiritual significance (see Figure 1). The RPD, PGP and participatory sculpting (see  
545 Figure 2) were particularly helpful in providing a way to allow people to express and  
546 explain these metaphors.

547

548 *Figure 1*

549

550 *Figure 2*

551

552 While some of the techniques were useful for promoting open expression about  
553 spiritual and natural values, on some occasions video media limited the discussion of  
554 controversial topics (e.g. corruption of regional leaders or government officials).

555 Where participants were willing to talk on video on such issues, researchers needed to  
556 exercise caution in deciding whether to show these images to other stakeholders<sup>3</sup>.

557 However, in most cases participants were very willing to allow use of descriptions,  
558 diagrams and photos about these topics. This suggests that in certain situations, other  
559 techniques can be less intimidating (or less politically risky) than direct video  
560 recording (of participant opinion). After several video recordings, some participants  
561 became less hesitant about expressing views on controversial topics on video, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Consent was always sought from participants for photography and video recording, and also for later use of the images. Footage was always shown to participants, and images deleted on request.

562 even appeared to gain satisfaction from placing their views on record recorded. As  
563 one female participant in Australia said '*we need other people to know about these*  
564 *issues, they are important and we need to talk about them*'.

565

566

## 567 **5.5 Combinations of techniques**

568

569

570 In some cases, it was helpful to combine the use of certain techniques. For example,  
571 participatory sculpting and diagramming were very compatible when used together.  
572 Women participants in Australia found that if they drew diagrams, they could add  
573 extra dynamic features (e.g. changes or actions) to their own or other participants  
574 diagrams by using the play doh (see Figure 3.4). The play doh (representing the  
575 features) could easily be modified by participants during discussions.

576

577 Photos, video and hypermedia DVDs were also very valuable in recording diagrams,  
578 sculptures, seasonal calendars, timelines, matrices, music and so on. These records  
579 could be used later during the inquiry process, such as for use in enhancing recall  
580 among researcher/s and participants, providing feedback for discussion and in  
581 communicating local perspectives to policy arenas (Petheram *et al.*, unpublished b).  
582 Hypermedia DVDs were particularly helpful in providing an organising structure to  
583 store, and present these images, as well as supporting text.

584

585

## 586 5.6 Conceptualisation in social learning

587

588

589 From the data gathered across various sites and communities, we concluded that  
590 participants were involved in three main types of conceptualisation during learning  
591 processes. We termed these: ‘open conceptualisation’, ‘specific conceptualisation’  
592 and ‘synthesis of thinking’. It seems important that facilitators of learning processes  
593 understand these types of conceptualisation, and ways in which each might be aided  
594 or enhanced. On deeper analysis, we found that these types of conceptualisation  
595 corresponded closely with the three main features that were identified early in the  
596 research as important in facilitating learning (in Table 2).

597

598 During the first stage – open conceptualisation – participants were engaged through a  
599 general exploration of their environment and sharing of ideas. Then (in specific  
600 conceptualisation) the process became focused on facilitating learning about specific  
601 concepts of interest in NRM – such as PES. The third stage of conceptualisation  
602 involved deep reflection and negotiating, as participants worked towards a synthesis  
603 of thinking about the particular NRM issue/s.

604

605 Our observations indicate that the strengths of visual techniques in promoting the  
606 different features important in learning (Appendix A) can also act to enhance the  
607 corresponding types of conceptualisation. Our findings are outlined below on visual  
608 techniques useful in promoting each stage of conceptualisation, together with further  
609 explanation of the three types. This information can be useful for practitioners  
610 applying visual techniques for the facilitation of learning in NRM.

611

612 *5.6.1 Techniques for open conceptualisation*

613

614 Before broaching discussion on specific topic areas in NRM, it was found to be  
615 essential for the researchers and participants to share their general aims and  
616 perspectives in a broad and open manner. Such exploration needed to occur in  
617 unrestrained and non routine ways, so as to encourage open and free thinking –  
618 without being too influenced by narrow project topics. This ‘open conceptualisation’  
619 also helped in building trust, confidence and positive thinking, and allowed strong  
620 engagement between researcher and participants later. All these steps emerged as vital  
621 prerequisites in facilitating deeper stages of learning.

622

623 RPD and PGP were particularly valuable techniques for providing participants with an  
624 ‘open’ and lateral way to conceptualise and express features in their landscape that  
625 had important (positive or negative) influence on their lives (see [Appendix A](#)). Such  
626 visual expression was useful in revealing values and preferences in a broad and  
627 creative way. Hence these two techniques were particularly valuable in providing  
628 general insight into the importance placed on different components of the landscape  
629 and they often helped in understanding the physical and emotional connections many  
630 participants had with nature.

631

632 Diagramming (RPD) was generally more versatile in allowing participants greater  
633 flexibility (than PGP) to include views on broader aspects that were not immediately  
634 visible in the landscape (e.g., features that are distant, or that existed in the past, or  
635 may exist in the future). People could sketch objects or even symbols of abstract  
636 concepts – that could not be photographed.

637

Deleted: Table 3

638 *5.6.2 Techniques for specific conceptualisation*

639

640 After discussing broad topics, it was often helpful for the researcher to share  
641 knowledge of their area as well as encourage participants to conceptualise and discuss  
642 their views on very specific topics (e.g., climate change), and on values, norms and  
643 behaviours underlying their perspectives. For the researcher, having tools on hand that  
644 provided feedback or present scenarios, helped to encourage participants to focus  
645 attention on specific topics (i.e. in ‘specific conceptualisation’).

646

647 RPD proved especially useful and versatile in exploring specific topics. Participants  
648 could be asked to draw images of aspects they would like (or not like) to see in their  
649 landscape in the future, or to depict scenes that may occur under different scenarios  
650 (i.e. a form of visioning or scenario building) and to discuss reasons for these  
651 preferences and views.

652

653 Other visual techniques were also useful in ‘focusing attention’ on particular topics.  
654 For example, photo elicitation allowed participants to respond to an image of  
655 particular scenes in the landscape (e.g. a degraded beach, an agricultural plot, children  
656 not in school) and discuss underlying reasons for their responses and opinions. The  
657 same image could be used to seek responses from a range of people at different  
658 locations and times. Information derived from the open conceptualisation stage could  
659 be useful to help guide this more specific conceptualisation.

660

661 Visual elicitation, particularly of participants talking about specific topics or issues  
662 (visual statements recorded from interviews or workshops) helped to encourage  
663 dialogue and hence elicit responses from other participants on the same topic. Such

664 techniques were useful in understanding differences in participants beliefs on a  
665 particular topic, and expanding on particular topics, as well as in knowledge sharing  
666 (e.g., between different ethnic groups). Thus they provided a basis for ‘social learning  
667 activity’ – through participants reflecting and reframing views on particular issues,  
668 refining their ideas and expressing underlying values and reasons for their behaviours  
669 and beliefs. Video of village or forest scenes were engaging to participants, but not  
670 usually very helpful in generating specific discussion and eliciting response. Some  
671 participants commented that moving images are too fast to focus specifically on some  
672 of these scenes. Thus, shorter clips (and photos) were better than long scenes.  
673 However, video clips of people taking part in specific work or other activity (e.g.,  
674 agricultural practices) was very helpful in stimulating dialogue on specific topics. The  
675 video statements and hypermedia DVDs were found to be valuable for focusing  
676 attention on particular topics – and particularly for verifying the researchers’  
677 perceptions of the village situation, and of participants’ perspectives

678

### 679 *5.6.3 Techniques for synthesis of thinking*

680

681 In promoting collective thinking, it was necessary for researchers and participants to  
682 summarise and synthesise the different perspectives within a group. This ‘synthesis of  
683 thinking’ occurred best after ‘open’ and ‘specific’ conceptualisation.

684

685 All the visual techniques provided (through their ‘products’) a record of deliberation  
686 processes and knowledge sharing at the research sites – although some were more  
687 valuable than others in this respect. Video footage of participants talking about  
688 particular topics was especially useful for the purpose of recapping on different views,

689 and was a valuable component in discourse at later stages, especially in developing  
690 hypermedia DVDs. The co-development of such DVDs required concerted effort by  
691 researcher and local people, to reach mutual understandings on perceptions of  
692 particular topics. Production (and showing) of these DVDs was helpful for  
693 encouraging participants to synthesise and summarise group understandings and  
694 opinions, and for refining ideas that they wanted to communicate to others. It became  
695 apparent that information derived from the ‘open’ and ‘specific conceptualisation’  
696 stages were very important in guiding the ‘synthesis of thinking’.

697

698 ‘Synthesis of thinking’ involves a slow conceptualisation process and needs continued  
699 re-visiting, and we found that ‘lack of time’ seriously limited this important stage .  
700 We found that facilitators were not necessarily needed for revisiting and completion  
701 of this (synthesis) stage – if community members had become adequately engaged  
702 and had access to resources. As mentioned earlier, some of the participants were keen  
703 to use the visual products derived from earlier processes, during later village  
704 meetings, to further discuss and refine perspectives and visions for the future.  
705 However, for the communication of these perspectives to other stakeholders,  
706 researchers will commonly be needed initially to act as intermediaries (or ‘boundary  
707 agents’; Merali, 2002) through delivering community messages to other non-  
708 community groups (and from other groups back to communities).

709

## 710 **5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND VISUAL TECHNIQUES**

711

712 Various limitations and requirements influenced the effectiveness of visual  
713 techniques. These were mainly associated with constraints of time and resource

714 availability, and the relative difficulty of use of some techniques, and the need for  
715 trusting relationships and hence for long term project duration.  
716

717 The creation of video and DVDs was the most time (and resource) consuming activity  
718 associated with the techniques used. The more participatory, digital techniques (e.g  
719 participant generated video) were usually more difficult to use than simpler, iterative  
720 ones (e.g., RPD), because participants were invariably busy with their farming and  
721 other livelihood activities. Few people had time to be heavily involved in (highly  
722 participatory) video production, and research funding was not adequate to pay  
723 participants for their time lost from work or other commitments. The considerable  
724 time spent editing and subtitling video clips reduced the time available for other  
725 aspects of fieldwork. Time could have been more effectively spent on research if an  
726 information technology (IT) or video technician had been available to manage editing  
727 and technical issues. Sometimes use of the more technology dependent techniques  
728 (e.g., video and DVDs) were limited by lack of access to electricity in the remote  
729 locations. The software available for editing video and producing DVDs can also  
730 markedly affect the time required.  
731

732 It became very clear early in the fieldwork that strong and trusting relationships  
733 between the participants and the facilitator (as well as the translators, and assistants)  
734 were crucial to ensuring a sound engagement process. Visual techniques were  
735 valuable in building these relationships, but the translator and facilitator's language  
736 skills, and engaging and facilitating skills – all had an impact on the effectiveness in  
737 promoting learning. Other requirements in facilitation were proficiency with visual  
738 techniques, sensitivity in selecting techniques and appropriate images, timing, and  
739 care in the way techniques were introduced in different cultural settings. It was



740 difficult to account for all these variables, but special effort was made to consider  
741 these factors when assessing the effectiveness of particular techniques.  
742

743 A difficulty noted in working with some of the visual techniques was that their use  
744 sometimes gave rise to subtle power differences, which could affect learning and  
745 communication processes. For instance, if certain techniques were introduced  
746 inappropriately in these remote communities, this could raise the 'perceived authority'  
747 of the researcher (or certain other participants) and thereby disempower some  
748 participants and cause barriers to learning. For example, this can occur where a video  
749 camera is used for immediate recording of participants, without proper levels of  
750 engagement and trust being built between researcher and participants prior to  
751 recording. In other cases, for example where strong engagement was built, the power  
752 balance seemed to shift in the opposite direction, that is participants felt they were the  
753 'experts' – in explaining aspects and interpretations of local images. This finding  
754 further highlights the need for practitioners to employ sensitivity and critical  
755 awareness in using these techniques in working in remote cross cultural situations.  
756

757 By the end of the 2 year contact with the village sites, quite strong connections with  
758 communities had developed and useful medium term results had emerged. For the  
759 study of long-term influences of using these visual techniques on NRM planning and  
760 community livelihoods, a more prolonged period of fieldwork would be required.  
761

762 In working with visual techniques, facilitators need to be highly mindful of ethical  
763 ramifications of the use of visual techniques, especially video – where peoples'  
764 statements can easily be taken out of context. Protocols need to be developed to  
765 clarify ways and circumstances in which images are to be used in a project. For

766 example, in the northern Australian context, recordings of individuals who later  
767 become deceased cannot then be used in photographic or video images (or at least a  
768 warning needs to be given to other Indigenous potential viewers). In the Vietnam field  
769 site, it was important to be cautious about showing controversial statements made by  
770 villagers to certain officials, without the permission of respondents

771

772 Commonly in NRM, there is a need to access local perspectives in instrumental ways  
773 and often on very specific topics that are not of high concern to local participants. We  
774 felt that this study was often compromised by the limitations and goals of the larger  
775 projects within which we were working. Without these limitations, the project could  
776 have been more participatory and open, rather than confined to seeking views on  
777 specific NRM topics.

778

## 779 **6. DISCUSSION: THE POTENTIAL FOR VISUAL TECHNIQUES**

780

781 The wide variation we found in the effectiveness of particular visual techniques for  
782 different purposes and in different contexts highlighted the need for flexibility in  
783 adapting visual tools to suit the situation and resources available. Although the  
784 primary researcher came to the project with sound skills in use of visual techniques  
785 and some group facilitation experience, considerable resourcefulness was needed at  
786 each new research site and cultural setting, to enable the potential of visual techniques  
787 to be harnessed.

788

789 One of the clear strengths of incorporating visual techniques into interviews and  
790 workshops was the way these encouraged participants to reflect and discuss in a less  
791 'restrained' and 'different' way, than did verbal techniques alone. Visual tools and

792 activities provided means for participants (including researchers) to conceptualise  
793 topics and issues in ways different to those familiar to them. The use of visual images  
794 often enabled people to remove themselves slightly from their reality, and hence to  
795 see the larger ‘picture’, or another perspective. This was particularly apparent in PGP,  
796 RPD, and video work. As explained by Van der Riet (2008:555), discussion around a  
797 visually created artefact is *‘less confrontational than direct questioning because it is*  
798 *the diagram or map, rather than the individual person which is “interviewed”*’.

799

800 The employment of visual techniques such as PGP and RPD as means for participants  
801 to express themselves in a *‘different’* manner, was useful in various ways. Firstly, it  
802 brought out perspectives that may not otherwise have been seen. Secondly visual  
803 expression had clear benefits for the researcher working in a cross cultural context and  
804 foreign language. Sometimes the techniques allowed participants to express views  
805 (visually), where verbal expression was taboo or threatening (e.g., topics on religion,  
806 spiritual values, politics). This was more apparent in Vietnam than in northern  
807 Australia. Additionally people whose voices are not commonly heard, had the  
808 opportunity to express their views in other ways.

809

810 Video and some other techniques aided in the research (and development) process, by  
811 providing a record (or ‘reliable memory’) of discussions and learning (see Appendix  
812 A). Such records can be very valuable for later promotion of discussion and reflection,  
813 and hence in generating feedback locally and externally. As Kitchener (1983)  
814 maintains, visual activities and processes allow participants to evaluate and monitor  
815 activities, and to check the suitability of various actions or solutions to issues.  
816 Additionally, visual records are very useful to researchers in allowing verification of  
817 their own perceptions of people’s views and the results of research. These visual

818 records can also play an important role in communicating local perspectives to other  
819 stakeholders in a way that can be emotive, real and impactful. The potential benefits  
820 and limitations of visual ‘products’ for this purpose are elaborated in greater detail in  
821 Petheram *et al.* b (unpublished)

822

823 Although most of the visual techniques were most effective when used in group  
824 contexts, it is important to stress that individual interviews played an integral role in  
825 deliberation processes. On some occasions participants did not want to argue about  
826 sensitive topics (in workshops), so tended to accept the wider group’s opinions. Janis  
827 (1982) refers to the concept of ‘groupthink’, where deep and rich thinking by  
828 individuals can be lost in group situations. Individual interviews provided a valuable  
829 way for facilitator/s to deal with such topics. However, visual techniques, such as the  
830 showing of video summaries and statements to individual participants (or smaller  
831 groups), were at times useful for broaching contentious topic areas. In some instances,  
832 participants felt more comfortable recording their perspectives on video, away from  
833 group pressure.

834

#### 835 *6.8.1 A model for facilitating learning in NRM*

836

837 Our analysis of data (and literature) led to the emergence of a simple model – to  
838 illustrate the types of conceptualisation and activities important in facilitation of  
839 learning for NRM project processes. Figure 3 shows the three types of thinking that  
840 can be encouraged among participants – arranged around the perimeter of three  
841 overlapping circles. These three inner circles represent a learning cycle, composed of  
842 the activities important for the functioning of the learning process – interaction,

843 discussion and reflection. For effective learning to occur, the process needs to involve  
844 all three activities, and participants also need to pass through the three types of  
845 conceptualisation – indicated by the ring of arrows. The model is intended to provide  
846 a guide for facilitators working within a specific project goal, as is often the case in  
847 NRM (e.g., seeking to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into climate change  
848 adaptation policy). The process should start from the number one arrow shown at the  
849 ‘open conceptualisation’ stage and move towards the ‘specific thinking stage’

850

851

852 Figure 3

853

854 Feedback is an essential part of all stages of the cycles in Figure 3, and particularly for  
855 ‘specific conceptualisation’ and ‘synthesis of thinking’. Visual products derived from  
856 the ‘open conceptualisation’ stage can be useful in guiding feedback for ‘specific  
857 conceptualisation’ and ‘synthesis of thinking’ – to draw participants’ attention to  
858 certain topics or themes. For example, photographs – derived from PGP – that  
859 represent particular themes (to participants) – can be shown to participants at the  
860 ‘specific conceptualisation’ stage, to focus attention on a particular issue, and also to  
861 gain responses from other participants on that topic. The visual feedback can be used  
862 in a variety of ways, and can lead towards clearer reflection of underlying values and  
863 beliefs and thus ‘deeper levels’ of learning; that is double and/or triple loop learning  
864 (described in Section 2.1). This process is in line with the claims of Leeuwis *et al.*  
865 (2002:459) that ‘*developing and organising feedback in visual forms can serve a*  
866 *range of purposes in social learning processes*’.

867

868 'Synthesis of thinking' is conceptualisation that is needed by a group working towards  
869 developing collective thinking on an issue – often with a view to communicating  
870 messages to other stakeholders. Stakeholder responses (to these messages) can also be  
871 taken back to communities/groups in the form of feedback (e.g., video summaries) to  
872 open up communication channels. It is important to keep in mind that this 'synthesis  
873 of thinking' is not static and is always changing. Additionally, as Roling (2002)  
874 suggests, it must be recognised that actors may be able to collaborate to reach  
875 'collective cognition', and their perspectives may overlap, but these are not shared  
876 completely and differences will remain.

877

878 In using the model in Figure 3, the stages in the outer cycle can be revisited in any  
879 order – but 'open conceptualisation' should always occur first, and more 'specific  
880 conceptualisation' later. It is also important to note that conflict and debate can play  
881 an important positive role in any of these stages if handled well. As Leeuwis (2000)  
882 emphasises, facilitators can strategically attempt to negotiate conflicts and sensitive  
883 issues among certain participants to reach beneficial and sustainable agreements.

884

885 The distinction between strategic and communicative rationality (see Section 2.2) will  
886 not always be clear in learning processes. Like Groot and Maarleveld (2000) we  
887 believe these types of rationality can be highly intertwined and often complementary.

888 We realised during this study that although our overall research intent was  
889 'communicative rationality', elements of 'strategic rationality' played a role,  
890 especially during initial specific conceptualisation and synthesis of thinking, when  
891 directed interaction can assist the process.

892

893 *6.8.2 Indirect benefits of visual techniques for research*

894

895 Our work with visual techniques revealed some unexpected features of both the  
896 techniques and the visual products. For example they provided invaluable means of  
897 recording and storing information from field sites, and also irreplaceable records of  
898 raw data that can be referred to at any future time. Photographic and video images  
899 were regularly used to refresh memories of participants' names and faces, language  
900 and places, and plants and practices relating to NRM. Video was particularly useful in  
901 allowing researcher/s to act reflexively, and to record verbal and visual field diaries of  
902 their ideas and observations of the day. These records often comprised part of the data  
903 analysed and were also used at later stages to verify recollections and interpretations,  
904 and to recall and understand possible researcher bias, and the evolution of ideas and  
905 theory.

906

907 **7. CONCLUSIONS**

908

909 Our study provided new insights into the effectiveness, complementarity and use of  
910 visual techniques in enhancing learning – in inquiry among remote Indigenous people  
911 on issues in the planning of local NRM. Visual techniques had strengths in engaging  
912 participants; encouraging unrestrained and lateral thinking; allowing opportunities for  
913 self-expression and reflection; and exposing the perspectives of other community  
914 members. We advise these techniques are best used with verbal approaches, and with  
915 awareness and reflexivity. In general, the techniques were valuable in helping to  
916 facilitate learning, although techniques varied in their utility for different purposes  
917 and in different cultural and physical circumstances.

918

919 Key requirements for facilitators using these tools are flexibility, openness and  
920 resourcefulness. As mentioned by Pauwels (2004: 50), practitioners utilising  
921 participatory visual techniques such as video (whether researchers, or separate  
922 facilitators), have to play a 'steering key role' in directing the process. This may be in  
923 contrast to other situations where outsider facilitators play less of an active role.  
924 Visual techniques can be invaluable to facilitators here, in helping participants focus  
925 on stages of learning and specific topics, and to provide activities that encourage  
926 deeper reflection and development of collective thinking. Such guidance needs to be  
927 done with sensitivity, reflexivity and awareness, and in a way that is inclusive of local  
928 people, their perspectives and their needs for sustainability. The model (Figure 3) was  
929 developed to strengthen awareness in facilitators of these requirements, and to  
930 emphasise the need to be cognisant of three important types of conceptualisation  
931 when using these techniques.

932

933 We found visual techniques useful in a wide range of development situations in  
934 remote regions. While modern IT-based equipment can be very powerful, we were  
935 able to adapt and use quite simple techniques (such as rich picture diagramming)  
936 valuably in the widest range of applications. It was found that modern video and  
937 photo techniques can be learned relatively easily today, but that they can have  
938 limitations in remote areas. Apart from their other benefits, video, diagrams, photo  
939 and other images were very valuable as a record of all research activities, and these  
940 media were a strong benefit in data collection and analysis in remote field locations.

941

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949

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Appendix A Summary of relative effectiveness of main visual techniques in enhancing learning and communication.<sup>4</sup>

VV = very effective in Vietnam, v = moderately effective.

AA = very effective at Australia, a = moderately effective

[-] = not effective / or not used (see Table 1) at a site

Note: Some techniques were used more frequently than others at different sites, so Table 1 should be referred to in conjunction with this table.

	RPD	Photo elicitation	PGP	Video statements	Video /photo summaries	Hypermedia DVD
<b>1) ENGAGING AND SCOPING</b>						
<b>a) Enhancing researcher engagement</b>						
Help build rapport & trust	vAA	va	VVAA	va	VVa	VVAA
Help break language and cultural barriers	vAA	va	VVa	VVa	VVa	VVAA
Help communicate research & concepts	–	VVAA	–	–	va	va
Engage & interest participants	vAA	va	va	VVAA	VVAA	VVAA
Allow a way to study with participants	vAA	va	VVAA	VVa	va	vAA
<b>b) Strengthening community spirit and capacity building</b>						
Foster optimism about community and future	va	va		va	VVa	va
Build confidence & empowerment	vAA	–	VVAA	VVAA	va	VVAA
Provide exposure and skills in technology	–	–	va	VVa	va	VVAA
<b>c) Improving researcher and participant understanding of local issues</b>						
Elicit responses and discussion	vAA	VVAA	VVAA	VVa	VVa	VVAA
Provide insight into underlying core values	VVAA	va	VVAA	va	–	va

<sup>4</sup> Although [the table in Appendix A](#) provides an overall indication of the relative merits of techniques in each country for many purposes; the pros and cons of each technique were not always consistent.

Deleted: Table 3

Encourage open & different thinking of issues	VVAA	va	VVAA	–	va	va
Provide insight into participant interactions, power differentials, representation	VVAA	va	va	VVAA	VVAA	va
<b>2) FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC NRM TOPICS</b>						
<b>d) Facilitating group learning cycle (enhancing feedback, discussion, interaction and reflection)</b>						
Encourage discussion	vAA	VVa	va	VVAA	VVa	VVAA
Encourage interaction	vAA	va	va	VVa	va	va
Encourage reflection	vAA	VVa	VVAA	VVAA	VVa	VVAA
Encourage discussion/reflection on underlying values/norms/ behaviours	VVAA	VA	VVAA	VVAA	VA	VA
Provide voice to those often unrepresented	vAA		VVAA	VVAA	VA	VA
Focus attention on topic areas	VVAA	VVAA		VVa	VA	VVAA
Provide memory of social learning process	vAA		va	VVa	VA	VVAA
Provide stimulus or feedback	vAA	va	vAA	VVAA	VVAA	VVAA
Promote visualisation of scenarios	VVAA	va	–	–	–	–
Verify interpretation of data (by researcher)	–	va	–	VVa	VVAA	VVAA
<b>3) NEGOTIATING AND COLLABORATING (FOR COMMUNICATION)</b>						
<b>e) Enhancing communication between community / other stakeholders</b>						
Communicate perspectives within community	vAA	VA	VA	VVAA	va	VVAA
Communicate perspectives to non community	vAA	–	VA	VVAA	va	VVAA
<b>f) Helping to develop a collective perspective</b>						
Allow deep and critical thinking and visioning together	vAA	–	–	va	va	VVAA
Summarise & revise collective perspectives	va	–	–	VVa	VVa	vAA
<b>g) Providing an avenue to communicate to other stakeholders</b>						
Create awareness about local perspectives and issues among external stakeholders	AA	–	va	va	VVa	VVAA

## List of Figures

*Figure 1. A man in Vietnam who expressed no interest in forest (or nature) during an in-depth verbal interview, chose photos only of vegetation when later involved in participant generated photography. The images were plants with cultural significance to him and his family. This photograph is in front of a reforested area that he often visits 'because it is peaceful'.*

*Figure 2. A woman in northern Australia using diagramming and sculpting to explain her view that 'Government [represented by elongated green play -doh] should come to the 'root' level to meet and discuss [climate change adaptation issues] with the community [yellow play doh circles]' – to enable future cooperation.*

*Figure 3. Model of key components (conceptualisation and activities) in facilitating deliberation for learning processes in NRM.*