Victorian & Murray Valley
Winegrape Growers' Council Inc

Adult Learning in Rural Extension



FINAL REPORT to

GRAPE AND WINE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Project Number: **VMW 02/01**

Principal Investigator: **Susan Byrne**

Organisation: **Victorian & Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Council**

Date: **16/10/2003**

Executive Summary

The Industry Development Officer for the Murray Valley received funding to travel to the University of Queensland to complete the subject *Adult Learning in Rural Extension.* The purpose was for the IDO to learn the theories on adult learning. Since completing the subject the IDO has incorporated ideas and theories from her studies into local extension projects.

Background

The Industry Development Officer for the Murray Valley has completed *Adult Learning in Rural Extension* delivered by the University of Queensland. The course covered theories on action learning cycles, learning styles and general rules of thumb for creating an environment conducive to adult learning. She has used these theories to design a workshop for developing the region's winegrape research and development (R & D) priorities. And to develop reference groups around each R & D priority.

Objectives

1. To complete the first subject in the Graduate Diploma of Rural Systems Management, Adult Learning in Rural Extension, at the University of Queensland at the Gatton Campus.

2. To learn theories on adult learning

3. To design learning activities for two extension activities that have received funding for 2003: Managing for Colour and Preventing Delayed Ripening.

Objective three was changed; a written project was due on June 6th 2003, and the two extension projects outline in objective three where to start in July 2003. The new objective was:

- To develop a workshop for ascertaining regional research and extension priorities; following this acquire reference groups around each R & D priority.

Method/Results/Conclusion

See written project (appendix one)

Budget Reconciliation

Budget	**Funding required from GWRDC**		**Actual Expenditure**
Local fares	900		900
Hire car/taxi	200		200
Total	1100		
Add 10% GST	110		110
Total funds requested from GWRDC	1210	**Total Expended**	1210
		Remitted to GWRDC	0

Learning project report cover sheet

Participants should use the following cover sheet when submitting their assignment.

Name	Susan Byrne
Phone	(03) 50213911 work (03) 50221474
Course name	Adult learning in rural extension
Course code	CERD7001
Commencement date	24/2/2003
Location	Gatton campus
Trainer/s	Richard Fell
Report title	Getting serious about the extension needs of winegrape growers.
Report Summary	I used adult learning principles to run a workshop to ascertain winegrape grower's research and extension needs. I then developed a process for growers to go through a learning cycle.

Statement of original authorship

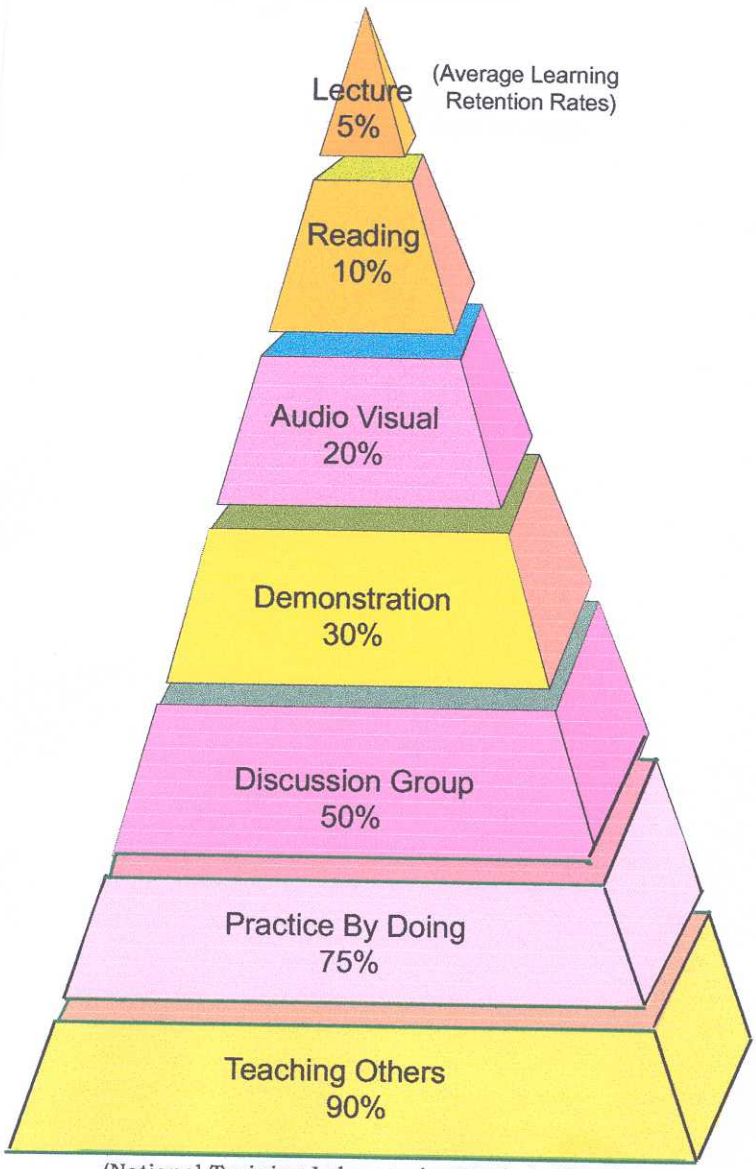
I herby state that the work contained in this assignment has not previously been submitted for assessment, either in whole or in part, by either myself or any other student at either the University of Queensland or at any other tertiary institution except where explicitly acknowledged. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the assignment contains no material which has been previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made. I make this Statement in full knowledge of and understanding that, should it found to be false, I will be subject to disciplinary action under Statute No. 13 and the Examination Rules of The University of Queensland.

Extension in the Winegrape Industry

As the Winegrape Industry Development Officer my primary role is to develop extension projects. It is important that the projects reflect growers needs. But how do I find out what grower needs are? When I began the job my brief was to send out a survey to growers to determine extension needs and from this survey develop extension projects. The survey asked growers to tick boxes with headings such as; powdery mildew, quality, rootstocks etc. The problem with the survey was it did not give enough detail, for example if everybody ticked powdery mildew I was still not aware of what the problem was. This coarse method of ascertaining growers needs did not reflect adult learning principles. One of Malouf's (1994) fundamental beliefs for adult learning is that, *Learners must participate actively in the learning process*, the procedure I was using did not encompass this concept.

Before undertaking the subject 'Adult Learning in Rural Extension', I had often took the much travelled path of organising seminars for 'teaching' growers. The seminars involve focusing on a topic, inviting experts to speak and growers listening. This type of learning experience is modelled on pedagogy where the learner is a passive recipient and a dependent personality (Burns 1995). Upon reflection I query the amount of 'learning' that was actually taking place during these seminars. A Learning Pyramid presented at the first residential supports my concern that lecture style learning activities are not very effective.

Learning Pyramid



(National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine)

Riverlink

I am not the only person working to ascertain grower's extension needs. In Mildura there is an organisation known as Riverlink, whose main function is to bring together scientists and industry to collaborate on research and extension (R&D) projects. Every year it organises a one day workshop aimed at determining local winegrape R & D needs. Scientists, industry people and growers are invited to attend. The workshop facilitator begins the day by inviting participants to nominate R&D issues for the region. Once a dozen or so issues are up on the board, the group are asked to examine the issues to decide if there is any duplication and to ask for any needed clarification. Once this is completed participants elect to attend a discussion group on one of the issues. The function of the discussion groups is to tease out the objectives of the issue, once this is completed the ideas generated from the discussion group are communicated back to the rest of the workshop participants. At the end of the day growers and industry people vote on the importance of the R&D issues. Issues that are rated highly are taken up by scientists and extension people and made into projects.

I have attended two of these workshops and at each workshop I am asked by the organisers why growers do not attend when the outcomes are directly affecting them and they pay levy money to fund the projects. I believe the workshop is not using important adult learning principles, which results in grower's reluctance to attend. If I go through each of the learning laws developed by Malouf (1994) I can see that at the Riverlink workshop some are being addressed while others are not.

Laws of Learning	Being meet at the Riverlink workshop?
Learners must feel a need to learn	To attend the Riverlink workshop is to acknowledge that there are R&D issues that participants feel they need to 'learn' more about.
The learning environment must be mentally and socially safe.	The need for learners to feel "mentally and socially safe" in their learning environment does not occur in the workshop. Growers are in the workshop with scientists and people who buy their product (winery liaison officers). It is not in the growers interest to look "dumb' on the day in front of people who buy their fruit. I also believe growers are self-conscious in front of scientists who often have a higher level of education than the growers. This leads to the belief that there are 'experts' in the workshop, which stifles openness in the discussion groups.
Learners must set their own learning goals	All participants were given a opportunity to voice their learning needs at the start of the workshop.
Learners must participate actively in the learning process	On the day of the workshop all stakeholders were given the opportunity to actively participate, however long term the scientists and extension people involved in 'doing' the projects would be actively involved while growers would be merely spectators.
Learning must build on, and use, the learner's experience	At the workshop the scientists were able to provide valuable input from their research experience and journal reading, however I felt the grower's experience was not taken seriously as they often provided anecdotal experiences that were not scientifically derived and had a perceived lower value of worth.

Learners must see that their learning has been successful	The objective of the workshop is to generate ideas and discussion. In terms of this objective the workshop is successful. However some growers may feel dissatisfied with their level of contribution. Long term the scientists and extension people involved in 'doing' the projects would be actively involved in seeing that their learning has been successful. However other stakeholders i.e. the growers are merely spectators (and not learners) in the project, reading about the successes in industry magazines.
Learners must involve effective two-way communication	I feel that the language the different groups of people at the workshop used worked to isolate the growers. For example the scientists often use sophisticated language and I observed growers having difficulty in explaining their ideas to the scientist.

Development of My Workshop

I decided I had to act to ensure grower input into the process developed by Riverlink, (this was before doing the adult learning course). Last year I organised a meeting with 12 representative growers from the Mildura region. I stood in front of the growers and said 'right what are the issues for this region'. The problems with the workshop were:

- I am a strong activitst, which I identified during the five day residential, this meant when I ran the workshop I ran it according to my learning style, therefore I allowed no time for reflection, planning or observation. (Honey & Mumford 1986)
- After the growers left I was left with one line statements in which I had to develop projects from, I believe the projects I developed from this workshop did not really reflect what growers wanted.

This time I have I decided to employ adult learning principles in the workshop ensuring growers who participate 'learn'. I decided to use the activity "Charting Unknowns", I like this activity as it is simple yet I believe effective.

ITINERARY FOR THE WORKSHOP

Introduction
In this activity I will introduce myself and outline the what we will be doing for the day. Developing ideas for research and extension projects. I will tell participants where the toilets are and what time morning tea and lunch will be.

Warm up exercise
This may sound like a lame ice breaker however I don't want to do an activity that is a bit kooky as this will automatically turn the growers off. I will simply be asking growers to introduce themselves and comment on this year's harvest.

Adult Learning
I will explain to the growers the adult learning course I am taking part in. I will briefly explain the reason I am doing the course is to increase my awareness of how adults learn and how I can facilitate that learning. To gain an understanding of adult education I will ask everybody to partake in The Learning Styles questionnaire (Honey & Mumford 1986). The reason for doing this is that we need to work as a group and it helps if participants understand their preferred learning style(s) and the people who they are working with.

After the group has completed the questionnaire I will go through each of the descriptions for each learning style.

Step One
List 5 key questions/issues that if answered/addressed would help you to improve the profitability and sustainability of your vineyard.

Do this silently and without consulting people around you.

Give everyone 10 minutes to complete this

Step Two
Ask each participant to offer their ideas in a round robin fashion for recording on the board. These will be listed one from each person until everyone has all their ideas on the board. Ones that are similar will only go up once. Clarification of ideas will occur once all ideas are listed.

This will take 40 minutes to complete.

Step Three
The questions will be sorted into the appropriate GWRDC# programs.

15 minutes to complete

Break for 20 minutes

Step Four
Each participant is given 4 pink dots, they need to put a dot beside the dot point they feel

is high priority, they are not allowed to put more than one dot point for each issue/question.

Once this is completed the top four topics are pulled out from the rest.

20 minutes to complete.

Step Five
The participants are broken up into 4 groups, each group is given one of the question/issues from the voting process. The growers need to work together to answer the following questions.
-What specific outcome(s) do they want?
-Why is it needed (value to growers and industry)?
-How is it likely to be used?

Half an hour to complete

Step Six
The information from step five is written on transparent overheads. These are put up and read out. Discussion from participants in other groups is invited, however discussion is limited to 15 minutes for each issue/question.

One hour

Workshop Finished

Grape and Wine Research and Development Committee, who are the main funding body for the winegrape industry.

I changed the original format of 'Charting Unknowns' to allow for more adult learning activities. For example I add in a warm up exercise for the purpose of creating a 'safe learning environment' (Stanfield 1997). I also added in the 'Learning

styles' questionnaire as I believed this would help the growers to understand how different members of the group think and thus contribute to the workshop, which would ultimately create a more cohesive working group. I also asked that growers vote for the top four issues/questions, the reason I did this was I believe for action to occur we needed to come down to a manageable number of projects. Finally I did not sort the issues into the categories of: research, extension or development, the reason being that I felt some of the issues/questions that growers have come up with in the past have often overlapped into these three areas.

Once the workshop is completed the growers will be asked to elect themselves onto reference groups for one of the four issue/questions that were raised at the workshop. The aim of the reference groups is to discuss and plan how we will approach the issue/question(s).

Once a plan is created we will look to start acting, this may involve applying for funding, asking a specialist to come and answer questions or find out some more information. The reference group will continue to meet and reflect on actions and plans.

The ultimate learning experience will be if the growers adopt new ideas or technology from this process. Also valuable would be rejection of the ideas/technology generated from this process, if it was shown to be based on sounding understanding (learning) of the idea/technology.

The Learning Cycle

The whole process from the initial workshop to the final adoption/rejection of the idea/technology follows an adaptation of the Kolbs learning cycle (Kolb 1984) (see figure one).

When putting together the workshop I have actively used Knolb's learning cycle and I have found that I have developed a spiral (see figure one). The spiral has micro, macro and mega processes occurring as described by Richard Fell (1996). Within the workshop, which I have identified as Reflection, there is a micro process occurring; growers are reflecting on farming issues, making conclusions through discussions, planning how they would like the issue to be addressed using the 'Charting unknown' activity. The macro process is the project ideas moving from the workshop to being addressed in the reference groups. The mega process is the final adoption of the project ideas which again involves reflection, observation and action.

I think for the spiral learning cycle to work it relies on the motivation of the growers. Growers are pressed for time and choose to partake in learning activities if they 'need' to make some change on their property. A model developed by Phil Race (1994) (see figure two) uses the 'need' of the participant as the centre of an adults learning process, the need ripples out to doing, digesting and feedback. Need is at the heart and provides the energy for the ripple to spread. The Feedback is on the outside as it is of external origin; doing and digesting are an overlapping process that are continuously influenced both by internally generated needing/wanting and by external feedback.

Seven Principles of Adult Learning

I would like to reflect the workshop with the growers and examine if it complied with the seven principles of adult learning developed by Richard Fell (1986).

Build on local experience, use the knowledge within the group/individual

When growers moved around the circle with their ideas, there was a lot of discussion. I noticed during this time growers used their experiences to illustrate a point. For example growers discussed the role tannin played in winegrape quality. One grower talked about attending a course on the topic and shared what he had learnt. Another grower discussed his experience of tasting skins and seeds and relating this each year to wine maker's comments on the quality of his fruit. A third grower explained his experience of making wine with his own fruit and the different tannins he tasted with each season. Using each others experiences the group was able to agree tannins played a role in winegrape quality and decided they wanted to explore this further. The method of using grower's own experience to direct learning aligns closely with ideas in Lewinian's Model of learning:

'Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning, giving life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process." (Kolb 1984)

Using their individual experiences the growers where able to build a bigger picture on the issue being discussed. This helped the growers learn individually and focus the group on where they should go with future learning, i.e. setting learning goals. Thus each participant's learning benefited from being in a group situation.

Making the learning environment comfortable and encouraging

To make the environment comfortable and conducive to learning there needs to be a sense of trust within the group, allowing growers to speak freely with out fear of ridicule, contempt or dismissal. I believe this was achieved in the workshop due to a number of activities. The ice breaker involved growers introducing themselves and providing some personal information about themselves, though it was a fairly subdued activity I did not want to begin with a confrontational activity, that would make growers feel uncomfortable.

The fact all participants were growers meant they were on an equal footing – nobody was an authority figure or an expert on a topic.

If I was to do this process again I would outline the days itinerary, as some growers were pragmatist, thus these growers would have felt more comfortable knowing where the day was heading.

It is difficult not to be hurried when sticking to an agenda and knowing you have to finish at 3pm. However I feel if you rush through an agenda to be on time at the expense of learning then it is not worth being there. When the growers were involved in a lot of discussion during a time when I had not planned discussion I remember thinking to myself, "stop Susan and listen to what is happening, they are thrashing out ideas, this is real learning".

Ensure the learning activity meets the needs and relates to the problems of the client group.
I think the whole design of the workshop worked to fulfill this principle. The growers were put into a situation in which they were forced (in a non-confronting way) to express their learning needs. Fell (1997) mentions the importance of having a practical pay off, if the reference groups are able to move through a complete learning cycle (see figure one) then growers will end up either rejecting or adopting an idea or technology.

As in Race's ripple model (1994) the 'need' has to be continually present as it will provide the energy for the reference groups to continue in the learning cycle.

Involve the audience in planning their own learning experience.
This is a vital step for 'learning' as it ensures the learning 'needs' of the growers are being meet and it fosters ownership of learning. In my learning cycle (see figure one) we can see I have provided the initial step for growers' learning; the workshop. The workshop acts as a brainstorming session to get the growers started. The formation of the reference groups will provide the growers the opportunity to actively plan how they will address the issues/questions that were raised from the workshop.

Have activities that involve, that are stimulating and are participatory.
The learning style questionnaire is a good activity as growers are actively involved in answering questions. Observations I made at the workshop with the growers and at the first day residential, showed by example, that people find activities where they learn about themselves interesting and stimulating.

When growers discussed their ideas/questions this was a participatory actively. This was achieved by ensuring all group members were given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. For example at the workshop there were two particular growers who did not get involved in the discussions I always asked them before we moved onto another topic if they had any input.

Allow time for people to reflect on what they are learning, take difficult subjects slowly and always be open to questioning.
There where two opportunities for reflection built into the workshop. The first was when growers were asked to think for ten minutes, without consulting anyone, on

ideas and issues that affected their farm. The second time was when they voted on the issues and questions. I had to be conscious of not talking during these reflection times, being a strong activist reflection does not come easy to me. Observations from the two reflection times illustrated to me how natural and comfortable it is for other people.

Build group and individual confidence by letting them know they are right, build a confidence that they are making progress towards their learning goals.
The aim of the workshop was to develop learning goals for the growers. During the workshop all individual's ideas were put on a white board, I believe this helped participants to feel confident in their contribution to the workshop.

Group confidence was achieved through completing the objective of the workshop; *Develop local winegrape research and extension priorities.*

Members of the reference groups will meet with the aim of progressing towards their learning goals. It will be my role to keep a record of achievements and progress of the group, thus the reference group will act as a feedback mechanism between observation and action. (Kolb 1984)

Reflections on the Workshop:
The learning style questionnaire activity got very strange looks at first and I could see the reluctance of the group. I think the group may have thought this was a time wasting activity, even though I had told them the relevance of the activity. However the growers really got into the activity once they worked out what sort of learning style they had. I think most people like activities where they learn more about themselves.

The next activity involved growers writing down their thoughts on issues affecting the local winegrape industry. The growers came up with great issues for the board and their issues showed their thoughtfulness. We went once around the table which took an hour and a half, the reason being the amount of time the growers took discussing each issue even though I had asked for no clarification until all issues were on the board. At first I tried to stop this however I could see that there was good discussion occurring and cross pollination of ideas. I think from this I learnt that even though you have an itinerary for the day you need to be flexible, to ensure you are catering for the groups learning needs and not for my own set of objectives for the day.

The group did at times get bogged down with agri-political issues, i.e. prices over fruit.

There was one growers who was very talkative and at times talked over people and took up too much air space. At the break I spoke to this growers and pointed out that he had very valuable input into the group and how much I appreciated it, however it was important we allowed all members to participate. He accepted what I said and after the break allowed other growers more time to speak their mind before discussing his ideas.

One problem I had with myself is that I am not a very good listener, it is a skill I need to become better at. I have a tendency to sometimes totally tune out for a minute or two, which is not very helpful when you are facilitating a group. Also there was one

grower I found difficult to understand what his ideas were. He would describe his ideas in a very long-winded way and when I went to write it up on the board, he would get frustrated with me as I was not writing what he wanted. I think you need practice at group facilitation.

I notice during the break that secondary learning was happening with growers discussing how this years crop went and what management they applied.

What I would do differently next time in the workshop:
I wish I had undertaken the 'expectations' activity at the start of the workshop, as this would have been good to use as an evaluation process.

Next time I would appoint a scribe at the workshop as it was very difficult to follow the thread of conversation and write on the board at the same time.

How did I feel about the workshop:
At first I felt very nervous about the workshop, it was important that the growers saw this as being useful and meaningful or else we would not be able to take the next step in the learning cycle.

At the end of the day I felt a sense of satisfaction as I believe the day was successful.

What I have learnt about myself as a learner:
I am an activist however I need to learn to observe and reflect. I think this quote eloquently explains to me why I need to make sure I take the time and effort to integrate observation and reflection into my learning:

*"It is through the integration of these opposing but symbiotically related processes that sophisticated, mature purpose develops from blind impulse"(*Kolb 1984)

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FIGURE ONE

Action Learning Cycle - with a few modifications

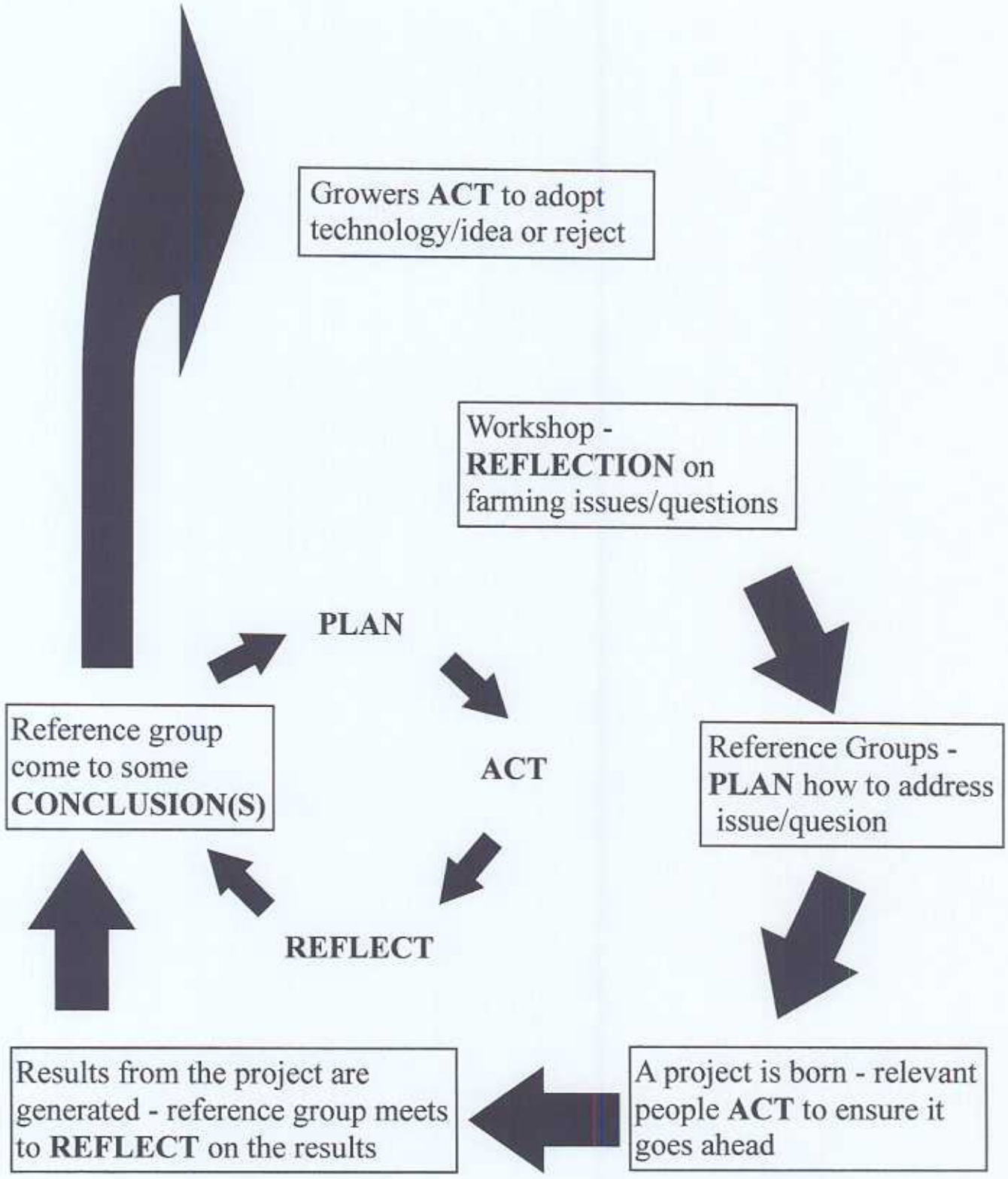


FIGURE TWO

RACE'S 'RIPPLES' MODEL OF LEARNING

