



# SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Advancing the UN  
Sustainable Development Goals

Scale and Sustainability:  
Two Sides of the Same Coin

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## About The Center for Learning in Practice

### **OUR VISION**

Every organization and every individual who works for global good will have access to high-value, high-impact, sustainably designed learning.

### **OUR MISSION**

To improve professional learning and knowledge sharing in and across civil society organizations through Sustainable Learning programming, research, and services.

### **OUR GOALS**

To be a leader in the design of professional learning practice and policy, that measurably improves performance, outcomes, and impact

To establish a system of programming and certification for individual and organizational Sustainable Learning -knowledge, skills, and application

To facilitate productive relationships between practice and policy actors that result in sustainable environments for learning and knowledge sharing

### **OUR OBJECTIVES**

We will support professional learning and knowledge exchange design, implementation, and assessment that improves performance, outcomes, and impact

We will share and generate evidence-based knowledge about effective sustainable learning practice and policy

We will build productive relationships between practice and policy actors that result in sustainable environments for learning and knowledge sharing

## Introduction

In September 2015, world leaders attended a special summit at the United Nations in New York to adopt Agenda 2030, including the Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs). The SDGs provide a holistic framework, applicable to all countries, aiming to eradicate poverty and deprivation, but also to grow economies, to protect the environment, and to promote peace and good governance. In this context, sustainability is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Within each of the 17 goals and across them there is the tacit assumption that knowledge will be generated and shared.



With the Sustainable Learning Framework, The Center for Learning Practice hopes to make a valuable contribution to an emerging body of work on effective knowledge-sharing strategies and professional development, most immediately for educators of refugees around the world. We join others who are pioneering new approaches to deeper learning.

Sustainability, as understood in this contemporary context, requires the weaving and integration of various learning traditions (including individual, organizational, systems, social and blended learning). Sustainable learning harnesses the digital speed of knowledge creation and the subsequent acceleration of learning cycles; it leverages the proliferation and free flow of curated content that allow learning and knowledge-sharing to occur anywhere and anytime. Most crucially, sustainable pedagogy is learning at the point of need. It thrives on the use of personal *reflection* combined with reflective *communities of practice* that allow multiple teachers to reflect with one another. The goal of our work to date has been to create a rapid method of preparation for teachers of refugees that includes mechanisms for teacher support, offers a competency-based structure, generates verified best practices, and is designed to build a professional, sustainable community of teachers of refugees.

## About the Sustainable Learning Framework

The Framework is grounded in established learning and change models, drawing on elements which have been empirically proven to improve outcomes. Thus, its elements are not new. What *is* new is the weaving and integration of these proven strategies into a new fabric, one that might be reliably used to accomplish critical objectives at scale.

As Wong et al. have noted,

***We in the global development community ... have viable solutions. We have set up pilot projects and done field experiments. We have collected the data. And we've created an industry of frugal innovation. But we have not done nearly as good a job at extending the reach of those innovative solutions as far as possible; we have failed, generally, to bring solutions to scale.***

This is precisely why we need a sustainable learning framework. Sustainable Learning enables practitioners to develop effective practice through collaborative reflection on their experience, and, thereby, to develop actionable data – data that enables them to see and if needed course-correct in real time, to local conditions.



To scale up innovative practices,

***implementers must replicate only those aspects of a proven solution that others can replicate in different settings—the efficiency core. But importantly, the core of the solution must adapt and undergo minor modifications to fit local contexts well enough so that people will actually use it. It is not about custom design, but about making a replicable intervention... suitable for a given context.***

(Wong, Zlotkin, Ho & Perumal, “Replicating Parts, not the Whole, to Scale,” Stanford Social Innovation Review, Aug. 7, 2014)

The Sustainable Learning Framework enables those who use it to identify and implement the “efficiency core” of their target intervention – be it for good health, quality education or any other goal – and to do so through a process of collaborative, evidence-based learning.

# Principles of the Sustainable Learning Framework

*The Framework is informed by three essential guiding principles:*

## **Principle 1: Sustainability and Scale Are Two Sides of the Same Coin**

Scaling has historically been a preoccupation of innovators and funders, and is generally understood to include the following objectives:

- Copying a program that research has shown to be effective
- Spreading an idea among individuals or organizations within a certain area or system (geographic, organizational, professional)
- Increasing the number of people or places that use or apply a technology, practice, or approach
- Ensuring that ideas expressed as policy are transformed into behavior throughout a place or jurisdiction (e.g., city, county, state, region, country).

We consider these four definitions of scaling as outcomes, the “what” of spreading effective practice. Yet “how” to accomplish these has been frustratingly elusive. We believe that Sustainable Learning is the actionable “how,” and the necessary other side of scaling. Through Sustainable Learning, scaling is reimagined, to be the process of mixing and remixing elements of effective practice to apply in a wholly unique context, or, indeed, to create entirely new practice.



## **Principle 2: Practice Mastery Matters Most**

There is an abundance of good content within and for all of the sustainable development goals. Well-researched standards, guides, reports and data are widely available and in the hands of many who need them. People have access to and are consuming more content than at any other historical moment. And yet, helping people hone the necessary skills and apply new knowledge remains the holy grail of scale.

Facilitating the development of practice mastery is complex, and often frustrating, particularly in crisis contexts, but it is only practice mastery – as opposed to content knowledge alone – that will have a real and lasting impact.

Sustainable Learning contributes to practice mastery by:

- **Creating a rapid feedback loop between knowledge and practice**
- **Fostering learning at the individual and systems level**
- **Codifying practitioner experience, making tacit knowledge explicit, and generating content in the process, in real time**

### **Principle 3:**

## **Deep Learning – Reflection on Practice and on Actionable Data – is essential to informed action**

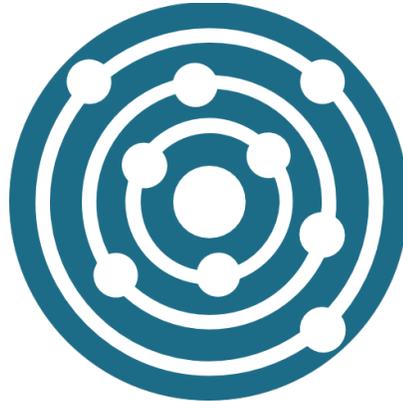
“Deeper” learning, according to the Hewlett Foundation, is

***a set of six interrelated competencies: mastering rigorous academic content, learning how to think critically and solve problems, working collaboratively, communicating effectively, directing one’s own learning, and developing an academic mindset – a belief in one’s ability to grow.***

Within the context of the Sustainable Learning Framework, Deep Learning embraces these competencies, and broadens the definition to include practice – the application of one’s professional skill and knowledge to one’s work, and the adherence to a set of professional principles and ethics. In this broadened definition, we look at the *practices* of those providing the learning, and we use new digital tools to “see” that practice. The data generated, and these new digital tools of analysis can be used to reveal *patterns* of practice or “value patterns.” Like Copernicus, we can discover the power of deeply observed patterns, and view a universe of connections that have always been there but not discoverable to the naked eye.



## Features of the Sustainable Learning Framework



Sustainable Learning is composed of *Processes*, *Building Blocks*, and *Discovery*. The Processes are called *Learning Loops*; they are the generators of learning and knowledge-sharing. They are dynamic and iterative. The Building Blocks form the foundation of the learning environment and are the design elements used to create an orderly, stable, and accessible environment. Discovery is the leveraging of digital affordances to do and see things that would otherwise be impossible.



**Processes - *Sustainable Learning Loops*** drive activities that serve to keep the learning environment viable and adaptive. They are the feedback system of Sustainable Learning and involve the distinct stages of a feedback loop.

## There are 4 interconnected *Learning Loops* in Sustainable Learning:

**Reflective Practice** – In Reflective Practice, participants purposefully reflect – independently and as a community – through observing, recording, assessing, and receiving feedback on their work. Typically, the practitioner may be trying to solve a problem, make a decision, or address a question that is facing them in real time. Reflective Practice facilitates insight and, hence, desired changes in behavior.

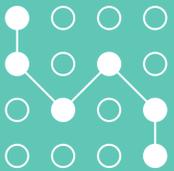
**Communities that Produce Value** – Practitioners, using a shared and defined professional language, have access to connection, knowledge, resources, support, and peer learning. In Communities that Produce Value, engagement is structured, facilitated, and assessed.

**Content Creation and Curation** – Practitioners create, discover, gather, and present digital content relevant to specific subject matter or practice methods. Content is continuously refined and adapted as a consequence of use in real-life situations.

**Data for Practice Improvement** – The designer starts with the end in mind and ensures that evidence of progress, improvement, and application are captured, analyzed, and shared and used for further learning.



**Building Blocks** are the Design Elements necessary to create productive learning spaces. An effective instructional design needs to be Participant-Centered, Context-Responsive, and Experience Structured and help participants improve their performance through reflection, peer-to-peer activities, and scaffolded learning.



**Discovery** is the application of new algorithms that enhance the speed, scale, depth, distance, and complexity of work. Discovery leverages Digital Affordances, opportunities created by working online that amplify and enhance all aspects of the Sustainable Learning Framework. Digital Affordances facilitate our ability to seek, share, and connect learning; to recognize progress and practice mastery; and to identify trends and insights. In the Sustainable Learning Framework, Digital Affordances include Social Structures (social tools for networking, content sharing, crowdsourcing, and curating), Dashboards, and Value Patterns.

# The Sustainable Learning Framework Applied

## The Refugee Educator Academy

The Refugee Educator Academy is our first deliberate application of the Sustainable Learning Framework. Using it we have been able to launch a response to the global crisis in preparing refugee educators in an intensely accelerated and inclusive way. Within an 18-month time span we have identified and engaged thought leaders and master practitioners around the world to develop an integrated system of courses, activities, certifications and practice communities focused on serving refugee educators. We have designed online tools and templates that enable learning designers to easily create their own activities using the Sustainable Learning Framework.

### We help Refugee Educators:

- Migrate offline training online
- Build capacity to scale learning and share knowledge
- Provide relevant and timely learning opportunities
- Embed learning in practice, supporting adult learners in their current work environments and through social and contextualized learning
- Identify key analytics
- Develop and apply learning assessments
- Foster community and collaboration among refugee educators and service providers worldwide



## Looking Forward: Sustainable Learning for Workforce Development at Scale

The Center for Learning in Practice offers the Sustainable Learning Framework, an evidence-informed model, to help achieve the larger aspirations of “learning for global good” – improved outcomes for learners in all contexts, and investments by organizations that result in measurable, sustainable impact.

