Building Capacity for Social Learning in Environmental Management

Margaret J Kilvington

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This thesis focuses on the increasingly recognised problem of how to build capacity for social learning into environmental management initiatives that address complex multi-stakeholder issues. It examines the proposition that participatory and development (P & D) forms of evaluation, when integrated into environmental management initiatives, can be a useful vehicle for building this capacity. In doing so it addresses three specific challenges.

The first concerns the competing definitions and purposes of the concept of social learning in the current academic and practice literature. Social learning has emerged as an important concept in the discourse around addressing complex environmental management issues. However, the multiple venues in which social learning appears have led to divergence in terminology, and difficulties for the theoretical and practical development of the concept. The thesis responds to this with an analysis of literature and a synthesis of ideas into a proposed framework for translating this normative concept into practice. This involves four interlinked areas for focusing awareness and developing practice in complex problen-solving situations:

1. How to manage group participation and interaction
2. How to work with and improve the social and institutional conditions for complex problem solving
3. How to improve the learning of individuals, groups and organisations
4. How to enable systems thinking and the integration of different information

The literature also reveals more has been written about the meaning of social learning, or whether social learning has occurred in any given situation, than about the ‘how to’ of social learning, suggesting the relationship between practice and theory is incoherent. While new approaches in evaluation offer mechanisms by which the ideas of social learning can become a basis for practice, the second challenge addressed in this thesis is an absence of established connection between social learning and evaluation. The thesis responds to this with an examination of the theoretical and practice literature on P & D evaluation and a proposed match with specific social learning capacity development needs of environmental
initiatives. This involves four arenas in which (P & D) evaluation approaches and social learning can intersect:

1. Scoping the environmental-management-problem situation
2. Supporting the capacity to enquire and problem solve
3. Supporting the management of programmes or interventions in the problem situation
4. Research and development that facilitates the growth of theoretical and practical knowledge about addressing complex-environmental-management situations

The third challenge is the limited availability of case history and practical experience of building capacity for social learning in environmental management contexts, or using P & D evaluation to contribute to improving environmental management initiatives. This thesis examines the practical experience of using P & D evaluation to support social learning through four case stories from the Collaborative Learning for Environmental Management group (CLEM) based at Landcare Research. As these cases were concurrent with this thesis they represented an opportunity to put new ideas about social learning into practice. The cases highlight three factors important to the pragmatic potential of using P & D evaluation to support the social learning capacity of a given situation: (i) the evaluator, their skill, values, and role; (ii) the mandate and location of the evaluation; and (iii) organisational disposition to learning and change. Further guidelines for working with P & D evaluation to support social learning are to (i) find champions who are interested, willing, and able to make change happen within their organisation; (ii) review the social learning challenges of the situation; and (iii) use this contextual analysis to design an appropriate response that can take forward some aspect of the social learning potential of the situation.

Skills, understanding and motivation to work in the field of building capacity for social learning remain a limiting factor in the New Zealand environmental management sector. In conclusion I propose a reconsideration of what is currently regarded as core expertise in environmental management, rejecting the primacy of biophysical science, and planning, and rather seeking proficiency in integration, facilitation, systems thinking and knowledge brokerage. Furthermore, social learning is a sophisticated concept of high practical value. However, to be a conscious framework of use to resolving resource use and environmental management dilemmas there must be greater literacy about the core elements of social learning and their relationship to the problem situation and its practical application requires rigorous attention that is responsive to the individual conditions of the situation.
Key words: social learning, participatory evaluation, developmental evaluation, environmental problem solving, integrated environmental management, environmental policy, environmental planning, capacity development, evaluation practice
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Table of Contents

Abstract i
Acknowledgements iv
Contents v
List of Figures ix
List of Tables ix
List of Boxes x
Glossary xi

Chapter 1
Social learning, environmental management and evaluation: the emergence of a research question 1
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Background and key concepts
  1.2.1 Environmental problem solving – a changing role for management agencies
  1.2.2 Programmes to tackle environmental management issues
  1.2.3 Social learning: an emerging concept
  1.2.4 Building social learning capacity: participatory, developmental evaluation
1.3 Thesis scope
  1.3.1 Linking literature
  1.3.2 Reviewing practice
  1.3.3 Establishing a field of enquiry for this research
  1.3.4 Significant stories – cases of building capacity for social learning
  1.3.5 Relationship with other work
1.4 Research methodology
  1.4.1 Learning cycles
1.5 Chapter outline
1.6 Summary

Chapter 2
Social learning and environmental management 29
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Definitions, descriptions and relationships between ideas
  2.2.1 Social learning and collaborative learning
  2.2.2 Social learning in planning and policy making
  2.2.3 Social learning in environmental management and sustainable development
  2.2.4 Social learning and science
2.3 The challenges of the social learning concept
  2.3.1 Challenges of practice
  2.3.2 Challenges of theory
2.4 Summary – the value of the social learning concept
Chapter 3
Building capacity for social learning: what evaluation has to offer

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Building capacity for social learning – what does this mean
3.3 Overview of the development of evaluation theory and practice
   3.3.1 Definitions of evaluation
   3.3.2 Critiques and new directions for evaluation
3.4 Offerings from evaluation to capacity building for social learning
   3.4.1 Increasing stakeholder participation in evaluation
   3.4.2 Construction of knowledge and meaning in evaluation
   3.4.3 Putting theory into evaluation
3.5 Tools and techniques for participatory developmental evaluation
   3.5.1 Frameworks for seeing across scale and systems
   3.5.2 Ways of asking questions
   3.5.3 Reflection and dialogue in evaluation
3.6 Summary: Linking social learning and P & D evaluation
   3.6.1 Putting evaluation into practice to support social learning

Chapter 4
Social learning in community-based environmental management
Case One: The Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Overview of the Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project
   4.2.1 The Atlantic Coastal Action Programme
   4.2.2 WCMP process and major events
4.3 Social learning challenges for WCMP: scoping the problem situation
   4.3.1 Group participation and interaction in the WCMP
   4.3.2 Social and institutional settings for the WCMP
   4.3.3 Promoting holistic thinking and enabling learning through the WCMP
   4.3.4 Theoretical basis and programme logic of the WCMP
4.4 The WCMP evaluation
   4.4.1 Outcomes of the WCMP evaluation
4.5 Summary – evaluation and social learning in the WCMP

Chapter 5
Developing critical thinking in teams
Case Two: The Target Zero waste minimisation programme

5.1 Introduction
5.2 Overview of the CCC waste minimisation work
   5.2.1 The Target Zero company training programme
5.3 Social learning challenges for TZ: scoping the problem situation
5.4 The TZ teams’ evaluation project
   5.4.1 Developing an approach for working with teams and organisational change
5.5 Outcomes of the TZ teams’ evaluation
   5.5.1 Task – ability of teams to achieve in the TZ programme
   5.5.2 Process – development of teams in the TZ programme
   5.5.3 Teams and their environment
   5.5.4 Response to the evaluation approach
5.6 Evaluation as an intervention in the TZ programme
   5.6.1 Embedding evaluation learning in TZ training
5.7 Summary – evaluation and social learning in the Target Zero programme

Chapter 6
Frameworks for seeing across complex social systems
Case Three: The social spaces of the Integrated Catchment Management programme

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Overview of the ICM programme
6.3 The social learning challenges for the ICM programme
   6.3.1 Foundations of the ICM programme
   6.3.2 Social learning theory and praxis needs in the ICM programme
   6.3.3 Role for social research in the ICM programme
6.4 Supporting social learning in the ICM programme
   6.4.1 Evaluation in the ICM programme
6.5 The Social Spaces Framework evaluation of the ICM programme
   6.5.1 Developing the Social Spaces Framework
   6.5.2 A review of the social spaces in the ICM Programme
   6.5.3 Using the Social Spaces Framework in a participatory evaluation
   6.5.4 A comparative framework based evaluation exercise
6.6 Summary – framework evaluation and social learning in ICM

Chapter 7
Integrated environmental research: platforms for dialogue and reflection:
Case Four: The Watershed Talk project

7.1 Introduction
7.2 Overview of the Watershed Talk project
   7.2.1 ICM programme needs
   7.2.2 Platforms for dialogue and learning in the ICM programme
   7.2.3 Previous experience of the Watershed Talk team
7.3 Addressing social learning challenges in Watershed Talk
7.4 Design of Watershed Talk
   7.4.1 Design principles
   7.4.2 Evaluation, learning and development in Watershed Talk
7.5 Watershed Talk in action
   7.5.1 Engagement – building capacity for conversation
   7.5.2 Creative conversation
7.6 Outcomes of Watershed Talk – content and learning
   7.6.1 Altered ideas about the Motueka catchment and its community
   7.6.2 Seeing itself and others
   7.6.3 Ideas about meeting and problem solving
   7.6.4 Preparedness for further engagement and action
7.7 Significant learning from Watershed Talk
7.8 Social learning as an explicit goal in ICM research
7.9 Summary
Chapter 8
Discussion: social learning and participatory developmental evaluation

8.1 Introduction
8.2 Scoping the environmental management problem situation
  8.2.1 Using the Social Learning Framework as a basis to programme development
8.3 Using P & D evaluation to build social learning capacity in four cases
  8.3.1 Case One: The Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project (WCMP)
  8.3.2 Case Two: The Target Zero waste minimisation programme
  8.3.3 Case Three: The ICM programme, and the Social Spaces Framework evaluation
  8.3.4 Watershed Talk – a platform for collaborative learning
8.4 Practical issues for using P & D evaluation to support social learning
  8.4.1 Evaluator, skills, values and roles
  8.4.2 Mandate, location and role for the evaluator
8.5 Observations on the case story methodology
8.6 Summary

Chapter 9
Conclusions

9.1 Introduction
9.2 Summary of research findings
  9.2.1 Additional conclusions from the case stories
9.3 Implications for environmental management in New Zealand
  9.3.1 The Social Learning Framework as a practical tool
  9.3.2 Social learning and environmental management professionalism
  9.3.3 Value of the social learning concept
9.4 Summary and future research

References
Appendices

Appendix 1 Critical conversations
Appendix 2 The New Zealand context for community based environmental management
Appendix 4 Summary of TZ company training programme rounds
Appendix 5 Target Zero teams’ evaluation checklist
Appendix 6 Workshop process for the Target Zero team performance evaluation
Appendix 7 Teams involved in Target Zero teams’ evaluation
Appendix 8 The ISKM (integrated systems for knowledge management framework) (origin Allen 2001)
Appendix 9 Evaluation check sheet based on ISKM framework
Appendix 10 Watershed Talk initial interview questions
Appendix 11 Watershed Talk follow-up interview questions
Appendix 12 Watershed Talk post-workshop evaluation questionnaire
Appendix 13 Summary of case story findings
List of figures

1.1 Case stories and evolving research focus in CLEM
1.2 Learning cycles in the research process
2.1 Social learning understood as a framework of elements critical to complex environmental problem solving
3.1 Four branches of evaluation theory and practice
3.2 Criteria for transformative experience (from Merriam & Heuter 1996)
3.3 Linking social learning and P & D evaluation
3.4 A SWOT analyses of the social learning challenges of a problem situation
4.1 First 2.5 years of WCMP (phase 1)
4.2 Three continuums of CBM initiatives
4.3 Components of the social learning challenge for the WCMP
4.4 The first few months of the WE timeline (derived from Kilvington 1998).
4.5 Critical reflection spaces for CBM
5.1 Overview of Target Zero cleaner production methodology
5.2 Components of the social learning challenge for the TZ programme
5.3 Four stage of the TZ teams’ evaluation project
6.1 Examples of project development in the ICM programme
6.2 Components of the social learning challenge for the ICM programme
6.3 Social engagement spaces of the ICM programme
6.4 Worksheets from the social spaces evaluation exercise at the ICM AGM (2007)
7.1 Phases and events of Watershed Talk
7.2 Aspects of social learning addressed in Watershed Talk
7.3 Map used for the ‘ice-breaker’ exercise (courtesy Pete Frew, TDC)
8.1 Suggested planning stages for behaviour change programmes (from Kirkland-Smith 2008)
9.1 Questioning the social learning capacity of a problem system (Kilvington & Allen 2009)

List of tables

1.1 Questions for case stories
2.1 Components of social learning (from Webler et al. 1995)
2.2 Seven stages of soft systems methodology (Checkland 1985)
2.3 Examples of situations utilising social learning ideas
2.4 Challenges of practice for social learning
2.5 Summary of critical elements of social learning theory
3.1 Conceptual levels for evaluation terminology (from Duignan 2003, pp. 78–79)
3.2 Changes and trends in evaluation
3.3 Four phases in fourth generation evaluation (from Guba & Lincoln 1989b)
3.4 Typology of questions (from Garvin 1984 in Preskill & Torres 1999, p. 97).
3.5 Aspects of programme management that can be supported by evaluation
5.1 A three-phase model for understanding teams and organisational change (Allen & Kilvington 2001, p. 6)
5.2 Teams involved in TZ teams’ evaluation
7.1 Traditional and resilience approaches to problem solving
7.2 Using photography in collaboration and dialogue processes
8.1 Coupling the Social Learning Framework with evaluation
8.2 How P & D evaluation contributed to social learning capacity in each case
List of boxes

3.1 Schema of questions for case studies
4.1 Summary of the Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project
4.2 The Whaingaroa Catchment
5.1 Summary of Target Zero and the teams’ evaluation project
5.2 Example of three-level reflection based around the teams’ checklist
6.1 Summary of the ICM Programme, and the Social Spaces Framework evaluation
6.2 Overview of the Integrated Catchment Management programme
6.3 Activities contributing to the social learning capacity of the ICM programme
6.4 The IRAP (Integrated Research into Aquifer Protection) programme
7.1 Watershed Talk: a platform for dialogue, reflection and systems thinking
7.2 Phases and events of Watershed Talk
7.3 Core principles in Watershed Talk
7.4 Shifts in learning receptiveness
8.1 Identifying a personal evaluation philosophy (from Trotman 2009)
### Glossary of terms and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACAP</td>
<td>Atlantic Coastal Action Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>annual general meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZEA</td>
<td>Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artsci</td>
<td>abbreviation for projects which unite artists and scientists</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBM</td>
<td>community-based management</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Christchurch City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEMP</td>
<td>comprehensive environmental management plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEM</td>
<td>Collaborative Learning for Environmental Management (LCR group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative NZ</td>
<td>Creative New Zealand – arts council of New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRI</td>
<td>Crown Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRG</td>
<td>community reference group</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOC</td>
<td>Department of Conservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSS</td>
<td>decision support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAG</td>
<td>end-user advisory group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECNZ</td>
<td>Electricity Corporation of New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENSIS</td>
<td>forestry research agency (a CRI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FG evaluation</td>
<td>fourth-generation evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRST</td>
<td>Foundation for Research, Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICM</td>
<td>Integrated Catchment Management programme, Motueka 2000–2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGNS</td>
<td>Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences (a CRI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRAP</td>
<td>Integrated Research into Aquifer Protection programme 2004–</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISKM</td>
<td>Integrated Systems for Knowledge Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAMS</td>
<td>local area management strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCR</td>
<td>Landcare Research (a CRI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry</td>
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<td>MfE</td>
<td>Ministry for the Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIRMAK</td>
<td>Motueka Iwi Resource Management Komiti</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoRST</td>
<td>Ministry of Research, Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIWA</td>
<td>National Institute of Water and Atmospheric research (a CRI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>P &amp; D</td>
<td>participatory and developmental [evaluation]</td>
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<td>RMA</td>
<td>Resource Management Act 1991</td>
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<td>SMF</td>
<td>Sustainable Management Fund (grant administered by MfE)</td>
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<td>TDC</td>
<td>Tasman District Council (unitary resource management agency)</td>
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<td>TNS</td>
<td>The Natural Step (a sustainable business framework)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQM</td>
<td>Total Quality Management (a business management framework)</td>
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<td>TZ</td>
<td>Target Zero waste minimisation programme run by the CCC</td>
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<td>WCMP</td>
<td>Whaingaroa Catchment Management Project</td>
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<td>WE</td>
<td>Whaingaroa Environment (group established from the WCMP)</td>
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<td>WEC</td>
<td>Whaingaroa Environment Centre</td>
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<td>WMU</td>
<td>Waste Management Unit of the CCC</td>
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