

Learning in action for social change: What Pakeha Treaty workers can learn from Kenyan sugar cane farmers

Jen Margaret

Centre for Development Studies - University of Auckland
Institute of Development Studies – University of Sussex

What are the connections between the campaign for sugar cane farmers in Kenya and Pakeha working for Maori self-determination? In this paper Jen Margaret responds to this question through discussing her involvement as a member of Facilitating Learning in Action for Social Change (FLASC) an initiative led by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Facilitating Learning in Action for Social Change (FLASC)

An issue we are faced with in social change contexts is that although knowledge is being generated continually, the ways in which this knowledge contributes to further change, is not well understood. We are challenged to create more effective learning environments in which all who engage in change processes may develop capability to access, create and share knowledge, and to engage critically with that which is already known and recorded (Taylor, 2007).

The Facilitating Learning in Action for Social Change initiative responds to this issue and aims to increase the effectiveness of social change work through exploring ways to support learning within and across different social change contexts. The purpose is to explore ways in which learning is facilitated within social change processes and to understand better how this learning may be shared, to support further learning and action in other contexts, as illustrated in Figure 1. The project is led by the Power Participation and Social Change team at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and is funded by the Ford Foundation.

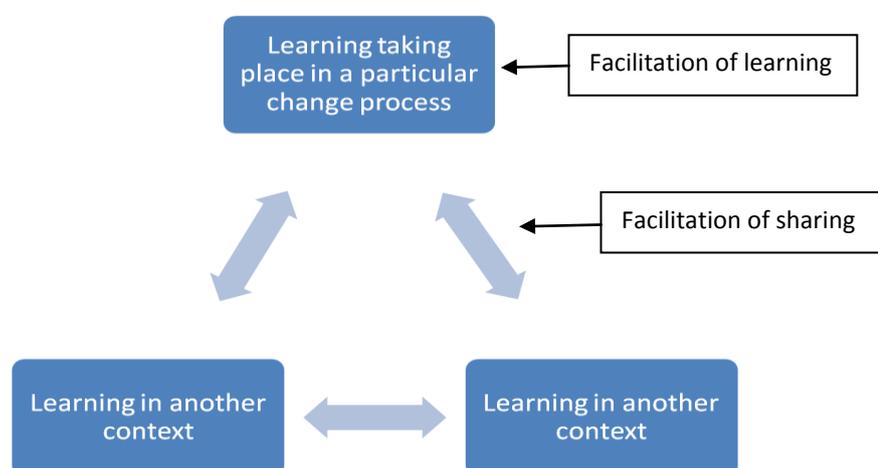


Figure 1: FLASC focus

Framing the issue

An initial international dialogue on FLASC in 2006 (Taylor, Deak, Pettit, & Vogel, 2006) involved around 30 participants from a range of organisations for whom knowledge, communication and learning in social change contexts is a significant area of interest. The outcomes of this initiative included a framework that provides a basis for analytical inquiry.

In this framework four inter-related dimensions, the conceptual, organisational, methodological and personal, were seen as critical for any movement to facilitate learning for social change,

with dilemmas being experienced in each dimension. Within the **conceptual** dimension, it has been observed that social change activists have difficulty in accessing and integrating theory. A needed interdisciplinary approach is obstructed due to different disciplines not “talking to each other”, creating a distance between theory generated through practice and theory that is generated by those who are working from the abstract. Within the **organisational** dimension, power relations are played out through dominance in hierarchical systems and structures. These are mirrored through pedagogy and teaching, and manifested through the inability of many organisations to apply participatory principles to their own practice, or to promote learning in the context of change. In the **methodological** dimension, dilemmas have arisen due to uncritical promotion and uptake of tools, techniques, blueprints, “how-to’s” and quick fixes. There are problems of pedagogical methods that maintain existing power asymmetries and imbalances as well as dominant worldviews and paradigms regarding learning, knowledge and change. Finally the **personal** dimension appears to suffer the most neglect, at the level of the self, the emotional and the spiritual. There is a need for individuals to emphasise and integrate various dimensions of the personal in processes of social change. Our understanding of the many ways in which individuals learn or resist learning is still limited, and we need to develop this to support communication and knowledge generation through doing and being, as well as through conceptual sense-making and the practice of tools and techniques. Most critical of all, we need to explore the power relationships which affect agency, the practitioner’s capacity to understand their own agency, and the way that they use that agency within their communities, and within different organisational or institutional contexts (Taylor, 2007).

Responding to the issue

It was recognised that this framing needed to be deepened further, conceptually, and that practical applications needed to be drawn out and tested. Since November 2007 a group of 12 development practitioners, including myself, from a range of organisations and locations have worked together to progress the FLASC initiative.

In the last year we have undertaken personal inquiries into a change context / process we are part of. Questions central to the inquiry process were:

- How do you understand social change to take place? What do you see as the general forces that lead to or create social change? What do you see as the general forces blocking change?
- How does your own practice relate to this?
- What specific methods or literature do you find useful?

My inquiry – the Pakeha Treaty workers’ movement

My inquiry has been into learning in the Pakeha Treaty workers’ movement. This movement emerged in the early eighties in response to Maori challenging Pakeha who were involved in opposing the Springbok Tour and apartheid in South Africa to also look at issues of racism in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Maori proposed that in order to address racism in this country Pakeha should work to have te Tiriti o Waitangi honoured. The first step in doing so was for Pakeha to educate other Pakeha about the history of the Treaty and the subsequent violations of it. From this time a Pakeha movement developed parallel to the Maori independence movement (Huygens, 2007).

I became active in this movement in the early 2000s and am part of the third generation¹ of the movement. When trying to respond to the FLASC inquiry questions in relation to the Pakeha Treaty workers' movement I realised that much of my practice and the understandings which underpinned it was inherited from my elders. I found it difficult to succinctly articulate 'my' theory of change. This led me to question how I had inherited this knowledge and to questions of how we learn within this social movement.

The scope of my inquiry went beyond what was required within the FLASC project and so has become my Masters thesis which I am currently writing in Development Studies at University of Auckland.

My research questions are:

- What factors are influencing the emergence and continuing learning of members of the Pakeha Treaty workers' movement?
- What factors are influencing how learning is shared within the movement?
- What are the implications for practice in this and other social movements?

Sharing across change contexts – a learning process

In June 2008 the FLASC group came together for a three day workshop to take the initiative forward through sharing our personal inquiries and considering what facilitates the process of sharing learning across contexts. We also considered how our experiences and insights might be shared more broadly with development practitioners and other social change agents. Central to this workshop was preparing and sharing of our personal inquiries and subsequent reflection on this process.

Given my inquiry was very specific and local I was surprised that others working in very different change contexts found resonances with what I had shared. As a listener I was struck by the insights on my work that I gained from hearing stories of people's change work in very different contexts. One of the people in the group shared his inquiry into his work as part of the campaign for sugar cane farmers in Kenya. This is a context which, on the surface at least, seems vastly different to my work within the Treaty movement in Aotearoa / New Zealand. However the discussion of challenges relating to movement building and sustainability paralleled many of the experiences of the Pakeha Treaty workers' movement and thus provided useful learning for me. These challenges include: the negotiation of the relationship between allies to a struggle and the people whose struggle it is; differing levels of involvement of group members; and, appropriate induction of newcomers. In particular, the approach that the Kenyan campaign uses for strategically analysing and responding to the social change issue is a practical tool which I have been able to share with others within the movement here.

The process of telling the inquiry story was valuable in the role of teller as well as listener. Crafting the story, deciding what to include and exclude and what language and concepts would make sense to those listening, required reflection on how to convey the essence of the work without oversimplifying. In reflecting on the sharing of the inquiries we gained insights into what might be gained and the limitations of sharing across contexts and aspects of process which support sharing.

What's being created and opportunities to engage

Through the different phases of the initiative we have generated a large number of questions from practice. Some examples are:

¹ The generations are based on the chronology of the movement rather than the age of individuals in the movement.

- How can we make the learning in social change processes more conscious, and how can we facilitate it in formal and informal contexts?
- How can power issues be surfaced as a critical dimension of learning in social change processes?
- How can conditions be created in organisations for more effective learning for social change?
- How can monitoring and evaluation contribute better to learning in social change processes?
- How can local approaches, learning and knowledge be shared meaningfully in an international context?

Currently work is underway to create an interactive on-line resource which will give background to the FLASC initiative, outline some of the key challenges and issues for the practice of facilitating learning in action for social change and include questions from practice as an entry point for sharing learning. Each question will be linked to specific stories, reflections, references and relevant web based resources. The intention is that other development practitioners can engage and add stories, questions, references and that our work as agents of positive social change might be made more effective through this engagement.

For more information contact: jen.margaret@clear.net.nz

References

- Huygens, I. (2007). *Processes of Pakeha change in response to the Treaty of Waitangi*. Unpublished PhD, University of Waikato, Hamilton.
- Taylor, P. (2007). Proposal: Facilitating Learning and Action for Social Change (FLASC); developing a framework for theory and practice. Unpublished project proposal. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Taylor, P., Deak, A., Pettit, J., & Vogel, I. (Eds.). (2006). *Learning for social change: Exploring concepts, methods and practice*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.