

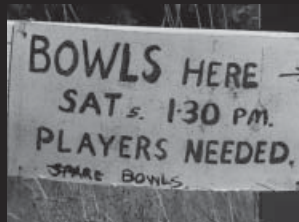
Watershed Talk

The cultivation of ideas and action

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A project about processes for building community resilience

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Context of this research

Watershed Talk is a social science project within an Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) research programme based in the Motueka River catchment. It asks the question: What tools and approaches can we use to promote effective interaction between the scientists, resource managers, and community working collaboratively on resource management issues for the catchment? The research area – labelled Science Responsiveness to the Community – explores processes of dialogue between these groups. Specifically, it examines the role these processes play in shifting people's understanding and developing their capacity to address the complex environmental issues they face.

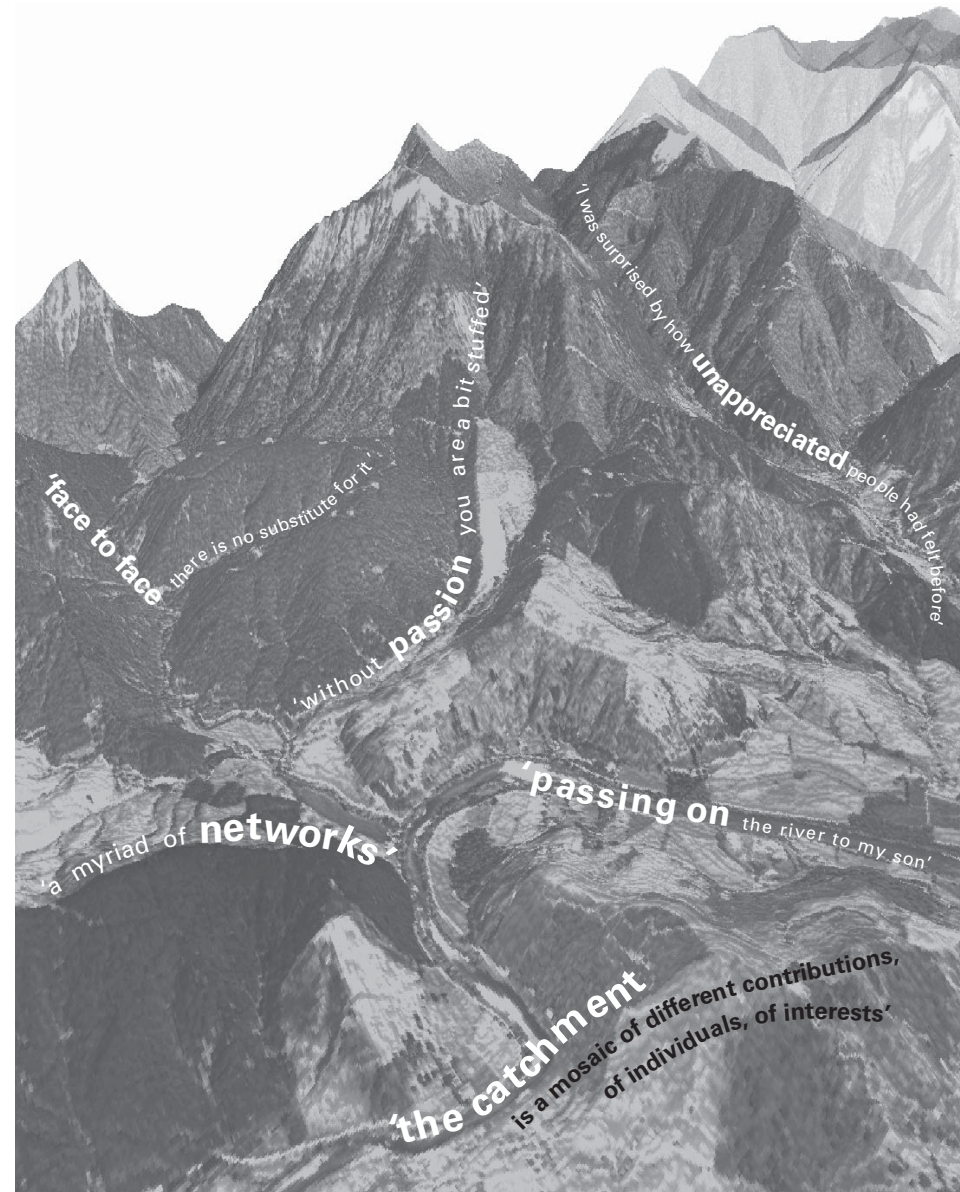
Watershed Talk builds on the participatory and collaborative successes of the art-science project that created the Travelling River exhibition of 2004–05. This exhibition wove together catchment science and community connection within the Motueka River catchment and revealed much about people's cultural identity with land and river, and their ongoing practices of care for the environment.

People often have a set of practices or values that underpin their wanting to leave the land in better shape – whether they work and live there, are managers, or do science about the place. *Watershed Talk* recognised that people care about their environment and their community in differing ways. It sought to extend knowledge about how to achieve more integrated and inclusive processes for harnessing those ethics of care and turning responsibility into action.

The New Zealand Integrated Catchment Management research programme is government-funded and more details can be found about it on the Landcare Research website (<http://icm.landcareresearch.co.nz/>).

Images in the document

All photographic images in this document were taken by the people participating in the project. Each image represents one or more ideas that a participant was seeking to illustrate. The running photo-strip at the footer of this document is compiled from that pool of images, but to caption and explain the context for the images would disrespect the workshop confidentialities. Rather, the stream of images eloquently illustrates the diverse ways we can look at the people and the places about us – wonderful 'snapshots' as lenses through which to discuss care and responsibility.



Preface

We find ourselves in a world of turmoil and challenge: of global financial and economic events which have left few of our families unscathed. We worry about the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, and struggle with the need to balance economic, social and environmental outcomes. It is a world in which globalisation has changed the way in which business is conducted and where nationhood has less of a place, and we have less control. And yet the new challenges have stressed the importance of governments to provide stability. There is also a need suddenly for the sectors to communicate and cooperate in new ways. In such a world, we could feel powerless and out of control; and yet it is in such times that new opportunities emerge.

In these times, the importance of those around you becomes enhanced: they can support you while you explore new opportunities. For it is in communities that the essence of our future lies; it is here that the art of conversation can begin. Communities and leadership are intertwined; one is dependent upon the other. As John Gardener, my favourite author on leadership and community, states: 'Skill in the building and rebuilding of community is not just another of the innumerable requirements of contemporary leadership. It is one of the highest and most essential skills a leader can command.'

The *Watershed Talk* project is about building reliance and meaning into community, and in doing so, revealing new possibilities for the future. It develops a dialogue process that builds head and heart. It is about looking for ordinary opportunities to have different conversations. It demonstrates the means by which this can occur and the

manner in which the sharing and tolerance of different values and perspectives can lead to new and innovative thinking and solutions.

The project explores the importance to community conversations of respect, diversity, and most of all, connection, which is key to a strong and innovative society. These processes are about generosity towards others, and the willingness to create an environment of open trust in which different perspectives can be shared. It is this process of reflection and dialogue that prepares for further engagement and action. This provides a basis for active citizenship and leadership.

There is a new awareness now emerging that by being able to truly listen, in a state of presence, we can connect in a way that we can provide synergistic outcomes that are far greater than might have been initially anticipated. Peter Senge, in talking about the power of 'presence' notes: 'We shift from repeating past patterns and mistakes to transforming the emerging future.'

Steven Carden, a young author who has researched a powerful and challenging book *NZ Unleashed*, talks about the importance of finding a willingness to change. It is important that we are comfortable with diversity and that we are involved with 'breaking down barriers and building communication; these are an eternal struggle for any society. When great ideas are flowing around, societies become dynamic. Their creative juices flow like crazy. They become beautifully positioned to evolve and adapt even further.' We are wasting the huge potential to find solutions, by not ensuring that we have engagement and leadership at all levels.

Connected and cohesive communities are our hope for the future. The world is now a dynamic and interconnected place, but it is where personal human connections occur that we have the real opportunity to build common values, tolerance and understanding and to nurture leadership. Such personal connections are the source of innovation and solutions. If we can become better at connecting at a community level, we will have more ownership over our future.

The *Watershed Talk* project provides a model for environmental management, and exploration of common solutions. It is a model for economic development, for communities to explore common futures from which they can all benefit. It is a model for local government, and for those involved in Resource Management Act processes. Most of all, however, it is a model for community leadership development; for leadership is the essential ingredient to ensure a positive and exciting future.

I commend those involved in this project, from the authors to those representing the various organisations, and most particularly, those who were from the community itself. You have provided a model for the many who will follow: you have led the way.

Jo Brosnahan

Chair Landcare Research, Manaaki Whenua
Founding Chair Leadership NZ, Pumanawa Kaiarahi O
Aotearoa

In summary

Participation, consultation, engagement; these have been buzzwords for a decade or more. But beneath the clichés many people are asking 'can we do it better, can we be more effective in mobilising change, and if so, how?'

Today's communities face increasing uncertainty about how forces such as economic recession, climate change, global energy shortages, shifting populations and changing land uses will impact our lives. Amongst the skills that build the resilience to respond and adapt to the challenges of major change is the ability for communities to have different types of conversations – conversations that draw on knowledge and experience from different sectors of the community, help us to get comfortable with what we know and what we don't, and find the willingness to change. Conversations that encourage our learning through complex problems will enhance our potential for active citizenship and leadership – the heart of a resilient future.

At the core of this action research project, *Watershed Talk*, was the possibility that how we have these conversations can make all the difference.

Over eight months, between October 2006 and July 2007, about 20 people from widely different backgrounds local to the Motueka Valley, or with strong local connections, took part in *Watershed Talk*. The project included individual interviews, take-home tasks, two group meetings and follow-up interviews (page 11). The basis of the project was to investigate existing ethics of care in the catchment and the role of dialogue in empowering action around environmental stewardship. The interviews, meetings and tasks were thus based on enabling participants to explore two questions, **is our catchment being cared for, and how do we recognise that?**, while the research project as a whole looked at the question **can dialogue cultivate community resilience?**

What follows – our synthesis of *Watershed Talk* – is in six parts. Part 1 introduces Jean Giono's parable of *The Man Who Planted Trees* as an apt metaphor for what we learnt about how to cultivate ideas and action in a community. This runs as a theme throughout the document. Part 2, **'All in this together' – understanding social strength**, examines the types of social attributes that enhance community resilience. In *Watershed Talk* our cultivation techniques aimed to trial and build knowledge about what

a resilience approach to collective problem solving could be like, and what it could achieve. Specifically we looked at some essential ingredients of resilience that can be influenced through dialogue: what we know (knowledge and understanding), who we know (networks), and our adaptive abilities (learning) (page 3).

In Part 3, **Watershed Talk – cultivating ideas and action**, we outline the theory and practice of community dialogue and explain how this led to the design of the *Watershed Talk* process described in Part 4, **Watershed Talk – the design**. Deliberative design to create dialogue opportunities requires planning and thought. It is a creative process and many aspects are place and community specific.

Rather than follow 'recipes' for engagement there are broad principles that guide successful interactions towards common good. We identified that: respect for the unique contribution each person makes and embracing *diversity* bring about different kinds of conversation. Nurturing dialogue leads to the potential *empowerment* of participants and the outcome; *generosity* in communication and behaviour fosters abundance of ideas. Finding ways to see 'we are all in this together' takes *active cultivation*.

Marama Takao



Roger May



Jason Garland



Mark Newcombe



Roger Young



Sue Robb



Emily Robinson



These principles and ideas about resilience influenced all stages of the project, from participant selection and engagement, through to the facilitation techniques employed during the meetings, and the use of evaluation and post-meeting interviews to further crystallise and cement new thinking. This included the innovative technique of providing participants with cameras to record their ideas before the first meeting, which increased the opportunity for each of them to reflect on the issues and engage with the question, and armed them with material to contribute to a conversation during the meetings. One of the effective facilitative devices used was the 'ice-breaker map' – a sketched map of the catchment that participants used to locate themselves and base their introductions to one another, bringing individual footprints together into a wider landscape perspective and encouraging the expression of connectivity-to-place (page 16). Both the photo sharing and map storytelling fostered a level playing field amongst participants, and helped create a positive group dynamic and trust – like a 'tensile strength' – that resonated throughout the project:

'It is people, it is people, it is people'

Part 5, **New landscapes of ideas and action**, reviews the outcomes of *Watershed Talk* through the insights of both participants and researchers. The *Watershed Talk* process tapped into a wealth of knowledge about connectivity to place, expressions of care and responsibility, and understanding of the social and biophysical fabric of the catchment. We found that dialogue around these issues increased participants' sense of their knowledge base. Powerful amongst our findings in this section was the way in which the innovative facilitation techniques and the

stepped process of interview, meetings, tasks and evaluation contributed to significant shifts in ideas and views on the wide range of aspects of building a resilient community. This included altered views on the Motueka catchment, its environment and its community (**New ways of seeing old terrain**); and personal changes in how individuals see their own role and that of others in caring for the catchment (**Shifting lenses**).

Participants also made their own observations and critiques of the *Watershed Talk* process. The conversations in the project were enacted in a way that enabled participants to open up to exploring familiar problems from a different angle. It also led to new awareness of the complexity of sharing values with those of diverse backgrounds – discovering various degrees of commonality. This changed their ideas about how to meet with others and problem-solve (**Confidence in 'camping out'**) and led to thoughts about how processes like *Watershed Talk* prepare people for further engagement and action (**Checking the compass**).

Mindful that others may be interested in employing the techniques used in *Watershed Talk* the final part of Part 5 includes reflections from participants and researchers on what aspects of design and implementation could be used to facilitate good process and dialogue in another setting (**Over the horizon**). *Watershed Talk* showed us that a deliberately designed process of reflection and dialogue can help prepare people for further engagement and action. For this, facilitation needs to be enabling and generative while pre- and between-meeting tasks create continuity and a focus on the purpose of the meetings. Evaluation is an integral part of the process; it helps provide creative feedback and opportunities for reflection, which cements new ideas and

ensures that learning is complete within the cycle of the project. Making sure that project expectations are managed is a matter of integrity and important for future relationships – designed process of reflection, and dialogue can help prepare people for further engagement and action. For this, facilitation needs to be enabling and generative while pre- and between-meeting tasks create continuity and a focus on the purpose of the meetings.

Key points from the *Watershed Talk* process are also summarised within Parts 3 and 5 in the **In Essence** boxes at the end of relevant sections. We envisage that these sections can be used as prompts, for both the design and evaluation of participatory processes across varied applications and situations.

In Part 6, **Looking ahead**, we conclude by looking at how the energy and ideas contributed by participants in a project like this could be taken further.

From *Watershed Talk* we learnt that there is a space for cultivating participation a little differently. High quality interchange of ideas and expressions of value encourage innovative thinking, which contributes to the creative generation of an abundance of useful ideas for action – that is the capital we need 'going forward'. Design of dialogue principles, scope and processes is vital for creating fertile new landscapes of ideas and actions in their own way, in their own place.