

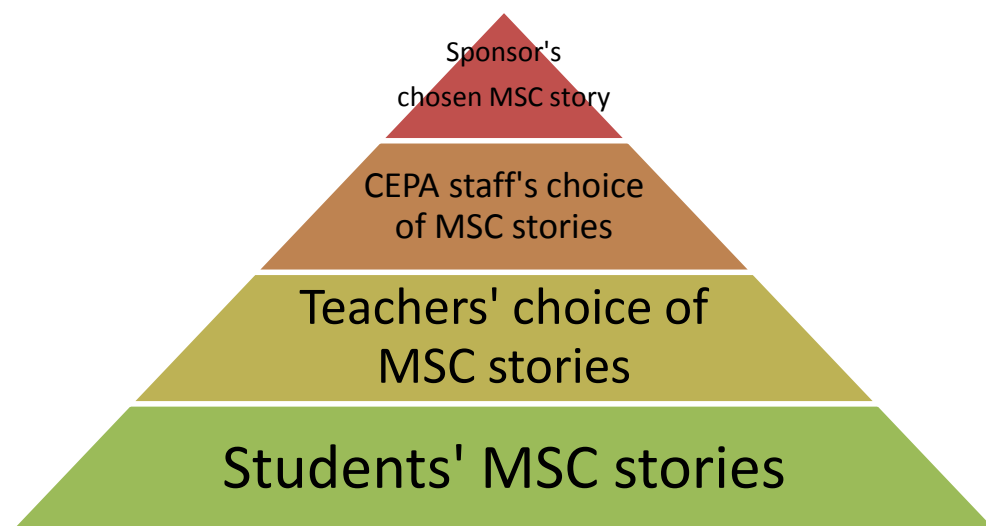
APPENDIX 5

Stories of Most Significant Change (SMSC) Methodology for Evaluation¹

In this formative evaluation process, participants are asked to share their stories of the most significant changes that they have experienced as a result of being part of a CEPA programme.

The process typically starts by asking people at the base of a pyramid of participants, what they regard as the most significant change that has taken place as a result of the programme.

For example, in the Cape Town Green Audits for Schools Programme², this question could first be asked of the students in the participating schools. It is the students who conduct the schools' environmental audit, decide which of their schools' audit results they want to improve, formulate what action to take, undertake the action, and report back on it. In response to the questions, Student A may respond that the most significant change for her is that she has learnt things about environmental resources that she can use for the rest of her life. Student B may respond that the interaction between richer and poorer schools was the most significant change experience for him.



The MSCC methodology is often misunderstood to simply end at this point, i.e. the collection of stories (which could be small case studies) is presented in the evaluation as the outcomes of the programme. However, the methodology described by Davies and Dart involves the next layer of stakeholders in the programme, in this case the students' teachers, to review these collected change stories, and decide which smaller selection of these stories represent *the most significant* change.

To make this choice the teachers have to discuss among themselves what they mean by 'significant change', and assumptions surface at this point. Teacher A may value a story that reflects academic outcomes more, Teacher B may value a story depicting life lessons most, Teacher C may value a change story with clear environmental benefits most, and so on.

¹ Davies, Rick and Dart, Jess, *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use*, 2005, <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

² See the Case Study Folder on the CD.

The teachers' smaller selection of change stories are then sent on to the programme developers – in this instance, the CEPA providers who introduced the Green Audits Programme to the schools and supported them in implementing it. These partners, which may include CEPA practitioners from the City, in turn choose one or two change stories, which reflect, in their minds, the *most significant change*. Again, assumptions about the nature of the change that is most valued, will surface, and be discussed. Incidentally, these discussions, and the choices made, all need to be documented.

The final selection of 2-3 stories is given to the CEPA programme's sponsors, e.g. the environmental managers in the City of Cape Town. They in turn choose one of these stories, based on their assumptions of what the most significant change would be in the light of their intentions and the vision they had for the initiative when they first initiated and/or approved it. All along the way there will be differences of opinion, hard decisions to make and discussions to record.

It is precisely these differences, and how they are resolved, that are important in this methodology, for they reflect programme participants' assumptions of what is meaningful and what kind of change we can and should strive for. The documented discussions provide CEPA practitioners, planners and managers with valuable insights and reflections that can inform future programmes and evaluations. The individual stories collected on the way can of course also be used for communication and educational processes – but that is a secondary benefit of the methodology.