

Indigenous evaluation

A strategic objective of the Australasian Evaluation Society

Indigenous evaluation

In 2003, the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) Board identified Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the Society. In coming to this decision, the Board signalled that it believed it was important to consider Indigenous evaluation more fully and its potential implications for the AES, its members, and the practice of evaluation.

This article provides brief background information about the factors that gave rise to the emergence of Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES, describes the activities and progress for the period 2004–2007, and identifies possible strategies to further progress Indigenous evaluation. It argues that greater engagement on the part of AES members is needed to progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the Society; in particular, the need for AES members to consider what Indigenous evaluation means or might mean for the Society and why, if at all, Indigenous evaluation has a place within the AES.

The article is set in the context of my role as a past Executive member of the AES Board, with responsibility to progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the Society. As such, it is a personal reflection of that journey to date.

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Tihei mauri ora!

Ko te mea tuatahi, ki te Atua i runga rawa nāna nei ngā mea katoa.

Ko te mea tuarua, e nga mate kua rupeke ake ki te pō, haere, haere, haere.

Ko te mea tuatoru, ki a koutou te hunga ora, tēnā koutou katoa

Kei te mihi hoki ki te tangata whenua o tēnei wāhi, o tēnei rohe, o tēnei whenua, kei te mihi.

I te taha ūkaipo

Ko Hikurangi te maunga

Ko Waipu te awa

Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi.

Ko te Whānau a Apanui tōku iwi hoki.

I tērā atu taha, te taha o tōku matua

Ko Tararua te maunga

Ko Ohau te awa

Ko Ngāti Tukorehe te iwi

Ko Ngāti Raukawa hoki.

Nō reira, koutou katoa i tae mai i tēnei huihuinga

Tēnā koutou tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

I first acknowledge, the creator, the source of all things. Second, I acknowledge those who have gone before us. Third, I greet all of you here today. Importantly, I acknowledge the traditional people of this land, of this region and of this place. My tribal connections on my mother's side are to Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau a Apanui and on my father's side to Ngāti Tukorehe and Ngāti Raukawa. Once again, I acknowledge all those who are present here today.

Introduction

This article is set in the context of my role as an Executive member of the AES Board, from 2003 to 2006, with responsibility to progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES, and provides a personal reflection of that journey to date. Importantly, the discussion is filtered through a single evaluation lens, mine. It does not purport to be independent, objective or even value free. Similarly, the judgements about progress to date are also personal. They have not been informed by international best practice, in-depth literature reviews, nor assessed against rigorously developed performance and outcome measures. Rather, they are based on my assessment and perceptions of change, and are my personal views.

This article is also filtered through a single cultural lens of a Māori woman who is passionate about evaluation, who hails from Aotearoa New Zealand with whakapapa (genealogical links) to tribes on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand—Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau a Apanui, and to tribes just north of Wellington—Ngāti Tukorehe and Ngāti Raukawa. For me,

this means three things in relation to evaluation. First, any evaluation pertaining to, conducted for and on behalf of Māori, must serve and benefit Māori. Second, this same principle applies to other Indigenous people. Third, evaluation must positively contribute to the communities in which we live, particularly to inform government policy and decision-making.

To date, the progression of Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES has, for the most part, taken a deliberately low-key approach with some small but, hopefully, significant changes having been put in place. It would also be fair to say that the conversations, discussions and deliberations that have informed the activities have involved a relatively small number of AES members, including Board and Executive members and Māori and non-Māori New Zealand evaluation practitioners.

This was a deliberate and intentional approach on my part, based on a personal sense of caution and 'tika' (correctness) about being Māori and 'leading' an Indigenous initiative in Australia. This article now urges that the time has come for greater involvement and engagement of AES members to further progress this strategic objective. In particular, there is a pressing need for AES members to consider what Indigenous evaluation means or might mean for the Society, and why, if at all, Indigenous evaluation has a place within the Society. The article further suggests that any future progression of the Indigenous evaluation strategic objective should be led by Australian members of the AES, and reasons for this are presented.

Background

In September 2003, the AES Board approved the Indigenous evaluation strategic objective:

Indigenous evaluation (including mentoring/coaching for Indigenous evaluators; identifying Indigenous issues in all regions. (AES 2003)

This decision was to add strength to the groundswell of interest in, and growing commitment within the AES, to Indigenous evaluation and a position role was established at the Executive level. The reasons for this were to signal the Board's commitment to Indigenous evaluation, and to enable direct input and influence on AES decision-making.

In talking to AES Board members at the time, their recollection was that:

It was a genuine move by the Board to try and walk the talk following the conversations and challenges put forward by Indigenous evaluators at previous conferences and gatherings of AES members.

In addition, the strategic objective and the role on the AES Executive were intended to provide a

focus, give impetus to, and support for activities put forward by Indigenous evaluators and others, in relation to evaluation with Indigenous people.

I was approached by the AES president at the time, to consider the role. It would be fair to say that the actual Board minute, while accurately recording the decision, was not terribly illuminating in terms of the exact nature and shape of the role. In conversations with the Executive at the time, they had wanted to allow the appointee to the position to shape and determine the way forward, without being overly constrained by predetermined processes or decisions.

I had some concerns about taking up the position including:

- struggling with the notion of individual representation without reference to an Indigenous committee, reference group or network
- worrying about whether it was appropriate for a Māori person to be leading this work, and whether in fact this position should be led by an Indigenous Australian evaluator
- mulling over the vastly different social, historical and political contexts of Māori and Indigenous Australians
- wondering how one would take account of the other views and needs of Indigenous peoples such as Pacific evaluators.

The most difficult question for me to weigh up personally, was what Indigenous evaluation meant to me, and whether in fact my understanding and my values around that concept were appropriate for the role and position.

The first set of concerns I dealt with mainly by talking to my evaluation colleagues, Māori and non-Māori, about the position, and about my concerns. They gave me both encouragement and permission to take up the position. Importantly, they provided a sounding board in terms of process and thinking.

Two points remain with me from those conversations. First, their support and endorsement was a decision for the time. What that meant, was that some time in the future I should look to hand over the role, ideally to an Indigenous Australian evaluator, or to an Australian evaluator experienced in evaluation with Indigenous Australian communities.

The second point was about being mindful of not only the similarity of shared experiences of Māori and other Indigenous people, but also more importantly, a recognition of the unique differences that characterise the context for Indigenous people.

Kia ata haere, kia tupato, kaua e whakahihi. These terms literally mean go slowly, be careful, don't be prideful or conceited.

I think the message from my colleagues was really to be humble, to be respectful and to go quietly and carefully. There was a cautionary note; not to impose Māori views, Māori ways of doing things on others, or assume that the way it is done

in New Zealand would automatically translate to other Indigenous settings and people. I suppose it was really about not being a cultural imperialist.

When I think of the term 'Indigenous evaluation', I think of evaluation carried out by Indigenous evaluator(s), with Indigenous people and communities.

The shorthand version for this, for us in Aotearoa New Zealand, is by Māori for Māori. Such is the strength of the position in New Zealand, that there would be few, if any, evaluations being carried out with Māori that did not have, as a minimum, Māori evaluators on the team. Ideally, the evaluation team would be led by a Māori evaluator.

Indeed, in New Zealand, most evaluation tender documents and requests for evaluation proposals that involve Māori have explicit questions and criteria about the nature and role of Māori on the evaluation team, as well prior evaluation experience with Māori.

By Māori for Māori, by Aboriginal for Aboriginal, by Indigenous for Indigenous is a position I am personally wedded to.

The reasons for this are many and varied and discussing them all within this article is not possible. However, from my personal perspective it is about having the necessary cultural capital—knowledge of tikanga (customs and practices), knowledge of te reo (language), knowledge of iwi/tribal history and contexts—in order to make sense of, and to understand, what is being shared.

This same knowledge also informs and guides the process of engagement. The diversity of the Māori population means that it is not always easy, even when you are Māori, to undertake research and particularly evaluation with hapū (sub-tribes), iwi (tribes) and Māori communities. Ultimately, I believe that Māori are better positioned to make sense of, and give meaning to, Māori experiences.

The context of AES, however, is not solely Aotearoa New Zealand. The context for Indigenous Australians is vastly different, as is the context in the wider Pacific basin. My sense is that the prevailing norm, at least in Australia, is that most evaluation being carried out in Indigenous communities will be undertaken or led by non-Indigenous peoples.

Again, my colleagues came to the fore, and I have been guided by what they felt was appropriate for the position, particularly with reference to Australia. This was to:

- increase awareness of Indigenous people per se
- increase awareness of the issues in relations to the conduct of evaluation with, and in, Indigenous communities
- strengthen and support the development of Indigenous evaluators
- in the longer term, look to provide some guidance about the conduct of evaluation by non-Indigenous evaluators with, and in, Indigenous communities. (Cram 1997; Henderson et al. 2002).

So what's changed?

First, at the Melbourne AES conference, we had a 'welcome to country' by the traditional owners of the land. As well as this conference, the welcome to country was a planned component of the Darwin, Brisbane and Adelaide conferences. Other AES conferences have also included local Indigenous peoples in the opening or closing ceremonies, such as in Auckland (2003) and also last year's Melbourne conference (2007). The difference now, is that there is a clear and stated expectation that a welcome to country will form part of the conference program, and that the conference-planning processes take account of this to ensure it happens.

Second, there were a number of presentations at the Melbourne 2007 that focused on some aspect of evaluation with Indigenous peoples or Indigenous evaluations. Previous conferences have also had specific conference streams featuring Indigenous evaluation or similar. Like the welcome to country, the difference is now a clear and stated expectation that the conference will plan for, and elicit, papers in relation to Indigenous evaluation. As one of my New Zealand colleagues commented on the first day of the conference, there is a clear sense that Indigenous evaluation is making its mark, and is highly visible at the conference.

Last year saw the establishment of an AES Indigenous Evaluation Award and Conference Support Grants for to support participation of Indigenous evaluation practitioners at the AES International Conference.

A special edition of the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, with a focus on Indigenous evaluation, is also planned. It has been on the publications committee program for some time, but has been delayed because of the lack of papers submitted to the journal editors. Some proactive strategies are being looked at to encourage submission of articles.

Although not this year, because of the crowded program, Indigenous keynote speakers have also been evident in our previous conference programs. This is one aspect that we need to further entrench as part of conference-planning processes.

How are we doing?

One of the most difficult aspects to measure or to document is the increased interest and discussion about Indigenous evaluation, and there certainly is an evident groundswell.

I am not sure how well we would rate in terms of progress against some measurable objectives, if we had them, or even if we created them retrospectively. (It may be timely to think about developing some indicators and measures to monitor and assess progress.)

Certainly there has been an increased awareness and acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples, but probably not enough. Certainly there has been an increased awareness of the issues and concerns in relation to Indigenous evaluation, but probably not enough. If anything, despite the progress we have

made, like Oliver Twist, I find myself saying, 'Please sir, can we have some more ...'

The process has been an evolution rather than a revolution. It has been softly, softly rather than, an 'in your face', aggressive approach. That is my personal and preferred style, and I have been held to task on a number of occasions for not having made as much progress, or evidence of progress, as some would like.

'Ma te wa' (in the fullness of time) is a Māori saying that applies here. Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES is a journey, and the journey needs to take as long as it needs to take.

Moving forward

In New Zealand there exists guidelines and practices in relation to the conduct of evaluation and research with Māori (for example, see Health Research Council 1998; NHMRC 2003; Social Policy, Evaluation and Research Committee 2005; and Te Puni Kōkiri 1999). While the issues are broadly the same, the Australian context is vastly different, as is the wider Pacific context.

I believe that an in-depth understanding of that context is necessary to further progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES, and in 2006 I stepped down from the position on the Executive as I believed that the time was right for this position to be picked up and carried out by an Indigenous Australian evaluator, or an Australian evaluator with significant experience in Indigenous evaluation.

As I have mentioned previously, the conversations and discussions to date around Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the AES, and the actions taken to progress this objective, have largely been by a small number of Society members.

I believe that greater engagement on the part of AES members is now needed to progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the Society. In particular, the need for AES members to consider what Indigenous evaluation means or might mean for the Society and why, if at all, Indigenous evaluation has a place within the Society.

I have been personally challenged to initiate the development of AES practice guidelines in relation to Indigenous evaluation for the safety of evaluators and Indigenous communities and to support the conduct of evaluation.

Certainly, I support the development of guidelines, but these need to go hand in hand with conversations around why Indigenous evaluation is important to us as practitioners, to the AES as a whole, and, most importantly, to the Indigenous people and communities that we work with.

Without an understanding of the 'added value' that Indigenous evaluation brings, and how it contributes to improving the quality of our work, then Indigenous evaluation is likely to be resigned to the fringes of evaluation, and for the most part, subsumed within current theories and approaches such as: participatory, collaborative, responsive and empowerment evaluation.

Moving forward, we need to consider what an evaluation partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous evaluators might look like and how it might operate (Ball 2005; Cram 1997). It is inevitable that these conversations will challenge us to reflect on the ethics that guide practice, to examine the positions of power of evaluators vis-a-vis Indigenous peoples and communities, and to become familiar with the sociopolitical history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the legacy of which, continues to impact on Indigenous peoples to this day.

Moving forward we will need to grapple with a number of questions: how do we, as evaluators, develop our cultural competency in order to be able to establish partnerships with Indigenous peoples; how do we develop meaningful partnership relationships when constrained by the context of evaluation budgets and reporting time frames; and how do we fuse Indigenous values into all aspects of the evaluation (Ball 2005).

Moving forward then, the challenge is to develop a process to facilitate the conversations around what Indigenous evaluation means to the AES, and how we give effect to, support and progress Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective of the Society.

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