

Reflections on the ANZEA conference – Nea Harrison and Lyn O’Donoghue , Darwin, Australia.

We were delighted to attend the 2012 Anzea Conference. We would particularly like to express our thanks to the Wellington Evaluation Group of the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) who sponsored Lyn.

We enjoyed meeting with and learning from Aotearoa evaluators who specialise in ‘people centred and community focussed’ evaluation. In particular we appreciated being so well looked after by Debbie Goodwin, who took us in and made her part of her family during the conference.

The ANZEA Conference helped us reflect on our own practice and learnings gained during more than 20 years working in partnership on a range of evaluation and program development roles in the Northern Territory and throughout Australia. It provided us with the opportunity to reflect on how much better we need to be as experienced practitioners in sharing our experiences and providing guidance to the increasing numbers of evaluators coming into remote Australian contexts.

The Hui Māori/Pasifika Fono

Firstly, thank’s to the Hui Maori and Pasifika Fono organiser’s for the invitation to participate in both these forums, particularly the welcome by senior Maori Elder Ray to the Te Kohinga Marama Marae, University of Waikato. AND to all the participants that embraced and shared their knowledge, experience and wisdom, my life has been enriched by your friendship.

Both the Hui Maori and Pasifika Fono presentations and discussions provided the space to talk about what does evaluation look like in the Maori and Pasifika context. The consistent thread was the importance of culturally responsive evaluation. Bridget Masters-Awatere setting the scene with an important question; how does evaluation incorporate cultural values when being applied to a program from an Indigenous perspective with the joining of two-world knowledge systems. This same thinking validated by Pale at the Pasifika Fono how evaluation methods are used and applied in your context, how are these framed with community.

Louise Were talked about using formative evaluation based on a strength approach to looking at family life in one community and developing an action plan to support change, Laurie Porima talked about using program logic theory and how to build capacity theories for Maori. Nan provided interesting insights to using Rubrics evaluation as a tool for performance-based assessment.

What an experience both these forums provided. The leadership and expertise in the field of evaluation was inspiring and importantly the application of evaluation frameworks, that it is designed and implemented with people to ensure language and world-views are central and integrated to meet the needs of the community.

The cultural experience of sitting, listening and sharing the work we do at the Marae was respectful and significant, the process of discussion at the Pasifika Fono was dynamic and engaging and in many ways many of the issues resonate with the work we do in our Australian contexts.

The keynote speakers

Thereza Penna Firme was a delight and shared her longstanding work in Brazil to build an evaluation culture to promote democracy by enabling transparency, reflection, critical thinking, participation and debate. Samantha Landon shared her experience as the recipient of multiple evaluations of varying value and provided valuable advice to external evaluators about how to ensure our practice enhances not burdens the work of our clients. Yoland Wadsworth shared her living systems inquiry work and provided us with the opportunity to think about how we create teams that effectively facilitate the collection, sharing, reflection and generation of new knowledge.

The presentations

Many of the presentations at the conference involved people reflecting on their own practice and sharing methodologies that worked for them. Saville Kusher's presentation on multiple narratives provided food for thought about how best to represent the multiple perspectives and present the multiple narratives of disempowered people. The Education Review Office (ERO) presented an inspiring story of how it adapted its evaluation methods and culture to meet to the circumstances of the schools and communities impacted by the Christchurch Earthquake. It adopted appreciative enquiry to draw out the experiences of students and communities and to support their recovery.