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Arts & Social Sciences

Social Policy Research Centre

# Evaluation theories and approaches; relevance for Aboriginal contexts

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# Glossary

AES	Australasian Evaluation Society
AH&MRC	Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Centre
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
CBA	Cost benefit analysis
IEF	Indigenous Evaluation Framework
NH&MRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
PAR	Participatory action research
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
VEE	Values engage evaluation

# 1 Introduction

This literature review has been commissioned by Aboriginal Affairs NSW to ensure that the *OCHRE* evaluation is informed by the best practice in evaluation and best practice in Aboriginal research. More information about the evaluation is available in the Evaluation Plan (Raven et al. 2016).

**A note on terminology:** As this is a review of international literature it refers to *Indigenous* peoples in jurisdictions other than Australia, or where the term refers generically to Indigenous peoples internationally. When referring to Australian research the term *Aboriginal* is used, as this is the term adopted by the NSW Government. Occasionally a particular reference uses the term *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* peoples, which is the term commonly used in the literature and in official publications outside of NSW.

## 1.1 Aims and review questions

In an attempt to ensure that the *OCHRE* evaluation is informed by theory and practice, this literature review examines existing evaluation theory and practices as published in peer reviewed and grey literature. The literature review provides an overview of research and evaluation paradigms, the different types of evaluations, and the different stances taken to analyse and discern between these types of evaluations. The review focuses particularly on Indigenous evaluation theory and practice.

The review aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the dominant stances that emerge from evaluation theories? What is known about the relative applicability of these to successful evaluation practice with Aboriginal communities?
- What are the characteristics of evaluation practice that led to successful evaluation with Aboriginal communities?
- What are the impacts of dominant approaches, including positivist and constructionist approaches, on the success of evaluation with Aboriginal community?
  - Is there any evidence for preference of one approach over another depending on stakeholders, including government and Aboriginal community?
- Does the approach taken influence the quality of the evidence obtained through the evaluation?
  - What is known about the influence of participatory practice on this?

## 1.2 Method

This literature review identified books, reports, peer reviewed articles, research and evaluation standards and protocols that pertained specifically to Indigenous peoples, as well as the broader area of evaluation theories and approaches. The literature review started with publications that specifically sought to draw a distinction between different types of evaluation. The review then sought particular articles that discussed, analysed or used each of the different types (formative/summative, use, transformative, methods and values) of evaluations. This was followed by peer reviewed journal articles which specifically mentioned Indigenous peoples in research.

The research was conducted in the first instance through a Google scholar search of the terms 'evaluation theories' and 'evaluation approaches'. A snowballing approach was applied to follow up articles from this search. This included seeking specific relevant articles from the bibliography list of relevant articles, and evaluation journals. For example, the first articles/book chapters identified were those by Alkin and Christie (2004), Dillman (2013), and Hansen, Alkin and Wallace (2013). These papers collectively assisted with identifying the main types of evaluation, the meta-evaluation frameworks and approaches, and specific evaluation journals. A query using the term 'Indigenous' was conducted on the identified journals of *New Directions in Evaluation* (n=44), *Evaluation Practice* (n= 0), and *Evaluation and Program Planning* (n=78). The term 'Indigenous' provided more results than the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait' which, for example, provided a smaller number of results for *Evaluation and Program Planning* (n=15 and n=3 respectively).

Given the context for the *OCHRE* evaluation, three queries were conducted on the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*. These separate queries included searching for articles with the terms 'Aboriginal' (n=14), 'Torres Strait' (n=2), and 'Indigenous' (n=16).

Lastly, the articles and references related to 'protocols' and Indigenous research were taken from a previous study by Raven (2014). A search was then undertaken to update the material for any relevant articles on protocols published in the last two years.

## 2 Basic research and evaluation theories

Evaluation is a form of research; therefore, the basic theories underpinning the way research is designed and conducted, and findings are analysed and interpreted, are similarly applicable to evaluations. These theories in turn are derived from different understandings of the nature of 'truth' and 'reality', with philosophical debates going back thousands of years. Furthermore, as described below, Indigenous peoples have their own understandings of the nature of reality and how the world should be interpreted.

### 2.1 Epistemology and methodology

#### 2.1.1 Epistemology

Social science is generally classified into two main epistemological paradigms Positivist and Interpretive. These have opposing views of the nature of social reality. *Positivism* is based on the natural sciences and asserts that there is an objective reality independent of the views or opinions of people. The aim of science is to identify and describe this objective reality and the underlying laws of nature. In the social sciences, the aim of research is similarly to objectively describe social phenomena and identify the generalisable social 'laws' that underpin human behaviour. The *Interpretive* or *Constructivist* social science paradigm can be traced to Max Weber (1949) and Wilhem Dilthey (1991). Weber argued that social science should study the meaning and purpose of society and social actions. In this view, there is no objective truth or reality, but there are different ways of interpreting and understanding social phenomena, depending on the context and ideological positions of different stakeholders. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm of social science is more concerned with examining people's understandings of reality and their motivations and beliefs, rather than trying to elicit the objective truth about social behaviour or outcomes. Included in this paradigm are 'critical' approaches to research which envisage research as a mechanism for critiquing the social structures that underpin inequality and discrimination, with the purpose of challenging the current power relationships within society and promoting social justice.

At one level, different epistemologies are 'incommensurable' or mutually exclusive (Kuhn, 1996). It is not possible to believe that there is an objective truth and also that truth is socially constructed and can be de-constructed. Nevertheless, many research projects involve multiple methods which are often based on different epistemological stances, and which attempt to bring together these different perspectives to gain insight into the nature of social actions and behaviour. In reality, even the most hard-nosed empirical social science can only provide findings which are contingent and partial, and therefore findings are always open to different interpretations which, by their nature, contain a degree of subjectivity.



## 2.1.2 Methodology

Research based on positivist paradigm is strongly associated with quantitative methodologies. The key characteristics of quantitative research are validity and reliability. Validity was defined originally by Kelly (1927) as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Reliability refers to the extent that the test produces similar results over time and in different situations.

Evaluation stances based on the interpretive paradigm tend to adopt qualitative research methods because they are more suited to identifying different subjective views and taking context into account. Nevertheless, quantitative methods can also be used within this paradigm, although even quantitative findings tend to be interpreted as one way of viewing the data rather than representing the objective truth about the causes and effects of the subject (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

## 2.2 Evaluation theories

Evaluation theories, as Miller (2010) suggests, 'are intended to provide evaluators with the bases for making the myriad of decisions that are part of designing and conducting an evaluation' (p. 390). Evaluation theories provide evaluators with certain perspectives and guidance on matters such as:

- The role of the evaluator and the relationship to the subject/s of the evaluation individuals and community
- Selecting evaluation questions and matching with suitable methods
- Participant selection
- Informational needs, such as who will receive the evaluation findings and in what format (Miller, 2010).

Dahler-Larsen (2012) suggests that society has become preoccupied with evaluation and that evaluation involves stopping and reflectively considering and creating meaningful understandings of social processes. Evaluation is 'assisted sensemaking'<sup>1</sup> (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, p. 26). In an attempt to define an evaluation process, Dahler-Larsen uses two metaphors. In the first, he asks us to consider a children's train in an amusement park. As the train lines are already laid the ride is predictable. In the second metaphor he asks us to consider the evaluation process as a bumper car ride:

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<sup>1</sup> Dahler-Larsen (2012) uses the notion of 'sensemaking' as developed in Weick (1995).

[...] where the trajectory is fairly unpredictable; there is no overall plan for where the bumper car is going. What happens depends to some extent on the intentions and skills of the driver, but all the other bumper cars are more important. After each bump, the car goes in a new direction, and the overall image is one of disconnected elements, continuously trying to find their way (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, p. 106).

Through these two metaphors Dahler-Larsen (2012) suggests that the evaluation process is more akin to a bumper car ride than riding a children's train. That is, the evaluation process is less structured and ordered, and aspects of the evaluation process evolve over time and place.

However, most evaluations fall between these two extremes; although they inevitably have to adapt to changes in the program or broader context over time, they also tend to have fairly clear research questions and methods which are applied to those questions (Dahler-Larsen, 2012). These can be adapted but should also remain relatively stable so that the evaluation provides a coherent account of the program's implementation and impacts.

Alkin and Christie (2004), through their 'evaluation theory tree', suggest that the roots of evaluation theory are grounded in accountability and systematic social inquiry. The 'accountability root', which is prevalent in government evaluations, stems from the need to account for actions or resources used in programs. In comparison, the social inquiry root derives from concerns for using a 'systematic justifiable set of methods for determining accountability' (Alkin & Christie, 2004, p. 12). From these roots of the 'evaluation theory tree' stem the branches of evaluation theories and practices based on 'use', 'methods' and 'values' (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Mertens and Wilson (2012), utilising the 'evaluation theory tree', create an additional branch they call the 'transformative' (or 'social justice') branch, and situate Indigenous and culturally responsive evaluations in this branch (Mertens and Wilson 2012).

## 3 Evaluation approaches

The literature on evaluation has identified a number of different approaches to evaluation. As indicated above, some of these are classified according to their methodological and epistemological assumptions whereas others are classified according to their objectives. For a comprehensive list of all the possible evaluation approaches, see the *Better Evaluation* website (<http://betterevaluation.org/approaches>).

As indicated above, evaluations take a variety of forms, and there are various positions and definitions on what constitutes an 'evaluation theory' or 'approach' (Dahler-Larsen, 2012; Elahi, Kalantari, Hassanzadeh, & Azar, 2015; Hansen et al., 2013; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

A *program evaluation* is a 'rigorous, systematic and objective process to assess a program's effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness and sustainability' (NSW Government 2016, p. 5). Further, program evaluations 'should always be undertaken with a view to informing decision making. This may include continuing, expanding, ceasing or refining a program' (NSW Government, 2016, p. 16). Program evaluations can be categorised as *Outcome/Impact*, *Implementation/Process* and *Economic* evaluations. Most evaluations involve more than one of these types, and usually incorporate process and impacts/outcomes. The types of program evaluations are explained further below.

### 3.1 Positivist methods evaluations

The *methods* approach is based on the positivist social science paradigm which concentrates on obtaining the objective truth about the causes and effects of programs, and focusing on the generalisability of findings (Alkin & Christie, 2004) through the use of rigorous methods (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). These evaluations hold that reality exists independent of the observer, and that the distance from the object of study helps to avoid bias (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). While most evaluations have a methodological concern, those on the method branch of the 'evaluation theory tree' emphasise well-designed studies and controls (Alkin & Christie, 2004). For instance, Ralph Tyler, one of the founders of evaluation, focused on objective measurement of outcomes – an approach that has come to be known as the objectives-orientated evaluation (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Campbell and Stanley's *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (1966), became a foundational paper for the social science method (and the methods branch of evaluation). Their paper advanced randomisation, internal validity, external validity, and quasi-experimental designs in social science research (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Campbell and Stanley define experiments as:

...that portion of research in which variables are manipulated and their effects upon other variables observed (1966, p. 1).

Positivist method evaluations are therefore associated with quantitative research methodologies, as these methods are explicitly aimed at providing objective data about programs and their outcomes. They require rigorous methods for identifying populations and samples, establishing control groups or other benchmarks, and measuring change over time for the intervention group, compared to the control group or other benchmark. The 'gold standard' of this approach is the randomised controlled trial (RCT) which was developed in the natural sciences to measure the effects of drugs and agricultural techniques. RCTs involve randomly allocating subjects, such as individuals, communities, or schools, to the intervention group and the control group and then observing changes in the intervention group, relative to the control group. These methods all aim at eliminating or reducing bias, therefore ensuring that the findings do not arise out of the particular beliefs or prejudices of the evaluator, or as a result of weakness in the methodological approach; therefore the findings are considered valid, reliable and robust.

While there is considerable debate as to their appropriateness for certain social policy evaluations (e.g. Heider 2013), it is generally agreed that RCTs are most effective for specific interventions with clear outcomes, and where quantitative evidence can be complemented by qualitative information on context and implementation, so they can provide insight into why interventions are effective or not (White, Sabarwal, & de Hoop, 2014). They are less appropriate for programs which are adapted to specific contexts and sites, involve multiple processes and outcomes and have small numbers of subjects. In addition, in some circumstances there may be ethical and logistical challenges to randomly assigning policy interventions to individuals or communities. In the case of Aboriginal research, as described below, where there are usually small numbers of communities involved, and where prior engagement and consent of the community is an integral part of ethical policy intervention as well as evaluation<sup>2</sup>, this means there is usually limited scope for using RCTs.

## Realist evaluations

As a response to the limits of the experimental approach, Pawson and Tilley (1997) developed the *realist* approach to evaluation. The approach is based on realist philosophical principles which assume that reality exists outside of human observations of it, and there are regular context specific patterns (or generative mechanisms) that are possible to detect (Mark, Henry, & Julnes, 1998). Like other positivist approaches, realist evaluation maintains that objectivity is possible and desirable. However, in realist evaluations the purpose is to understand the particular mechanisms by which programs work to achieve change within specific contexts. This is unlike experiments, which aim to generalise findings to all contexts, and therefore view the specific contexts in which the program is being implemented as 'confounders'.

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that RCTs or experimental studies could never be done in Aboriginal communities. However, they would have to abide by the principles of Aboriginal research set out in Section 4.1.1 below.

## 3.2 Constructivist evaluations

Constructivist evaluation approaches include a range of different methodologies and evaluation aims which, as indicated in Section 2.1, share in common the view that there is no objective truth about the effectiveness of programs and policies; different stakeholders have different viewpoints in relation to the implementation and impact of the program, each of which must be taken into account in order to assess its value. Some of these approaches go further than this and view evaluation as part of a process of societal change.

### Participatory or 'use' evaluations

The *use* branch<sup>3</sup> of the 'evaluation theory tree' focuses on the way the evaluation will be used and who will use it (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Patton's *Utilization Focused Evaluation* (2008) focuses less on the multiple methods used and more on the utility of the evaluation. In particular, Patton emphasises that evaluations should be designed so that their findings can be used by policy makers to improve and develop policies and programs. He applies a number of standards to evaluations in particular:

- Utility – ensure relevance and use
- Feasibility – realistic, prudent, diplomatic and frugal
- Propriety – ethical, legal, respectful
- Accuracy – technically adequate to determine merit or worth (Patton, 2008).

Participatory, collaborative and empowerment evaluations also fall into this branch of evaluation (Askew, Beverly, & Lay, 2012). Participatory and collaborative evaluation can be defined as 'evaluation that is 'based on a partnership or collaboration between trained evaluators and program community members and stakeholders, all of whom work together in the production of evaluative knowledge' (Chouinard & Milley, 2016, p. 3). Participatory and collaborative evaluations are set apart from other approaches through the 'relational and dialogic nature of the inquiry process', the involvement of multiple diverse stakeholders, the engaged position of the evaluator, and by the relationships that develop between stakeholders and evaluators (Chouinard & Milley, 2016, p. 3). Participatory evaluation tends to emphasise program improvement, rather than summative judgements (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

A framework<sup>4</sup> to classify participatory evaluation includes the following dimensions: control of the evaluation process, stakeholder selection for participation, depth of participation, and phase of

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<sup>3</sup> Alkin and Christie (2004) suggest that the *use* branch is based on the work of Daniel Stufflebeam, Egon Guba, and Joseph Wholey.

<sup>4</sup> Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014) suggest that the framework to distinguish forms of participatory evaluation was first developed by Cousins, Donoghue and Bloom (1996) and revised by Cousins and Whitmore (1998) and later by Weaver and Cousins (2004).

participation (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). The participatory approach is flexible in methodology and approach (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). The evaluator, for instance, begins through the identification of users and participants from a broad range of stakeholders, and identifies what the different stakeholder groups expect from the evaluation.

Within the participatory evaluation approach are further elaborations of *transformative participatory evaluation* and *practical participatory evaluation* (Cousins, Whitmore, & Shulha, 2012; Chouinard & Milley, 2016). Transformative participatory evaluation is grounded in political justification and has as part of its modus operandi emancipation, empowerment, self-determination and social change, while practical participatory evaluation has a more pragmatic approach that focuses on the program problem solving, evaluation process and the use of findings (Cousins et al., 2012; Chouinard & Milley, 2016). Transformative participatory evaluation and practical participatory evaluation are not mutually exclusive categories of participatory evaluation, as they both share a common philosophy to develop a deeper meaning through collaboration (Cousins et al., 2012).

Collaborative and participatory evaluations appear to be the most often used approaches to interventions and evaluations with Indigenous and Aboriginal communities and international development settings (Cousins et al., 2012; Chouinard & Milley, 2016). As Johnston-Goodstar (2012, pp. 113-114) suggests, “participation is especially vital to decolonized evaluation because community members are invited to design and participate in the evaluation”. Participation is essential to informing the evaluation goals, questions/problems and methods (Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Mattehews, 2011, Johnston-Goodstar, 2012) in these settings. Advisory groups can act as a way to ensure Indigenous participation, and that the evaluation is relevant to the community (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). Participatory evaluations in the Indigenous context are discussed further in Section 4.3.2.

### 3.3 Transformative or social justice evaluations

*Social justice evaluations* exist within the transformative paradigm, and focus primarily on the viewpoints of marginalised groups (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). This type of evaluation is part of the ‘critical research’ approach which addresses and interrogates power structures to further social justice and human rights (Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). This approach is premised on the idea that all knowledge claims are situational, where the relationship between participants and evaluators are interactive, and the questions for the evaluation are derived from the voices of the marginalised groups (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Mertens and Wilson suggest that Indigenous evaluation is positioned in the ‘social justice’ evaluation category.

### 3.4 Values evaluations

*Values* (or valuing) evaluations emphasise that placing value on the subject of evaluation is essential to the process (Christie & Alkin, 2014) and that an evaluation must provide an objective

assessment of value (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Therefore the approach focuses on identifying multiple values and perspectives and does this primarily through the use of qualitative methods (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Values evaluation theoretically draws from the constructivist paradigm – the idea that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is also created by our own experiences (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Through this approach, the evaluator is aware of their own and others values (Mertens & Wilson, 2012), and stakeholders place a definitive role in defining the questions, variables and interpretive criteria (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

Values evaluation includes specific approaches such as the *values-engage evaluation* (VEE) (Hansen et al., 2013; Luskin & Ho, 2013). The purpose of VEE is to enable full participation of all legitimate stakeholders (Luskin & Ho, 2013). The “evaluator works with participants to ensure that their diverse values and perspectives are legitimized and advanced” (Luskin & Ho, 2013, p. 63). One goal of VEE is to ensure that all stakeholders receive adequate information about the evaluation so that they can participate fully and have equal access to the relevant information (Luskin & Ho, 2013).

Values evaluation, and more specifically VEE, is less conducive to questions related to whether particular outcomes have been produced, because it is difficult to operationalise the differing values of stakeholders (Luskin & Ho, 2013). Nevertheless, it is possible to assess how different stakeholders assess the impact of the program or policy on them or their communities.

Some other names for constructivist approaches include: interpretive evaluation, narrative evaluation, ethnography, oral history, ethnomethodology, and phenomenology (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

## **Co-production**

Included in this category is the increasing development of *co-production* in evaluations. The concept of co-production has been developed mainly in the context of evaluations of disability and mental health programs. People with disability or mental health issues are involved not only as subjects or participants of the evaluation, but are integral to the design of the project and are involved in collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings and disseminating the research. According to Robinson, Fisher, and Strike:

Inclusive approaches to evaluation aim to engage the people who are intended to benefit from social support programs as active agents in evaluation processes with the transformative goals of improving the programs in their interests. The approaches can offer opportunities for increased breadth and quality of data, an ethical schema, a clear conceptual and methodological framework for practice, and the potential for addressing the human rights and social justice of marginalised groups (2014, p. 1).

While the term co-production has not been used in the context of Indigenous evaluation in Australia or internationally, it is entirely consistent with the principles related to Indigenous research articulated in Section 4 below.

## 3.5 Focus of evaluation

### 3.5.1 Impact/outcome evaluations

*Impact/outcome evaluations* are one of the most common types of evaluations, focusing on whether program objectives have been achieved (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Objectives or outcomes can be categorised in terms of organisational outcomes and client/community/end user outcomes. Organisational outcomes refer to the impact of the program or policy on organisational structures, functions or methods for delivering services, whereas client/community/end user outcomes refer to the effect of the program on the wellbeing of those people who are expected to benefit from the program.

Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007), rejecting this definition, suggest that defining evaluation in this way can lead to evaluation failure, waste resources focusing on objectives that are unworthy of achievement or irrelevant to those who are supposed to benefit from the program, and can steer an evaluation towards only considering narrowly defined objectives rather than the broader effects of the program.

### 3.5.2 Process evaluations

*Process evaluations* involve evaluations of both the process of implementing the program, as well as processes involved in delivering the program. Process evaluations answer questions such as:

- Is the program appropriately targeted?
- Is it engaging appropriately with participants?
- How faithful is the delivery to the intended model?
- Are governance arrangements appropriate?
- Is the workforce appropriately trained and supported?
- How satisfied are clients with the service?
- How effective is the leadership?

Process evaluations often link to impact or outcome evaluations. This allows for better understanding of the impact of the program and provides insights into the reasons for program success or failure.

In recent years there has been a growing focus on implementation, leading to the development of *implementation science* (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). This is in



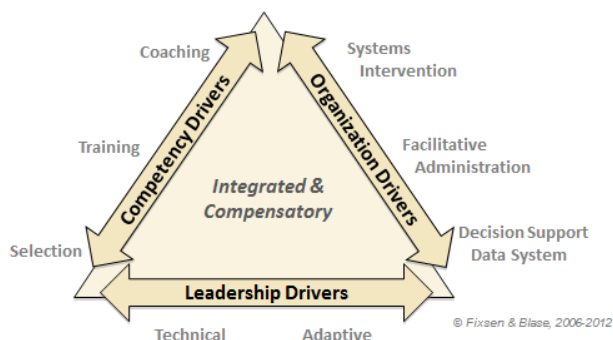
recognition of the fact that many well-conceived and evidence based programs and policies fail to achieve their intended outcomes because of failures of implementation. The literature draws out the factors which lead to successful program implementation in different contexts. However, Fixsen et al., in their review of the implementation literature, concluded that:

Implementation to achieve beneficial outcomes for consumers seems to require a longer-term multilevel approach. At this point, we still do not know enough about the important factors required for implementation nor do we understand what makes those factors work (2005, p. 94).

Nevertheless in the past 10 years there has been considerable progress in the theoretical and empirical development of implementation studies. Effective implementation has become recognised as a key factor in understanding the successes and failures of programs and policies.

The National Implementation Research Network in the US has identified three main drivers which interact with each other to ensure effective implementation. These are competency, organisation and leadership, as indicated in Figure 1:

**Figure 1 Implementation drivers**



Source: NIRN (<http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation/implementation-stages>)

Evaluations therefore have to take these factors into account to fully explain the barriers and facilitating factors to implementation.

### 3.5.3 Formative and summative evaluations

Chambers (1994) indicates that the distinction between *formative* and *summative* evaluation is historically associated with Scriven (1967). Scriven argues that the goal of evaluation is to provide an objective assessment of value, and that the two main 'roles' of evaluation are to assist in developing a program or policy (formative) and to assess the value of the program or policy

once it has been developed (summative) (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Therefore, an evaluation is either *formative* or *summative* based on how the information is used, not on how it is collected (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Formative evaluations focus on process and generally occur during the running of the program whereas summative evaluations assess the merits of a program and judge its value (Chambers, 1994), focusing on outcomes and reporting at the end of the program (Robinson, 1988, as cited in Chambers, 1994). The same collected data and information may be used for formative or summative evaluation (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014) and many evaluations contain both formative and summative components.

### 3.5.4 Economic evaluations

Economic evaluations provide systematic quantitative methods for assessing choices in the context of optimal program outcomes. Primary economic evaluation techniques in areas of health care and human service program evaluation include:

- cost effectiveness analysis which compares costs and outcomes to estimate incremental cost per unit of program effect, for example, cost per life-year gained.
- cost utility analysis which is considered an extension of cost effectiveness analysis and focuses on a generic measure of health gain. This technique is widely established in healthcare program settings as it incorporates health related quality of life outcomes used to estimate Quality Adjusted Life Years or alternative generic measures.
- cost benefit analysis which has its origins in areas such as construction of buildings and transport. The method involves valuing outcomes in monetary terms and then comparing the cost of the program or policy to the monetary benefits of its outcomes. If undertaken comprehensively, this method theoretically provides a highly comparable measure; however, in practice, methodological problems in valuing outcomes and other program consequences in monetary terms limits the application of cost benefit analysis in program evaluation settings. This is reflected in the substantial majority of published health and social program evaluations being based on cost effectiveness and cost utility analysis methods (Drummond, Sculpher, Claxton, Stoddart, & Torrance, 2015).

## 3.6 Components of evaluations

There are a variety of approaches for analysing an evaluation theory. Mark (2008) for example, argues that the four categories of research on evaluation are:

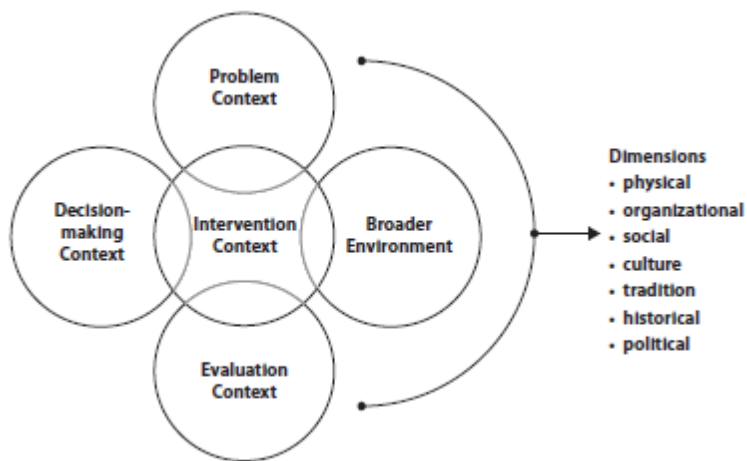
- evaluation context
- evaluation activities
- evaluation consequences
- professional issues.

Hansen et al. (2013) similarly use the same categories but substitute 'professional issues' with 'external factors'.

### 3.6.1 Evaluation context

The *evaluation context*, as Mark suggests, refers to ‘the circumstances within which evaluation occurs’, and includes the societal, organisational, community or program level (2008, p. 117). The contexts of evaluations are ‘complex, multifaceted, highly interactive encompassing social, historical, political, ecological and cultural dimensions, all of which interconnect to influence program and evaluation characteristics and possibilities’ (Chouinard & Milley, 2016, p. 1). Rog (2012) indicates that context should be foregrounded, especially in Indigenous evaluation. She identifies a range of different contexts which must be taken into account, each with a number of dimensions, as indicated in Figure 2:

Figure 2 Areas of context that affect evaluation practice



Source: Rog (2012) p28

Chouinard and Milley, in their discussion of collaborative evaluation, characterise contextual factors along the following four dimensions:

- Characteristics of evaluator and evaluation team (expertise, communication and instructional skills, cultural background)
- Community context (demographic, social, economic and historical characteristics and factors, pre-existing relationships, and micro-political processes of stakeholder relationships)
- Institutional influences (level of administrative support, availability of resources and time, organisational culture, information and program needs, stakeholder participants level of evaluation skills)
- Program influences (program complexity and breadth, program history, design and objectives, characteristics and role of program staff) (2016, p. 2).

Chouinard and Milley (2016) further argue that context ought to be conceived of as a spatial construct or as 'space'. Borrowing from the work of critical geography<sup>5</sup>, Chouinard and Milley suggest that contexts, when conceived of as spaces, 'are saturated with multiple and often contested and competing cultural, political, and social narratives' (2016, p. 3).

### 3.6.2 Evaluation activities

The *evaluation activities* are procedures used to carry out the evaluation, and include different approaches, components and practices (Mark 2008). Focusing on the evaluation practices in particular involves examining specific aspects of the way the evaluation is done; for example, how evaluators undertake evaluations and report on their findings, and the level at which stakeholders participate (Mark 2008).

### 3.6.3 Evaluation consequences

*Evaluation consequences* include any changes that occur, or do not occur, as a result of the evaluation (Mark, 2008). This area of evaluation research relates to the 'use' branch of Alkin and Christie's (2004) 'evaluation theory tree', and comprises outcomes and "changes in those who actively participate in the evaluation" or changes to the evaluation context (Mark, 2008, p. 120).

### 3.6.4 Professional issues

*Professional issues* involve the 'structure, norms, and continuation of the field of evaluation', and includes aspects such as training and standards (Mark, 2008, p. 117).

Overall the combination of contexts, activities, professional issues and consequences is different in each case and therefore evaluations are very diverse in nature.

## 3.7 Adapting evaluations to the context

Miller (2010) suggests that evaluations can be analysed on the basis of their operational specificity, range of application, feasibility in practice, discernible impact, and reproducibility.

To evaluate *operational specificity*, Miller argues that evaluations must translate into clear guidance and indicate their theoretical basis (2010). In this regard, Miller suggests that guidance could include the identification and prioritisation of evaluation questions and when and how these

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<sup>5</sup> See for example: Harvey, D. (1993) 'From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of postmodernity'. In J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, & L. Tickner (Eds.), *Mapping the future: Local cultures, global change* (pp. 2–29). London: Routledge; Massey, D. (1993) 'Politics and space/time'. In M. Keith & S. Pile (Eds.), *Place and the politics of identity* (pp. 139–159). London: Routledge; Massey, D. (1996). 'Politicising space and place', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 112(2), 117–123; Massey, D. (2005) *For space*. London: Sage Publications Inc; Thrift, N. (2003) 'Space: The fundamental stuff of human geography.' In S. Holloway, S. Rice, & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Key concepts in geography* (pp. 95–107). London: Sage Publications.

are done; who ought to participate at each stage of the evaluation process; the evaluators' role; methods; how values ought to be enacted; and consideration of evaluation plans and results.

Miller (2010) states that no single theory can fit every evaluation and therefore suggests that the evaluation theory should consider the limits of its application. Miller argues that the *range of applications* of an evaluation can be discerned by asking the following questions:

- What are the most suitable conditions for applying the theory?
- When the theory is applied under ideal circumstances, are the processes and outcomes similar to or different from those that occur when it is applied in circumstances that are less than ideal?
- How adaptable is the theory across a range of conditions? (2010, p. 393)

Evaluation is not just a technical activity, but is also a political and social activity. Therefore, *feasibility in practice*, relates not just to the methods of evaluation, but also the skills, experiences and expertise of the evaluator.

Hansen et al. (2013), for example, through an analysis of the context, activities and consequences/effects, argue that evaluators engage differing roles and skills across the range of evaluation approaches. Through the 'use' approach, evaluators have knowledge of evaluation and capabilities for training others in evaluation; develop technical knowledge and skills and shared understanding of programs and processes; and assume responsibility for the technical evaluation tasks. Through a 'value' approach, evaluators have evaluation knowledge; attend to relational dimensions; and commit to broad stakeholder consultations. And through the 'methods' approach, evaluators recognise the contextual aspects of program effects and recognises the weaknesses and strengths of each evaluation approach (Hansen et al., 2013).

Similarly, Skolits, Morrow, & Burr (2009) argue that it is more realistic to view the role of an evaluator through the common activities that evaluators engage in throughout an evaluation process. In contrast to Hansen et al. (2013), Skolits et al. discern that evaluators take on the role of a manager, detective, designer, negotiator, diplomat, researcher, reporter judge, and learner.

The *discernible impact* criterion is concerned with whether the evaluation had a particular impact (such as empowerment evaluation) (Miller, 2010). Miller suggests that an important factor in evaluating *discernible impacts* is whether any of the observed impacts can be reproduced over time, occasions, and by different evaluators. As Miller argues, it is important to examine the *reproducibility* of an evaluation "because theories are to be used by evaluators other than their inventors, examination of whether evaluators can reproduce the approach and its outcomes are essential" (2010, p. 396). An examination of the 'reproducibility' of an evaluation theory, argues Miller, may assist with categorising the degree to which the approach is a source of practice guidance or as a 'sensitizing ideology'.

### 3.8 Role of the evaluator

Most evaluation methods propose that the evaluator should be – and should be seen to be – independent of the program and the program funder. Independence is important for the credibility of the evaluation and to ensure that evaluation findings are not biased or influenced by the needs of the funder or other powerful stakeholders (Picciotto, 2013). There are different levels of independence that evaluators can maintain. At one end of the continuum, the evaluator does not engage with the program at all, other than to collect data. These evaluations are likely to be positivist or experimental in nature, where objectivity is most highly valued. On the other end of the continuum, evaluators are highly engaged with the program and may even participate in some of the program implementation activities (such as in participatory action research) (Chourinard & Cousins, 2007). In these situations independence is nevertheless important in that findings would still be expected to reflect the evaluator's judgement about the program and its effectiveness. Indigenous evaluations are likely to be of the latter sort. Evaluators must be engaged with the program and with the range of participants, especially community members who are expected to benefit from the program. However, the reporting of the evaluation must still reflect an independent view of the program that is not influenced by government or other funders.

## 4 Indigenous evaluation and research

The distinction between Indigenous research and evaluation is fairly arbitrary, indistinguishable, and some Indigenous communities consider both as political acts (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). While a program evaluation may have different objectives and purposes from research, the methods through which information is gathered from Indigenous peoples crosses over into research, and research in Indigenous communities is considered by many Indigenous peoples as a form of colonisation (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012).

The history of research in Indigenous communities has been one where researchers enter an Indigenous community, collect the information they need, leave the community, and publish the results as they see fit (Taylor, 2003). Like the dominant story of Australian history, mainstream perspectives on evaluation findings are heard, while Indigenous views are silenced or not acknowledged. This kind of reporting does not represent the Indigenous community nor does it capture a true interpretation of the research findings (Taylor, 2003).

Evaluations involving Indigenous peoples need to consider the body of knowledge dedicated to unpacking, understanding and decolonising Indigenous research (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). And “because evaluation is a form of research, and evaluation researchers are not immune to these oppressive practices, it is essential that evaluators acknowledge and engage with this history” (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012, p. 110).

This section provides a brief overview of the literature on Indigenous research, followed by the ethical principles and protocols for conducting Indigenous research. An overview of themes within the Indigenous evaluation literature is then presented. In the Indigenous evaluation context, evaluation can have different meanings that focus on accountability, process, impact, and single or systems wide aspects (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). In the Indigenous context ‘evaluation is more than just providing accountability in the narrowest financial sense or checking boxes to ensure that prescribed processes have been followed, and that it should have a role in holding governments to account for outcomes’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, p. 3).

### 4.1 Indigenous research methodologies

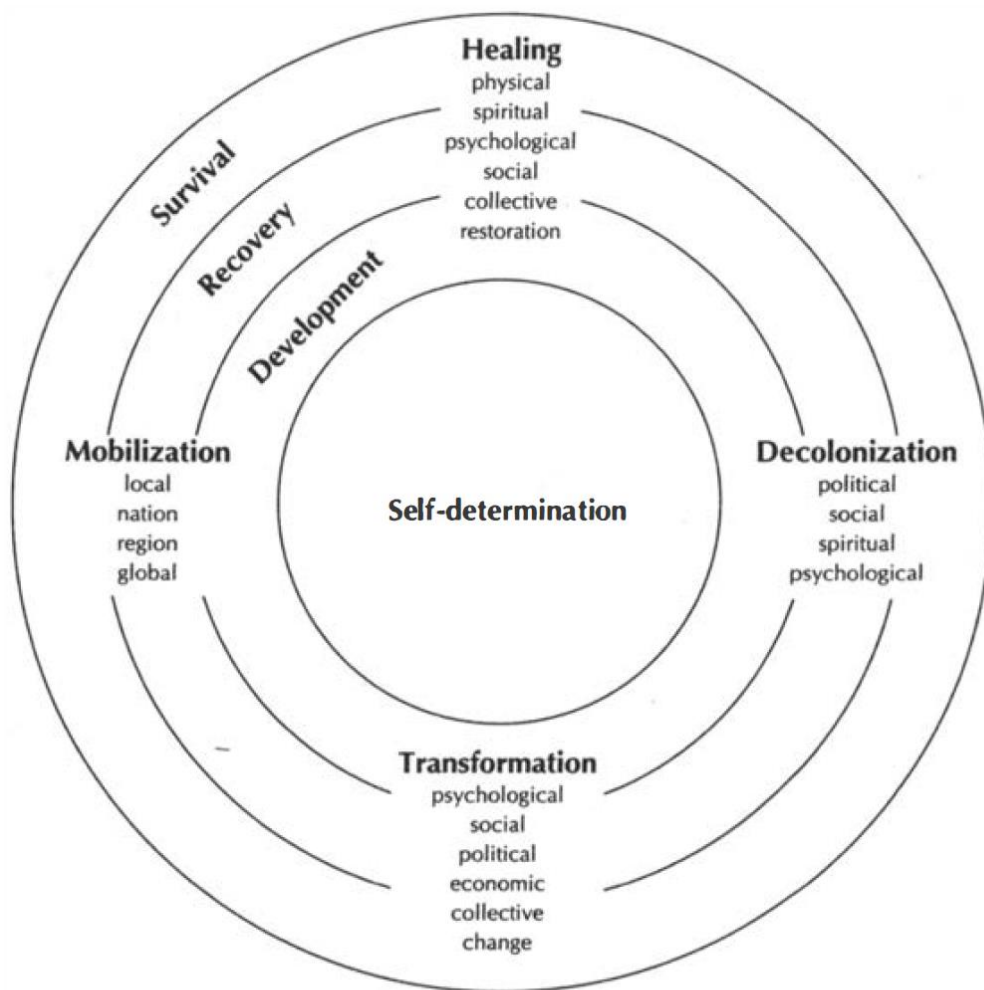
Research involving Indigenous populations, in Australia and internationally, has traditionally been conducted using Westernised (mainly positivist) paradigms and research processes where ‘knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West’ (Smith, 2012, p. 1). This has reinforced the perception that the knowledge held by ‘white’ scholars is superior to that of minority cultures that are always placed in the category of ‘other’. As such, Indigenous voices are continually being repressed within ‘mainstream academic discourses’ (Blodgett et al., 2011, p. 522). Scholars have used this

oppression as a vehicle for arguing the need for change to research processes in Indigenous contexts (Blodgett et al., 2011).

Decolonising research is the term used for research that 'recognises and works within the belief that non-Western knowledge forms are excluded from or marginalized in normative research paradigms, and therefore non-Western/Indigenous voices are silenced and lack agency within such representations' (Blue, Swadener, & Mutua, 2008, p. 33). Adopting a decolonising approach to research requires researchers to understand colonial standpoints and the impact this has had on Indigenous populations. One of the most important contributions to the development of an Indigenous decolonising research agenda is the New Zealand scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith. In her book *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Tuhiwai-Smith sets out the reasons that Indigenous peoples have been hostile to and suspicious of research, which has historically been used as a way to scientifically 'prove' the inferiority of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, research has been a significant site of struggle for Indigenous peoples against colonial exploitation and oppression. In acknowledging this history, the book indicates that Indigenous peoples can themselves use research to combat the colonising discourse of mainstream research, and that research can contribute to Indigenous peoples' healing and self-determination, as indicated in Figure 3.



Figure 3 The Indigenous research agenda



Source: Tuhiwai Smith, 1999 p117

At the core of Indigenous research is the concept of *Respect* and in particular, mutual recognition between researchers and those being researched. The ethical principles set out in Section 4.1.1 are all designed to ensure the respect for Indigenous communities who participate in research. In particular, they are designed to prevent researchers and those who fund research from exploiting Indigenous peoples and using their cultural knowledge in ways that could cause harm to the community or individuals, or could benefit non-Indigenous people at the expense of Indigenous communities. Research and evaluation in Aboriginal communities therefore must be conducted *by* and *with* Indigenous peoples, rather than research or evaluation *on* and *about* Indigenous peoples. This emphasises and values the existing strengths, assets and knowledge systems of Indigenous communities.

Kovach finds the following aspects central to Indigenous methodologies:

- Indigenous knowledge: Holistic Indigenous knowledge systems are a legitimate way of knowledge

- Relational: Receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants is (or ought to be) a natural part of the research methodology
- Collective: Collectivity, as a way of knowing, assumes reciprocity to the community
- Methods: Indigenous methods, including story, are a legitimate way of sharing knowledge (2015, p. 53).

Although there are commonalities and shared experiences of colonialism and disadvantage across Indigenous communities in many countries, researchers must acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages community structures, resources and experiences. Each community has a unique history and culture, and research must be sensitive to the differences between communities as well as the shared history of Indigenous peoples (Cobb-Clark, 2013; Maddison, 2009).

#### 4.1.1 Ethical principles for Indigenous research

The methods used in Indigenous research will vary to meet the relevance and capacity of the project, however, all Indigenous research, if carried out correctly, must comply with the ethical principles for conducting research with Indigenous people. This is true in Australia as well as internationally.

In Australia research that is undertaken through universities and involves humans, or is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC), requires ethical research clearance from a Human Ethics Research Committee (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Research must meet principles and standards set by the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (NH&MRC Statement; Commonwealth of Australia, 1999). Additionally, any research that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/s must meet the standards set out in the NH&MRC *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). The guideline sets the values and principles for undertaking research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as: spirit and integrity; reciprocity; respect; equality; survival and protection; and responsibility (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003).

The *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* developed by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies<sup>6</sup> (AIATSIS; AIATSIS, 2000) largely shaped the NH&MRC's values and ethics guideline. These guidelines were revised and updated in 2010 and again in 2011 (AIATSIS, 2011). The AIATSIS Guidelines contain 14 principles grouped under the categories of:

- rights, respect and recognition
- negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding

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<sup>6</sup> AIATSIS released one of the first sets of guidelines in Australia that gave substantial support to Indigenous autonomy and rights in the research process.

- participation, collaboration and partnership
- benefits, outcomes and giving back
- managing research: use, storage and access
- reporting and compliance.

The AIATSIS Guidelines and NH&MRC Values and Ethics Guidelines seek to ensure ethical research practices with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The guidelines seek to redistribute power and control in research relationships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/s.

In NSW, the main ethical body for Aboriginal research is the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC). The AH&MRC has five principles which guide research in Aboriginal communities:

- *Net benefits for Aboriginal people and communities:* The research will advance scientific knowledge and result in a demonstrated net benefit for the health of Aboriginal people and communities
- *Aboriginal community control of research:* There is Aboriginal community control over all aspects of the proposed research including research design, ownership of data, data interpretation and publication of research findings
- *Cultural sensitivity:* The research will be conducted in a manner sensitive to the cultural principles of Aboriginal society
- *Reimbursement of costs:* Aboriginal communities and organisations will be reimbursed for all costs arising from their participation in the research process
- *Enhancing Aboriginal skills and knowledge:* The project will utilise available opportunities to enhance the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal people, communities and organisations that are participating in the project.

In Australia there have been significant changes to the way research has been conducted over the past two decades, and there is now much more recognition of the need to engage with Aboriginal communities in research and for researchers to establish meaningful and respectful long-term relationships with Aboriginal communities (Kendall et al., 2011). However, these authors claim that there is still a long way to go for Australian research to fully embrace the changes which need to occur for research to become truly decolonised and free of western paradigms.

The basic principles underpinning research and evaluation with Indigenous Australian peoples are similar to those of other countries. For example, the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) *Aboriginal Research Statement of Principles* provides the following principles:

- **Recognize [Aboriginal research](#)** as defined under the Definitions of Terms on SSHRC's website.

- **Apply** the standards set out in the second edition of the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#), and, in particular, [Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada](#).
- **Respect** Aboriginal knowledge systems, including ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies, as important avenues for exploring the contours of indigenous knowledge, contributing to interdisciplinary collaboration, and extending the boundaries of knowledge in western disciplines.
- **Affirm** the important, holistic and interdisciplinary contributions to human knowledge that are made by Aboriginal knowledge systems.
- **Support** the talent of Aboriginal researchers and students, including through direct and indirect financial support for Aboriginal students.
- **Promote and facilitate** fair and equitable merit review processes and procedures by including on adjudication committees reviewing Aboriginal research proposals Aboriginal researchers and/or experts in Aboriginal research.
- **Value** collaborative and diverse relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in Canada, and with indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.
- **Recognize and respect** the diverse protocols and processes appropriate to conducting research in Aboriginal communities with Aboriginal Peoples.
- **Accommodate the diversity** of Aboriginal Peoples and identities, each with their particular aspirations and occupying distinct cultural, historical, political and socio-economic spaces.
- **Encourage** the participation of elders and knowledge keepers through recognition of their research contributions and the observance of knowledge-specific protocols.
- **Ensure** that all levels of SSHRC programming includes information, guidance, training and tools that help build awareness and understanding about the importance and value of these principles.
- **Continue to identify important topics, issues and questions** relevant to Aboriginal research and to which the social sciences and humanities can contribute its knowledge, talent and expertise, through initiatives including [Imagining Canada's Future](#).<sup>7</sup>

The principles set out in this section provide the basis for respectful engagement with Aboriginal communities and for research and evaluation to be carried out in a way that benefits rather than undermines the community. However, the principles are all expressed at a high level and implementing them is challenging. For example, communities are not homogeneous, and different community members or organisations may claim 'ownership' of different aspects of the community wisdom and resources. Furthermore, Aboriginal people may have a number of different roles including elders, custodians, citizens and consumers, and therefore the community may respond to the evaluation in numerous different ways as it progresses. All these complexities need to be taken into account when engaging with communities.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au\\_sujet/policies-politiques/statements-enonces/aboriginal\\_research-recherche\\_autochtone-eng.aspx](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/policies-politiques/statements-enonces/aboriginal_research-recherche_autochtone-eng.aspx)

## 4.1.2 Protocols

Protocols play an important role in research, consultation or working with Indigenous peoples. Some communities, organisations and Australian and state government departments have their own protocols to govern research and evaluation practices (Australia Council for the Arts, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d; Board of Studies NSW, 2008; Oxfam Australia, n.d.; State of New South Wales, 2008). However, there is no clear definition or conceptualisation of protocols. Across a range of contexts, protocols have been variously conceptualised as standards (Nakata, Byrne, Nakata, & Gardiner, 2005); rules (Carter, 2010; Community Cultural Development New South Wales, 2003); appropriate ways of communicating and working with others, and acceptable practices (Board of Studies NSW, 2008; Janke, 2012); tools that prescribe particular types of behaviours (Anderson, 2010; Bowrey, 2006; Carter, 2010); rights based approaches to affirm self-determination (Jonas, Shrumm, & Bavikatte, 2010); and tools to protect Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights (Oxfam Australia, n.d.). Carter, for example, found the following aspects related to the use of protocols including the need for: coordinated participation; cultural awareness activities; scrutiny of agreement making and representation; and the implication for conducting place-based Indigenous engagement (2008; 2010).

In close proximity to guidelines for research, protocols appear to operate as voluntary tools for governing behaviour and practices (Bowrey, 2006; Clemens, 2007; Garwood-Houng, 2005; Mackay, 2009), and can provide a gentle nudge to organisations not acting ethically (Mackay, 2009). Protocols also exist in a non-written form. Indigenous peoples and communities use protocols as a part of community and cultural life and practices. Garwood-Houng (2005) suggests that actors (researchers, evaluators) may be ignorant of the existence of the protocols or choose not to follow them.

## 4.2 Indigenous evaluation

Evaluation literature highlights the need for evaluation that is grounded in Indigenous values (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010). Indigenous evaluation in Australia began through the label of “cross-cultural awareness” and then moved to requirements for evaluators to be “culturally competent” (Hurworth & Harvey, 2012, p. 2). Both of these approaches are directed at non-Indigenous evaluators (Hurworth & Harvey, 2012). Hurworth and Harvey (2012) suggest that cultural competency in Australian Indigenous evaluation was replaced with calls for participatory and collaborative evaluation approaches. Yet, the notion of cultural competency still continues in the broader area of Indigenous research and service delivery in Australia and abroad.

For instance, in 2011 Universities Australia released the *National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia, 2011). Under this framework cultural competency is defined as:

Student and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of Indigenous protocols, combined with the proficiency to engage and work effectively in Indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of Indigenous Australian peoples (Universities Australia, 2011, p. 6).

The framework sets the following five guiding principles for Indigenous cultural competency:

- Indigenous people should be actively involved in university governance and management.
- All graduates of Australian universities should be culturally competent.
- University research should be conducted in a culturally competent way that empowers Indigenous participants and encourages collaborations with Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous staffing will be increased at all appointment levels and, for academic staff, across a wider variety of academic fields.
- Universities will operate in partnership with their Indigenous communities and will help disseminate culturally competent practices to the wider community (Universities Australia, 2011, p. 8).

Culturally competency is also a core component of the 2011 Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association evaluator competency framework (Goodwin, Sauni, & Were, 2015). But rather than viewing cultural competency in isolation, Goodwin et al. (2015) suggest that cultural competency and cultural responsiveness are better viewed through a continuum of 'cultural fit', which sits closely with the notion of cultural accordance – to be in a state of harmony or agreement.

The Board of the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) endorsed *Guidelines on Ethical Conduct in Evaluation in 1997* (AES, 2013). In 2000, the Guidelines were incorporated into the *AES Code of Ethics*, with the updated version updated in 2013 (AES, 2013). The AES guidelines include the following three sections:

- A. Commissioning and preparing for an evaluation
- B. Conducting an evaluation
- C. Reporting the results of an evaluation.

The AES Guidelines do not specifically mention Indigenous peoples, however, in Section B, the guidelines 'consider implications for difference and inequality' and cite the AIATSIS Guidelines, therefore inferring the inclusion of Indigenous peoples (AES, 2013, p. 8).

In 2003 the AES identified Indigenous evaluation as a strategic objective (Hurworth & Harvey, 2012). The same year, Taylor delivered a keynote address at the AES in Auckland where he called for the 'need for renewed focus on ethical evaluation practices in inter-cultural contexts'

(2003, p. 44). The inter-cultural context<sup>8</sup> – “a meeting of two distinct cultures” – is influenced by the history of colonisation and the differing perspectives that we all bring to this history, which are influencing evaluation outcomes (Taylor, 2003, p. 45). Evaluators need to recognise that they do not work in an ethical or cultural vacuum, and evaluation must appreciate and explore the presence of inter-cultural issues and differences (Taylor, 2003). Taylor suggests that the principles in the AIATSIS guidelines serve as a practical framework for achieving ethical and cultural standards in research and evaluation that occurs in inter-cultural contexts. And that “if evaluation involving inter-cultural factors are not prepared to outline the principles [...], they should not be funded”, as they represent poor business decision making, and the resulting evaluations lack inter-cultural integrity (Taylor, 2003, p. 48).

In 2012 the Productivity Commission organised the Roundtable *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation* (Productivity Commission, 2013). The roundtable presentations argued that Indigenous evaluation should recognise the rights of Indigenous self-determination and that most evaluations fail to take into account the needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. According to Malezer:

Conventional evaluation methodologies used by government fail to comprehensively understand the full range of factors that contribute to the successful delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Consequently, there is a failure to understand how programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be delivered and evaluated in a framework of self-determination.

Evidence from Australia and internationally consistently shows that community empowerment and involvement are the precursors for long-term economic development. Accordingly, Indigenous social policy should be evaluated in the context of self-determination and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (2013, p. 69).

Malezar (2013) concluded that to be truly inclusive of Indigenous peoples in evaluation research, the legacies of historical injustices, and continued injustices today, need to be recognised.

Ethical considerations are often undermined, particularly in the reporting stage where some funders attempt to influence the findings through pressuring the evaluators to make more positive findings (Guenther & Galbraith, 2014). Markiewicz (2012) suggests that Indigenous evaluation in Australia should be based on the principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility. In New Zealand, for example, a Maori conceptual framework for evaluation, building on the work of Boulton and Kingi (2011) and Kerr (2012), includes the six principles of: control, challenge, culture, connection, change and credibility (Hurworth & Harvey, 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> Nakata (2002) utilised the term ‘cultural interface’, and this is a similar approach taken by Taylor (2003). See Nakata, M (2002) ‘Indigenous Knowledge and the Cultural Interface: Understanding issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems’, *IFLA Journal*, 28(5/6): 281-291.

In the US, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium instigated the development of an Indigenous Evaluation Framework (IEF) as a response to requests for an evaluation model that is more respectful of American Indian settings and contexts than those imposed by Western external funding organisations (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; LaFrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart, 2012). In the IEF the 'setting defines everything', it is a 'context-first approach' (LaFrance et al., 2012, pp. 60-61). Indigenous knowledge circles the IEF, and includes 'keen observation', 'multiple perspectives', and 'community and individual experience' (LaFrance et al., 2012, p. 63). Indigenous knowledge then circles a series of core values including: 'place', 'gifts', 'community', and 'sovereignty' (LaFrance et al., 2012, p. 63). At the centre of the IEF model sits what may be considered the processes and methods for evaluation with Indigenous peoples and includes: 'creating the story', 'building the scaffolding', 'engaging community and celebrating learning', and 'planning, implementing and celebrating' (LaFrance et al., 2012, p. 63).

The concept of validity is also altered when approaching research from an IEF framework. As LeFrance et al. argue, 'when one moves beyond inquiry grounded in post-positivist epistemology and explores alternatives such as constructivism, critical theory, or culturally specific epistemology, the construct of validity must expand accordingly' (2012, p. 70). Concepts of validity need to expand to include cultural paradigms not usually considered in traditional approaches; for example, the role and context of nature, spirituality, animals and language (LeFrance et al., 2012). Therefore, 'working deeply within indigenous cultures and communities simultaneously supports validity and expands validity arguments' (LeFrance et al., 2012, p. 61).

#### **4.2.1 Aboriginal economic evaluation**

A recent systematic review, although noting the relatively low number of economic evaluations of Indigenous programs, indicates that a majority (22 of 27) interventions were identified as cost-effective or cost-saving (Angell et al. 2014).

Although Indigenous health programs have been shown to be cost effective, additional research reviewing Aboriginal maternal and child health programs and services in Australian primary health care settings has identified that research methodological quality varies considerably with quantitative studies in this area and are typically rated as weak (Jongen et al 2014). Further work has also highlighted that mainstream health economics has not traditionally considered cultural diversity and values in assessing health services and programs (Mooney 2009). Therefore, the discipline of economic evaluations in the Aboriginal context are still under-theorised and not well developed in practice.



## 4.3 Principles, concepts and themes for Indigenous research and evaluation

### 4.3.1 Respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility

Markiewicz (2012) suggests that Indigenous evaluation should be based on the principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility. This encompasses:

Having 'respect' for the importance of historical, socioeconomic and psychological context; commitment to ensuring 'relevance' in methodologies and approaches used; 'reciprocity' in considering the benefits for participating indigenous communities; and 'responsibility' in undertaking effective communication and consultation (Markiewicz, 2012, p. 19).

Scougall (2006) wrote a reflexive piece based on his role in the evaluation of the Australian Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. Scougall comments on the tensions in Indigenous evaluation and seeks to explain methods and approaches for finding a balance between contextual depth and representative breadth. This involves balancing professional and local knowledge; dealing with dual accountability to the organisation commissioning the work and Indigenous participants; and the need to complete the evaluation while leaving practical benefits or capacity for Indigenous people (Scougall, 2006). In the first instance, depth and breadth was achieved through the use of a questionnaire, face-to-face follow-up visit, observation, and case studies which were selected with dissimilar objectives and operated in different settings (Scougall, 2006).

Balancing professional and local knowledge was achieved through collaboratively recruiting local Indigenous people to assist with the case studies, to enable a supportive and trusting environment, and guard against misinterpretation of data/stories (Scougall, 2006). However, Scougall also suggested that it is not always advantageous to employ local Indigenous people, as "in some situations 'outsiders' without prior involvement in local community politics might be more acceptable and effective" (2006, p. 53).

Scougall (2006) suggests balancing dual accountabilities can in part be achieved through the ethics approval process, the use of 'plain English statements', and seeking feedback on the reports from the local Indigenous organisation prior to finalisation. However, at the national level Scougall indicated that Indigenous control of this evaluation was harder to achieve. Without the existence of an Indigenous Reference Group, the evaluation relied on a set of principles that was developed from the Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable in 2000 (Scougall, 2006).

### 4.3.2 Participation

Indigenous advisory groups are considered one component of best practice in Indigenous Research (NH&MRC, 2003). Indigenous advisory groups can provide respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility in an Indigenous evaluation (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012).

Another way to gain cultural guidance is through individual advisors. Bennett and colleagues (2011) used Aboriginal mentors as cultural advisors for a research study exploring the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social workers who work with Aboriginal populations. Two of the researchers were Aboriginal in this project (Bennett et al., 2011).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) argues that knowledge is produced through the collaborative working together of community and researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). PAR values the expertise of participants and prioritises the research processes and benefits to the community from the research, rather than just research outcomes. To achieve this, the research plan and methodology need to be flexible to meet the needs of the community (Elser, 2008). As knowledge has been traditionally generated in a way that excludes the voices of marginalised groups, PAR also aims to correct this by informing knowledge with the expertise of these groups, contributing to social justice, and specific to Indigenous groups, promoting Indigenous knowledge systems (Cochran et al., 2008).

Blodgett and colleagues (2011) used a PAR methodology and 'portrait' vignettes to bring Indigenous stories and perspectives to the fore regarding community-based research. Portrait vignettes are used as a way to present research data, rather than generate it (Blodgett et al. 2011). In this study, the experiences of nine participants, referred to as 'Aboriginal co-researchers', were captured through interviews and transcription, then transformed into a portrait vignette through a collaborative process between the mainstream researcher and Aboriginal co-researchers (Blodgett et al. 2011). The authors argued that through PAR using vignettes, participants were empowered to generate knowledge and share their experiences and views in a way that resonated with their cultural practices of storytelling as teaching (Blodgett et al. 2011).

Willis and colleagues (2005) also discussed how Aboriginal communities were involved in providing input into a study exploring Aboriginal peoples' views about the provision of water infrastructure. The authors provided an alternative approach to a traditional focus group which saw the research participants set the agenda rather than the researchers. In some instances, community members participated in their native language and then provided English translations. A quarterly newsletter was also sent to participants in the first year of the project to keep the communities up-to-date on the project and learn what was happening in other communities (Willis et al. 2005).

Weston and colleagues (2009) discuss how, in their community-based research project on violence prevention, knowledge exchange and capacity building of Aboriginal community members are priorities. These were achieved through "seminars and discussions about the

importance and implementation of research paradigms” (Weston et al. 2009:52), as well as providing training for community workers in topics identified in the research process. To date, there has been formal training in psychological effects of trauma, grief, and loss, as well as research methodologies (e.g. in-depth interviewing) (Weston 2009). Tchacos and Vallance (2004) discussed the process of engaging an Aboriginal community to undertake research concerning Aboriginal young people’s views on youth suicide. After a year of consultations, an Aboriginal reference group was formed to oversee the research, consisting of community representatives from five towns. A key element of this project was capacity building; young Aboriginal people, carefully selected by the Aboriginal reference group, were trained to be research assistants and gather data for the project. Following the research, the principal researcher continued to be a career mentor for the research assistants (Tchacos and Vallance 2004).

### **4.3.3 Knowledge and skills: Indigenous and non-Indigenous**

Evaluations conducted in Indigenous contexts require a range of knowledge and skills (Scougall, 2006). Indigenous peoples bring a range of skills and knowledge to the evaluation, which should be recognised and respected and ‘given the same currency as other non-Indigenous knowledge’ (Taylor 2003:50). The literature is split between the ideas that evaluations should balance professional and local knowledge (Scougall, 2006; Taylor 2003), and privilege Indigenous knowledge (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). The positioning of Indigenous knowledge on the outer aspects of the American IEF, for instance, suggests that Indigenous evaluation should privilege Indigenous knowledge (LaFrance, 2012). However, as Taylor (2003) argues, Indigenous knowledge should be ‘afforded a ‘parity of esteem’ with other knowledge at all times, and that in some situations, it should be given primacy’ (Taylor 2003:50). An advisory group can ensure that Indigenous knowledge is included in the evaluation (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012).

Given the harmful history of research conducted on Indigenous populations, mistrust and a reluctance to engage with non-Indigenous researchers is still prevalent for some people and communities. If Indigenous peoples choose to engage in research today, the preference for many is that the researcher is also Indigenous (Burnette & Billiot, 2015). There are many scholars that insist Indigenous researchers should undertake Indigenous research. For instance, Kite and Davey argue that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers are more likely to convey information in a manner that is both culturally acceptable and specific to those participating in the research and benefiting end users of the information’ (2015, p. 192). Additionally, they highlight that when Indigenous research is driven by Western methods and undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers, there are a range of risks to the integrity of the research and the accuracy in reporting findings, such as ‘unethical practices, the production of questionable data and subjugation of Indigenous knowledge through the silencing of Indigenous voices’ (Kite & Davy, 2015, p.192).

However, some scholars argue for ethnically diverse research teams, as there is a need for non-Indigenous allies to advocate alongside Indigenous people for the pursuit of Indigenous rights and decolonisation (Burnette & Billiot, 2015). Further, some caution on the risk of polarising

researchers as Indigenous (insider) vs non-Indigenous (outsider), as it is much more complex; consideration must be given to other aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality, social background, and life experience (Burnette & Billiot, 2015). Regardless, there is still a strong requirement to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and skills are included, welcomed, and form the basis of evaluations.

#### **4.3.4 Place and context**

Evaluation theory more generally recognises the importance of context in evaluations (Rog, 2012). Indigenous evaluation places substantial importance on context. The 'effective analysis and understanding of the inter-cultural issues at stake in any evaluation needs to be viewed from a 'local' perspective and on a specific project by project basis' (Taylor 2003: 49). This is particularly so for the Australian Indigenous context where learning, knowing, deciding, and interaction vary from community to community (Taylor 2003). The existence of local protocols is likely to impact on the relationship between the evaluation team and the Indigenous community (Taylor 2003). The IEF, for instance, includes 'place' as a core values, which fits within the broader discourse in evaluation theory to recognise the 'context'. Honouring place in Indigenous evaluation includes recognising the nuances of the location of evaluation and its own history including the recognition of Indigenous nationhood (LaFrance, 2012).

Indigenous evaluation is particularly complex in remote areas (Guenther & Galbraith, 2014). Remote Indigenous evaluations are faced with the challenges of history of previous evaluation and research activities, of cost, time, distance, language, culture and ethics (Guenther & Galbraith, 2014). Certainly, the choice of method for one context may not be appropriate for another. For instance, a 'theory' of change' model may work well for one community whose main concern is change, but for another, the model may detract from their own expectations of the evaluation (Guenther & Galbraith, 2014). This complexity also plays out through the inter-cultural context of evaluation, through the tension between the 'objective' evaluator and the 'insider' Indigenous participant (Guenther & Galbraith, 2014). Indeed, Guenther and Galbraith ask the question 'is it possible to maintain an appropriate balance of objectivity and subjectivity when formative and summative approaches are merged?'(2014, p. 3).

#### **4.3.5 Storytelling**

Storytelling and metaphor are important for Indigenous peoples. As LaFrance et al. argue, 'stories are a method and means for understanding the consequences of lived experience. Stories can employ lexical form as well as visual symbols or metaphors, song, and prayer (2012, 66). In Indigenous evaluation the use of metaphorical devices, such as stories, can replace the concept of the logic model 'which is based on a linear and a causal relationship between actions and outcomes' (LaFrance, 2012, p. 67). Through embedding storytelling in the framework, the IEF seeks to replace the evaluation language of goals, activities, outputs and outcomes with images that are culturally grounded (LaFrance, 2012). 'Building the scaffolding' is akin to

evaluation design, but the IEF approach seeks to ensure that the evaluation is designed and built with community and cultural considerations in mind (LaFrance, 2012). This includes consideration for the methods, the evaluation team, and community cultural protocols.

Storytelling in Aboriginal cultures is commonly referred to as 'yarning' (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013). Yarning is increasingly being used as a data collection method for Indigenous research because it 'creates a space through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can voice and infuse traditional cultural knowledge in the creation and completion of research' (Leeson, Catrin, & Rynne, 2016). Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) discuss four types of yarning that take place during the research interaction:

- 'social yarning', where engagement and trust is built
- 'research topic yarning', usually in the form of an interview which is relaxed, yet focuses on gathering information about the research topic
- 'collaborative yarning', which includes sharing ideas or brainstorming about the research topic, and
- 'therapeutic yarning', where during a conversation the participant discloses emotional or traumatic experiences. When this occurs the researcher is to adopt a listening and supportive role to assist the participant to make sense of, or affirm, their experience.

Through this, 'the meaning making emerging in the yarn can empower and support the participant to re-think their understanding of their experience in new and different ways' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 41). Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) argue that to use yarning as a research tool the researcher needs to merit the importance of the entire conversation, even if it appears to steer of track or digress. They found that often when they assumed stories participants were telling were digressing from the research topic, they were in fact taking a 'meandering route to arrive at the same destination as the researcher' and emphasise that 'the rigor in the yarn is to listen and allow the story to flow while looking for threads that relate to the research topic' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 41).

Just as storytelling is significant to Indigenous research, so too is listening. 'Dadirri' is a word from the Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly River in the Northern Territory and is used to describe 'inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness' (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002, p. 1). 'Dadirri' is known by different names in different Aboriginal cultures, and in the mainstream Australian context it is most accurately translated as 'contemplation' (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002, p. 1). Dadirri in a research context requires the researcher to continually be reflexive of their relationships with others, the reciprocal role that the researcher and participants/community have in the research, and in sharing stories with each other. West et al. argue that drawing on Dadirri as a research method is empowering of both Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities as it 'enables working with indigenous people and allowing their voices to be heard' (2012, p. 1585).

### 4.3.6 Relational

Human relationships are central to Aboriginal communities and research must acknowledge this, in data collection, analysis and dissemination. Evaluators need to establish trusting relationships with communities, and this can take some time, given their past experience of research (Kendall et al., 2011). Communities should be seen as unique, even if they belong to the same language group or culture as their neighbours (Kendall et al., 2011). Attempts to generalise across communities must be attempted very carefully. Research and evaluation should be conducted in the form of a dialogue with the community, rather than an exercise in data gathering and analysis.

Research should not only involve community participation; researchers and communities should enter into long-term research agreements or memorandums of understanding (Kendall et al., 2011). Research that seeks a fully negotiated model of community ownership involves a paradigmatic shift from positivist scientific principles of objectivity to research frameworks that construct knowledge through relational ethics and have the intent of addressing social inequities. Dissemination is also important for relationships. Aboriginal communities have often been harmed by misrepresentation of research findings by the media or policy makers, and it is important that they are able to engage actively with researchers in disseminating findings.

### 4.3.7 Self-determination and control

In the Canadian context, Cargo et al. (2008, as cited in de Leeuw, Cameron, & Greenwood, 2012) argues that while the participatory approach may be an ideal research practice, it may compete with Indigenous self-determination. de Leeuw et al. raise concerns with participatory and community-based research within Indigenous geographies such as the potential for projects to 'reinscribe and retrench unjust relations' and difference (2012, p.185). Institutionalisation of participatory approaches may place undue burden on communities through researchers' needs to ensure 'good practice' research that involves extensive consultation and collaboration. The competing demands of research and other participatory activities can place a significant burden on communities who may already be over-stretched.

As indicated in Section 4.3.1, the use of 'evaluation advisory groups' or 'Indigenous advisory groups' are suggested as a way of ensuring the self determination of the community. They can ensure relevance of the evaluation, and decolonise the process (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). Johnston-Goodstar suggests that advisory groups can provide the following direct benefits to evaluations:

- Centrality of Indigenous worldviews
- Participatory inquiry/evaluation
- Relevance and service to community (2012, p. :112).

Ideally the community, represented by the advisory group and/or by other means, should have control over the whole evaluation process including deciding on the topic and questions for the

evaluation; the choice of evaluator; the methods to be used in the community; and the reporting of the findings. This is rarely achieved in research, and in particular in government funded evaluations.

## 4.4 Western and Indigenous approaches

As indicated above, most of the literature contrasts positivist and constructivist approaches to evaluation, and placed Indigenous evaluation and research in the constructivist area. However, there have been some attempts to bring these two stances together. In particular the 'Braided Rivers' approach which is being developed in the NZ context by Angus Macfarlane and colleagues (Macfarlane, 2012) which attempts to synthesise western and Māori approaches to evaluation.

In this approach, western science and kaupapa Māori (Maori knowledge or wisdom – commonly applied to Maori research) streams are acknowledged as distinctive approaches to the development and evaluation of programs but are brought together in a mutually respectful and reinforcing fashion. According to Macfarlane, this approach has the following key features:

- The western science and kaupapa Māori streams are acknowledged as distinctive approaches to the development and evaluation of programs.
- The model permits knowledge from the kaupapa Māori stream to inform the development of western science programs and knowledge from western science programs to inform the development of kaupapa Māori programs.
- The model also permits the evaluation methodologies used in the western science stream to be applied by the kaupapa Māori stream and the evaluation methodologies used by kaupapa Māori research can be applied to the western stream.
- Finally, the model assumes that the acceptance of programs as being effective will rely on an acceptance of evidence from both streams (2012, p. :218)

This approach is very promising and provides a way forward for evaluations that have multiple stakeholder groups, each of which may have different epistemological and methodological assumptions about the most appropriate approaches to evaluation. However, it must be recognised that this approach is firmly embedded in the NZ context and therefore will have to be adapted to Aboriginal Australian contexts. It does run the risk of the Western science stream colonising the Indigenous stream of the evaluation and therefore this will have to be closely monitored.

# 5 Summary and conclusions

## 5.1 Summary

This section summarises the answers to the questions set for this review, as far as they can be addressed by the literature reviewed in this report.

### What are the dominant stances that emerge from evaluation theories?

The review identified four main stances that emerge from evaluation theories:

1. *Methods or positivist evaluations* which focus on validity, reliability and generalisability of data.
2. *Constructivist/Interpretivist* stances which focus on the perceptions of different stakeholder groups about the program including:
  - *'Use'/participatory evaluations* which focus on how the evaluation will be used by stakeholders and participants.
  - *Values evaluations* which focus on the experiences and interpretations of the participants in the evaluations and are aimed at empowering participants.
  - Also included are *transformative or social justice evaluations* which are explicitly aimed at societal change.

Evaluations are normally also categorised along two other dimensions:

3. *Summative* evaluations collect data and report findings at the end of the data analysis whereas *formative* evaluations interact with stakeholders throughout the process, informing program and policy development as the evaluation progresses.
4. *Process/implementation* evaluations focus on the way the program is operating and the quality of the services provided. *Impact/outcome* evaluations focus on the effects of the program on the service environment and on the people who are expected to benefit from the program. *Economic* evaluations compare the costs with the effects/benefits of the program.

### What is known about the relative applicability of these to successful evaluation practices with Aboriginal communities?

The literature indicates that constructivist – including 'use' and 'transformative' evaluations are more appropriate for Aboriginal communities than those based purely on positivist 'method' approaches. However, this does not preclude the use of quantitative methodologies. The key to successful evaluation in Aboriginal communities is that the community is in control of what data is collected and how this data should be used in the evaluation, rather than the specific methods which are used. There are a few attempts to combine these two methods, including the 'Braided



Rivers' approach, but none has been documented in an Aboriginal Australian context and so this will need to be adapted to the specific context of *OCHRE* communities.

### **What are the characteristics of evaluation practice that led to successful evaluation with Aboriginal communities?**

There is little direct evidence relating specifically to evaluation but there is now a large body of evidence that research with Aboriginal peoples (and other Indigenous nations) is only successful if it is conducted with the participation (and preferably the control) of Aboriginal communities. Successful research is characterised by 'de-colonising' approaches which do not privilege western methods, understandings or theories over those of Indigenous peoples. In particular community members should not be seen as passive subjects and evaluators should not have the role of experts – rather the project needs to be co-produced. In addition, Aboriginal knowledge should not be exploited by the evaluator and should be seen as the property of the community. Overall, research and evaluation must be seen as part of the self-determination of Aboriginal communities and the methods and approaches must be congruent with this objective.

### **What are the impacts of dominant approaches including positivist and constructionist approaches, on the success of evaluation with Aboriginal community? Is there any evidence for preference of one approach over another depending on stakeholders, including government and Aboriginal community?**

The literature is very clear that the history of research and evaluation in Aboriginal communities has left a legacy of distrust, fear and anger by Indigenous communities worldwide to researchers. This is particularly because, historically, research has been conducted according to Western theories, by self-designated 'experts', and where the community is seen as an object of examination rather than active participants in the research process. In addition the findings from research and evaluation have often been used to harm rather than help Indigenous peoples.

In general the literature indicates that constructivist and participatory methods are more conducive to evaluations in Aboriginal communities than positivist or quantitative methods. This is because positivist methodologies by definition objectify research subjects and the theory behind this approach asserts that there is one 'objective' truth. Constructivist approaches, on the other hand, acknowledge the diversity of experiences and viewpoints, and do not attempt to identify a single objective truth. Nevertheless, quantitative and economic evaluation methods can be used if they are conducted in accordance with the principles and protocols of Aboriginal research, and in particular that communities participate in designing the research and interpreting the findings.

## **Does the approach taken influence the quality of the evidence obtained through the evaluation? What is known about the influence of participatory practice on this?**

There is very little literature which directly compares the quality of evidence in Aboriginal evaluations obtained by different approaches. However, as indicated above, the quality of the evidence, and indeed the participation of community members in the evaluation, depends very significantly on the approach which the evaluators take in engaging with the community and working in partnership with community members to develop the methods of data collection, analysing the data and interpreting the findings. Without active participation of the community it is unlikely that the evaluation will be able to collect data. Furthermore, if the evaluation does not adhere to the principles of research with Aboriginal communities, then this is likely to undermine any other research and evaluation which is attempted in those communities.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This review has covered the main theories underpinning different types of evaluation, and then focused specifically on evaluation with Indigenous peoples. The literature indicates that research and evaluation are viewed with suspicion and hostility by most Indigenous communities, in Australia and internationally. This is because the history of western research has led to detrimental outcomes for Indigenous peoples, irrespective of the intentions of the researchers. However, in the past few years there has been a growth in the development of Indigenous decolonising research approaches, and there are now strict protocols and standards for researchers in conducting research in Indigenous communities. The research literature acknowledges that achieving these standards can be very challenging for evaluators and researchers, and some of them are in tension with each other; for example, the requirement for consultation and the requirement for minimising burden on the community.

In terms of the theoretical and methodological basis for Indigenous research, the literature tends towards constructivist or transformative approaches. These approaches to research and evaluation favour active participation or control by community members of the research methods and dissemination. However, quantitative and economic evaluation methods are also increasingly being included as part of Indigenous research and evaluations when they meet the standards of Indigenous research; in particular when the community has a say in, and ideally control of, the research questions, methods and dissemination processes. This is a developing area of research, and the interplay between methods, ethics and dissemination processes are still being developed and refined, in Australia as well as in other jurisdictions.

It is important to recognise that the conduct of the evaluation or research project is only one component of the research process. Equally important is the process for setting up and funding the evaluation, deciding on the evaluation questions, and choosing the evaluators. Similarly, the way the evaluation findings are responded to by government or other stakeholder groups is very important for the acceptance of the evaluation findings by Indigenous communities, and the way

the findings are reported in the media can also affect the impact of the evaluation on the communities involved. Many of these processes are not within the control of the evaluators, but evaluators nevertheless must be aware of these factors in their work with communities.

One of the most important conclusions arising from the literature is that evaluation should be an intrinsic part of the planning and implementation of programs and policies, especially those affecting Aboriginal peoples. Evaluations which are conducted in an ad hoc manner and or which are 'bolted on' to programs as an afterthought or simply to 'tick a box' are likely to provide little of value to policy makers or the communities involved. As the review has demonstrated, they can cause long-term harm to Aboriginal peoples and undermine their trust in government.

### 5.3 Gaps in the literature

There is now a considerable literature on Indigenous research and evaluation, but there are still considerable gaps and problems in the literature. Most importantly, there is little consideration in the literature about the actual implementation of the principles set out in Section 4.3. Although the principles themselves are universally accepted, there is only a limited literature which deals with the reality of the tensions and challenges – for researchers, funders and evaluators – of successfully carrying out evaluations in Aboriginal communities, particularly government funded evaluations with short timescales, limited funding and prescribed methods.

In reality there are tensions between some of the principles, for example between community consultation/ownership and minimising burden on communities, who may be required to manage many research programs. There are also tensions between the bureaucratic requirements of research and the needs of communities. For example, many ethics committees require lengthy project explanations and complex consent forms, which can be intimidating to Aboriginal participants because they replicate the bureaucratic processes they are subjected to by authorities.

Another issue often missed in the literature is that many Aboriginal (and other) communities are not homogenous; the community may be divided about the research and there may be very diverse views about the value of research as well as findings. Furthermore, much research and evaluation focuses on the most vulnerable members of communities who are marginalised from the recognised community structures; this may create barriers to accessing those participants or may suppress findings (Katz, 2007). In some communities there are also cultural barriers for certain community members to talk to outsiders.

Another challenge for Aboriginal evaluations is that even if the researchers themselves adhere to the most stringent ethical principles and processes, they are not in control of the whole research process. Evaluators are often not involved in setting the evaluation questions – which are often related to funding agency priorities rather than those of the communities. Further, once findings are in the public domain they can be used or abused by anyone, including the media for purposes which they were not intended. This could include ways that can severely disadvantage

communities even if the evaluators have been scrupulous in their commitment to ethical principles. Often findings are ignored by the organisations which funded the research.

These are some of the issues which anecdotally have affected researchers and evaluators in Aboriginal communities in Australia but are very poorly documented in the literature. Therefore there is a clear gap in the literature in relation to the actual practicalities and challenges for researchers.

Much of the literature on Indigenous research methods originates in Canada, USA and NZ, and Australia is under-represented in the literature. It is important to grow the literature and evidence base for Aboriginal research which can contribute to the international literature from a specifically Aboriginal Australian perspective.

Finally, research and evaluation are generally considered in the literature as a *threat* to Aboriginal communities, because of the history of the role of research in the colonisation of Aboriginal peoples, with Indigenous research methods aimed at mitigating the threat. However, increasingly research is being seen as an *opportunity* for Aboriginal peoples, offering a resource which can be used by communities to advocate for the needs of their members, for self-determination and for the maintenance of language and culture. Unfortunately this is under-represented in the literature and more attention needs to be paid to how Aboriginal communities can and do use research for these purposes.

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