INDIGENOUS EVALUATION THEORY & PRACTICE

Dialogue 1 Summary Report

“What difference will this make for students and how will we know?”

A Publication of the First Nations with Schools Collective
Summary of Dialogue Session held on March 27, 2019
Executive Summary

Evaluation is a field of study with governance structures, frameworks and ways of ‘doing’ developed over the years through the contributions of evaluation practitioners and scholars globally. However, a group of Indigenous evaluators within the larger global evaluation societies say more is needed to ensure Indigenous methodologies are included in evaluation theory and methodology scholarship.

Three guest speakers joined a dialogue discussion hosted by the First Nations with Schools Collective (FNWSC) or ‘Collective’ on Wednesday, March 27, 2019 to talk about their practice. Six participants in all attended a one-hour dialogue via an on-line virtual meeting space to share their experiences and stories as Indigenous evaluators working with Indigenous communities.

Three key themes emerged from the dialogue; defining evaluation, local involvement and networking. A key goal is to build capacity in Indigenous methodologies (by us for us) while engaging the broader evaluation community in the work.

Defining Evaluation

Participants reiterated the sentiment that over a millennia Indigenous peoples naturally evaluated in order to thrive and survive in society and in the environment. Generally, participants felt, while as a people we may not have called it ‘evaluation’, Elders will tell us it was a very natural order of things to do in our daily lives.

“
In evaluation I think of the happiness of a student, when I think of all the pieces that have to come together, my mind is always going to put the students first.” – Fay Zoccole, Education Director, Wiikwemkoong

For guest speaker, Nicky Bowman, the difference lies in how evaluation is framed. For Indigenous peoples, evaluation is not seen as producing knowledge that labels things as good or bad but relaying what ‘is’, that is - what is being experienced at this time, and adapting, adjusting our actions to cause a better outcome to emerge. Carolee Dodge-Francis, guest speaker, noted that Indigenous communities have roots that education systems do not have; thus, it is important we begin to define and create for ourselves our own systems to regain power.

It was felt that Indigenous methodologies draw on notions of genealogy, lineage, and
roots in how they seek to interpret the problem and define positive outcomes. Thus, an Indigenous framework necessarily requires active participation at the community-level in problem-solving solutions. All the guest speakers agreed, this is where skilled evaluators having specific evaluation tools can be really useful to communities undertaking an evaluation.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION PRACTICES

“Indigenous communities do in fact evaluate, however, its framed much differently from a Western view of evaluation. The process of evaluation is more cyclical in nature and not linear.” – Carolee Dodge-Francis, Indigenous Evaluator and participant

Another important theme that arose from the dialogue was the importance of building capacity in the community in effective qualitative evaluation practices. This might include involving youth in note-taking activities while community engagement is under way or it might mean hosting circles with key groups such as Elders or children early on to hear the stories of the community. It might also mean inviting individuals to blog about the evaluation process, or make art, media or written pieces that express the needs of the community as it relates to the problem being addressed. Another effective practice of a skilled evaluator is to insert themselves in communities as helpers and listeners first. That by allowing community members to show and share their experiences in an evaluation process, this ensures the problem is being locally contextualized, so the array of possible solutions have meaning and the community takes ownership over them.

INDIGENOUS EVALUATION NETWORKING

Finally, it was felt that the more Indigenous evaluators, researchers, and community practitioners gather to share their methodologies and experiences, the greater the service and benefits to community. Participants suggested creating a Google document to share resources about Indigenous evaluation theory and practice. Others suggested getting involved in evaluation conferences held in Canada and the United States to create spaces to dialogue with other experts in the field about Indigenous community practices.

CONCLUSION

As Keiko Kuji-Shikatani, Indigenous evaluator and guest speaker, says, “evaluation is really about building the relationship and establishing the trust to get at the real issues the community wants to address. If in the end, the findings are not useful then the evaluation [process] should not be viewed as a good evaluation.”
Acknowledgements

Yaw^ko, Miigwech, Nia:wen to everyone who contributes to the work of the First Nations with Schools Collective. This is the first of a series of dialogues in 2019-2020 to explore data sovereignty and accountability frameworks for eight First Nations in Ontario seeking jurisdiction over education. This series of webinars are being offered to build capacity in research inquiry for governance. The First Nations with Schools Collective is made up of Elders, education directors, chiefs, elected councillors with education portfolios, community liaisons, and education staff. The delegates meet at a regularly convened inter-nation table where coordination of key activities in education governance takes place.

Participating Communities of FNWSC

- Bkejwanong Territory-Walpole Island First Nation
- Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
- M’Chigeeng First Nation
- Mississaugas of Credit First Nation
- Oneida Nation of the Thames
- Sagamok Anishnawbek
- Six Nations of the Grand River Territory (Observer Status)
- Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory

Dialogue Participants

Many thanks to participants of Dialogue 1: Indigenous Evaluation Theory and Practice, March 27, 2019:

1. Nicky Bowman, Mohican/Munsee, President, Bowman Performance Consulting, PHD, Researcher/Evaluator, LEAD & WEC Centers, University of WI-Madison www.bpcwi.com
2. Carolee Dodge-Francis, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Researcher/Evaluator, Associate Professor/Executive Director, American Indian Research and Education Center, Project Coordinator, Nevada INBRE
4. Bette Summers from Oneida Nation of the Thames, Education Director
5. Leslee White-Eye, from Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Structural Readiness Coordinator, First Nations with Schools Collective
6. Fay Zoccole, Anishnawbe-kwe from Aroland First Nation registered in Lac Seul First Nation, Education Director at Wikwemikong Board of Education.

Sponsors

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Dialogue 1: Discussion Synopsis

Dialogue session 1 took place on Wednesday, March 27, 2019 from 4 pm to 5:10 p.m. via an online virtual meeting platform called ZOOM. Leslee White-Eye facilitated the session on behalf of the FNWSC.

The session began with a brief overview of the First Nations with Schools Collective and an acknowledgement that all participants in the dialogue should see themselves as having knowledge in evaluation theory and practice. The facilitator explained that the session will begin with the guest speakers providing some initial reflections on the three guiding questions provided in the notice of session which would be followed up with an open discussion using guiding questions for all participants to contribute.

The session began with a round of brief introductions by participants.

AN INDIGENOUS EVALUATOR AND RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVE - GUEST SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS

The following are highlights of discussion points made by guest speakers in their opening remarks and during the dialogue session concerning Indigenous evaluation theory and practice.

Guest Speaker: Nicky Bowman, Mohican/Munsee, President, Bowman Performance Consulting

Nicky began by introducing herself as Mohican/Munsee in her native language, Lenape, and expressing appreciation for the invite. She provided her experience working for over 20 years in evaluation and Indigenous communities. She has spent the last 15 years in evaluation trying to figure out how to braid language, culture with evaluation. She indicated there is more scholarship in recent years on this. One big inquiry question she has for her field is, “How do we get nation-to-nation evaluation?” She indicated her and her colleague, Carolee Dodge-Francis are attending a culturally-responsive evaluation conference today, a gathering of social justice evaluators. She indicated those in the social justice space are getting better at using culture, language and community. She also stated they are trying to get the legal and political aspects included, like sovereign nations would. She has been publishing lately on contact and pre-contact and how that manifests in our contemporary governance structures for the field of evaluation. She noted that there is governance of evaluation and a field of evaluation but none of these subject matter experts and scholars

Key Highlight

Creating an Indigenous evaluators’ sharing space that includes non-Indigenous champions for change will help transform the field of evaluation to be more reflected of Indigenous community needs and ways of doing.
in academia ever include Indigenous voice. So as Indigenous evaluators they are asserting themselves in the field and taking back evaluation in a way that honours Indigenous methodologies.

**Guest Speaker: Carolee Dodge Francis, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Indigenous Evaluator/Researcher**

Carolee shared how important the area of education is in this work. Education is an area that hasn’t been tapped very much. And so, when nations begin to take their own power, it needs to happen at an educational level. Indigenous people often lose their power because their children are raised up in the education system that takes their power. Where our Indigenous communities have strong roots, she notes, typically the education system does not. And Carolee asks the question of participants, “So, how do we, as Indigenous people, end up defining that and creating that so that it becomes reflective of what a tribal community looks like?” She indicated evaluation can be a place to start doing that by evaluating small steps within community educational frameworks. Each community must figure out where do we begin, and what is most important and what will have the most impact for change. Carolee is in academia in her more recent phase of her life’s work but has done most of her work in urban and rural tribal Indigenous communities, with state and federally recognized tribes, including in Alaska and Hawaii. Her experience includes education, curriculum-development, health and intersectionality of all those things. She indicated how health plays a huge role in whether our kids get through their education.

**Guest Speaker: Keiko Kuji-Shikatani, Indigenous from Tokyo, Credentialed Researcher/Evaluator, Ontario Ministry of Education** (joined the dialogue later)

Keiko shared her insights on evaluator practice. She stated it really is about building the relationship and establishing the trust to get at the real issues the community wants to address. If, after all is done, the community can’t find meaning in the report or tools produced, it’s not useful, and that’s an indicator of a bad evaluation process. She also indicated she spends a lot of time listening and observing. Her role is to help communities’ express what matters to them in their terms.

OPEN DISCUSSION – DISCUSSION POINT SUMMARY

Here we highlight several themes that emerged from the guiding question responses. A more complete list is included in Appendix A. If seeking to review the video recording pertaining to this part of the dialogue session go to the 14:47 minute lapse point.

1. How and what ways can we draw on Indigenous knowledge to build on evaluation theory and practice?

“We had evaluation because it was a matter of life in order to survive.
Evaluation has always been a part of our culture. We just didn’t call it that.
It wasn’t written down, they were life lessons, that you just remembered.
Like those old wise tales...” – Fay Zoccole, Education Director, Anishinaabe

Communities seeking to honour their traditional knowledge in terms of evaluation should:

1. Define Indigenous evaluation for themselves.
2. Draw on Indigenous Knowledges by:
   o Building scholarship in theory and practice at community-level.
   o Go through a framing exercise to identify what is valued in evaluation from an Indigenous perspective (i.e., timing, who must be involved, guiding principles, definitions, purpose, self-care)
   o Answer question, “How did we get here in our current evaluation practices?”
   o Name and celebrate Indigenous evaluation theory and practice already utilized in the community (community liaison positions, engagement approaches, etc.)

2. How and what ways can evaluators design evaluation processes that support community development processes before, during and after evaluations?

KEY PRACTICES OF COMMUNITIES SEEKING EVALUATION SERVICES

⇒ Gets an understanding of how the community sees and values the issue at hand by doing their own qualitative evaluation.
⇒ Provides an orientation for the evaluator before evaluation work commences.
KEY PRACTICES OF EXPERIENCED EVALUATORS IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

⇒ Engages with community members by listening and observing.
⇒ Talk to community members to get a sense of what is really going on.
⇒ Honours existing people, data and practices and include them in their work (i.e., inviting individuals to blog throughout the evaluation process, paint experiences or feedback being requested, create visual media of the evaluation process).
⇒ Helps community leads identify the various sources of data existing in the community and convenes a sharing space to discuss and share.
⇒ Builds relationships and establishes trust. Knows how to ‘be in’ the community.
⇒ Ensures useful outputs that the community understands and can utilize.
⇒ Willing to communicate.

3. As evaluators, what has been your experiences in the field that you would like to share or discuss?

LESSONS IN APPROACH

• Evaluator should be prepared to listen and try to understand what is happening.
• Short-term discomfort means long-term gains, evaluators must be prepared to tell it like it is.
• Job is to speak in cross-cultural terms often using non-Indigenous language at the policy and performance level to make change.
• A robust culturally-relevant policy environment means better relationships.
• Evaluators research and share trends in what nations in U.S. and Canada care about and are including in sharing agreements with state, federal and provincial governments.

PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATION IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

• As an evaluator, I think of the happiness of a student. When I think of all the pieces that have to come together, my mind is always going to put the students first.

NEXT STEPS

2. Look into attending the national conference in Minnesota and putting together a session to further discuss how to improve education.

3. Structural Readiness Coordinator to invite participants to upcoming Success Indicators & Land-based Learning

4. Share the registration information for Canadian Evaluation Society’s 2019 Conference in Nova Scotia in May and ask how space could be provided for these types of conversations to continue. How do we get lightning sessions on this topic for example.

5. Send an email to Dr. Bowman about what the FNWSC are doing and what we would like to do

6. Host a google document to store links to the articles, research and effective practices in Indigenous evaluation.

**Resources**


2. Evaluation Matters He Take To Te AromaTawai [https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/evaluation-matters](https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/evaluation-matters) - is an online, international, interdisciplinary journal published annually by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), in conjunction with the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA).