

# An Indigenous perspective on evaluations in the inter-cultural context: how far can one throw a Moree boomerang?

Russell Taylor

Greetings.

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respect to the Maori elders, bothers and sisters of Aotearoa. I would like to particularly thank the elders for their welcome this morning and to thank the AES Committee for my invitation to attend the conference. As a Kamilaroi man and, as I understand it, the first Indigenous Australian to present a keynote address at any AES forum, I feel very proud and hope that my words today do justice to this honour.

I particularly acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of this area, the local Iwi, Ngati Paoo from Tanui Waka, on whose tribal grounds we meet today. I thank them for the honour of being able to visit and to speak on their country.

Qualification 1: Emphasise that my paper/presentation represents AN Indigenous Australian perspective and not THE Indigenous Australian perspective and for this reason my paper is specifically so entitled.

Qualification 2: I am not a professional 'evaluator' but I do have some experience in the context of research, policy and program development and implementation, project management and the evaluation of such activities in the Australian Indigenous domain.

## Acknowledgements

Briefly, I need to acknowledge and thank some colleagues: Mr Ed Wensing, Ms Jacquie Lambert, Dr Peter Veth, Dr Rob Bourke, Mr Rod Alfredson and Ms Wai-Fong Yik for their supportive critique of earlier drafts of this paper; and Ms Kate McKegg and Ms Brenda Smith for their warm welcome to Auckland and for making my visit so enjoyable and informative.

## Introduction

In my presentation today I want to discuss the ethics involved in conducting evaluations involving Indigenous communities, the implications for evaluators and the need for a renewed focus on ethical evaluation practices in inter-cultural contexts. I also wish to highlight the need for the development of a new relationship between the Indigenous community and the evaluation profession.

Although I readily recognise the significance of the interdisciplinary nature of evaluation, my address today will specifically focus on issues which are inter-cultural, essentially involving differences between western and Indigenous worldviews. And I use the term 'inter-cultural' advisedly. I mean something very different from the more frequently used term of

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'cross-cultural'. By 'inter-cultural' I mean the 'meeting of two distinct cultures' through processes and interactions which retain the distinctive integrity and difference of both cultures and which may involve a blending of elements of both cultures but never the domination of one over another.

I was recently provided with a copy of a document which was entitled *Program Evaluation. The Role of the External Consultant*<sup>1</sup> which articulated the following essential and laudable elements of program evaluation<sup>2</sup>:

1. a clear appreciation of what the whole exercise is about – that is, the problems being addressed, the circumstances in which programs operate;
2. the need to apply a systematic problem solving methodology;
3. an effort to collect useful and relevant information – not just any data;
4. a commitment to consultation with the people involved in, or affected by, program activity;
5. effective communication with the client;
6. a capacity to produce conclusions and recommendations that are capable of implementation.

So, as a starting point for discussion, I make the following challenge to the evaluation profession. If you generally share the foregoing perspectives about evaluation, then you need to be prepared to explore, in some detail, the inter-cultural contexts within which the practice of evaluation occurs.

In preparing this paper, through reflection about my early professional experience with evaluations<sup>3</sup> in Australian Indigenous community settings, I was reminded of the frequent material variances between the formal findings and recommendations of evaluation reports and the understandings and perceptions held by the Indigenous community – essentially involving judgements and conclusions about the same events and activities!

At the time, I questioned why is this so? Why the huge variances in views and findings between trained, professional evaluators and the Indigenous community stakeholders? Could such variances be explained simply as part of any difference in intellectual capacity of the parties involved and/or explained through the misunderstandings between say the bureaucracy and community?

The answer is, of course – no. The issues involved are far more complex and culturally deep-rooted!

There is currently a prime example of such a variance of views, perceptions and findings in the Australian context in the debate about Indigenous/non-Indigenous historical relationship since colonisation. Many people will be aware that past methodologies employed and the findings

in researching and articulating this historical relationship have been, and continue to be, vigorously contested in the public domain in Australia. Indeed, the disputation involved is not simply confined to any dialectic airing of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous views, but also includes hotly contested and competing views involving various disciplines (and ideological factions) within academia<sup>4</sup>.

Paradoxically, many well-informed and perhaps well-meaning commentators also often remind us that, as Australians, we all enjoy a 'shared history'<sup>5</sup>.

One could therefore suggest that this relatively short, shared 215 year experience of colonial and post-colonial history should not present such a difficult academic and/or evaluative challenge. Any objective observer might question why so much of this black/white history is so vehemently disputed.

Leaving aside any discussion of imbalance in the costs/benefits in the sharing of Australian history, any 'objective' evaluation of this shared historical experience, irrespective of whether one might be applying either a so-called 'black-armband' or 'white-blindfold' perspective, is influenced by a diversity of factors and perspectives (including the nature of records (and silences) in public and private historical accounts). All of these factors, in my view, have unavoidable and undeniable cultural, or rather inter-cultural, manifestations and consequences.

So an explanation for the variances I have mentioned in evaluation outcomes can be found, to a very large degree, in the significant inter-cultural differences in experience, ideology and origins of 'practice' between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous evaluators and stakeholders involved.

And we need to recognise that such variances in evaluation outcomes, caused by inter-cultural factors, are still occurring in contemporary evaluation practice today and require some redress.

In fact, if my address today contains any significant message it is this: that the evaluation profession itself needs to move beyond rhetoric to reality in its practice. In so saying, I mean that the issues highlighted by me in this paper may not be new concepts to many (or indeed the majority) of people attending this conference – and these principles have been expounded and advocated long and hard by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike over recent years – and I am also aware elements have been explored in previous AES conferences to varying degrees. However, the profession needs to realistically evaluate itself in an effort to determine whether or not these principles are truly being embraced in actual practice.

From my own personal and professional perspective, there remains considerable work to be done. Over the last 7 years, through my work at

the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra and the associated ongoing interaction involving the evaluation profession, the broader research community and the Indigenous community, I continue to be confronted with irrefutable evidence that, – in practice – proper ethical principles for research involving Indigenous peoples are too frequently being either ignored and/or deliberately circumvented and devalued.

On this issue, and certainly in the Australian context, we need to recognise that the historical relationship between the Indigenous community and the research community (involving various research disciplines which comprise the evaluation profession) is not a particularly positive one.

No so long ago, researchers/evaluators simply targeted an Indigenous community, negotiated access, accommodation and any other necessary logistical arrangements usually with various non-Indigenous authorities/parties (such as government agencies, the local community superintendent, missionary representatives and/or the non-Indigenous property owners), visited the community, carried out their research, left the community and published or otherwise made available the results of their research to all and sundry but often to the exclusion (or near-exclusion) of the Indigenous peoples concerned.

The legacies of such inappropriate, unethical, disrespectful, disempowering practices are deeply

entrenched in the collective past and recent memory of the Australian Indigenous community. This lamentable history and relationship needs to

be recognised, put on the table and dealt with as a precursor to more enlightened, contemporary attempts to deal with any specific inter-cultural differences in our relationships.

Inter-cultural differences are manifested through differences in who we are and our histories, in our knowledge and ways of knowing, in our ways of behaving and relating to others and how we do business, in our ways of owning and sharing knowledge, and in the differences, application and weighting of our respective cultural values.

So, as professional evaluators, we need to recognise that evaluations do not occur in a cultural or ethical vacuum – even if the research is of a high quality and is well intentioned.

Effective evaluations require consideration and analysis of the inter-cultural differences I just spoke of. Any evaluation involving Indigenous communities must be of value to all stakeholders, including the Indigenous community and, in

this context, I readily admit that I see the role of evaluators as being one of potential agents of change or at least to offer this opportunity to groups hosting the study.

Even in a context where certain ‘outcomes’ appear clear or obvious and unlikely to be disputed, effective evaluation still requires appreciation and exploration of the inter-cultural issues and differences that may be present.

Such cultural issues can be extremely complex. They require proper exploration and consideration and extend to the examination of the cultural settings pertaining to the activity, project or community service which is being evaluated – as well as the questioning of those who are conducting the evaluation, including **their** methodologies, **their** language and **their** capacity to understand inter-cultural issues.

In referring to ‘inter-cultural’ issues and contexts etc in this paper, I am specifically referring to the interaction or intersection between two distinct cultural domains represented by Indigenous and non-Indigenous (or predominantly Western) cultures<sup>6</sup>

Professor Martin Nakata, an eminent Australian Indigenous academic with a particular interest in the field of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of constructing and maintaining knowledge, refers to this Indigenous/non-Indigenous inter-cultural space as the ‘*Cultural Interface*’.

Nakata reminds us that the *Cultural Interface* is actually a space that is the reality of contemporary social existence. He states that the

Cultural Interface is : ‘the place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and, more to the point, the place where we are active agents in our lives – where we make decisions – our lifeworld’ (Nakata 2002:9,10).

Nakata also highlights that the *Cultural Interface* is a place where cultural boundaries are not always clear and where cultural tensions are ever present and require negotiation. In the context of any evaluation activity these points need to be remembered.

In taking an Indigenous standpoint, Nakata also insightfully reminds us that as Indigenous peoples, everyday we are influenced by both Indigenous ways (‘*traditional forms and ways of knowing, or the residue of these*’), as well as by Non-Indigenous (‘*Western*’) ways and that ‘*for many of us a blend of both has become our lifeworld*’ (Nakata 2002:9). Indigenous and Western worldviews are being actively combined and (re)negotiated by Indigenous peoples to present new ways for understanding and negotiating with other cultures and with ourselves in a post-colonial world.

In so saying, Nakata (2002:9) states that:

## Effective evaluations require consideration and analysis of the inter-cultural differences

...Indigenous peoples do traverse these intersecting discourses on a daily basis, responding, interacting, taking positions, making decisions and in the process re-making cultures – ways of knowing, being and acting. In Indigenous individuals, communities and the broader collective, differences in responses and in the priority given to different systems of Knowledge and thinking illustrate the dynamism and diversity within the collective. This dynamism and diversity reflects the original heterogeneity of traditional contexts, the varied experience and impact of colonisation, the diversity of contexts in which Indigenous Australians now live and the creativity of the mind in devising ways to bridge systems of Knowledge and understanding and respond to changing circumstances (emphasis added).

In this paper, I am attempting to highlight the point that evaluations, or more importantly evaluators, need to take steps to devise ways to bridge systems of knowledge and understanding and respond to changing circumstances. Evaluators need to take much stronger account in evaluation practices of the cultural influences at play – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

However in this issue, like Nakata, I am adopting an Indigenous standpoint, or perhaps even a bias, in stating that whilst most evaluators are familiar with the dominant cultural influences<sup>7</sup>, my own experience suggests that, in the main, they remain uninformed about many aspects of the prevailing Indigenous cultural context in which they may be operating.

Having made the point that professional evaluators need to be much more attuned to inter-cultural factors in conducting evaluations involving both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people or communities, I now want to focus on some key points that might make evaluation practices more inter-culturally attuned and therefore more effective and useful.

In highlighting some key principles and issues, I draw heavily on the ethical principles that my own organisation, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies<sup>8</sup> (AIATSIS) has developed as a result of well over three decades of inclusive involvement and experience in research in the inter-cultural context in Australia.

The AIATSIS principles are articulated in Attachment 1<sup>9</sup> to this paper and are grouped under three sub-headings:

- Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding,
- Respect, recognition and involvement, and
- Benefits, outcomes and agreement.

When considered holistically, the three sub-headings provide guidance to three discrete stages: 'before', 'during' and 'after'.

I would make the point that in developing these ethical research principles, the AIATSIS is not attempting to establish any institutional cultural policing role, but rather to simply provide a more practical framework aimed at achieving the best ethical and cultural standards for research and evaluation occurring in inter-cultural contexts.

### **Principles underpinning evaluation in the inter-cultural context**

As a basic tenet, approaches to evaluative research involving Indigenous people must be based on respect for Indigenous people's inherent right to self-determination, and our right to control and maintain our culture and heritage. Indeed, in my view, these principles are not only a matter of ethics, but are also fundamental to our human rights.

Ms Erica-Irene Daes, Chairperson Rapporteur of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, has remarked<sup>10</sup> that:

**As a basic tenet, approaches to evaluative research involving Indigenous people must be based on respect for Indigenous people's inherent right to self-determination, and our right to control and maintain our culture and heritage.**

Heritage can never be alienated, surrendered or sold, except for conditional use. Sharing therefore creates a relationship between the givers and receivers of knowledge. The givers retain the authority to ensure that knowledge is used properly and the receivers continue to recognize and repay the gift.

Accordingly, in my view it is imperative that evaluators adopt, as a non-negotiable operational ethos, approaches which demonstrate professional respect and commitment to ensuring that:

- Indigenous peoples are involved in and consulted as legitimate participants in any evaluation project that concerns them;
- a shared understanding be achieved between the evaluators and the Indigenous peoples about the aims and methods of the evaluation; and that
- Indigenous peoples must be informed – in ways that are useful and accessible – and share in the results and flow-on outcomes of the evaluation.

At every stage, I repeat, at every stage, including during the preliminary scoping and design of the methodology, evaluative research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the evaluators and the Indigenous peoples concerned. This must be underpinned by the critically important notion that any Indigenous decision-making must be based on free and fully informed consent.

The cost of carrying out evaluations in ignorance of the inter-cultural contexts is inestimable. In the context of evaluations in the inter-cultural settings – and particularly in the Australian context – I would like to make an important point.

In the Indigenous domain, the results and, therefore the value, of some discrete individual evaluations involving small or modest programs are often problematic. The health and socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians reflect our current level of severe disadvantage and the underlying causes are complex and, as inferred earlier, result from the historical, political, social and cultural effects of our colonial and post colonial existence. However, often individual program evaluations (such as modest health, environmental health, legal services and housing programs) either fail to take account of the complexity of these inter-cultural and other related influences at play, and as a result, can misleadingly show favourable results or conversely may indicate program failings but without proper consideration of the totality of the broader picture and related systems. In the inter-cultural context of evaluations, this issue is an important factor and needs to be very seriously considered and explored in the future.

### **Implications for evaluators**

So what are the implications of the broad ethical principles I have mentioned for evaluative practices in inter-cultural contexts? There are six points I want to make in answer to this question.

Firstly, as I have already said, I should acknowledge that the principles I have referred to are not exactly brand new concepts and that for many evaluators they should not involve any dramatic change of direction. In the Australian context many evaluators and researchers are already following these principles, including that of developing collaborative projects with clear benefits<sup>11</sup> to the researched communities through formal agreements with the respective Indigenous groups involved and I would be very surprised if this is not also the case in New Zealand.

Secondly, I would anticipate that many researchers/evaluators would have no difficulty in continuing their work or adapting their projects to meet any cultural, ethical or other concerns from Indigenous groups. However, it must be said that some evaluators and researchers, hopefully a minority, may have to seriously re-evaluate their activities or indeed their future as professional evaluators if they choose to ignore concerns raised by Indigenous groups or communities.

Thirdly, I would expect that, with evaluation/research projects being based on proper consultation, the negotiation of free and informed consent, and a mutual understanding of the specific aims and intentions of evaluations, a greater degree

of productive inter-cultural evaluative research collaboration will result.

Fourthly, evaluations based on a greater recognition and respect for Indigenous involvement and our knowledge systems, will result in much better evaluative results being accomplished. The findings and conclusions of such evaluation practices are far less likely to be contested and the outcomes will be of much greater value to the stakeholders involved.

Fifthly, I am confident that non-coercive, open, frank negotiation around explicit issues and agreement regarding protocols and the use of research results, will not only identify clear benefits for the researched community, but also for those who commission evaluations and the profession itself.

Lastly, I would make the point that explicit agreements about the ownership of intellectual property, copyright and further dissemination and publication of results will lessen misunderstandings and disputes about the use and application of the results.

If evaluation projects involving inter-cultural factors are not prepared to embrace the principles I have outlined above, then, in my view and put simply, they should not be funded – as any such funding decisions would represent poor business and investment decisions. The justification for my view is based on my experience in Australia. Such evaluations will lack inter-cultural integrity. Their outcomes will be less than accurate, and they may require additional effort or material additional financial resources to remedy any short-comings. In this regard, from my experience, poor initial scoping and planning, incorporating proper consideration of the inter-cultural aspects of evaluations, are the most significant cause of acute problems later in the process – and can and should be avoidable.

I do not necessarily envisage that all will be ‘plain sailing’ in establishing and adopting appropriate inter-cultural approaches to evaluation or research projects from the outset. Some evaluators/researchers have already raised problems, which essentially go to the key questions about the freedom and the (dare I say in some cases, almost divine) rights of evaluators and researchers. I feel these concerns are largely illusory. I also think that some rebalancing of the power equation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests in the evaluation and research fields is long over-due

Ultimately, of course, Indigenous communities will seek to exert their right to either approve or reject their involvement in any evaluation proposals. Similarly, evaluators/researchers will also have the right to reject undue impositions and restrictions upon themselves. Both must be free to look elsewhere for the appropriate collaborative effort.

However, I remain optimistic that through greater awareness and understanding of the inter-cultural and ethical issues at play, any non-productive, stalemate

situations will be avoided and potential inter-cultural evaluation 'no-go zones' will be eliminated.

Mutual respect must be the key. The evaluation/research community and the Indigenous community must acknowledge the respective skills brought together in any evaluation project.

The cultural and intellectual proper rights<sup>12</sup> of all participants in a research project must be recognised. The rights to ownership by appropriate Indigenous community members of their cultural heritage must not be alienated by evaluators/researchers who fail to recognize these rights and to acknowledge their sources.

This is an important matter which has proved to be highly contentious. It is often at the nub of an imbalance in the research relationship, particularly in relation to the misuse of evaluation and research results.

Surely, gone are the days when the colonial settlers took for granted the use and exploitation of Indigenous cultural knowledge and intellectual property without prior informed consent and without any benefit and/or recompense to the rightful Indigenous owners? Such consent must be obtained without any undue influence or interference in decision making by the Indigenous community concerned.

Ultimately, there must be respect for the ownership by Indigenous peoples of their cultural knowledge, intellectual property and heritage. Similarly, there must be respect for the intellectual expertise of principled evaluators and researchers.

### **The development of ethical inter-cultural professional practices**

An organisation such as the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) should and undoubtedly does provide leadership in the field of ethical evaluation practices.

To this end, I note that the AES has already invested considerable time and energy in the development of its own institutional Code of Ethics, articulated through the AES document *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*.

I note that these guidelines 'are designed to suit the cultural, social and institutional contexts of evaluation in Australia and New Zealand' (*AES Guidelines* p. 4 – emphasis added) and that, similar to our approach at AIATSIS, provide advice which looks at the 'before', 'during' and 'after' aspects of evaluation practices.

I see little purpose in my attempting any comprehensive critique of AES guidelines today and, in any case, I would assume that, in the interest of organisational effectiveness and continuous improvement, the AES will, in due course, revisit these guidelines in the near future.

In this context however, and in the light of my address today, I do see room for some improvement in the coverage of the inter-cultural aspects of

evaluation practices in the AES document, consistent with the specific principles I have already outlined.

I do recognise that there is always a danger of being overly prescriptive, however, experience has taught me that the inter-cultural issues at play in evaluation are significant and cannot be addressed adequately as part of a more broader approach.

**The rights to ownership by appropriate Indigenous community members of their cultural heritage must not be alienated by evaluators/researchers who fail to recognize these rights and to acknowledge their sources.**

They do require specific institutional and/or cross-industry exploration and treatment.

Suffice to say that, in any future revision and/or expansion of the AES ethical guidelines, the AES does need to explore some critically important issues. In particular, any review must go to the question of: How well are AES members advised and prepared with respect to their capacity to carry out **effective** and **ethical** evaluation practices in **inter-cultural** settings?

In responding to this issue, my comments in the following sections may be of value.

### **The primacy of the local inter-cultural context**

It needs to be said that 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.

Any broad inter-cultural understandings, however well defined and understood, will nevertheless require testing, clarification, refining and checking as to their legitimacy and relevance at the **local level**.

In the Indigenous cultural context (certainly in Australia), this is of paramount importance and simply cannot be overlooked. Indigenous ways of learning, knowing, deciding and interacting in relation to the world at large vary greatly from community to community (and this means any practice manual or code of ethics must be flexible and not prescriptive in terms of local representative structures or protocols for the handling of knowledge and confidentiality – it must be organic by definition). Local Indigenous protocols will determine the relationship between the Indigenous stakeholders<sup>13</sup> and the evaluators – including who has the cultural and/or institutional legitimacy to speak on behalf of Indigenous stakeholders, clans, community and/or country.

Too many important evaluation projects suffer or run the risk of failing their purpose because the local cultural aspects have not been adequately respected and taken into consideration.

In the Australian contexts, this is becoming critically important. From an inter-cultural

perspective, the need for local Indigenous ownership and accountability of outcomes is of the utmost importance.

### **Greater Indigenous Participation:**

Another very significant issue is the level of Indigenous participation and involvement in the evaluation profession itself.

In addition to the inclusive and consultative approaches suggested in the AIATSIS Guidelines already outlined, there is a need to address the level of Indigenous participation in evaluations and in the evaluation profession itself.

Increasing the level of Indigenous participation in evaluation can be addressed through a number of initiatives. Including for example, through institutional arrangements and/or through other collective and/or individual representations and relationships.

In my view, a strengthened, strategic relationship between Indigenous peoples and the evaluation profession would bring about a range of mutual benefits. From an industry perspective, the main benefit would be a markedly enhanced professional capacity to operate more effectively in inter-cultural settings as well as having a larger, more diverse pool of expertise available to support its broader professional activities and responsibilities.

An effective, multi-level relationship between the evaluation profession and the Indigenous community could collaboratively address the issue of recruitment, support and development of more trained Indigenous evaluators (through secondments, sponsorships, traineeships, cadetships, scholarships and the like) in ways which are professionally effective and sustainable. Importantly, such initiatives need to be driven by an industry or profession-wide recognition of, and formal commitment to, the premise that there is significant value in increasing the ranks of professional Indigenous evaluators.

In addition, it needs to be recognised that Indigenous peoples do not come to the evaluation experience either empty-handed or empty-headed. Indigenous cultural knowledge and experience needs to be recognised, respected and given the same currency as other non-Indigenous knowledge. On this point I am not advocating that Indigenous knowledge should replace non-Indigenous or 'Western' knowledge but rather that it should be afforded a 'parity of esteem' with other knowledge at all times and, that in some situations, it should be given primacy. I believe that Indigenous knowledge now has its own 'space' which is neither a primitivist 'traditionalist' view nor a largely Western one – but rather has its own identities giving rise to a variety of new and strategic ways to interact with

and create more even power relations in a post-colonial world.

Again I reiterate that mutual respect is the key to improved professional relationships. This recognition can be articulated through greater use of Indigenous advisory groups and consultants, through dialogue with both formal and informal Indigenous networks, the development of program/project specific Indigenous reference groups or steering committees, and through the increased engagement of Indigenous peoples in evaluative research as evaluators and /or in liaison/facilitating roles which broker or mediate any inter-cultural tensions or disputes.

### **More Inter-culturally Attuned Ethical Mechanisms**

I inferred earlier in this paper that the various inter-cultural aspects of evaluation are not always clearly defined and require some consideration in order to effectively identify, clarify and address such matters. Undoubtedly, ethical issues will arise. If they are not addressed sensitively, and as I have suggested with due diligence, then there is a potential risk that individual evaluation projects could fail. We must not let that happen.

I would like to suggest that it may prove to be of considerable value if the evaluation profession, under the auspices of the AES, could consider the establishment of a peak Indigenous advisory or ethics committee, comprising selected/invited Indigenous experts<sup>14</sup> who would be able to assist the profession with advice and in developing best-practice approaches to evaluative research projects in inter-cultural contexts<sup>15</sup>.

In my view the establishment of a peak Indigenous advisory or ethics committee as a component of the AES governance structure would represent a significant and opportune step in the development of a stronger relationship between the evaluation profession and Indigenous peoples. Over time, such a committee will make a significant contribution to the capacity of the profession and its standing in the wider community. The work of such a committee would also contribute to the profession's capacity to better understand Indigenous community values and issues and thereby to operate more effectively in inter-cultural settings.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I will restate some of my main points:

Evaluations and evaluative research do not occur in a cultural or ethical vacuum.

This paper has attempted to offer some principles for ethical, inter-cultural evaluation and research practices. It was my intention to make some suggestions about approaches to best practice in an attempt to ensure that evaluative research with or about Indigenous communities is of high value to

the various stakeholders, including, the Indigenous community, those who commission evaluations and the profession itself.

As a basic tenet, I repeat that approaches to any evaluative research involving Indigenous peoples must be based on respect for Indigenous people's inherent right to self-determination, and our right to control and maintain our culture and heritage. Mutually respectful, inclusive, consultative evaluation practices in the before, during and after stages are seen as the preferred model of practice.

Evaluations with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the evaluators and the Indigenous peoples concerned and be underpinned by Indigenous decision-making based on free and fully informed consent. The inter-cultural aspects of evaluation raise important ethical dilemmas that are not always readily identifiable or easily resolved. Inter-cultural issues can be extremely complex and require sensitivity and proper consideration before, during and after the evaluation process.

In advocating the need for proper consideration of the inter-cultural issues through the development of ethical, cultural standards, this paper also highlighted the significance and primacy of Indigenous cultural mores and protocols applying at the local level. I have also advocated fostering and developing more Indigenous researchers/evaluators within the profession, for example through Indigenous/non-Indigenous partnerships and collaborations in evaluation projects.

I have also suggested, as part of building a stronger, more mutually rewarding relationship between the profession and the Indigenous peoples, that the profession, auspiced through the AES, consider establishing a peak Indigenous ethics committee to enhance the profession's capacity to operate more effectively in inter-cultural settings as well as increasing the potential for achieving more valuable collaborative outcomes.

My address today has also attempted to highlight that the evaluation profession itself needs to move beyond rhetoric to reality in practice. The profession needs to realistically evaluate itself in an effort to determine whether or not ethical principles for evaluations in the inter-cultural context are truly being embraced in actual practice. If, as I am suggesting, such a professional self-evaluation shows that more needs to be done in this area, then it is entirely appropriate that the AES itself shows leadership and moves to address this important shortcoming – and I would hope that, through this address, I have provided impetus towards meeting this ethical professional challenge.

My paper today is a call to the evaluation profession to take a more deliberative, proactive

professional stance with regard to evaluations in inter-cultural settings. By this I mean to express a view that Indigenous peoples undoubtedly benefit from the activities and outcomes of evaluations. I have stated earlier that I see the role of evaluations and evaluators as one of agents and influencers of change. I am aware of too many governmental and non-governmental programs and projects

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involving Indigenous peoples which cry out for proper, professional, ethical evaluation (and associated research). If only, in the interest of developing more effective public policy (although by no means the sole issue), I would ask that the evaluation profession, under the auspices of the AES, and through individual firms and practitioners, proactively engineer and highlight its willingness, availability and greater capacity to develop a stronger relationship with the Indigenous community and to increasingly undertake such worthwhile inter-cultural evaluation activities. I feel that, over time, the worthiness of such a professional repositioning strategy would be recognised and the benefits would become self-evident.

Finally, I will address the question: how far can one throw a Moree Boomerang?

The answer to this question, which was often posed by Koori<sup>16</sup> peoples from New South Wales as a component of a tongue-in-cheek, inter-cultural, quasi-IQ test, lies in the fundamental aspect of knowing what actually is a Moree Boomerang.

From an inter-cultural perspective, most New South Wales Kooris of all ages know the answer because this is a learned component of their Aboriginal cultural domain – part of their cultural heritage and lifeworld.

To know the answer to this question, indeed the answer to many other fundamental questions involving evaluations and judgements, **requires knowledge and understanding of an inter-cultural nature** – which, of course, is the underlying theme of this paper.

Here is the answer:

A **Boomerang** is an Australian Aboriginal throwing weapon (used for hunting and in music and ceremony) which is made from various timbers in varying shapes and sizes.

A **Moree Boomerang** is a member of an Aboriginal Rugby League Team from Moree in New South Wales – a team known as the 'Moree Boomerangs'.

## References

- Australasian Evaluation Society Inc. 2002 Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations.
- 2002 (a) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Canberra.
- 2002 (b) Paul, M and Gray G (eds) *Through a Smoky Mirror. History and Native Title*, AIATSIS Native Title Unit, Canberra.
- Nakata, Martin 2002 *Indigenous Knowledge and the Cultural Interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems*. IFLA Journal , Vol. 28, No 5/6, pp. 281-291.

## Footnotes

- 1 Provided courtesy of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu and written by John Howard and published through the Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration No. 63 December 1990, pp. 93-99
- 2 It is recognised that there is significant diversity in the nature of evaluations, including program evaluations (and including those that arise from legislative, other legal and/or official requirements) however in attempting to establish some generic elements of evaluation, this document is particularly useful.
- 3 The term 'evaluation' is said to encompass the systematic collection and analysis of information to make judgements, usually about the effectiveness, efficiency and/or appropriateness of an activity. Source: Australasian Evaluation Society Inc: *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*.
- 4 And in addition, involves analysis, debate and dispute over historical/legal aspects of recent Court decisions concerning very important Native Title claims, their evidence and outcomes. For further reading see AIATSIS 2002(b).
- 5 In my view, the more negative and harmful aspects of this historical relationship (including death, dispossession, alienation and marginalization, incarceration, impoverishment, ill-health etc) appear to have all been evident to a far greater extent in the Indigenous sharing of these times than has been the case in the experience of our colonising, times-sharing, non-Indigenous partners.
- 6 Often referred to generically in the Australian context as 'blackfella/whitefella' domains.
- 7 i.e. In the Australian and New Zealand context this of course refers to the non-Indigenous cultural issues, histories, protocols etc
- 8 Refer AIATSIS 2002(a)
- 9 For more details of these Principles, including supporting examples and comments, please visit the AIATSIS website at [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au).
- 10 Erica-Irene Daes, 'Discrimination against Indigenous peoples: Study on the protection of the cultural and intellectual property of Indigenous peoples', paper presented to the 45th session of the Commission on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council, United Nations, New York, 1993, p. 9.
- 11 Note: reference to 'benefits' does not mean , and should not be construed as meaning, that any research can only produce 'good news' for the Indigenous stakeholders – but rather that the research will produce valuable information and/or positively influence actions or policy responses etc which will ultimately be of benefit to the community e.g. the delivery of better, more effective health services etc
- 12 Rights which, of themselves are complex in the Indigenous domain and include concepts such as collective ownership, and interests, are extremely diverse, include knowledge of an oral nature, and may incorporate restrictive rules covering secrecy and sacredness – all of which elements are only broadly and not specifically dealt with in this paper.
- 13 Which also include the (intra-Indigenous ) sensitive representational issues involving important aspects of 'mens business' and 'womens business', the recognition and treatment of the secret/sacred materials and relationships and of course, the issue of age and respect for elders.
- 14 Of course membership of such committees needs to reflect the diversity of interests and expertise available from within the Indigenous community and include consideration of issues such as gender balance and any other specific sectoral expertise and interests (e.g. professional, layperson, church representatives etc) as considered appropriate to the circumstances.
- 15 I would make the point that the membership of any such proposed Indigenous ethics committee(s) should be respected and remunerated, in the same manner as other non-Indigenous experts are remunerated for their professional advice.
- 16 An Aboriginal term used to identify Aboriginal peoples from New South Wales.