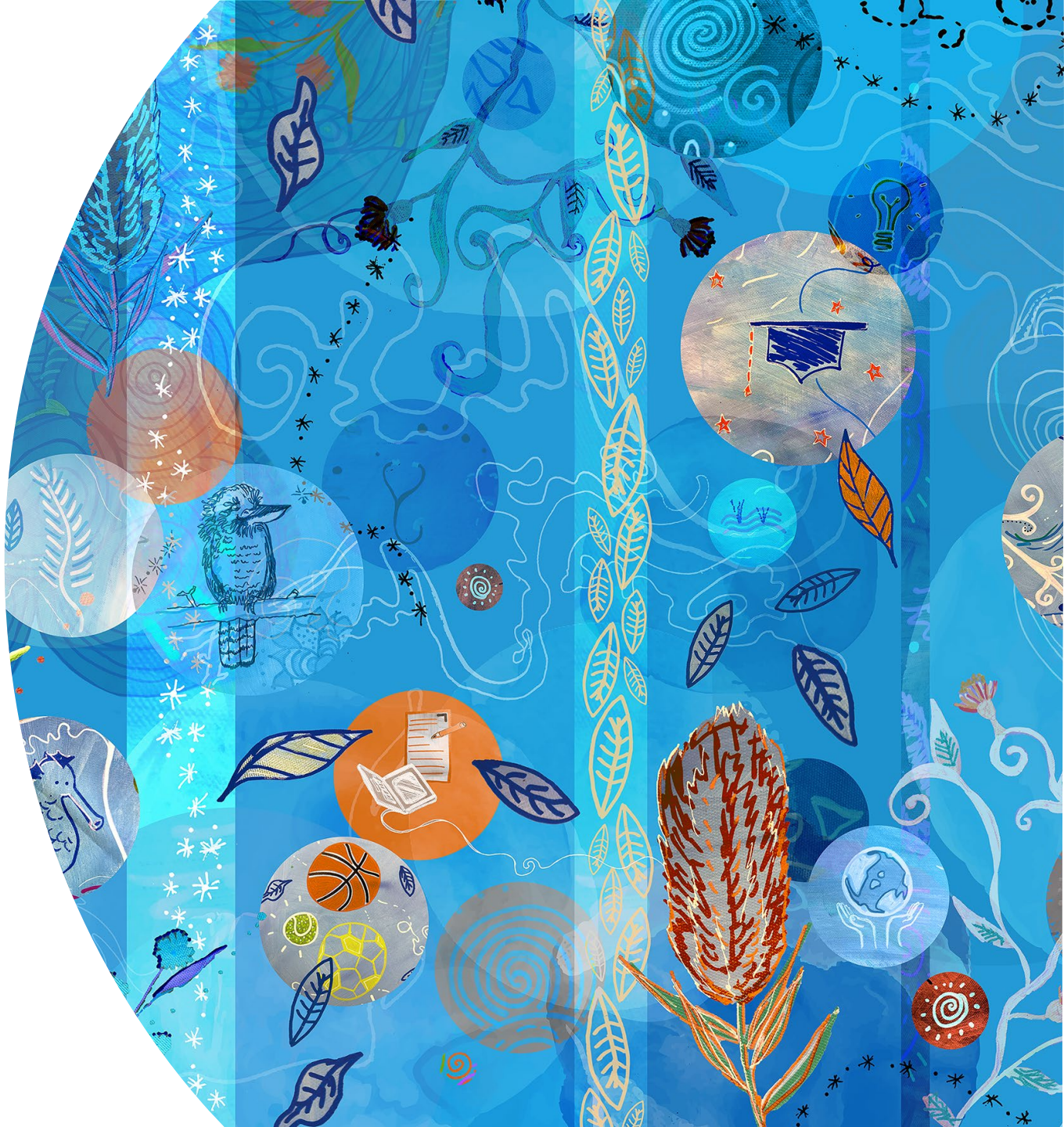
MAKING SPACE, VALUING PLACE: *IN AND THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION*

Nathan Towney
Monica McKenzie
Matt Lumb
James Ballangarry
Rhyall Gordon

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



WHO ARE WE?



Nathan Towney

Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Equity at the University of Newcastle

Monica McKenzie

Indigenous Evaluation Partner at the University of Newcastle and Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellow

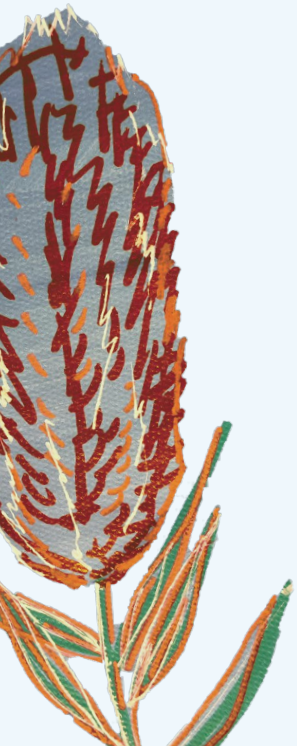
Matt Lumb

Associate Director, Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle

How do we engage with evaluation?

Evaluation doesn't measure the world …it participates in making versions of our worlds visible…

- Who gets to decide what success looks like?
- Whose knowledge counts as evidence?
- What becomes visible through our methods—and what disappears?



From representation to practice …

What is the problem represented to be?

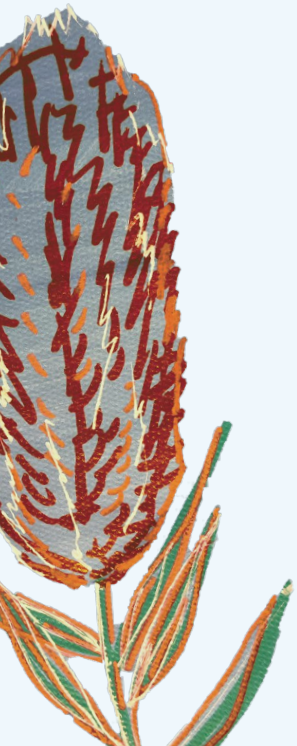
What version of the problem has made those evaluation questions seem obvious?

…ideas, institutional arrangements, administrative practices and material technologies become assembled together and acquire governing force …

How will evaluation processes intervene?

What conditions does our evaluation create for people to participate as persons whose knowledge has consequence?

- Who defines the problem?
- Who determines what matters?
- Who decides what counts as evidence?
- Who interprets that evidence?
- Who benefits from the knowledge produced?
- And to whom is the evaluator/evaluation accountable?



Introduction

For generations, Aboriginal people have had to fit into a system that was not designed for us or by us. As a result our histories, views of the world and lived experiences have been excluded. In its place success has been defined by the ability to fit into another culture.



The NSW Department of Education has the opportunity to change this, and extend established relationships and partnerships that value a local approach to recognising that those living our stories are the best to tell those stories.

Through listening together we all have the ability to re-define what success means in our schools and communities. However, changing a definition is not enough. This document aims to provide a process to share those stories and translate that into actions in our schools and across the department as a whole.

We encourage everyone to embrace these Principles and determine what they mean for their lives.

As we yarn we will have the opportunity to nurture and grow a shared story and new future.

> *We always say relationships are extremely important, but we never evaluate how well people do this across the system*

> *I feel that the things I am most proud of as a school leader are not valued by the system. I hope this work provides a time and space for me to share these stories and the system listens*

> *Evaluation is used for two purposes, 'to pat ya on the back' or 'to belt ya with it', this shouldn't be why we evaluate*

> *Hopefully this work will remind corporate that the source of truth is in schools. They may be well-intentioned but have no concept of looking into the eyes of Aboriginal kids*

> *Current evaluation processes don't get to the real problem, which is, who defines what success looks like and feels like*



Re-imagining Evaluation:

A Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework





A culturally responsive evaluation of the expanded Connected Communities Strategy

An Application of the Re-imagining Evaluation Framework



Figure 1: Map of 33 Connected Communities schools

Healing

This theme highlights the role schools are playing in improving the lives of Aboriginal people, whilst supporting the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students.



34

"While this strategy's in place, then it's helping the kids, you know, to be able to stay at school, stay connected, stay, you know, involved, and for the parents to feel like they've got a place to come that's a safe place because, you know, of that – the whole community connection that they've got going."

(Parent, Phase 2 school).



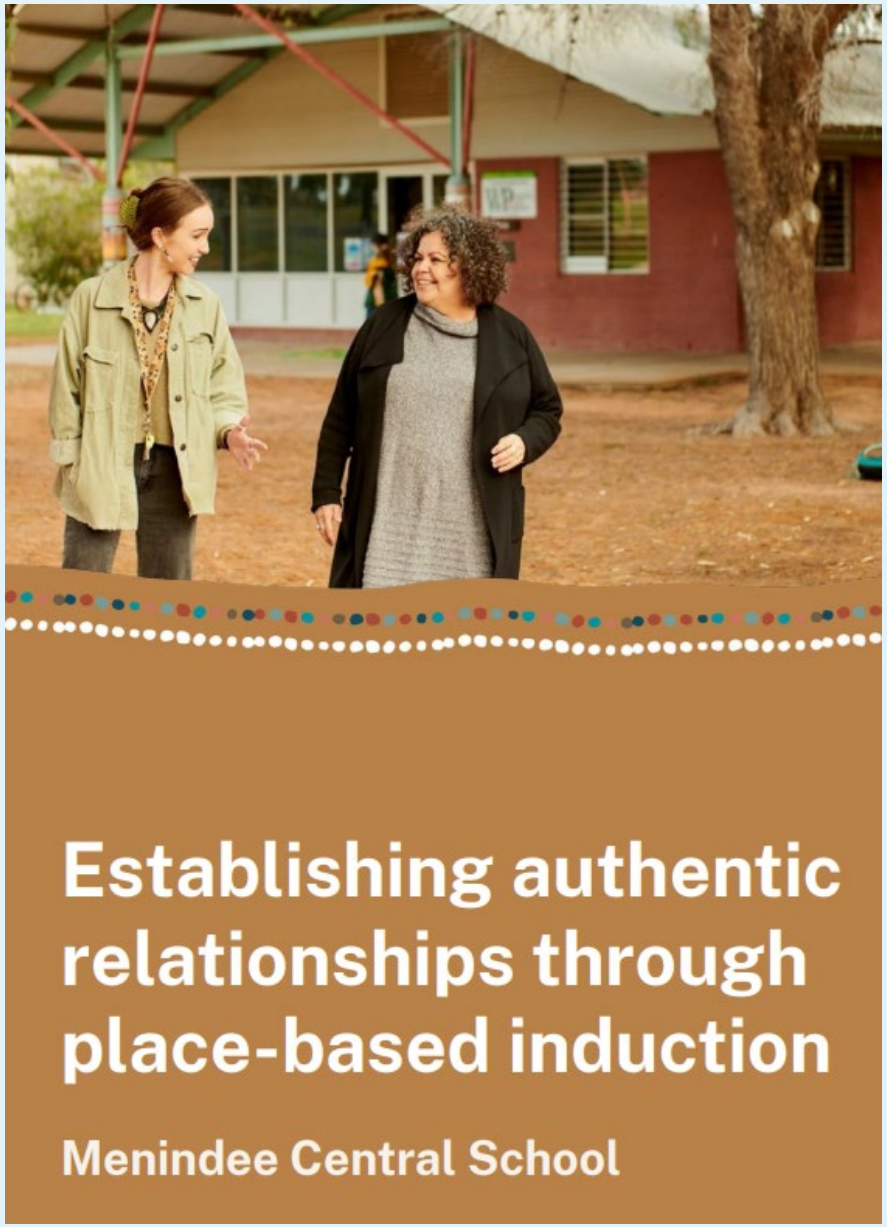
"Some parts of the education system don't understand the complexities of our site."

(Executive Principal, Phase 1 school)

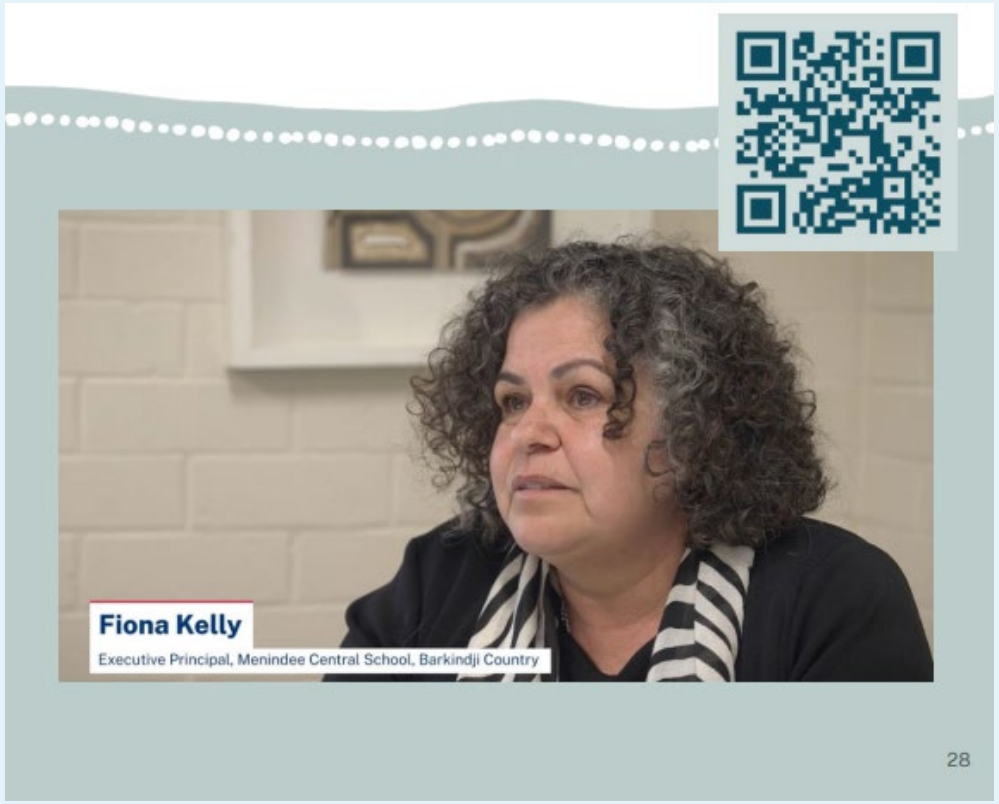
53



"If a student's trauma doesn't get addressed at school, it will never be addressed."



More than just a Place.





5. Recommendations

Impact of the Culturally Responsive Evaluation of the Connected Communities Strategy

QUESTIONS



Many Voices, One Community

Collaborative Art Project
2025

Digital artwork
Size variable
The University Art Collection AA2026.1

Many Voices, One Community is a collaborative collage shaped by the individual artistic contributions of community, alumni, students and staff gathered to mark the University's 60th anniversary in 2025. Guided by First Nations traditions of shared making and knowledge exchange, the work brings diverse perspectives together, celebrating connection, collective achievement, and the University's enduring commitment to equity, engagement, excellence and sustainability.



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