Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

Messy work! Combining participatory action research and developmental evaluation approaches in remote NT Indigenous communities.

Cat Street, Allison Stewart & James Smith

The WCE initiative

* Funded by the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

* Objectives:

Inspire six remote Indigenous communities to include higher education as a normal expectation by:

- exploring remote community perspectives about higher education

- identifying ways to make education relevant, meaningful and accessible

- building on what is already working

- creating sustainable partnerships

… with a view to establishing strong and sustainable educational pathways from early childhood to lifelong post-secondary education.
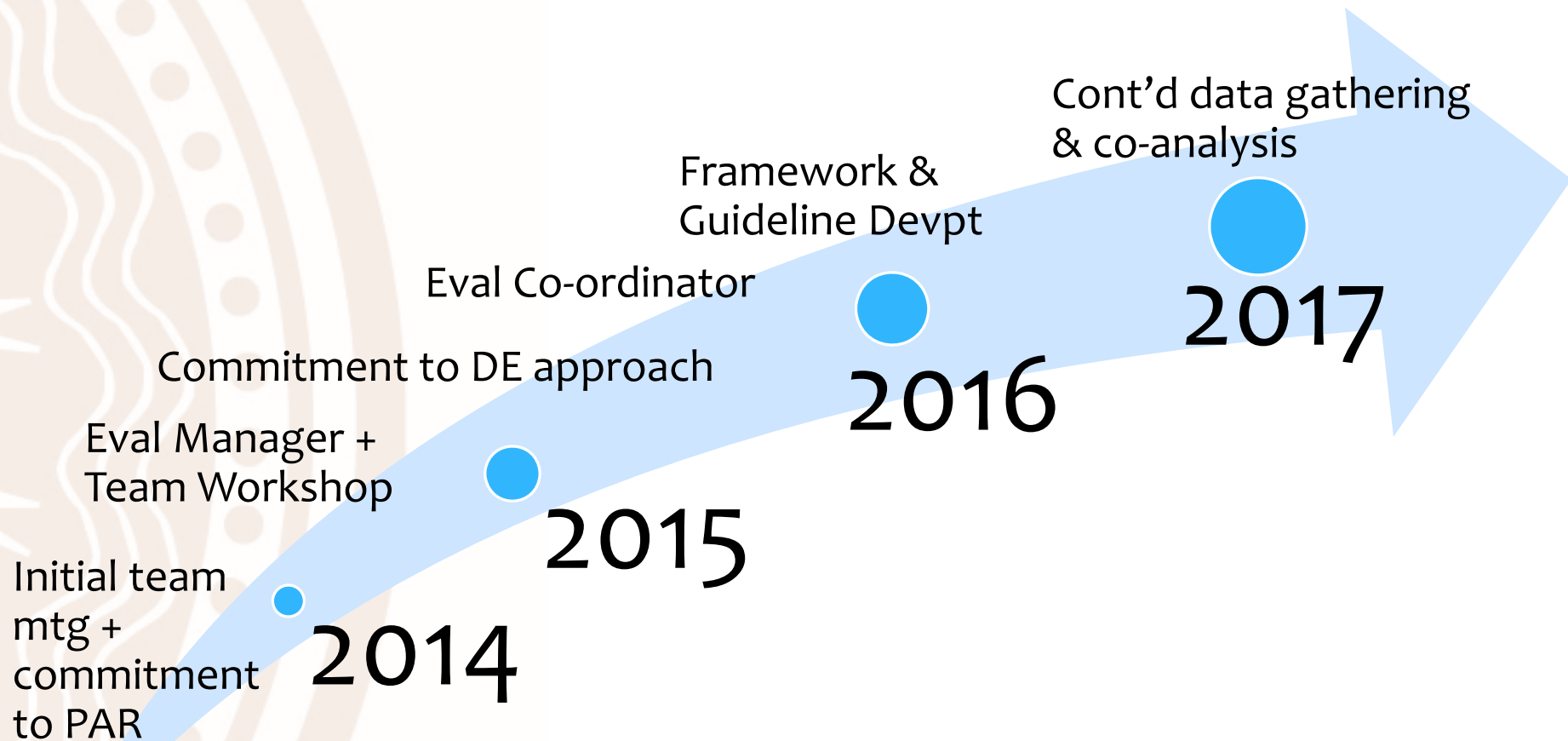
The WCE initiative

The WCE initiative

The team:

Indigenous Higher Education in the NT

* 2% of Indigenous people in the NT are enrolled in university (ABS Census of Population & Housing, 2011)

* In 2011, 9% of Indigenous students at CDU admitted from high school (CDU, 2017)

  * VET

  * mature aged students

* Few Indigenous students articulate from VET to HE

Timeline

Cont'd data gathering & co-analysis

Framework & Guideline Devpt

Eval Co-ordinator

2017

Commitment to DE approach

2016

Eval Manager + Team Workshop

2015

Initial team mtg + commitment to PAR

2014

Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

Participatory Action Research

Search to establish new facts, solve new or existing problems, prove new ideas or develop new theories

Aims to answer a specific research question

Inductive reasoning

Focus on action & empowerment; the 'researched' become partners

Creation of new knowledge

Non linear, iterative & emergent

Collect data to motivate action

Acknowledge complexity & uncertainty

Value local context, perspectives and knowledge systems

Appreciate change & continuous improvement

Flexible & responsive

"Bottom up"

Developmental Evaluation

Acquire and analyse information about activities, characteristics or outcomes of a program

Data is used to make judgements, improve effectiveness and/or inform decisions about future programs

Abductive reasoning

Focus on systems thinking

Provision of feedback to stakeholders

Sept 2015

Planning

∗ Scoping document

∗ Community action plans

∗ Team workshops

Research & Evaluation Approach

* Participatory Action Research (PAR)
* Developmental evaluation (DE)

* Why?
  * Context-specific
  * Local control
  * Valuing cultural knowledge systems/expertise
  * Emergence, complexity

PAR and DE

* Participatory Action Research (PAR):
  * Focus on power relations
  * Contested definitions/approaches

* Developmental Evaluation (DE):
  * Must be embedded in planning
  * Requires significant resourcing
  * Not for novices

The intersection between PAR and DE

Stern (1995, cited in Patton 2011) frames the linkage between PAR and DE through the following statements (p.282):

- *Judgement and explanation require analysis, on the one hand, and*
- *Development and empowerment require action, on the other.*

Action research integrates judgement with development, and explanation with empowerment – and thereby combines:

- *Analysis with action*
- *Theory with practice*

Things to consider...

Context

- Policy context
- Political factors
- Organisational factors
- Geographical factors
- Linguistic/ cultural factors

Design/Planning

- (Timeframe)
- Consultation
- Evaluation planning & capacity
- Research active positions
- 'Flexible' PAR approach
- Campus-based staff as conduits
- Flat structure

What happened?

Successes

* (Equal) power in the process
* Community leaders' felt valued and were highly committed – retention of community-based staff
* Invested in relationships and trust
* Positive team working environment…

* Community-driven initiatives established that were showing potential
* 'Community disposition towards higher education'

Elizabeth Katakarinja, Yuendumu.

Emerging Developments

'Last week we did a proposal to continue the Raypirri [Both Ways mentoring] work. There is a lot of involvement from different community organisations. CDEP supervising the workers – they are involved; Night Patrol; Yalu; Marthakal Homelands; where can we take the children for this discipline. From the start – it's growing bigger – from the small mentoring program, it's going out in to the community. WCE planted the seed. This is the outcome.'

∗ - Community Researcher, Galiwin'ku.

'We started things up with the WCE initiative and now it's really working very well in the community with the school and the other organisations, and we will continue ourselves - because of WCE it was possible. We want to continue the work ourselves in the community.'

- Community Researcher, Yuendumu.

Challenges

* **Timeframe**
* Internal conflict
* Management in 'innovation'
* Strategic partnerships – did not function as intended – restricted impact on 'systems' change (within institutions)*
* Attempt at developmental evaluation did not work well
  * Resistance to/confusion about
  * Varying types, amounts and quality of data
  * Quality of evaluation suffered

Key Lessons

* Evaluation resourcing and expertise
* PAR – a single agreed model
* Evaluation embedded
* Locus of change; what type of 'action' will result in change; what is the purpose of the 'research'; specific & achievable goals

* Relationships and trust
* Local knowledge/expertise
* Cultural metaphors and stories
* Linguistic and cultural factors

* Indigenous methods of research and evaluation vs. essentialism
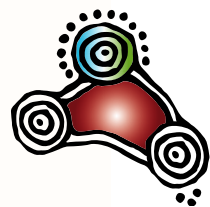
* **TIMEFRAMES**

References

Charles Darwin University 2017, Higher Education Admission Data, Darwin, Charles Darwin University. Accessed 16th June, 2017.

Patton, M 2011, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*, New York: Guildford Press.

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