
It Is Only New Because It Has Been Missing for so Long: Indigenous Evaluation Capacity Building

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Abstract

Despite 11,000 years of honing evaluation skills in order to thrive in some of the harshest climatic conditions on the planet, there are few Alaska Native program evaluators and until a recent exchange with New Zealand *Maori*, there was no collective vision for building Alaska Native capacity in program evaluation. This article tells the story of a recent project that represents the first concerted attempt at building the evaluation capacity of Alaska Natives. It is written by Alaska Native and *Maori* people involved in that project. This evaluation capacity building story is shared with the international evaluation community in the belief that others can learn from our experiences in attempting evaluation training across cultures and across the globe. The authors also hope that it will encourage other indigenous evaluators to share their stories so that a wider audience can benefit from the considerable knowledge about evaluation held by indigenous peoples.

Keywords

indigenous, Alaska native, Maori capacity building, cross-cultural, teaching, learning

Introduction

New Zealand *Maori* use the term *Kaupapa Maori* to refer to programs and projects that are “by *Maori*, for *Maori*” and where *Maori* worldview is normative. *Maori* have been “doing it our way” in the evaluation of *Maori* programs for many years now. *Maori* have been so busy doing it, that with few exceptions they have not had the time or the inclination to write about what they have been doing. As a consequence, the considerable progress made by *Maori* in the field of evaluation has gone largely unnoticed internationally, limiting the potential for other people to learn from *Maori* evaluation experience.

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For indigenous Alaska Natives living half the world away from *Aotearoa* New Zealand, their context and therefore their experiences of program evaluation has been markedly different from those of indigenous New Zealanders. For Alaska Natives, evaluation has always been “done to us” or at best “done with us” and until a recent evaluation capacity building project between indigenous *Maori* from *Aotearoa* New Zealand and Alaska Native people, there was no collective vision for program evaluation allowing the use of indigenous knowledge or for “doing it our way.” This article describes the vision and the beginnings of building Alaska Native evaluation capability and capacity.

The article is cowritten by Alaska Native and *Maori* authors. The article was peer reviewed by *Whariki* colleagues who were a part of the capacity building project team. The article seeks to privilege the Alaska Native voices as they have previously been without voice in evaluation. To facilitate this, Alaska Native authors “speak” for ourselves (words in italics). When first “speaking” we introduce ourselves in ways that are appropriate to us, coming as we do from different tribes and villages and with diverse professional experience. These biographical details have been included as they provide the context for our writing, connecting us to the people and places that truly identify who we are as native people.

Amelia Ruerup

My Tlingit name is Tlagoonk. I was named after my paternal grandfather. I am of the Eagle moiety, Chookaneidi (Bear) clan. My father is Chief Gooch-eesh (Father of the Wolves) of the Kach-adi clan (the Land Otter People) of Hoonah, Southeast Alaska. My mother is Susan Price of Irish decent and amazing character. Through guidance from my Elders, I have learned the importance of cultural balance and presence in my life and strive to “know both sides.” I live in Fairbanks with my children and consider both Hoonah and Interior Alaska my home.

Prior to meeting our Maori evaluators, the thought of evaluating our own programs had never crossed my mind, however it was one of those things that once brought to my attention, the gaping hole that had always been there had become obviously apparent. This presented more questions than answers which was actually more inspiring than daunting and acted as a catalyst for seeking answers and establishing more pointed questions.

It seemed so simple, we should have our own evaluators, and it made sense. So why hadn't any of us thought of this before? There are so many explanations of historical and cultural nature. Over years of subjugation, racial tension and bouts with inequality and trickle effects of colonization, many things that were once proudly ours are at a loss of ownership. However, looking past the injustices that are relatively recent in the historical scheme of things, our people possess a rich history of evaluative practices that resulted in strict protocols and cultural lessons that led to prosperity, passed down from generation to generation, orally, through teachings. My grandfathers and grandmothers evaluated constantly, deriving the best ways, that's what they passed down, what worked. We did have “indigenous evaluation.” It's only a new concept because it's been missing for so long.

What I found most exciting was the empowerment and feeling of ownership that indigenous evaluation presented. I had not thought of evaluation as an area of personal, cultural, or professional interest. Evaluation was something that someone else did, with clipboard in hand, pursed lips, stern look of disapproval and critical comments which we would never see because it was about us, not for us, meant for a shelf in someone's office I'd never meet and no one I knew would probably ever read and even if they did, probably would never understand. However, no one had ever told me that “indigenous” evaluation existed or was an option.

The first part of this article briefly outlines the path leading to the *Ukk'aa—Te Ropu Whariki* (*Whariki*) evaluation capacity building project, followed by a description of the teaching and learning aspects of the capacity building project. *Whariki* are the *Maori* research group from Massey University, New Zealand, who were involved in the project. *Ukk'aa* arose out of the Interior-Aleutians Campus, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Ukk'aa and *Whariki* each share their respective reflections on the challenges and successes of the teaching and learning including the advantages and barriers to the project arising from its mediation through nonindigenous institutions from two different nations and the use of technology including videoconferencing, telephone-conferencing, e-mail, and web group to sustain momentum between face-to-face exchanges.

Following this, both groups outline what they learned from participating in this project and reflect on the outcomes from the evaluation capacity building process. The last word belongs to *Ukk'aa*, as they look to the future and the way forward from here for Alaska Native evaluation capacity building.

Background to the Capacity Building Project

In 2008, Clara Anderson was the Director of the Interior-Aleutians Campus (IAC) of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and attended an Evaluation Conference in *Aotearoa* New Zealand. She attended to support a colleague whom she had encouraged to begin a doctorate on indigenous based evaluation the previous year. The colleague was not an Alaska Native but she had conducted many internal evaluations for the IAC and had an interest in developing expertise conducting indigenous based external program evaluations.

For many years, the IAC Director had struggled to find external evaluators for their grant programs and none were Alaska Native. The Director was unaware at the time that “indigenous evaluation” existed as a term that was used by indigenous evaluators in other contexts. By the time the two attended the *Aotearoa* New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA) Conference in Rotorua in July 2008, this was the second evaluation conference for the evaluator-come-doctoral-student and she was looking to interview people about indigenous evaluation for her doctoral thesis. In *Aotearoa* New Zealand they both were surprised to find that almost a third of those attending were indigenous people.¹

The strong presence of indigenous evaluators at the *Aotearoa* New Zealand conference inspired the IAC Director to catch the vision for indigenous evaluation and dream of the day when Alaska Natives would have what *Maori* had in New Zealand:

1. *Maori* aspirations fully considered in the evaluation
2. A significant pool of skilled *Maori* evaluators
3. *Maori* evaluating *Maori* programs
4. Non-*Maori* evaluators having considerable knowledge and respect for *Maori* culture and working in partnership with *Maori*.

From that ANZEA conference in 2008, a plan was made to build Alaska Native Evaluation capability and capacity. *Te Ropu Whariki*, a *Maori* research and evaluation group from Massey University who, along with their Treaty partnership group Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE), are the largest providers of evaluation training in New Zealand (Adams & Dickinson, 2010), were contracted to provide two, 2-day evaluation training workshops in Alaska, linked with mentoring support and monthly video/teleconferencing.

Planning the Capacity Building Project

IAC perspective and beginnings of Ukk'aa

Clara Anderson

Clara Anderson (Koyukon Athabascan) was the Director of the Interior-Aleutians Campus (IAC), a rural community campus under the College of Rural and Community Development at UAF. IAC has had

success in pioneering programs that interface Alaska Native Knowledge and traditions with Western learning thereby providing access to place appropriate careers and higher education to new groups of indigenous and rural students. IAC has several new workforce occupational endorsements as well as a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Program that is of interest to students who want to increase their workforce skills and prepare for new careers. Ms. Anderson received a BA in Sociology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an MSW from Portland State University.

The plan was to draw together a small cadre of capable graduates for two workshops with teaching and mentoring between workshops using videoconferencing, a web group, and e-mail. A cadre is a nucleus of trained people around which a larger group can be built and trained and so the vision was to train a small group who would catch the vision for indigenous evaluation, receive training and mentoring support and who could then build evaluation capacity from there. The cadre was given the Athabaskan name Ukk'aa. It is the Athabaskan term for an eddy or still place in a river. It is a place of reflection where upriver and downriver are both in view and is symbolic of evaluation's purpose from an Alaskan Native perspective.

Initially, a small number of Alaska Native people were invited to become part of Ukk'aa and attend the evaluation capacity building training, but word spread quickly and the number of attendees at the first workshop grew from the planned maximum of 10 to 26. The group consisted mostly of well-educated, highly competent Alaska Native people from around the State who came to the first training with varying motivations and levels of experience, interest, and commitment to pursuing program evaluation training. There were also a small number of self-selected nonnative people who attended.

Malinda Chase

My parents are Rudy Chase of Anvik, Alaska and Sandra originally of California. I was raised in Anchorage and later, when older in Anvik. I live with my daughter Deenaalee in Fairbanks, yet home for me is Anvik, or Gitringithchagg, which translates as "the mouth of the long, long river," as my Auntie Alta once told me in our Deg Xinag Athabaskan language. Anvik is located at the old mouth of the Anvik River, on the lower middle Yukon River. It is beautiful country and where I am connected to generations before me—to my ancestors. It is there that I am always welcome; forever accepted and can truly be myself.

I was motivated to attend the indigenous evaluation training given by Whariki, a group of indigenous evaluators from New Zealand, or "Aotearoa" as I also know it, after receiving an invitation from Clara Anderson at UAF IAC. My motivation stemmed from a desire to have a better understanding or a better handle on program evaluation, which I saw primarily as a funding and reporting requirement to get feedback on how the project was unfolding and being delivered. I knew that evaluation provided some feedback of how to make improvements to a project from the participant's or stakeholder's perspective but I also knew that often when individuals complete evaluation surveys, which was the one common feedback method that I was familiar with, they often did so in a rush or without being given much time to reflect and provide fuller or deeper answers. Given this experience with evaluation, I did not give it much credence. Evaluation was a "removed process" and I did not see it as an overly insightful tool: It was something required to be done but done by someone else—an evaluator who knew more about evaluation.

Debbie Mekiana

Debbie Mekiana currently works at the University of Alaska Fairbanks as the director of Rural Student Services. She earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Inupiaq Eskimo from UAF. Debbie's graduate work was completed in Community Psychology also at UAF. She calls Anaktuvuk Pass, AK home, where she was raised by her Inupiaq father, Caucasian mother and their extended family that consists of the whole community. Debbie has two sons, In'uli and Usisana, who are being raised by the Yup'ik, Inupiaq and nonnative values.

I agree with Malinda's statement regarding evaluation's primary function being "for reporting and funding requirements to get feedback on how the project is unfolding and delivered." When I facilitated a grant-funded program in my home community, the whole idea of evaluation was there for the above reasons. Reporting attendance was depressing because community members did not attend the program as much as one would hope. But then, local community ideas were not implemented in the planning so once again, we were "programmed." My motivation for attending the training came from my interest in being able to evaluate a Native program with Native values rather than always attempting to make a Native program outcomes work for the nonnative evaluation process.

Whariki Perspective on the Development of the Capacity Building Project

We planned to *hikoi* (journey) with our Alaskan Native colleagues, recognizing that the process was likely to be as important as the final destination (Moewaka Barnes, 2009). In the planning stages of the capacity building project, we tried to communicate frequently, learn as much as possible about what our colleagues hoped the project would achieve, about Alaska Native cultures and about the approaches and contexts for the practice of program evaluation in Alaska and the United States generally. In these early stages, we felt the distance as a very real barrier to "journeying" as communication was infrequent and mediated through unreliable technology. As a consequence, we were designing the project in less than optimal circumstances: we were unable to work in a fully collaborative way and were therefore still uncertain of the evaluation context or outcomes that the Alaskans wanted from the project; funding was not confirmed until 3 days before we left; and we did not know how many students we would have as the number of likely *Ukk'aa* students had risen from between 6 and 10 originally to 20+. Word had gotten out and people wanted to come—this showed great enthusiasm for the idea of indigenous evaluation, but threw out our planning as we had intended to work very intensively with a small group. We did what we always do in indigenous evaluation planning—we planned the first steps tightly and then held the plans loosely. We reminded each other to "trust the process" referring to the *hikoi* process (Moewaka Barnes, 2009). *Hikoi* as used in evaluation at *Te Ropu Whariki* incorporates the concepts of:

- A collective journey
- The goal of the journey is negotiated.
- All parties are united in their desire to achieve the goal.
- Others with the same or complimentary goals may join along the way.
- The journey itself is important for relationship building and learning.
- It is by *Maori*, for *Maori*, toward *Maori* development and self-determination

An evaluation *hikoi* encompasses all of these things. For the purposes of helping to build Alaska Native evaluation capacity, we exchanged "*Maori*" for "indigenous" and trusted that we were on a collaborative journey that would unfold as we travelled together.

We saw ourselves as passing on evaluation theories, skills, and approaches from our indigenous context, to our indigenous cousins in Alaska. We knew that our theories and approaches to evaluation were strongly aligned with other Native American indigenous perspectives (LaFrance & Nichols, 2007):

- Assessment of merit based on traditional values and cultural expressions;
- Responsiveness to local traditions and cultures;
- Ownership in defining evaluation meaning, practice, and usefulness;
- Respect for tribal sovereignty and self-determination;
- Evaluation as an opportunity to learn and go forward.



Figure 1. The evaluation cycle: catch the vision for indigenous evaluation.

In order to honor the sovereignty and self-determination of Alaska Native peoples, we planned to open our evaluation *waka huia* (traditional *Maori* treasure boxes) and allow Alaskan Native people to pick out the treasures that resonated for them in their context and would assist them with evaluation, and then to use them in whatever way seemed right for them.

The Teaching and Learning Plan

The overarching aim of the project was for Alaskan Native participants to catch the vision for indigenous evaluation, learn basic theory and evaluation skills, and chart their own course for achieving evaluation capability and capacity. The plan was to hold two evaluation-training workshops in Alaska, linked with mentoring support and monthly video/teleconferencing. The expectation was that the *Whariki* team would teach the basics of indigenous evaluation theory and practice in the first workshop, mentor trainees as they used their new knowledge on a practical evaluation project, and reinforce the learning during the second workshop.

The first 2-day workshop introduced the participants to the idea of indigenous evaluation and gave them a complete evaluation process from design through implementation, reporting, and dissemination. The *Whariki* team shared stories from *Aotearoa* New Zealand and challenged participants to think about Alaska Native approaches to evaluation throughout. In keeping with Alaska Native worldviews, the framework *Whariki* introduced was cyclic and based on the workshop aim of catching the vision for indigenous evaluation (Figure 1).

During the first workshop, participants were partnered with a *Whariki* team member as an evaluation mentor. The mentoring relationship was to be built upon during the 4 months between workshops through regular e-mail and videoconferencing. Fortnightly videoconferencing lessons were also planned and a web group started.

The videoconferencing plan included teaching sessions on evaluation planning, evaluation design, data collection, making evaluative assessments, and testifying to results. Within each of these sessions, trainees were taught about Western and indigenous approaches and encouraged to reflect on Alaska Native understandings. Cultural values and metaphors, indigenous knowledge generation, community engagement, and the place of story were all highlighted and trainees were given

readings and a range of exercises to complete for each session that further focused thinking on Alaska Native perspectives. For example, prior to the session on evaluation planning, trainees were to reflect on specific questions they would want to add to the Key Evaluation Checklist (Scriven 2003 in Davidson, 2005) if designing an evaluation for an Alaskan Native context. The exercises generated discussion and important data for ongoing reflection and use.

The second 2-day face-to-face workshop focused on using key learning on an actual evaluation project individual to each trainee. If trainees did not have a project, they worked in groups to plan Alaska Native evaluation capacity building and to develop an evaluation plan for the ongoing capacity building project. There was no plan for ongoing training past the end of the second workshop but we knew that further support would be needed to build Alaska Native evaluation capability and capacity (Adams & Dickinson, 2010). Everyone acknowledged that this was a beginning and carried an expectation that our journey together would continue in some way.²

Ukk'aa Reflections on the Teaching and Learning

James Johnson III

I grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska with close ties to my relatives in Tanana, Rampart, and Ruby. I'm an undergraduate Sociology major at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an Indigenous Research Assistant for Evaluation Research Associates where I assist in evaluative research of educational programs throughout rural Alaska. I'm also an alumnus of the Rural Human Services program and the Arctic Institute for Indigenous Leadership. I enjoy being a father, mentor, basketball player and working closely with the Native communities of the Interior.

I remember this being an introduction for most of the participants that sat through this workshop, including me. Although I'd been working on my Rural Human Services Practicum and was doing some evaluative things with this project, "Indigenous Evaluation" was still a mystery to me (as well as the concept of evaluation itself). Facilitating this workshop was a fabulous team of New Zealand Evaluators. The team immediately showed signs of great knowledge from a country far away, and there was also a feeling of familiarity about them that comforted me and gave me confidence in my position as a newcomer.

During this workshop and exchange of ideas about "Indigenous Evaluation," the gathering also ignited many stories between New Zealanders and Alaskan Natives. I was especially fond of the different culture the New Zealand team brought to the training that left me fascinated with the idea of "Indigenous Evaluation." During the workshop, I had the opportunity to show the group some of the software I was using to analyze data for my practicum project. At the time, I was doing several evaluative procedures that others were not doing, but I knew nothing about why I was doing it. It was a strange start, but the workshop gave me some great foundation into the discipline of "Indigenous Evaluation."

Amelia

I was so moved by the cultural presence within the Whariki professional task of bringing us up to speed with this idea of indigenous evaluation, capacity building and ownership. They began with meaningful songs, bestowed gifts to their hosts and wove into their entire presentation a seamless, binding connection to their culture. I've seen this at Koo.eex³ and spoken, taught by my aunts, but in the workplace? Of course! Another epiphany of such simplistic nature, I felt sort of embarrassed for not already being in that frame of mind.

Throughout our training, our Maori friends were ever mindful to not present their approach as what we were supposed to do, rather an example of how they do it. We were encouraged to use our culture, songs, and stories to illustrate our approach and philosophies that made our evaluative process indigenous. There was no one way they could spell out for us, no canned or cookie cutter approach, no Iowa-based standardized approach . . . so cool!!! They kept saying that we begin by dreaming the dream. All of this so foreign and so much like home.

However, it was difficult to learn about indigenous evaluation without having knowledge or even an interest in western evaluative processes. The Whariki team went so fast and I thought I should understand faster. It felt like the time I took a computer programming class and the teacher was so used to teaching upper-level courses that the intro course he was now teaching these “newbies” was difficult for him because he had to go from such an advanced state to the basics. I felt we were at the basics and not only did I want to be up to their speed, I felt bad for them teaching what I sure was a bunch of blank stares. But, I’m also happy that I didn’t know so much of the western evaluative approach because I think that would have made it harder. I would then have to retrain myself and in this way, I can start fresh the right way!

Malinda

While the initial face-to-face evaluation meeting between Whariki and a larger group of invited and self-selected group of Alaska Native individuals came together, the overall capacity building process and really our hikoi, our journey together between Whariki and Ukk’aa has unfolded to respond to the “place” we have been at collectively, in our indigenous evaluation exchange. To follow up with our first face-to-face meeting, a series of joint video combined with audioconference meetings were held between Whariki and the larger group—six of these distance meetings were scheduled. Also we were assigned a Whariki mentor as a resource in our overall understanding of evaluation. The intention was to keep the capacity building effort going and to continue maintaining and building the relationship. In Alaska, holding audioconference meetings is a fairly common form of conducting meetings and academic courses due to the size of and distance within the state.

As the series of distance conferences proceeded from month to month, we did lose some of the initial Alaska Native group members, and the number of those who remained involved declined. In part, this may have been because of the challenges of video and audioconferencing with a larger group, and that the online web meeting program that we were using was not familiar for the Alaskan group. And while the web resource was laid out well, it was almost too much information to shift through and respond to in a larger online group. It may also be connected to the fact that we as Native people have multiple commitments at tribal, as well as individual, family, and community levels. These commitments often impact building capacity in a number of arenas. As a result, there was a smaller group that subsequently met during our next face-to-face meeting with Whariki.

Individually my challenges included being overwhelmed with the amount of written resources and tools given to us with limited meeting time to review them; however, I see this as a desire by Whariki to let us know that indigenous evaluation was being done and there is evidence and methods in doing it.

Whariki Reflections on the Teaching and Learning

We opened our evaluation *waka huia* to our indigenous colleagues and let them see everything we had in there. In hindsight, it was probably too much. We tried to hand over the best of our knowledge and experience of indigenous approaches to program evaluation gathered and gleaned over 20 years in *Aotearoa* New Zealand, but we should have been more selective given such a small number of actual face-to-face teaching hours.⁴ As a result, some of what we tried to teach was not relevant, and we missed more relevant information because we were not prepared. For example, we were not always able to answer the questions about statistical analysis that arose during the training. Our context in *Aotearoa* New Zealand where evaluations in general seem to be less numbers orientated than in the United States and the situation of *Whariki* within a university-based research group with dedicated statisticians available to do the number crunching, meant that we lacked the knowledge and were caught unprepared to teach this part of evaluation that is very important, and often mandated in U.S. program evaluation.

We also struggled to maintain the relationships, so crucial in indigenous evaluation approaches (LaFrance, 2004; Wehipeihana, 2008) when teaching and learning was mediated through distance technology. Although familiar to most of the Alaskan trainees, teaching by teleconference was entirely new to us. We have had a small amount of prior experience with videoconferencing and were comfortable with it as we could still read the group from visual cues and adjust our teaching accordingly. However, when the video link between our institutions would not work, we were left floundering in totally unfamiliar territory, trying to teach multiple trainees by teleconference call. The delay over the phone lines meant that dialogue and group discussion were impossible, let alone the subtler but equally important elements in relationship building such as sharing of humor. The problems were compounded when sunspot activity over Alaska cut people out of teleconference calls without us knowing. It was wholly disconcerting to never know whether we had any students on the other end or not—and it was probably very annoying to trainees to have us continuously asking “are you still there?”

The web group was planned as an important tool for the intermediary teaching and learning phase between workshops and although lesson plans, readings and so on were posted there, some students from remote rural Alaska had intermittent access to the Internet while others were without home computers and were not always able to access the web-group documents prior to lessons. For some, the unfamiliar format and sheer volume of information that rapidly accumulated was disconcerting and difficult to navigate. When the web-group hosts eventually lost all the data, it underscored the lessons for us, that Internet-based groups have their purposes but they must be easy to navigate and be secure places to deposit valuable knowledge.

In hindsight, the mentoring relationships also did not work as intended because trainees did not have practical evaluation projects to work on. There is an ongoing need for evaluators in Alaska, but trainees did not have enough knowledge or experience to take these positions and with 20/20 hindsight, it is obvious that most of the trainees were already fully committed in their communities and in their full-time jobs. In effect, we gave trainees a taste but without the potential to gain the needed skills, qualifications, or a clear career pathway to pursue evaluation as a profession. We would help as and when we could, but basically, it was going to be up to Alaskan people to develop this pathway.

Perhaps the most disconcerting experience for the *Whariki* team was related to the institutional position of the Interior-Aleutians Campus within the University. We were intending to train a small group of Alaska Native people in indigenous evaluation, but ended up with a class that included nonnative people who self-selected to attend. Although IAC had been designated an Alaska Native Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education in 1999, they were not allowed to limit attendance to Alaska Native peoples, as this would be deemed racial discrimination. For *Whariki*, this was a strong reminder that we were in a foreign context. In *Aotearoa* New Zealand the norm in *Maori* evaluation even within institutions like universities, has become “by *Maori*, for *Maori*” which is a reflection of our Treaty based right to self-determination.⁵ We wondered what rights Alaska Native people had to determine their own actions within the institution of the University of Alaska before being labeled “racist”—it obviously did not extend very far.

As evaluation trainers, we lamented the loss of the ideal of indigenous group learning together about indigenous evaluation. We were not keen to have uninvited nonnatives in the class because we knew from experience in other indigenous settings that it tended to change the group dynamic—the dreams and stories we shared would be tempered by the presence of people who did not share our indigeneity. This was not ideal for teaching and learning either, as these people could have nothing to contribute to the development of distinct Alaska Native approaches to evaluation. But it was not a situation that we could change, so we trusted the *hiko*i process and walked alongside our indigenous colleagues, in their institutional context.

Key Learning From the Capacity Building Project

Ukk'aa Reflections

Drena McIntyre

Drena McIntyre is an experienced community facilitator and fund-raiser with more than 28 years of experience in meeting and workshop facilitation, grant writing, program development, program management, and grant writing instruction. Drena lives in Fairbanks, Alaska, and is the daughter of William Guthrie of the Tsimshian nation and the late Nellie Brandal of the Unangan nation. She has a son, a daughter, and one granddaughter.

I appreciate and aspire to the Whariki approach wherein the evaluator/evaluators walk beside their clients from beginning to end of a project/program including the visioning/planning phase. I believe this gives the evaluator the depth of understanding needed to not only evaluate the project/program in such a way that it is driven by the creators of it in answering questions they want answered, but also provides benefits to project personnel such as mentoring and professional growth so that they may someday do their own evaluation work.

I am very grateful that Te Ropu Whariki is willing to teach and mentor our little cadre of potential evaluators here in Alaska. However, I believe our biggest challenge is that of making inroads into "institutional" change wherein grantors will support and ascribe to our new approach to Alaska Native evaluation for Alaska Native projects and programs.

Receiving and carrying out the goals and objectives of a government-funded grant is a profound responsibility. The relationship between the grantee and the federal government is very different to relationships within a smaller community with shared cultural values.

The relationship with federal agencies is:

- *Formal*
- *Impersonal*
- *Based on federal laws and regulations, and is not community-based*
- *At arm's length, and not a partner or personal.*
- *Based upon grantee's action or inaction to compliance, and not your intent.*
- *objective, not subjective.*

In direct contrast, the relationships within Alaska Native communities are:

- *Informal*
- *Very personal*
- *Based on cultural ways of knowing and beliefs*
- *Close-knit, as a partner and/or family member*
- *Based upon your good intentions and your word as a person in your community*
- *Very subjective, not objective.*

James

I love the way "hikoi" is put. It is a path we take together, and should always be balanced in this way. I find that working on an evaluative project you never know what to expect when you begin the process. How are these people going to react towards me, will these people be irritated with me or will they be cool with me. Sometimes these are the things going through my head before doing interviewing research with new people involved with your program evaluation. The first times can be a little scary, but I'm always able to tell myself this is just a conversation about a subject they know about, and they are telling me a story about it. 'Telling the story' is a phrase I use a lot. Eventually I found that interviewing takes

practice and preparedness, so be ready when you begin interviewing new people. I also try not to be too challenging with my questions, just enough to stir the mind, and get the people talking about stuff. And don't speak to soon . . .

More reading and writing helps in building your own capacity as an evaluator, I have also struggled with this. In order to do someone's story justice, you need to effectively learn how to interpret pertinent data found within one's research. This is the tricky part, interpreting and being culturally sensitive to a story for an audience that wants concrete answers. The goal is to make things better through these experiences and make it sound convincing enough to keep things going. Effective reporting is where my challenges began in the process of learning evaluation. My writing has come a long way since the beginning though, and sometimes you just have to force yourself to do it.

I have now learned that respecting a people and their culture is a big part of Indigenous Evaluation. In fact, as Alaskan Native Evaluators, we prefer to hear stories about life in a community before we even step foot into asking questions. To find success in evaluating rural programs in Alaska, you must find a way to build relationships first.

Debbie

I am reminded of the countless research that has been done on and about the Nunamiut, my "tribe." Behavior and thinking processes are interpreted incorrectly and when published the academic/literature world believes that what is written is the truth. So information is incorrectly shared with the rest of the world and many times the information is not respectful; the misinterpretation depicts the Nunamiut as nonsensical people. If the researcher shares their information with the Nunamiut before publishing, many of these errors could be avoided.

James speaks of building relationships with clients and colleagues. This is something that has always stayed with a majority of Indigenous people. The value of kinship: Even in my work, there is expectation to make relationships with community members before seeking help with projects or meeting students' needs.

Amelia

Many of us are not closely in touch with our culture and to me, it was another compelling reason to know who I am culturally to better understand the needs of the programs I serve and the world as a whole. Our stories are so similar, the Maori and Alaska Native, we even look similar. But, their journey is further down the road in certain respects even though the road we've both travelled is similar. This was another reason I felt that I could relate to these people from literally across the world. Our stories were similar and I wanted to go where they did . . . forward and how genius to use the cultural wisdom of our ancestors as a foundation for successes we have borne witness to since time immemorial.

I have since been inspired to learn more about the evaluative process and believe wholeheartedly in the importance of developing trained professionals that can evaluate Alaska Native programs. I had even tried to attend training on program evaluation after my enlightenment and was wholeheartedly disappointed with the linear, nonsensical approach, which I guess really just strengthened the notion that "indigenous" was the piece that made the Maori approach effective.

Unfortunately, the resources are limited and why it is important to get the word out! Everyone should know!

Malinda

Through our training and knowledge exchange with Whariki and the parallel evaluation of a project that I was administering through my work, I've increasingly come to see the power and place of evaluation as a significant tool and resource in the process of making positive shifts in our Indigenous organizations and communities—sites where program and project efforts are created and unfold.

Although I was curious about evaluation because I wanted to improve my understanding and feel more competent about administering the evaluation piece in the project I administered, I did not expect to be "pulled into" and remain involved in the ongoing, loosely structured, and desired effort to continue building

Alaska Native and indigenous evaluation capacity. For me, having a dialogue with Whariki—this particular group of four indigenous women evaluators—brought more successes than challenges and elevated and revealed that yes, we Alaska Native people are making evaluation decisions all the time and we clearly have a “place” and vested interest in “doing it our way”—envisioning and following our own dream.

One of our biggest successes, or in my case, a breakthrough and shift in my whole thought process was to be validated and, in a sense “freed” to experience and follow (hence implement and explore evaluation areas/topics/questions) on what you know as an indigenous person. The training with Whariki raised our awareness and with awareness you have the choice to follow the path that you know will work best on behalf of your People. This awareness and feeling of being culturally validated in your professional work was a big internal release to perceive and proceed in a manner in program delivery and shifting that evaluative lens in a way that increases the potential to make an impact in our work. It was like someone gave me the “green light or broke the dam” so that you could pursue, record and document (write)—to take action and make explicit why you sought a certain approach that culturally aligned with ourselves as Alaska Natives.

In building a professional relationship with Whariki, we are more able to see and articulate areas to explore in evaluation that are reflexive and respond to the vision we see for ourselves. Having a dialogue with indigenous people half way around the world provided us with a place to share stories and perspectives, and be exposed to another indigenous group that used western evaluation models and tools but were based in their own value system. It also let us know that we do have evaluation questions that we want to explore, and the ones that may be identified by a funder or by the evaluation “done to us” may not fully explore areas that we want feedback on or see as prominent. It is also important—more important than it appears—that we trained as a group and now have a small team striving to continue building our evaluation capacity. As individuals we all have layered commitments with our families, work, and communities, so having a small group that collectively learns and aims to expand knowledge and skills with evaluation keeps us determined—self-determined to continue our efforts on behalf of our collective community.

The Seasonal Model—One Example of “Doing It Our Way”

Malinda

As a tool that was initially introduced at the training, I struggled to “get” or understand the linear logic model, which is a common mainstream evaluation model. To me the logic model is more analytical than big picture or “global” in the way it is used. This was a common response for many in our Alaska Native group and so we turned to using and presenting the cyclical/seasonal model many of us could relate to or used in our own development processes.

This seasonal model has been developed in various forms, and been also referred to as the Athabaskan Circular Model, the Community Engagement Model, the Athabaskan Circle and the Indigenous Seasonal Model (Aruskevich, 2010). It was originally developed as the Seasonal-Cyclical Model by class participants, who were Athabaskan from Interior Alaska, during the fall of 1995 in a University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Interior-Aleutians Campus course (Figure 2).

Debbie

A circle is a model just about any Indigenous person can relate to. Linear thinking does not make sense to me. How can something end and not begin something else? In Fairbanks, many nonnative people complain to no end about winter coming; the cold weather, the darkness, etc. Without winter how would we have spring and summer? I do not understand the complaining but it happens and it irritates me.

Amelia

I can’t say that the circle has any one particular meaning to me other than we are an oral tradition based culture in which all stories are circular in nature. This to me seems universally Alaska Native, meaning that all Elders I’ve heard tell stories tell it in this manner regardless of what kind of Native they are. Also,

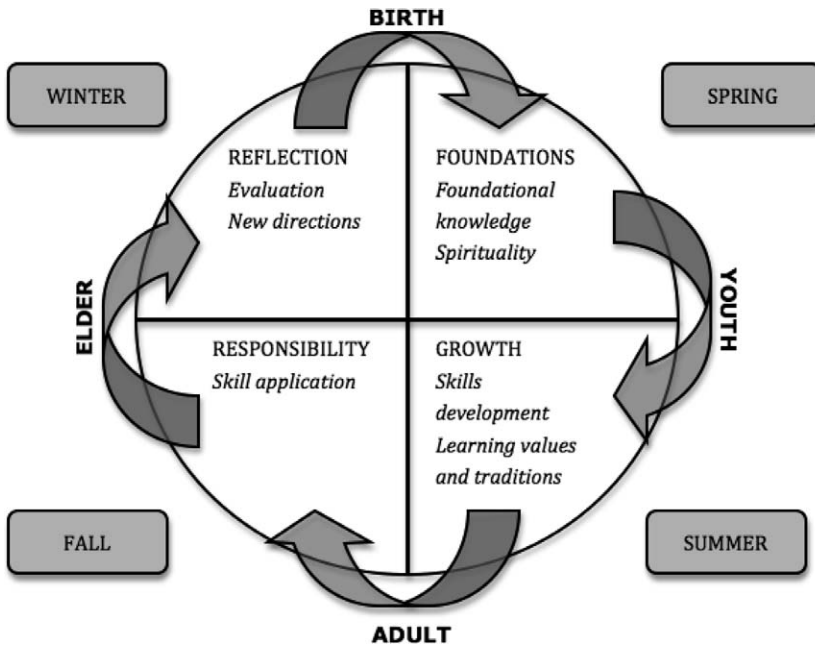


Figure 2. Seasonal model.

a circle is not linear! I think the linear model is what I struggled with the most with the evaluation models that don't incorporate indigenous philosophies or approaches. The circular approach is more natural. In Tlingit culture, we are very symmetrical and balanced in the visual representation of things and the circle assists with this way of thinking. Also, the sun and moon are circular and play a significant role in stories, folklore, and songs.

James

Thinking of the circular model is something I haven't used yet, but a device my mentor uses on most projects to strategize and plan for. I like to write stuff down as it comes, and try to keep paper handy, as for sometimes I get ideas lying in bed at night before I fall asleep. As a new evaluator, I think everyone finds a personal way to plan for projects, and it should never be limited. The road of 'Indigenous Evaluation' is always changing, a people will find a way to survive, as well as a program evaluator will find a way to evaluate his or her own.

Whariki Reflections

The outcomes for us as at *Whariki* have been less about building Alaska Native evaluation capacity, and more about sharing indigenous experience and knowledge. As *Maori* evaluators we have shared evaluation theory and practice from our context with a group of very competent Alaska Native people. What we learned in the process of sharing our knowledge has been formative in our own practice of evaluation. We realized that we shared some common experience from our histories of colonization but we learned just how different the Alaska Native context is and therefore how crucial it is that Alaska Native people develop their own theories and methods of evaluation from the riches of their own cultural contexts. Of course, we knew this before we went, but there is nothing like being in a

totally different cultural context (not to mention going from 30 °C to −40 °C) to remind you that you do not have the answers for these people from this place.

From our common histories of colonization and subjugation to the dominant culture, we shared a deep-felt empathy with Alaskan Native stories of cultural loss and suffering. We understood the frustration of having to use English language to try and express epistemological understandings that were best expressed in native tongues. We also knew the shame of not knowing our own tongue and having to try and learn it in academic settings, coping also with the tension of having a worldview that was at odds with the Western academic mind-set. We shared the same guilty anger at the “well meaning” paternalism that seemed to thinly mask a deeper cultural imperialism, and we shared an instinctive understanding that program evaluation, as it was most often practiced, was entrenched in this western cultural imperialism that made us feel so frustrated, angry, and ashamed.

By the end of our capacity building project, we also shared optimism about evaluation—that it can make a real difference for our communities if we can evaluate what is truly important to us, in ways that will enhance our development efforts.

We learned that *Maori* from *Whariki* and Alaska Native *Ukk'aa*, share a desire for evaluation to be principle based, and that there are many overlaps in the principles that we value. Examples include the high value placed on extended kinship relationships and on connection to place, spirituality, and the maintenance of sovereignty. However, the differences between our cultures cannot be downplayed for they are vast and the rich differences between tribal groups within Alaska are also marked. Representative of the diversity of Alaska Native cultures, the *Ukk'aa* cadre consists of Tsimpsonian, Athabascans from the Deg Hit'an and Koyukon regions, Inupiaq, and Tlingit. The Seasonal model is a model for evaluation and planning that could not have come from our context in *Aotearoa* New Zealand where the seasons are very indistinct and although we have cyclic thinking in *Maori* epistemology, it is not generally focused on the four seasons. The Seasonal model represents a way of experiencing and ordering the world and also illustrates a profoundly different logic, in that it is nonlinear. Circular logic is common among Native American peoples, but initially we *Maori* experienced this as somewhat confusing, wondering where people were going when they were telling stories or attempting to explain the theory of change driving a particular program. In experiencing this conflict between indigenous and nonindigenous logic systems (Woorama, 2006), we learned just how ingrained the idea of western linear logic was in our own thinking.

Whariki had planned to open our evaluation *waka hui* and allow Alaskan Native people to pick out the treasures that resonated for them—we had not realized how many gems they would put into our treasure box for us to use as our evaluation *hiko* continues. We were privileged to witness this small group of Alaska Native people have the revelation that distinct Alaska Native approaches to evaluation have existed for many thousands of years and therefore indigenous evaluation is “only a new concept because it has been missing for so long”—one little gem of pure genius from among many that came out during the capacity building project. There is a wealth and richness emerging already as Alaska Native people begin to complete the circle from their ancestral evaluation knowledge to current program evaluations. Those are their stories to tell, when they are ready, and we hope we will still be journeying with them when they do.

Despite the many challenges, the key success story of this project from *Whariki's* perspective is the ongoing journey of a small cadre who have caught the vision for indigenous evaluation, dreamed dreams and then developed plans that chart their own trails for building Alaska Native evaluation capability and capacity. A small remnant of the original *Ukk'aa* are now the forerunners in indigenous evaluation in Alaska; they are the lead dogs in the team and they recognize that it is a small beginning with a long and difficult trail ahead but they are still meeting, still talking, and dreaming about indigenous evaluation.⁶

Ukk'aa Conclusions

Drena

Our little group of Alaska Native evaluators is willing and able to learn, and support and mentor each other. If we stay cohesive as a group, we can make change happen for Alaska Native programs. We need to commit to the "long haul".

Amelia

I think little practical steps of applicable nature are in the cards. I figure, if we can DO, then it will be!

If we wait to know it all, we will waste time, which is not to say that we jump in blindly, but that we don't overkill with meetings and good intentions. I'd also love to go to New Zealand and get formal training at Massey University. Farfetched? I think not . . . because they told me that you have to start by dreaming the dream . . . this is my dream. And before I can make anything happen, I have to fully know and understand so I can teach others. Our cohort talked about going together to Massey, I think it's possible.

I found this process inspiring overall. It's an opportunity of a generation, of a lifetime. I feel like the Alaska Native community is on the brink of movement, a revolution if you will. We are ready, capable and possess the desire for change and I see the Maori, Whariki, presenting an opportunity for this forward progress. I would like to find ways to develop my understanding and learn how to develop the evaluative efforts. I am honored to be included in the efforts even though I don't know much already. However, I think this also works in our favor because in essence, I represent the average Alaska Native who does not know about Indigenous Evaluation either and I can better learn how to teach.

James

I'm happy to be on this journey and to know, I'm not alone.

Debbie

My ultimate joy is knowing that Indigenous evaluation is thriving among Indigenous people and the day will come to Alaska when this will be a norm in Alaskan communities. Having said this, my frustration is that it is not here yet. We continue to use nonnative measurements to measure Indigenous programs, projects, experiences, etc.

These frustrations continue on a daily basis in the office I work in. We are a Native serving department and our successes are low because the definition of success is nonnative. An example would be graduation rates; the University looks at graduation rates (quantitative) of Alaska Native people and the time it takes to graduate. I believe the Indigenous definition of success is what the journey to graduation was like; did the student feel welcomed when they first got to the campus? Was there discrimination against said student and what were the coping skills of this student to continue as a student? How many deaths in the home community did the student have to endure? How many times did a class have to be repeated before it could be passed? How much service was performed while in college that impacted their peers? Were friends made from in-state, out of state, and internationally? These are the kinds of questions that show the success of a student.

Many of the evaluation processes require quantitative rather than qualitative measures and many of our successes as Indigenous people are in the stories. Sharing narratives rather than numbers is the Indigenous way to share successes. For example, when we hunt caribou at home, the success is in the process of hunting rather than the number of caribou we shoot. The process includes the amount of energy exerted during the hunt, the number of bullets needed to shoot the animal, and where on the animal the shot hit. In sharing the experience, evaluation is included. The mistakes that might have been made are shared with the audience and what the hunter could have done better. There is the belief that nothing is perfect, there is always room for improvement.

To be an Indigenous evaluator, using Indigenous measures validates the Indigenous experienced with the rest of the nonnative world.

Malinda

In building capacity, I think we as Native people, realize that individually we all have multiple demands, and although it may mean that someone has to “step out” of an effort, in this case indigenous capacity building, while at the same time that person can also “step back in” and continue to contribute at another time. I think sharing a vision or “dreaming a collective dream” and sharing a history allows for that inclusive movement in capacity building. Perhaps that is why our group could so easily see how James’ individual work in indigenous evaluation really aligns with our collective work and that we need and want to journey together. For us, the hikoi, with Whariki and internally within Ukk’aa, means staying the course together.

For our Ukk’aa group, we have since made efforts to gather together informally to continue to jointly agree to read, review and share our thoughts on indigenous evaluation work. We meet occasionally for coffee to discuss papers and support each other in our individual and organizational work, or as it is increasingly happening we find ourselves in the same meetings or working on the same initiative and there is an underlying understanding about indigenous evaluation issues among us.

In our knowledge exchange with Whariki, we are coming together—even loosely but with a desire to make systematic change. We have raised our awareness—making conscious our own ability to live and envision our own dream.

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Notes

1. *Indigenous* is a term of self-identification. In this article, the term is used based on the following (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues): self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; Historical continuity with precolonial and/or presettler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture, and beliefs; form nondominant groups of society; resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.
2. One of the *Whariki* trainers will spend the 2011–2012 academic year teaching indigenous planning and evaluation at the Interior-Aleutians Campus in the Tribal Management Program. This has been made possible through a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence Award. The Award also makes it possible for the *Whariki* trainer to continue to journey with *Ukk’aa*.
3. “The *Koo.eex* is a [Tlingit] ceremony in which the deceased member or members and ancestors of a clan are remembered. It is a time for the surviving clan members to push away their sorrow after a year of mourning, to celebrate life, to reaffirm their social and kinship bonds, and to ceremoniously present their clan *at.oow* (clan regalia, objects, songs and stories).” http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/programs/Koo.eex_Memorial_party.pdf.
4. Approximately 30 hr in total (included in this face-to-face time were important cultural ceremonies, greeting campus visitors, feasting and celebrating important events with our hosts).
5. Treaty of Waitangi—Aotearoa New Zealand’s founding document signed in 1840 by the Crown and *Maori* chiefs.

6. There are a very small number of other Alaska Native people practicing evaluation and also nonnative people who are very supportive of the journey. For example, Dr. Kas Aruskevich has been mentoring James Johnson since completing her PhD in 2010.

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