TELLING THE STORY OF INDIGENOUS EVALUATION & MAPPING THE PRACTICE
…a study in progress

Since the 1970's there has been a global movement by Indigenous peoples in post-settler states to reverse injustices and dispossessions inflicted through hundreds of years of imperialism. At the heart of this movement are land claims, self-determination and sovereignty, fueled by the recent development of decolonizing methodologies. The resurgence of Indigenous peoples and the associated politics of reclaiming their land advance as international immigration reshape the multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial composition of cities and societies (Sandercock, 2003). Ironically, it is in the face of the displacing force of multiculturalism that the claim of being Indigenous, not a settler of any sort, has gained importance in political movements and distinction in the increasingly diasporic present (Clifford, 1994).

Emerging from within the decolonizing politics of the Indigenous movement are decolonizing methodologies that move beyond the political movement to encompass social justice issues. These decolonizing methods which were "once viewed as the formal process of handing over instruments of government, are now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (Smith, 1999, p. 98).

Aided by postmodern and postcolonial discourse that challenges Enlightenment epistemology and Euro centrism itself, (insofar as Western thought has worked as a colonizer of other cultures and sought to impose it own rationality and language), Said, Bhabha, hooks, Smith, Trask are a few of the many scholars that offer up the alternative epistemologies, the 'traditional' ways of knowing. Ultimately, the Indigenous movement is situated in the cultural politics of place and identity which are enmeshed in the legacies of imperialist ideologies and practices. Yet the critical time for cultural survival in Indigenous communities is now, with many elders, usually the strongest keepers of tradition, passing on and the future of a culture in the hands and spirits of those who learn and document it now (Guyette, 1996).

This dynamic, interdependent state of affairs of the early 21st century sets the situational frame for this study which aims to tell the story of where decolonizing methodologies find an application: in the evaluation of merit and worth of projects for Indigenous peoples.

In this excerpt of a dissertation study, background information will be provided on the Western research model and a distinction will be made between research and evaluation with a brief discussion on culture and context in evaluation. A succinct presentation of research questions, methods, models and study area follow.

Background

The Western positivist research model, known as the deficiencies model, is a general template for writing a solid introduction to a proposal or a research study (Creswell, 2003). This model builds an entire project around identified problems or issues and poses solutions to the problem privileging the use of Western epistemology of the scientific and technical over an array of equally important alternatives – "experiential, intuitive, local knowledge, knowledge's expressed in visual and other symbolic, ritual and artistic ways" (Sandercock, 2003).

The Western paradigm of research itself is a "problem" for Indigenous peoples. Smith (1999), Trask (1993), LaFrance (2007) tell of the cynical nature of Indigenous peoples toward Western researchers motives and methods which has not delivered many benefits to Indigenous peoples. Smith states, "At a common sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument"(p.3). She goes on to detail research as a tool which regulates and realizes the code of imperialism and colonialism. If research supports imperialism and colonialism – where does this place evaluation with its roots in Western strategies?

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Worthen and Sanders (1987) detail twelve characteristics that distinguish evaluation from research that are clearly drawn from a logical positivist approach to research. Nevertheless, this comparison is important to the study as it lays the foundation to link evaluation to knowledge creation (a role long held by research and a posit by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2007), thus a parallel can be drawn between decolonizing research and decolonizing evaluation..

On one hand, the problem for evaluators of projects targeting Indigenous-peoples is to work in or around the Western positivist scientific model which continues to be the standard for validity in research and evaluation and a required accountability method for most funders. Yet on the other hand, failure to understand how culture and context interacts with program implementation and impact can jeopardize validity of the evaluation and in the worst case can draw spurious conclusions that my unfairly affect access to resources (Nelson-Barber, et.al, 2005) as well as misinform the personnel of Indigenous-peoples projects.

Shadish, Cook and Leviton (1991) remark that evaluation texts discuss methods but few are comprehensive about contextual matters that shape and constrain method choices, how social programs operate and change, how evaluative information is used, how program efforts and outcomes are valued, how the knowledge evaluators construct may be justified and how evaluations could be conducted that are sensitive to practical trade-offs.

> *The exploratory research challenge of this study is to tell the story of how evaluators of projects for Indigenous peoples are coming to terms with the contextual multiplicity of situation, culture and tradition, sovereignty, validity and relevance and meet the funders and communities need for project-based knowledge.*

Research Questions

1. What are the theoretical frameworks of evaluation utilized by key-informant evaluators for projects targeting indigenous peoples?
2. What are key components of the evaluator's role and philosophy when conducting an evaluation for indigenous-peoples?
3. What distinctions in evaluation practice are indicative of decolonization?
4. Is emerging theory influencing practice?

Methods & Models

Data collection for *Telling the Story of Indigenous Evaluation* will occur in two Phases. Phase I is the key phase of the study and consists of qualitative research to identify theoretical frameworks utilized or emerging as reported by key informant evaluators of projects targeting Indigenous-peoples through in-depth interviews. To get at contextual matters, Shadish, et al's (1991) framework of five theoretical bases of *social programming; knowledge construction*; *valuing*; *knowledge use*; and *evaluation practice* was used as a guideline to develop the study's interview questions. Phase I also includes contribution of statements on theory and practice by key informant evaluators to develop the instrument to be used in Phase II.

Phase II is a secondary phase of the study and consists of administering an online survey to key informants and evaluation practioners. The interpretation of dimensions unfolding from the survey results of the key informants will be used as coordinates to

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which the responses of evaluation practioners will be empirically mapped to answer the research design question, Is emerging theory influencing practice? A graphic representation of the research design can be found in Figure I in Appendix A

Smith's model of decolonizing research will be used to gauge if decolonizing methodologies are being utilized in evaluation of projects for indigenous peoples. These conditions of directions and tides in Smith's model relate to the reality that indigenous people are not in control and are subject to a continuing set of external conditions. The four "directions" of healing, mobilization, transformation and decolonization are processes which connect, inform, clarify tension between local, regional and global – these processes can be incorporated into practices and methodologies. The four "tides" of survival, recovery, development and self-determination are conditions and states through which indigenous communities are moving. Smith's model is presented in Figure 2, Appendix B

Study Area and Logistics

This study proposes to investigate the practice of evaluative key informant and practioners' theory and methods of project evaluation for Indigenous peoples in four post-settler countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. These four countries have been chosen for the commonalities between them: all are liberal democracies and all but New Zealand have a federal system of government, all are former British colonies, 3) indigenous people represent a demographic closed society within each country, conflicts between Indigenous peoples and other actors have been prominent features of politics in all four countries (Lane and Hibbard, 2005; Jacobs, 1996).

The researcher plans to attend the four national conferences to interview identified key informant contributors, to investigate leads gained from personal attendance on key informant contributors for potential inclusion in the study, and to experience first hand any emerging information on Indigenous / decolonizing evaluation. If possible, she will attend each national conference in 2009 to report on the study's findings. Below are the four evaluation associations and their annual conference dates for 2008:

Canadian Evaluation Society	Quebec, Canada May 12-14, 2008
Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association	Rotora, New Zealand July 14-16, 2008
Australasian Evaluation Society	Perth, Australia September 10-12, 2008
American Evaluation Society	Colorado, U.S. November 5-8, 2008

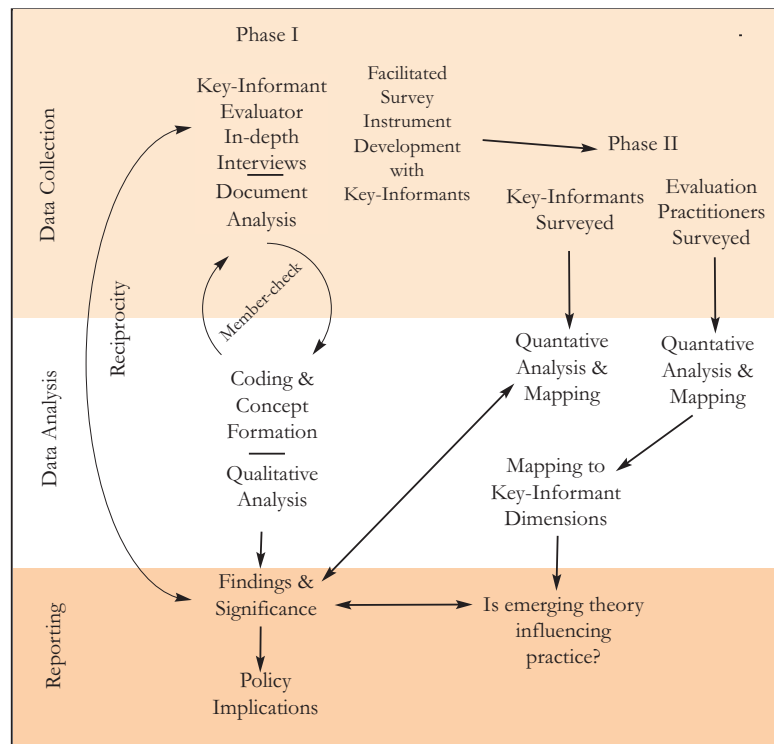Further information and references are available on the study's website at http://evaluationstudy.us

Appendix A

Table 1. Worthen and Sanders characteristics that distinguish research from evaluation.

	Characteristic	Research	Evaluation
1.	Motivation of inquirer	Advance knowledge	Solves practical problems by judging value of what is evaluated
2.	Objective of inquiry	Seeks conclusions	Leads to decisions
3.	Laws vs. descriptions	Nomothetic (quest for relationships bet. 2 variables)	Idiographic – describes activities
4.	Role of explanation	Phenomenon explained	Conduct eval of outcomes without causal explanation
5	Autonomy of inquiry	Researcher sets task	Evaluation undertaken by request of client
6.	Properties of phenomena assessed	Generate knowledge; may yield indirect social utility	Assess value; seeks social utility
7.	Generalizability of phenomena studies	Across time, geography, instances	Applicability to specific instances
8.	Criteria for judging activity	Internal & external validity	Accuracy, credibility, utility, feasibility, propriety
9.	Identifiable clients	Nebulous who may use results; generally available	Conducted for a well defined audience
10.	Relevance of time	Sets own time schedule	Time bound
11.	Disciplinary base	Defines own problem; seldom goes out of own discipline	May need wider range of inquiry perspectives
12.	Preparation	Relatively traditional social science discipline	Interdisciplinary education & experience

Figure 1. Research design.

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Figure 2. The Indigenous Research Agenda, (Smith, 1999 p. 117).

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