REFRAMING EVALUATION: DEFINING AN INDIGENOUS EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), comprising 34 American Indian tribally controlled colleges and universities, has undertaken a comprehensive effort to develop an "Indigenous Framework for Evaluation" that synthesizes Indigenous ways of knowing and Western evaluation practice. To ground the framework, AIHEC engaged in an extensive consultation process including conducting a number of focus groups in major regions of the United States. Cultural experts, Indian educators, and evaluators shared their concerns regarding evaluation and described how evaluation fits within a cultural framework. This article summarizes the focus group discussions and describes how the framework developed using the key principles of Indigenous ways of knowing and four core values common to tribal communities.

Résumé :   L'American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), composé de 34 collèges et universités sous contrôle tribal par les Indiens d'Amérique, a entrepris un vaste travail en vue d'élaborer un « cadre théorique autochtone d'évaluation » qui synthétise les façons d'apprendre autochtones et la pratique d'évaluation occidentale. Pour poser les fondements du cadre théorique, l'AIHEC s'est lancé dans un processus de consultation en profondeur et a réalisé plusieurs groupes de discussion dans les principales régions des États-Unis. Les experts de la culture, les éducateurs autochtones, et les évaluateurs ont partagé leurs préoccupations au sujet de l'évaluation tout en décrivant l'intégration de l'évaluation dans un cadre théorique culturel. Cet article résume les échanges des groupes de discussion et décrit comment le cadre théorique a été élaboré à l'aide des principes clés des façons d'apprendre autochtones et de quatre valeurs centrales communes aux communautés autochtones.

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The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), comprising 34 American Indian tribally-controlled colleges and universities, has undertaken a comprehensive effort to improve American Indian student achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A key component of this effort is the development of an "Indigenous Framework for Evaluation," which synthesizes Indigenous ways of knowing and Western evaluation practice. The goal of this project is to develop evaluation processes that are robust enough to accommodate and value different "ways of knowing" within Indigenous epistemologies, build ownership and a sense of community within groups of Indian educators and evaluators, and effectively contribute to the development of high quality and sustainable science and mathematics education programs. This article explains the process used to generate a cultural framing for evaluation and describes the foundations of the framework.

Evaluators—and their close relatives, researchers—are not popular in Indian Country. The field of evaluation draws heavily on research methodologies that can be considered invasive when imposed by outside funding agencies. The close connection between research and evaluation is problematic to many American Indian and Alaskan Natives whose tribes and families have suffered from a long history of intrusive studies that, while building the reputations of anthropologists and other researchers, have brought little to Indian communities and have actually resulted many times in cultural exploitation and the loss of intellectual property rights. The unpopularity of research permeates Indigenous communities. For example, in an address to the Canadian Evaluation Society, Marlene Brant-Castellano, co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), told a story of her experience at a special meeting of the RCAP when she attempted to solicit feedback on the content of a proposed research program. She noted that the entire first session was spent facing criticisms of research, with many audience members echoing the statement, "we have been researched to death" (Brant-Castellano, 1997, p. 1).

Over the years, Indigenous writers have argued the importance of building capacity among Indigenous researchers and evaluators and shifting the focus of research efforts to be more responsive to local concerns. In 1977, Joseph Trimble, a Lakota researcher, described himself as a "sojourner," a lone voice attempting to sort through the American Indian community needs and the agendas of researchers. His review of articles on Indian educational research found that most of the literature concentrated on problems centred on the investigator's interest, and not those of the tribal people from whom the data

were obtained. Often these research studies depicted Indians in a naïve or negative light.

LaFramboise and Plake (1983) noted the need to increase the number of American Indian researchers and expand community participation in research. In 1991, the *American Indian Quarterly* dedicated an issue to research in Indian Country. Wax (1991) described many of the ethical problems inherent in conducting research in Indian communities, including the incompatibility of world views, conflicting ideas of what constitutes ethical behaviour and science methodologies, and differing concepts about the researcher's need for individual autonomy versus tribes' wishes to have informed consent and limited disclosure of research findings. In a 1993 interview published in the *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Education,* John Red Horse, a professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota, described the need for stronger control over research conducted in Indian communities (Boyer, 1993). In her foundational work on decolonizing methodologies, Linda Tuwahi Smith (1999) addressed imperialism, research, and knowledge while also offering guidance to those who aspire to doing respectful and ethical work with Indigenous peoples. Her framework for a research methodology that honours and builds the cultural life of a people also serves as a guide for tribes seeking to establish their own guidelines for community-based research and evaluation. Over the years, other Indigenous researchers have elaborated on the need for research and evaluation that is grounded in Indigenous values (Brant-Castellano, 2000, and LaFrance, 2004). In her address to the Canadian Evaluation Society in 1997, Brant-Castellano also noted:

> Much of the research that has been done on Aboriginal affairs is challenged by Aboriginal people on two counts: the appropriation of voice—who has the right to speak authoritatively about Aboriginal experience; and the validity of fact and interpretation assembled by outsiders to the culture and community. (p. 1)

AIHEC's development of an Indigenous evaluation framework intends to provide voice to an evaluative process that can speak authoritatively about our experiences in developing and implementing programs. As Cheryl Crazy Bull (1997) explained:

> We, as tribal people, want research and scholarship that preserves, maintains, and restores our traditions and cultural practices. We want to restore our homelands;

revitalize our traditional religious practices; regain our health; and cultivate our economic, social, and governing systems. Our research can help us maintain our sovereignty and preserve our nationhood. (p. 23)

AIHEC believes evaluation should also respond to tribal concerns for usefulness, restoration, preservation, and sovereignty, and to do so, it must be grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, responsive to cultural values, and embraced by the communities that it is intended to serve.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

In the initial planning year of the project, AIHEC recognized that the knowledge they were seeking to guide their thinking on evaluation was grounded within the tribal communities. The project convened a group of American Indian scientists, educators, evaluators, and cultural experts to advise the AIHEC staff throughout the project. At their initial meeting in November 2003, the advisory committee recommended that the project seek the wisdom, stories, and recommendations from a broad group of tribal people through a series of focus groups to be held in major tribal regions throughout the country.

From January through March 2004, four one-day focus group forums were conducted—in the Southwest (Tempe, AZ), the Plains/Great Lakes (Denver, CO), the Northwest/Alaska (Seattle, WA), and in conjunction with an AIHEC organizational gathering (Billings, MT)—to gain the perspectives of tribal college representatives, other Indian educators, and tribal cultural traditionalists on what American Indian and Alaska Native traditions, terms, practices, values and concepts, and protocols might be appropriately used to "frame" an *Indigenous*[1] Peoples' concept of evaluation, particularly as related to education. Key issues that were explored in the meetings included what is meant by Indigenous evaluation and its relation to recognized evaluation approaches; what are culturally appropriate Native educational practices and models; and what strategies do participants recommend for doing evaluation.

From an initial list of approximately 120 potential participants, 54 participants (including five project advisory committee members) were able to attend the four forums. Because of the nature of the focus group approach, participation at each group was limited to fewer than 20 individuals to ensure that each participant would have adequate time to contribute meaningfully to the discussions. Of

the 54 participants, 25 individuals were at the time or formerly had been affiliated with tribal colleges. Several participants played dual roles at the forums, bridging the categories of cultural traditionalists and academician/educators. Utilizing terms from their various Native languages, these individuals provided insight into traditional Native cultural epistemologies as they relate to evaluation from an Indigenous perspective.

The focus groups were coordinated by Carrie Billy, deputy director of AIHEC and principal investigator for the project. The discussions were facilitated by Richard Nichols (Colyer-Nichols, Inc.) and Joan LaFrance (Mekinak Consulting), co-principal investigators on the project. In designing and implementing the focus groups, we honoured our own cultural ways of knowing by using protocols appropriate to our tribal practices. For example, at each focus group, the meeting room was prepared for the important work to be done by "smudging" with sweet grass to purify and clear the air spiritually. Prior to the discussion, all of the focus group participants were given an offering of tobacco to honour them for sharing their wisdom. At the end of each meeting, to thank participants for their contributions to the discussions, the facilitators also gave gifts of food from their respective home cultures to focus group participants. To provide a context for the discussions, each participant was provided, prior to the gathering, with a one-page statement, "What We Believe about Evaluation" which had been developed by project staff based on the advisory committee discussions. Furthermore, although questions were developed to guide the focus groups, the discussion did not follow a question-and-answer format. Rather, the conversation flowed as participants shared ideas and explored traditional values, described these values in their tribal languages, reflected on the cultural contexts of education, and discussed their views regarding evaluation. The following section summarizes some of the stories and the wisdom shared in the focus groups.

SHARED WISDOM AND STORIES

Not surprisingly, before participants could begin exploring the concepts of Indigenous evaluation, they needed to vent their frustrations with evaluation and told several stories about negative experiences with evaluators. A number of people noted that, in their communities, evaluation is often associated with negative judgements or criticisms and descriptions of deficiencies or failings. Many stories illustrated how evaluation has come to be associated with exploitation, oppres-

sion, loss, and deficiency. Some expressed the view that evaluation, as taught in a Western tradition, focuses on assessing against non-Indian standards. When these standards become the definition of success, evaluation fails to recognize strengths in the community. It was noted that evaluators should recognize this history and the failure of evaluation to serve communities. An important recommendation arising from these discussions was that, to counter this negative legacy, it was critical that evaluation be redefined. Rather than conveying judgement, evaluation should be viewed as an opportunity for learning.

Taking Ownership

A strong theme throughout the discussions was taking ownership for defining success and "telling the story" from the perspective of the community's values and aspirations. One experienced evaluator argued that there is a responsibility to let the community know that there is flexibility in what is to be measured and assessed. Communities can define the standards. Another evaluator described the importance of being an advocate and telling the program's story:

> Most of the programs I've seen, I know immediately how much work they put in, so I just say forget all the rules about evaluation. I'm going to tell their story, and I'm going to become the voice for this group. So I would tell their story, and you can do that by putting it in their own words, you know, here's what's being said, and so you become sort of an advocate for those people, because you want to make them shine. And so for those programs that are really strong, I think about, you've got to celebrate their accomplishments, and that's what, to me, evaluation is about, and I just forget about all the other things that I learned in graduate school, in our doctoral programs, and I just say, you know, somebody's got to tell their story.

From an Indigenous perspective, for evaluation to be *true* and useful—that is, a good evaluation—the evaluator must have an understanding of the self-determination that fuels the goals and aspirations of Indian communities to preserve, restore, and protect their cultures and ways of doing things. Although programs being evaluated might contain activities similar to those in most American schools, there is always a subtext about self-determination in Indian Country that must be heard by evaluators. One participant described the duality

that living in two worlds creates for education. On one hand, educational programs must meet state or federal standards, yet many projects do not want to merely duplicate mainstream approaches. These programs also strive to use culture and language, to reinforce tribal values, and to build "a whole energy in self-determination, of wanting to be something beyond what we are expected to be." Thus, a good evaluation has to sort through complexities of expectations imposed by funders, as well as those emanating from a self-determining community.

Another participant noted the value of Indigenous knowledge, but cautioned that there are many who deny it exists, including even some tribal community members who have been educated through Western institutions. Also, she noted the many instances of how Indigenous knowledge is expropriated by non-Indians and renamed and credited to these individuals. Using Indigenous knowledge to inform evaluation provides many provocative challenges in articulating how to frame the concept of evaluation in tribal terms. At each focus group, several participants were able to provide cultural guidance on evaluation from their specific tribal perspectives. It was noted that while the term "evaluation" may not translate literally into specific Native words, conceptually there are terms, processes, or metaphors that relate to the sense of knowledge creation and/or problem solving within an Indigenous community. In connecting Native language and culture to evaluation, participants described the need for community engagement and an emphasis on personal development within the context of a tribal value system. Evaluation was not distinguished from group process, self-development, education, or, more broadly, living a good life.

Traditional Ways of Community Reflection and Assessing Worth

When asked to consider how evaluation is approached in an Indigenous fashion, some participants described specific communal or tribal processes of decision-making and reflection. Their stories illustrated the importance of deep deliberation within a community that goes beyond discussion of the agenda or substance of the meeting, reinforcing the concept that actions have consequences beyond the immediate and that deliberations must thus explore these consequences that may span generations. In recognition of these consequences, it was noted that evaluative deliberation should also engage cultural protocols, such as opening prayers in the Native language to connect the deliberations with spiritual guidance from the Creator and

ancestors in order to properly interpret the subjective and intuitive feelings of the people regarding the content under discussion. Communication is not only focused on content of a discussion. Importance is also placed on the proper ways of communicating, such as the use of "respectful language." The deliberation processes described in the focus groups reinforced the importance of community as a central value in Indigenous thinking.

The personal attributes of goodness, personal worth, and being a strong person emerged from participants' reflections about how evaluation might be expressed in traditional ways. For many of the cultural experts in the groups, traditional or cultural conceptualizations of evaluation in education meant the assessment of personal completeness or the development of each student's particular strengths within the context of a tribal way of thinking and a communal setting. Their stories stressed the importance of moral development related to cultural values, not just achievement of material success. These stories suggest that Indigenous evaluation needs to incorporate a broad range of standards when assessing what is of value for a community or program.

Respecting and Inviting Elder Knowledge

Another strong theme in the conversations was the importance of including elders when designing and conducting evaluation, as well as in assessing student achievement. Most agreed that inclusion of elders is critical to an Indigenous evaluation framework. As one person explained, "I would think that if we were to develop an Indigenous evaluation process that we would somehow have to assure that we are including [elders], the people who actually possess that knowledge. Sometimes we don't ask them for the information that they have. And when we do ask, we're amazed at what they tell us."

Understanding the Role of Time

The concept of time arose as a critical factor in Indigenous notions of evaluation. One participant in the Denver meeting noted that a "true" assessment of learning takes time. He quoted a saying in his Native language and explained that it translated as "Eventually you will know in the future what you have been taught today." This orientation to process suggests that evaluation in the Western sense of measuring within a discrete timeframe will generally fall short of the Indigenous notion of taking time to fully comprehend what

has been learned, how it was learned, and how it is demonstrated. The Western concepts of efficiency or expeditiousness were seen as unimportant compared to the task of taking time to assess students' growth in both depth and breadth of knowledge.

Another recurring theme in the discussion of program evaluation was timing. It was recommended that evaluation begin in the early stages of program implementation in order to fully engage the staff and community. More than a few participants noted that Indians, especially elders, "take things seriously," and, thus, need sufficient time for deep consideration and deliberation in order to understand what is being asked of them in an evaluation process. Participants recommended giving elders time to reflect before asking their opinions; furthermore, engaging them in conversation was seen as often more effective and respectful than having them complete a survey questionnaire.

A Sense of Becoming

There was a significant conversation across the focus groups regarding traditional values, the struggle for communal as well as individual wellness, and the dynamics of ever evolving into one's personhood. Although these concepts might seem ephemeral, understanding and appreciating their roles in our communities is important for evaluation. There was much discussion of the concept of *historical trauma* as a result of cultural repression, the need to heal and work toward individual and community wellness. Within this context, evaluation is valued when it reflects community values and contributes to learning related to cultural renewal and revitalization.

Furthermore, this concept places the idea of learning within a broader context in which merit or worth is the culmination of a life-long journey toward self-actualization that is realized within the shared meanings and cultural parameters of the community. Thus, it was noted that evaluation should reflect insights and understandings captured in the sense of becoming. As one participant eloquently explained:

> [In our efforts, we are] about becoming, we are always becoming…. And so they talk about people becoming—not of its finality but of its becoming because we are people who are constantly growing and changing and learning, even as we get older and older, we're still learning, and like in a lot of the older [evaluation] models and the

measurement, it's so finite, the achievement score, that one place in becoming, which we know is just a measure of that moment. So somehow this becoming … is [not only] one element within a [single] context but a larger picture … living within this larger frame and in harmony, and in peace and in that sense of place…. I think that most evaluation systems have a hard time capturing that.

DEFINING CORE VALUES

As we combed through the focus group transcripts, the notes from the advisory committee meetings, and our own experiences as Native people, the research question arose:

Is there a set of core beliefs or common values that can serve as a foundation for framing a tribal approach to evaluation?

Four key values emerged from our analysis: (a) being a people of a place, (b) recognizing our gifts, (c) honouring family and community, and (d) respecting sovereignty. These values serve as cornerstones of the AIHEC evaluation framework.

People of a Place

Among Indigenous cultures, the land and environment is a living presence. Tribal creation stories explain how a People came to be in a place that is central to their sense of a homeland. Despite wrenching histories detailing the loss of much of our homelands and even displacement from them, we still have strong connections to the natural world within and around these places – the lands, mountains, oceans, rivers, lakes, and other features that make up our homeland. Our sense of place provides roots to our communities and defines our nationhood. In *God is Red*, Vine Deloria (1997) writes about these sacred places:

The vast majority of Indian tribal religions … have a sacred center at a particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature. This center enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it. Regardless of what subsequently happens to the

> people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in
> their cultural and religious understanding. (p. 67)

In addition to a tribal people's responsibility to their sacred places, there is a reciprocal relationship in this profound connection to land. This is expressed by an Apache woman who explains, "The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right—the land looks after us" (Brasso, 1996, p. 38). A tribe's Indigenous knowledge is intimately connected to the natural world and is centred on learning about the place of the People within it—nature's balances and relationships. This sense of place is the opposite of the Western perspective, which seeks to manipulate the natural world into a so-called "better" man-made environment.

Recognizing Our Gifts

Within the traditional concepts of the living universe and relationship, respect is a moral imperative. Every entity within the natural world has its purpose, and thus it demands our respect. Among our fellow tribespersons, each one should be given the right to exercise free will and choice within its own realm. This core value of respect requires that the uniqueness of every person be honoured by valuing his or her gifts. In an educational context, this means that each student's skills and talents, as well as learning style, should be taken into consideration. Moreover, individual student growth is valued regardless of whether it measures up to a normative standard. The evaluator's task, then, is to devise measures that respect individual learners' growth and progress.

Some people use the term *personal sovereignty* to denote this respecting and encouragement of the full development of one's gifts. That is, each person should be permitted to fulfill his or her destiny. However, along with this freedom for self-expression, there is a correlated responsibility to respect the relationships one has within a living universe. Responsibility for maintaining harmony of life falls equally on all, as does a responsibility to use one's gifts to contribute to the community. Rupert Ross (1992), a legal scholar who has observed and written about First Nations in Canada, explained this sense of personal sovereignty as

> the conviction that life is a process of slow and careful
> self-fulfillment and self realization. That process of matu-
> ration continues until death, and so no one ever becomes
> all that they can become. The duty of all people, therefore,

is to assist others on their paths, and to be patient when their acts or words demonstrate that there are things still to be learned. The corollary duty is to avoid discouraging people by belittling them in any fashion and so reducing their respect for and faith in themselves. (p. 27)

Centrality of Community and Family

Unlike the American focus on individualism and independence, among Indigenous people family and community are core elements of one's personal identity. An American Indian person sees him/herself through the prism of their relatedness to others within their tribe. This centrality of family and community is manifested in myriad ways by different tribes. Most, if not all, tribal cultures recognize or are organized around various tribal kinship groups. Some have clans; others, such as the Lakota, recognize extended family groups—the *tiospaye*. Greg Cajete (2000) writes that it is in this understanding of one's place within community that one comes to oneself:

> The community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed. It is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one's people. (p. 96)

When we introduce ourselves to others from the same or different tribal backgrounds, we show respect by acknowledging our tribal background, lineage, ancestry, and kinship affiliation. In doing so, we are connecting the present with those who have lived before. As we proceed in life, through this ceremonial protocol our relationship to our community is expressed while acknowledging that we have many grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins without whom we would not exist. All our ancestors and relations are part of who we are as people and as a family. In most, if not all, tribal communities, the distinction that non-Indians make between nuclear and extended family does not apply, because for many of us our cousins are our brothers and sisters, and our aunts and uncles carry the same authority as our parents.

Sovereignty

Because of this deep connection to one's tribe, Indian people place a great value on tribal sovereignty. Tribal sovereignty is an expres-

sion of our ongoing nationhood, a recognition that our tribes have survived decades of cultural and actual warfare, as well as oppression. Although it is vested in a simple clause embedded in the U.S. Constitution, for tribes, sovereignty derives from our sense of place, our language, history, and culture. It is deeper than simply a legal or political relationship. Evaluation has a responsibility to support nation building.

> Good … projects in Indian Country are explicitly part of a nation-building agenda—that is, local people have themselves planned the project and placed it within a larger vision of what they hope their nation will be. Project evaluation can contribute to these nation-building efforts by providing needed feedback to local implementers and activists about what the problems that plague their nations are, how the problems might be solved, and how well the solutions are working. (Robertson, Jorgensen, & Garrow, 2004, p. 519)

Reclaiming our Indigenous ways of knowing is an assertion of tribal sovereignty. As tribal people assert rights to design our own institutions, such as our schools and educational programs, or to redesign other institutions, such as our tribal governments and court systems, we bring into place values that are fundamental to our ways of knowing. Reclaiming our ways of determining merit and worth is also part of this process.

INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, CULTURAL VALUES, AND EVALUATION PRACTICE

To build a framework for Indigenous evaluation, the AIHEC project staff investigated how Indigenous knowledge is conceptualized and described by several Indigenous scholars in contrast to knowledge creation from a Western perspective or world view. Among those scholars, Marlene Brant-Castellano (1997), a Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte Band in Canada, describes three categories of Aboriginal knowledge:

- *Traditional Knowledge*: handed down through the generations—creation stories, origins of clans, encounters between ancestors and the spirit world. This knowledge can also be based on the history and experiences of the people. This knowledge reinforces values and beliefs.

- *Empirical Knowledge*: gained through careful observation from multiple vantage points over extended time
- *Revealed Knowledge*: acquired through dreams, visions, and spiritual protocol. (p. 23)

Vine Deloria (1999) noted that "The old people experienced life in everything." In his essay, "If You Think about It, You Will See It Is True," he explains that knowledge itself has life and moral purpose. The energy or spirit permeating the universe forms connections and "participates in the moral content of events, so responsibility for maintaining the harmony of life falls equally on all creatures" (pp. 49, 52).

He further explains:

> The old Indians were interested in finding the proper moral and ethical road upon which human beings should walk. All knowledge, if it is to be useful, was directed toward that goal. Absent in this approach was the idea that knowledge existed apart from human beings and their communities, and could stand alone for "its own sake." In the Indian conception, it was impossible that there could be abstract propositions that could be used to explore the structure of the physical world…. Knowledge was derived from individual and communal experiences in daily life, in keen observation of the environment, and interpretive messages that they received from spirits in ceremonies, visions, and dreams. (p. 44)

Indigenous knowledge relied on interpreting our experiences, of which all are valuable:

> We cannot "misexperience" anything; we can only misinterpret what we experience. Therefore, in some instances we can experience something entirely new, and so we must be alert and try not to classify things too quickly. (p. 41)

These discussions of Indigenous knowledge stress the relevance of wisdom accumulated over the ages, the importance of keen observation of phenomena using multiple ways of knowing, and the value of understanding relationships that exist within all that we experience. They also suggest that knowledge has no function in isolation from use. For this reason, knowledge creation carries with it a moral

purpose, as well as a responsibility for its application or use for the betterment of community or environment.

These Indigenous views about the nature of knowledge and knowledge creation have major implications for evaluation. They require that as evaluators we must continually remind ourselves of our responsibility to be comprehensive in our observations, to value subjective experience as well as objective data, and to ensure that we are contributing to the health and well-being of the world.

The AIHEC framework describes how Indigenous ways of knowing can shape ways in which culturally congruent evaluation can be conducted in our communities. The core values described in the previous section—or other core values particular to a specific Indigenous community—can guide how evaluation should be practiced in our communities. For example, using the core values, we recognize that tribal programs are "place based"; consequently, evaluation must be designed to capture the contextual situations and connections to the place in which they operate. Furthermore, this emphasis on context suggests that the emphasis in designing an evaluation should not be on testing the generalizability of a program to other communities, but rather on seeking to understand how each program fits its particular situation and contributes to local understandings of what works. Thus, it may not be appropriate to attempt to use evidence-based models that may not necessarily be replicable due to the unique circumstances within a particular Native community.

Indigenous evaluators also have an obligation to recognize unique gifts—for example, the unique skills and talents of individual students or program participants—and cannot be limited to using only narrow measures of merit or achievement to assess learning, progress, or achievement. The fact that community is central to our sense of being a People should be accounted for in our evaluation practice through the use of participatory approaches and transparent practices. Finally, sovereignty dictates that evaluation belongs to the tribe and community and should be practiced in ways that build capacity and ensure local control and ownership. Table 1 provides an overview of how the beliefs regarding Indigenous knowledge and core/common cultural values can influence evaluation practice in our communities.

It is also important to acknowledge that prayer and ceremony can play a critical role within Indigenous evaluation practice. Throughout the process of building a framework for Indigenous evaluation, the

AIHEC project staff has sought direction through prayerful reflection. Throughout this journey, we have been fortunate that our partners— including Advisory Committee members, focus group participants, local tribal college staff, and others participating in the piloting of the curriculum—have offered songs to guide us and prayers for our project in their sweat lodges. We believe that the ways of knowing that emerge from these connections with the spiritual realm are important in ways that do not lend themselves to outlining in tables or describing in a narrative.

Over the next year, AIHEC will be offering training workshops to personnel in tribal colleges and others involved in Indian education.

Table 1
Core Values and Evaluation Practice

Core Values	Indigenous Evaluation Practice
Indigenous knowledge creation context is critical	o Evaluation itself becomes part of the context; it is not an "external" function o Evaluators need to attend to the relationships between the program and community o If specific variables are to be analyzed, care must be taken to do so without ignoring the contextual situation
People of a place	o Honour the place-based nature of many of our programs o Situate the program by describing its relationship to the community, including its history, current situation, and the individuals affected o Respect that what occurs in one place may not be easily transferred to other situations or places
Recognizing our gifts— personal sovereignty	o Consider the whole person when assessing merit o Allow for creativity and self-expression o Use multiple ways to measure accomplishment o Make connections to accomplishment and responsibility
Centrality of community and family	o Engage the community, not only the program, when planning and implementing an evaluation o Use participatory practices that engage stakeholders o Make evaluation processes transparent o Understand that programs may focus not only on individual achievement, but also on restoring community health and well-being
Tribal sovereignty	o Ensure tribal ownership and control of data o Follow tribal Institutional Review Board processes o Build capacity in the community o Secure proper permission if future publishing is expected o Report in ways meaningful to tribal audiences as well as to funders

The project staff views the Indigenous Evaluation curriculum as a process, an invitation to reframe evaluation practice by centring it through Indigenous ways of knowing and aligning it with core tribal values. Although the curriculum is constructed around the four core values that emerged in the project's discussions and research, the workshops will be an invitation for participants to reflect on their own tribal or community values and consider how these should influence their own evaluation practice.

AIHEC'S development of a framework for evaluation is only one of a number of efforts to redefine research and evaluation to reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and values. Fiona Cram (2009), an Indigenous scholar from New Zealand, describes *Kaupapa Māori* research that is based on seven Maori principles initially outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). A Native Hawaiian scholar, Ku Kahakalau (2004), explains her own personal pathway to "Indigenous heuristic action research" that adheres to Hawaiian protocols of communications and data collection. The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (www.ankn.uaf.edu) is a resource for compiling and exchanging information related to Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing. The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) has developed a higher education accreditation process that recognizes "the inherent diversity of Indigenous cultural histories, traditions and world views, all of which must not only be acknowledged, but must be recognized and celebrated as a valued asset and serve as one of the fundamental premises on which the accreditation process rests" (WINHEC, 2003, p. 4). These are only a few examples of Indigenous Peoples' efforts to reframe research and evaluation using inherent values and ways of knowing.

Framing evaluation practice to be responsive to Indigenous values is and will continue to be an evolving process, a "coming to be." Our journeys to define and implement relevant evaluations will need to look to our own traditions while also recognizing the merits of Western practices such as participatory and empowerment evaluation. There is no one set of steps or practices that define Indigenous evaluation. What it is, or becomes, will emerge from our collective attempts to ensure that traditional values are at the core of any approach to evaluating programs in our communities. The AIHEC project hopes to inspire those who participate in the training workshop sessions to explore their own tribal ways of knowing, assessing merit, and evaluating program experiences.

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NOTES

1. The term *Indigenous*, as used in the framework, encompasses American Indian tribes and communities and Alaska Native tribes, corporations and villages, First Nation and Aboriginal peoples of Canada as well as Native Hawaiian communities and organizations. The term is not meant to connote "pan-Indian" cultural traits or factors, nor is it meant to replace the primacy of tribally specific concepts, terms, or values.

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