What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education contexts in Australia?

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Northern Institute – People. Policy. Place. Seminar Series

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I would like to acknowledge that the land we are meeting on is that of the Larrakia people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and future.
Overview

• What do we know about Indigenous higher education in Australia?
• What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education?
  • Evaluation in Indigenous contexts
  • Evaluation in higher education contexts
  • Evaluation in equity focused higher education contexts
  • Evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts
• Equity Fellowship
• Preliminary Findings
• Discussion
What do we know about Indigenous higher education students in Australia?
Snap shot of post school education success

Census: 2011 Highest post-school qualification as a proportion of adult working population (15 – 64 years), Australia 2011
Snap shot of post school education success – field of study for people holding a Bachelor degree

Census: 2011 Field of study for population holding Bachelor Degree, by Indigenous status and sex, Australia 2011
Snapshot of Indigenous students enrolled in higher education, Australia

Student progress for students who commenced study in 2006

- **Completed (any year)**
  - Non Indigenous: 73.9%
  - Indigenous: 47.3%

- **Left after one year and never returned**
  - Non Indigenous: 7.6%
  - Indigenous: 17.5%

- **Re-enrolled but dropped out**
  - Non Indigenous: 4.2%
  - Indigenous: 14.3%

Higher Education Graduate Outcomes

- Full time employment: 74.5% Indigenous, 70.9% non-Indigenous
- Employment overall: 86% Indigenous, 86.4% non-Indigenous
- Labour Force participation: 90.1% Indigenous, 91% non-Indigenous

Source: Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2016
What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous contexts?

- Need to produce more high quality evaluations that generate evidence to drive future policy and program improvements (Productivity Commission 2013; Hudson 2016).

- Despite a longstanding focus on respect, reciprocity and responsibility between Indigenous and Western culture, it is acknowledged that new approaches to evaluation within Indigenous contexts are required (Productivity Commission 2013; Hudson 2016).

- There are emerging principles, guidelines and frameworks to support Indigenous evaluation work in Canada, New Zealand and to a lesser extent Australia (Roorda & Peace 2009; La France and Nichols 2010; Echo-Hawk 2011, AMSANT 2014; Fred Hollows Foundation 2015).
What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous contexts?

• Gradual acknowledgement of the importance of Indigenous knowledges in improving evaluation practices in Indigenous communities. This has occurred as a result of a parallel dialogue relating to:
  (a) principles underpinning Indigenous research in Australia (Fredericks 2008; Jamieson et al 2012); and
  (b) ethical conduct with Indigenous populations (NHMRC 2003; AIATSIS 2011).

• Need to increase the cultural competence of people completing such evaluations (Caldwell et al 2005; Morelli and Mataira 2010; Hurworth & Harvey 2012; LaFrance et al 2012).

• Calls for Indigenous people to lead and actively participate in evaluation work in Indigenous contexts (Garnett et al 2009; Sithole et al 2009)
What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous contexts?

- There have also been parallel calls for more innovative approaches to be used in Indigenous evaluation contexts, including the application of decolonising evaluation methods that are more closely aligned with Indigenous knowledge systems (LaFrance & Nichols 2010; Morelli & Mataira 2010; Hurworth & Harevy 2012; Hudson 2016, 2017).
What do we know about evaluation in equity focused higher education contexts

- Paucity of evidence about the effectiveness of equity higher education initiatives in Australia (Naylor et al 2013).
- An emerging evidence-base about the impact of equity initiatives, particularly Indigenous higher education programs (including enabling programs), that are showing great promise (Kinnane et al 2014; Bennett et al 2015; Pitman et al 2016).
- Recent development of an *Equity Initiatives Framework* outlines examples of methods and data sources that can support evaluation work in equity-focused higher education initiatives (Bennett et al 2015).
- However, there is currently no recognition of Indigenous-specific evaluation approaches in higher education contexts.
What do we know about evaluation in equity focused higher education contexts

“Despite significant funding flowing into higher education for programs aimed at improving participation, access and success, there still exists a limited amount of systematic evaluation taking place within the sector. In some institutions (including universities, research centres and centres of excellence), a greater level of onus has been felt in recent years for the need to ascertain whether funding sources such as the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPPP) have led or are likely to lead to positive equity-related outcomes.”

(Downing 2017)
What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education?

“While considerable data was available through departmental program-based reporting to monitor progress, there was not always sufficient evidence to assess the overall success or otherwise of specific programs. In some cases, there were no independent evaluations of programs for the Panel to draw on.”

(Behrendt et al 2012, p154)
What do we currently know?

“One key challenge we face in Australia is to move beyond basic process and impact evaluation approaches about Indigenous higher education pathways and transitions. We need to develop more sophisticated evaluation models that reflect more rigorous, comprehensive and nuanced understandings of what Indigenous higher education trajectories look like, the inherent complexities they bring, how they can best be navigated, and the tangible outcomes Indigenous-specific programs can achieve. This includes the capacity to examine and monitor new and innovative institutional and organisational culture change to reform Indigenous education within higher education settings...emerging evaluation approaches that build on Indigenous knowledge systems could be useful in this regard. These will need to privilege Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies.”

(Frawley, Smith & Larkin 2015, p10)
Aim:

To investigate ways of strengthening the evaluation of Indigenous Higher Education (HE) programs and policies in Australia
Chief Investigator

• Assoc Prof James Smith

Associate Investigators

• Ms Kellie Pollard
• Ms Fiona Shalley
Steering Group

- Ms Kim Robertson – Senior Policy Analyst, CDU
- Ms Wendy Ludwig – Director Operations, CDU
- Prof Steven Larkin – University of Newcastle (UoN)
- Prof Penny-Jane Bourke – Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE), UoN
- Prof Sue Trinidad – National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)
- Prof Sue Shore - Community of Associate Deans of Research in Education
- Ms Deb Goodwin – National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (NCATSIS)
- Ms Elouise Arch – Department of Education and Training
- Dr Mark Diamond – Department of Education and Training
- Mr Glen Hansen – Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Ms Cheryl Godwell – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC)
2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship

Rationale:

• Evaluation evidence is important for informing policy and program development and implementation within government and HE institutions

• There are unique considerations in the Indigenous HE space
  • Behrendt Review (2012) – recommended the development of an Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation framework
  • HEPPP 2014 National Priorities Pool Grant – ‘building an evidence base about Indigenous pathways and transitions into HE’
  • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (2016) – recommended development of an Indigenous Higher Education Performance Framework
2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship

• What do we know about the quality and utility of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

• What are the current challenges and opportunities associated with planning and undertaking evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

• What are the enablers and barriers associated with using evaluation evidence to inform policy and program development and reform aimed at supporting Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education in Australia?

• What strategies might be useful for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?
Project Status

• CDU Human Research Ethics Committee approval obtained in Feb 2017 (HE17005)
• Two secondments with Department of Education and Training
• Fieldwork:
  • Completed 15 interviews with policy-makers working in Indigenous and/or Equity policy and program contexts in DPMC and DET
  • Completed 9 interviews with Indigenous leaders/scholars in HE education across Australia
• Overseas Study – July 2017
  • Finnish Education Evaluation Centre; University of Oslo; Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education; Western Norway University of Applied Sciences; University of Saskatchewan (including Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education); Ryerson University; World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education; Simon Fraser University
Preliminary findings

- Conflation between the terms ‘evaluation’, ‘monitoring’, ‘review’, ‘performance’, ‘measurement’ and ‘reporting’
- Tension between preference for quantitative data vs qualitative data
- Perception that quantitative data (particularly Indigenous student data) is important, but redundant without context
- Narratives/stories perceived as particularly important to Indigenous Leaders
- Current funding performance measures need to extend beyond Indigenous student enrolment, success and completion data (noting these are important)
- A holistic framework is preferred that is strengths-based in focus, including one that explicitly deals with ‘system levers’
Preliminary findings

• Performance measures could relate to:
  • Quality and scope of Indigenous community and family engagement activities;
  • Quality and scope of Indigenous specific outreach activities;
  • Quality and scope of formal partnership arrangements with Indigenous organisations
  • Explicit strategies aimed at increasing Indigenous identification upon enrolment;
  • Explicit strategies to enhance Indigenous education and training, including Indigenous curriculum and pedagogies;
  • Explicit strategies to develop Indigenous graduate attributes, build cultural competency and reduce institutional racism;
Preliminary findings

- Performance measures could relate to:
  - Quality of Indigenous enabling course enrolments and completions;
  - Success of Indigenous workforce strategies;
  - Success of Indigenous research strategies;
  - Evidence of genuine Indigenous governance and leadership;
  - Evidence of adopting a Whole of University approach (e.g. individual accountability within executive/management contracts);
  - Indigenous student financial support (AFB/Abstudy)
  - Stories of Indigenous student success
  - Pathways across the education continuum (between VET to HE; from undergrad to postgrad)
  - Attempts to achieve parity need to be contextualised in relation to each university’s Indigenous cohort
Preliminary findings

• Preference for a framework that dovetails with:
  • Proposed Equity Evaluation Frameworks (such as that to be developed through HEPPP)
  • Other relevant education evaluation frameworks (i.e. early years, K-12), with increased potential for data-linkage
  • Evaluation frameworks in other sectors (i.e. ATSI Health Performance Framework), with increased potential for data-linkage
  • Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020
  • National/International university accreditation processes (i.e. TEQSA, WINHEC)

• Accountability is important:
  • At the individual level (i.e. senior executives achieving Indigenous focused KPIs)
  • At the institutional level (i.e. universities demonstrating Indigenous ‘excellence’)  
  • Among the private sector (i.e. organisations increasingly working in the ‘Indigenous HE space’)
  • At the national level (by the Australian Government as a major funder)
Conceptual Map of an Indigenous Higher Education Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

June 2017

Equity Policy & Program Environment

- HEPPP
- SEE

Pre-Access & Access
- School Outcomes
- Community & Family Engagement
- Community & School Outreach
- Enabling Programs
- Scholarships
- Pathways & Transitions

Participation
- Identification
- Enrolment Data
- Success /On-track to Success Data
- Completion Data
- Rippling Stories of Success

System Levers
- Indigenous Workforce
- Indigenous Curriculum & Pedagogies
- Indigenous Leadership, Governance & WOU approach
- Indigenous Research
- Cultural Competency

Indigenous Policy & Program Environment
- IAS
- ISSP
- AFB & ABSTUDY
- UA Indigenous Strategy
Open Discussion & Questions
Thanks and Contact Details

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