Reflections over time: Indigenous roles in Australasian evaluation conferences 1999-2014. Evaluative Voices 1(3)

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Abstract: A review of presentations at Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) conferences from 1999 to 2014 available on the AES website, and of AES annual reports, revealed how the proportion of Indigenous focused evaluations fluctuated over 15 years. There was no consistent increase over that period. Instead, conferences with a higher proportion of Indigenous-focused presentations tended to occur in sites with higher local Indigenous populations such as Darwin and New Zealand, although numbers could be affected by conference organiser outreach. More consistent changes over time occurred in the nature of presentations on Indigenous issues. In earlier years, Indigenous peoples were presented primarily as objects of evaluation, but by 2014 there was evidence of Indigenous managed evaluations. The steps through which this change occurred are reflected in presentation topics and show how New Zealand has consistently been ahead of Australia in this regard. Interviews with stakeholders indicated that further progress would be required to achieve evaluation by, as and for Indigenous people, particularly in Australia.

Introduction

Ros Hurworth and Graeme Harvey, in their introduction to an issue of the Evaluation Journal of Australasia (EJA) focusing on Indigenous evaluation, noted that the topics of papers submitted to the journal reflected an evolution in the relationship of evaluators and Australasian Indigenous peoples (Hurworth and Harvey 2012). In the early years, from 1993 to 1997, they note that even when Indigenous evaluations were the topic of a presentation, there was no mention of Indigenous evaluators, although community members might sometimes sit on evaluation advisory committees. The voice of Indigenous evaluators was not apparent in the journal until Taylor's 2003 paper on evaluation in inter-cultural contexts; however, by 2011 and 2012 specifically Indigenous frameworks and methods were being discussed in the journal.

A parallel search was conducted by the author to determine how the topics of presentations at AES conferences might reflect similar trends, a method that could be termed 'conference mining'. There are more AES conference presentations each year than there are papers

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published in the EJA, so it seemed possible that more fine-grained observations would be possible. Also, an audit of conference presentations could identify the potential role of location as well as change over time. Finally, as AES annual reports provided conference registration numbers, it was possible to identify the ratio of Indigenous focused presentations to conference registrants. It was anticipated that participants would be more likely to be exposed to Indigenous evaluation issues in a conference which provided one presentation on such issues for every ten conference participants than one that provided such a presentation for each 100 participants.

This article begins with a description of the method used to search and calculate results, followed by a year by year account of conferences. An analysis of multi-year patterns is provided, supplemented by observations from stakeholders, and the article concludes with a call for further research.

Method

All materials were sourced in 2015 from the Australasian Evaluation Society website (aes.asn.au), which provided records of conferences back to 1999. A search was conducted for conference sessions from 1999 to 2014 that appeared to address Indigenous evaluation issues.

Presentations identified included:

- those with titles containing the words 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal' or 'Maori';

- those whose titles that included the name of an Indigenous organisation, such as 'SNAICC' (an acronym for Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) or 'Central Land Council';

- those whose titles included the name of an Indigenous-focused event or issue, such as 'Stolen Generation' or 'Northern Territory Emergency Response';

- presentation titles that used Maori words such as 'whanau', even though the word 'Maori' might not appear in the title; and

- presentations where the presenters were Indigenous and/or the presentation showed it referred to an Indigenous evaluation, even where the title was not indicative of this.

Where conferences had specific streams for Indigenous-themed papers, all of these papers were accessed where possible, regardless of their titles. All abstracts and presentations were read when accessible, to determine the role(s) Indigenous people had played in the evaluations discussed in them.

Some challenges emerged. The way in which presentations were documented on the website varied from year to year; in many cases there were gaps in what was displayed and in some cases presentations were duplicated in the website list. A substantial effort was made to address such issues and obtain an accurate count of presentations where the content could be determined. Once this was achieved, the proportion of presentations focusing on Indigenous issues to presentations focusing on other issues was determined.

AES annual reports provided additional useful information on conferences, including conference registration numbers for the preceding year. An additional calculation was performed to determine the ratio of registrants to Indigenous-focused presentations for each conference for which this information was available.

Limitations

The search was exploratory rather than definitive. Although the AES website was a useful resource, it did not include programs for all of the conferences between 1999 and 2014. In a number of cases, only lists of papers and presentations were provided, and these were not always complete. In 2013, for example, the 2013-2014 Annual Report (AES 2014) noted 110 sessions at the conference, but the website listed only 87 presentations, keynotes and papers. The situation for 2012 was even more complicated. Although one keynote address appeared only as a keynote, others were also listed as presentations. There were some sessions shown only as conference papers or only as PowerPoint presentations, but a significant number were presented as both. Duplications were addressed wherever they could be identified; further details are provided in the year by year descriptions.

Although many references were identified, this is almost certainly an under-estimate of the actual number of conference sessions that addressed Indigenous issues, for a number of reasons:
- There were no materials on the AES website from the Geelong conference in 2000, nor of conferences prior to 1999.
- Complete programs were not available for several conferences; where only a partial list was available on the website, some sessions titled 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal' or 'Maori' might not have been documented.
- In addition to the oral presentations, keynote addresses, plenary sessions, panel discussions, symposia and mini workshops noted below, many conferences provided cultural elements such as opening and closing ceremonies, and introductions. These have not been analysed here.
- Not every session dealing with Indigenous issues reflected that focus on its title, and not every conference provided a separate stream for such presentations. Although a number of Indigenous evaluation presentations were identified by the author in spite of the focus not being reflected in the title, it is possible that one or more Indigenous-focused presentations between 1999 and 2014 were not identified.

Results year by year

While admitting these limitations, tracking the incidence of 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal', 'Maori' and related words in records of AES conference presentations between 1999 and 2014 revealed a number of interesting patterns. No record for 2000 was found and that year is not covered.

1999

The first AES annual conference of which there was a record on the website is the 1999 conference in Perth. 53 papers were provided on the website; no titles contain the words 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal'. There was a paper (Bunn, 1999) focusing on a Maori evaluation that noted the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi, and detailed collaboration with a Maori advisory group in developing a survey for hospital patients.

2001

There was no record on the website of an annual conference in 2000, but the website showed that in 2001 Canberra hosted a conference; 49 conference papers are shown. One paper noted input from Australian Indigenous staff community members in museum evaluation processes; another paper detailed an initiative to place Maori research graduates in Maori organisations to: enable evaluation 'by Maori for Maori' (Gillespie 2001: 1), increase the number of Maori evaluators, and build the evaluation capacity of Maori service providers.

2002

After 2002, when the conference was held in Wollongong, annual reports became available online, providing an additional source of information on conferences, including registration figures. The 2002-2003 annual report (AES 2003) noted that the 2002 conference attracted 229 delegates. The conference program was available on the AES website, and showed 65 sessions over three days. (This excluded the pre-conference workshops, which did not make reference to Indigenous issues.) At least two papers on Maori issues were presented: Dallas, Ngarimu and Roberts 2002, (where the title contained 'whanau'), and Chetwin, Waldegrave and Simonsen 2002. Both of these papers discussed issues involved in Maori evaluators working with Maori evaluands. A third paper contrasted the situation of New Zealand and Australia in this regard, pointing out that in 'New Zealand there is now a considerable literature about the need for evaluations to take into account the cultural appropriateness of services provided for Maori' (Thomas 2002:1) but that as of 2002 Australia lacked this literature, with the exception of a few calls 'to engage in community consultation, such as with indigenous [sic] stakeholders' (Thomas 2002:1).

2003

The 2003 AES conference was held in Auckland, and attracted 268 full registrations to 72 sessions (AES 2004). Conference ceremonies included a number of Maori cultural elements. The 2003-2004 Annual Report noted that one of the AES aims for the year had been to advance 'evaluation with indigenous populations' (AES 2004: 1), and welcomed Nan Wehipeihana to a fifth Executive Board position, in recognition of its strategic importance. The program for the conference was available on the AES website, and reflected this emphasis, showing that there was an 'Indigenous' stream in this conference with six presentations, three focusing on New Zealand and three on Australia. The conference also included two keynote addresses on Australian Indigenous issues, one of them by Russell Taylor on 'Evaluation issues for Indigenous Australians'. Hurworth and Harvey (2012: 4) note the significance of an Australian Indigenous keynote speaker addressing this topic: 'a real milestone in that it was the first time an Indigenous person literally took centre stage to speak about indigenous [sic] evaluation'.

2004

The AES website listed 72 papers from the 2004 conference in Adelaide, but the 2004 conference program was not available on the website. Cultural diversity was one of four themes of the conference, attended by 288 participants (AES 2005). Four titles included relevant words: 'Indigenous', 'Maori', 'Aboriginal' and 'Stolen Generation'. The two papers focusing on New Zealand (Cameron 2003 a and Cameron 2003 b) dealt with Maori and 'fourth world' research paradigms. One of the Australia-focused papers (Hurley and Rankine

2003) was co-authored by a non-Aboriginal evaluator and the chair of the advisory group that worked collaboratively on the evaluation, each presenting learnings from their own perspective. The final paper (Yik and Arthur 2003) showed how statistical modelling of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey results demonstrated funding needs for Stolen Generation services. A number of Aboriginal cultural elements were woven into the conference.

2005

The 2005 Brisbane conference program was available on the AES website and showed 58 sessions, a mixture of plenaries with guest speakers, oral paper and poster presentations, roundtables and panel discussions. Although there were cultural events around the conference, attended by 224 delegates (AES 2006), only a roundtable and a panel dealing with New Zealand issues provided evidence of Indigenous issues at the conference. The annual report noted consideration of 'the potential for an AES scholarship scheme, including the idea of sponsorship for evaluators from developing countries to attend the annual AES conference' (AES 2006: 7). Interestingly, there was no mention in the 2005-2006 report of Indigenous scholarships, although that has since become the major focus of the grants. The report further noted that the Auckland Evaluation Group was leaving the Australasian Evaluation Society to become a branch of the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association; the Wellington Evaluation Group continued to operate within the AES.

2006

In terms of Indigenous content, the 2006 conference showed a strong contrast to the previous year. Held in Darwin, it attracted 244 delegates (AES 2007), and Indigenous scholarships were provided to attend the conference (Harrison et al 2008). In addition to cultural events at and around the conference, there was an 'Indigenous contexts' stream, and almost one in four sessions – 20 out of 81 – showed an Indigenous focus. The conference program on the AES website showed that 16 presentations, three roundtables, and a panel focused on Indigenous issues. The themes of the presentations varied, but included presentations by Indigenous researchers, discussion of participatory evaluation approaches and calls for better recognition of Indigenous voices in evaluation. During the Darwin conference, the AES announced a new evaluation award to be presented in future years, for the best evaluations working with Indigenous communities.

2007

The 2007 conference in Melbourne attracted a large audience, with 465 people attending (AES 2008). The program, available on the AES website, showed that there was no specific stream for Indigenous targeted papers, but thirteen session titles contained relevant words, such as Indigenous, Maori/whanau, Aboriginal, and – for the first time in the presentation titles recorded on the AES website – Torres Strait Islander. Topics included valuing Indigenous knowledge, engagement and participatory evaluation, cultural accountability, and (in New Zealand rather than Australia) building an evaluation community of practice with Indigenous service providers. Nan Wehipeihana (2007) gave a presentation on the journey to date of the AES in achieving its Indigenous evaluation strategic objectives.

2008

No program was available on the AES website for the 2008 conference, held in Perth and attended by 295 delegates (AES 2009), although many papers and presentations from the conference were provided on the website. In 38 cases, both a presentation and the paper based on it appeared on the website, but the topic was only counted once here. There were 29 titles found only in the presentation list and 25 found only in the 'paper' list. Of these 92 titles, only seven appeared to note an Indigenous focus, but at least two others (Harrison, Walker and Watson 2008 and Cram 2008) had an Indigenous focus not reflected in the title. The presentations included approaches conducted very much as externally driven evaluations as well as ones which reflected more of a partnership approach.

Two presentations available on the website[2] of special interest were one (Harrison et al 2008) focusing on progress to date in the AES Indigenous Strategy, and another (Wehipeihana 2008) titled 'Indigenous Evaluation – a journey beyond participatory and collaborative approaches in evaluation'. The AES adapted an action plan in 2008-2009 for its Indigenous Strategy. It included establishment of an Indigenous Strategy Special Interest Group with a presence on the AES website and Indigenous Strategy working groups, endorsement of and workshops on ethical good practice for evaluators working with Indigenous peoples, and strategies to increase the number of Indigenous participants at annual conferences and regional events.

2009

A program was available on the AES website for the 2009 conference held in Canberra, which attracted 458 delegates (AES 2010). Only two session titles contained the word 'Indigenous'. One other session (Williams and Cummings 2009) described an Indigenous focused and largely Indigenous led project. Although the title did not contain the words' Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' but only 'remote community members', the presentation slides made it clear these were Australian Indigenous community members. Of the two sessions with 'Indigenous' in their title, one (Markiewicz 2009) noted non-Indigenous evaluators were inevitable until greater evaluation capacity developed within Australian Aboriginal communities; the other (Williams 2009) described how 'yarning' improved a CATI project used to evaluate programs in Australian Indigenous communities.

2010

A program was also available for the 2010 conference held in Wellington, which attracted 307 delegates (AES 2011). There was an 'Indigenous peoples' stream at the conference, with ten sessions presented in it, as well as a keynote by Professor Maaka on 'Indigeneity in research and evaluation' (Maaka 2010). Interestingly, at least two papers with an Indigenous program evaluation focus, and with Indigenous authors (Williams and Hussien 2010, Boulton et al 2010), were presented in the 'Social and community' stream, perhaps due to the lack of words such as 'Indigenous' in their presentation titles. A significant number of the papers in the Indigenous people's stream did not describe techniques or findings, but dealt with topics such as culture and whether evaluations might be contributing to Australian Aboriginal people's disempowerment (eg Harrison 2010).

The Indigenous Strategy Special Interest Group held a symposium during the conference, noting in regard to the AES conference support grants, that there had been 'few applications from Indigenous Australians since the scheme began in 2007… Grants were very widely

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[2] A 2008 presentation by Fiona Cram, 'Evaluating my Relations', could not be retrieved from the website.

promoted to Indigenous networks, organisations and media in 2010 but only one application from an Aboriginal evaluator was received.' (AES Indigenous Evaluation Special Interest Group (SIG) Workshop, 2 September 2010)

2011

The AES website had an Excel spreadsheet version of the program for the 2011 conference in Sydney, as well as selected papers/presentations; over 530 delegates registered for this conference (AES 2012). Once again, there was an 'Indigenous peoples' stream, which in 2011 was sponsored by KPMG, with six sessions on Wednesday, three on Thursday and two on Friday, as well as a plenary session on Wednesday on 'Closing the Indigenous Health Gap and Evaluation'. 'Closing the Gap' and the 'Northern Territory Emergency Response' were referred to in multiple presentations at the conference, reflecting major new government policies and initiatives. During 2011-2012, the Indigenous Special Interest Group was replaced by an Indigenous Strategy Committee, and potential terms of reference were drafted. Also in this year, an AES Executive Officer was hired; previously there was only a Secretariat to support the efforts of Society volunteers.

2012

No program was available on the AES website for the 2012 conference, held in Adelaide and attended by 440 delegates (AES 2013). The 2012-2013 Annual Report noted that the conference provided five keynotes and '112 sessions, as oral, mini workshop, symposium, linked and roundtable presentations, as well as a world cafe style session…' (AES 2013: 12). Not all of these sessions were available on the website, but most were, and a number of them were provided in multiple formats, ie as a written paper and as a PowerPoint presentation. Once duplicates of this sort had been eliminated, 104 sessions were available on the website. Of these, 18 made reference to an evaluation in an Indigenous context, four with a New Zealand focus, 12 with an Australian focus and two covering both countries. The Annual Report noted:

> *Whilst we are aware of a strong and vibrant cohort of Maori evaluators with varying degrees of expertise who are willing and able to support the work of the AES, a concern… has been the need to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people's involvement in the work of this organisation – not only for the benefit of the AES but for the sector more generally. (AES Annual Report 2013, pg 19)*

However, while it was true that a number of the Australian Indigenous focused presentations were presented from an external evaluation perspective, there were signs of change in this area. For example, Stapleton (2012) noted that two Indigenous peer research assistants were trained to participate in an evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, which used a participatory evaluation method. (It is not known how the research assistants have progressed in their careers since.) Perhaps most notably, Otto Campion Bulmaniya (Campion 2012) presented as an Australian Indigenous evaluator showing an Indigenous evaluation with strong cultural components; the presentation was not delivered in partnership with a non-Indigenous partner, but was entirely Indigenous delivered.

2013

There was no program on the AES website for the 2013 conference, held in Brisbane and attended by 449 delegates. Some but not all keynote addresses, papers and presentations from the conference were available on the website. The Annual Report noted that 'As well as [five] keynote sessions, 105 presentations were delivered over three days, through roundtables, symposia, mini workshops, short and long papers...' (AES 2014:15). Material from 87 sessions was available on the AES website, and twelve of them dealt with Indigenous program evaluation. Ten focused on Australia and one on New Zealand, while one addressed Indigenous evaluation issues common to both countries. The content of the presentations differed in a number of ways from presentations on Australian Indigenous evaluations a decade earlier. Some presentations explicitly addressed how evaluations had previously been done 'to' Indigenous communities, with little benefit to them, and noted the need for the community voice to be central in the evaluation (eg Young 2013). Others presented projects conducted by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members, with the Indigenous team members not acting in an advisory role but paid as professional co-researchers/evaluators (eg Schierhout 2013).

One of the keynote addresses (Wehipeihana 2013) set out a new paradigm, although making it clear that the field was not yet at the point where Indigenous evaluation was recognised as 'evaluation by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples as Indigenous peoples', and where non-Indigenous evaluators would recognise that they had no automatic right to evaluate in Indigenous contexts, with their participation only coming through Indigenous invitation. Steps were set out that could be used to determine how successfully evaluation was moving in this direction. The AES President stated in the Annual Report:

> *I believe our first priority must be to improve the way we work with Indigenous peoples both within the AES and within evaluation as a discipline. The way we work with Indigenous peoples should be based on principles developed by the Indigenous peoples... (AES 2014: 10)*

2014

The 2014 conference was held in Darwin, with 327 registrations recorded (AES 2015). Once again, no program was available on the website, but a conference paper, four keynote addresses and 92 presentations were available. The 2014 conference provided discussion of Indigenous evaluation issues from a broader regional perspective than in previous years. A keynote (Mataira 2014) discussing evaluation in Indigenous communities focused particularly on Hawaii. Nandi (2014) addressed evaluation with Indigenous peoples in India, while Lucks noted both the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the Philippines in evaluation processes, and the challenge of preserving their voices and achievements in the evaluation report (Lucks 2014). However, the majority of Indigenous-focused evaluations at the 2014 Darwin conference (15) presented concerned Australian Aboriginal peoples, with two focusing on New Zealand.

It was noteworthy that presentations did not just involve professional Australian Indigenous evaluators, but Indigenous Australian professionals working out of Indigenous research centres and groups informed by Indigenous cultural values (eg Daniels 2014, Davis 2014, Larkin 2014). In fact, one presentation by non-Indigenous evaluators (Guenther and Galbraith 2014) even asked 'is there a role for non-Indigenous researchers?'. Although their

presence demonstrated that non-Indigenous evaluators were still active, it was not a question that had come up in Australian presentations fifteen years earlier.

The involvement in the conference of Australian Indigenous research and evaluation groups and centres such as ARPNet, the Tangentyere Research Hub, and ACIKE (the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education, which hosted the conference) showed that Australia was slowly beginning to acquire some of the Indigenous evaluation infrastructure that New Zealand had had for some time.

Discussion of patterns across years

An analysis of proportion of identified Indigenous focused presentations over fifteen years of AES conferences revealed factors that did not emerge when looking at individual years. Interviews with selected stakeholders added further insights into change over time.

Patterns in the data

The statistics for Indigenous-focused presentations at AES conferences demonstrate a pattern of peaks and troughs over the decade and a half from 1999 to 2014, rather than showing a consistent increase over time.

Figure 1: Percentage by year of AES conference sessions devoted to Indigenous issues where presentation topic could be determined
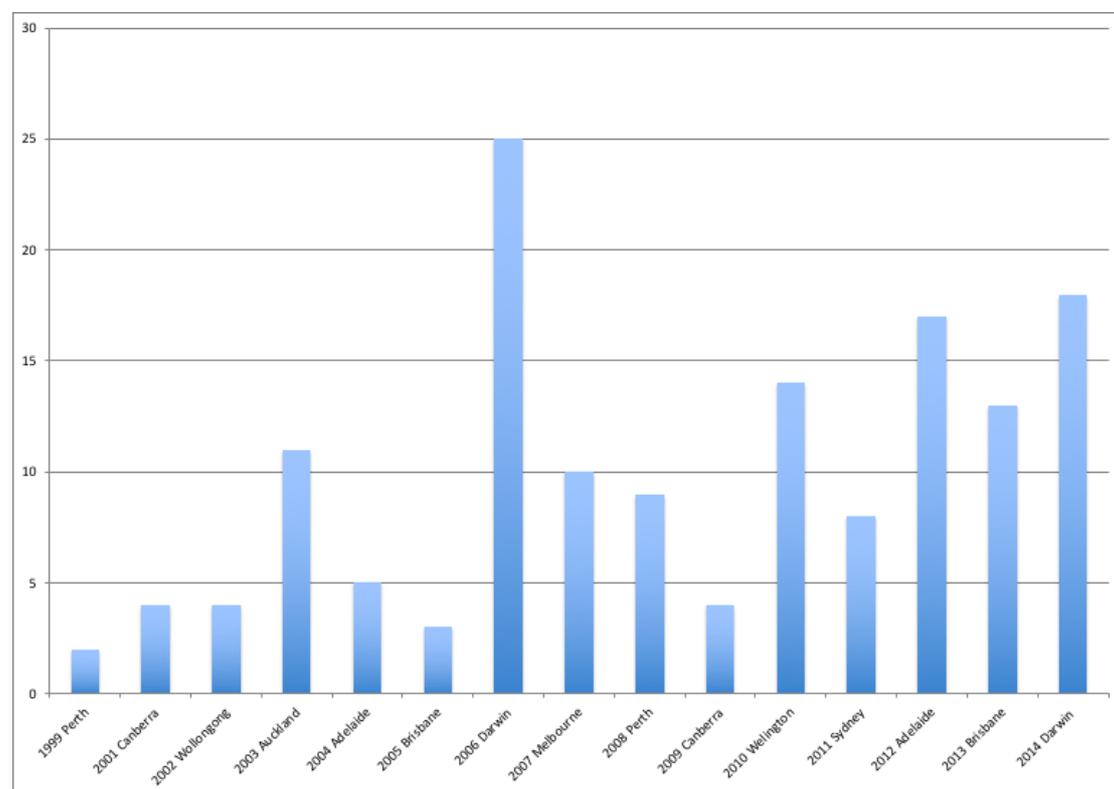

From 1999 to 2011, the pattern was relatively consistent. Conferences in New Zealand and in Darwin (where the Indigenous percentage of the population was higher even than in New Zealand) attracted higher numbers of sessions devoted to Indigenous themes. There

appeared to be a temporary flow-on effect that gradually diminished, so the year immediately after the NZ or Darwin conference shows Indigenous session figures still higher than average, but the next year(s) less so. However, the Adelaide conference in 2012 broke this pattern.

As documented in AES annual reports, conference attendance figures varied considerably from year to year, with larger cities – particularly in eastern Australia – typically attracting larger audiences. It had been anticipated that participants would be more likely to be exposed to Indigenous evaluation issues in a conference which presented one presentation on such issues for every ten conference participants than one that provided such a presentation for each 100 participants.

Figure 2 shows the number of sessions devoted to Indigenous evaluation issues compared to the number of conference participants. As attendance figures are available only for 2002 to 2013, only those years are shown, and the attendance total has been divided by 20, as this makes the pattern more visible.

Figure 2: Number of identified Indigenous themed AES conference sessions per 20 conference participants
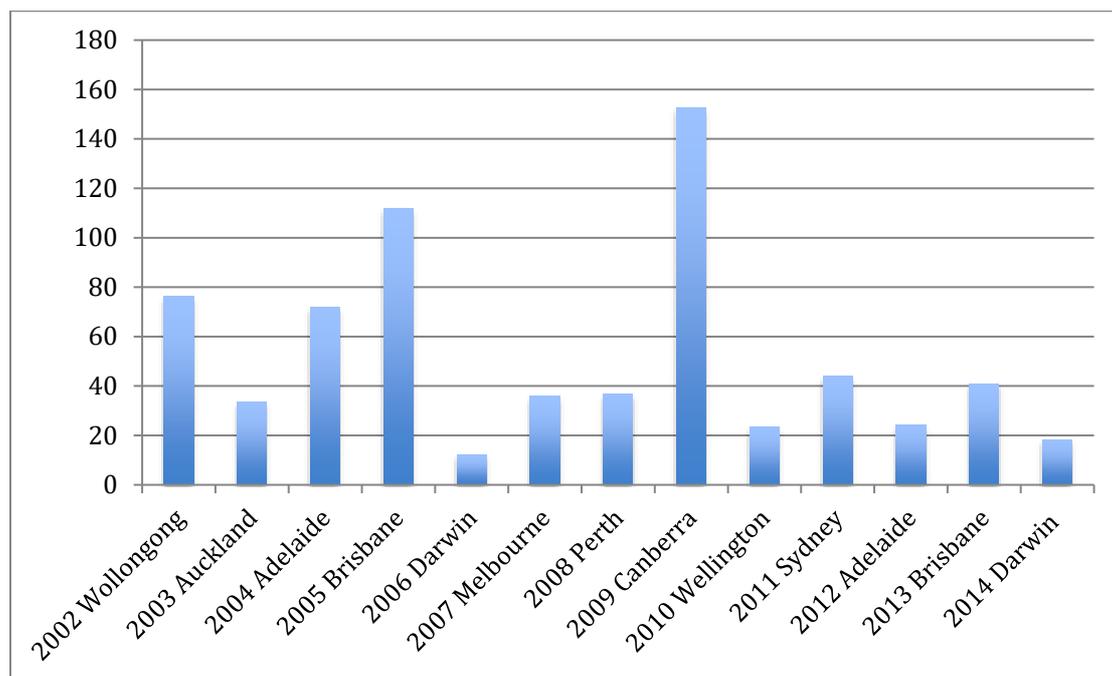
The chart showed that there was one Indigenous-themed session for every 12 conference participants in Darwin in 2006, and one Indigenous-themed session for every 24 conference participants in Adelaide in 2012. On the other hand, Canberra in 2009 had the lowest ratio of Indigenous-themed sessions per attendance of any year since records have been available, with one Indigenous-themed session for every 153 people attending. It was apparent that someone attending the 2006 Darwin conference could hardly have avoided hearing about Indigenous evaluation issues, while a participant at the Canberra conference in 2009 would have had to make an effort to do so.

Brief interviews with conference organisers for the 2012 Adelaide conference, and for the 2009 Canberra conference revealed some of the dynamics that might have led to different

results in the two cases. For the Adelaide conference, dedicated outreach had been conducted specifically to ensure a relatively high level of Indigenous participation; this did not occur for the 2009 Canberra conference. The impact of policy developments was also noted; the impact of the Northern Territory Emergency Response was raised as a factor in the increased focus on Indigenous evaluation after 2009.

Other patterns emerged from the year by year findings that were difficult to quantify. Somewhat similar to the findings of Hurworth and Harvey, it appeared from references in the conference presentations from 1999 to 2014 that Indigenous people had evolved from objects of evaluation – although it was noted in some cases that good relations were instrumental in non-Indigenous evaluators getting access to data – to ongoing (typically unpaid) involvement in participatory methods and advisory roles, to paid positions on evaluation teams, to examples of evaluations being run out of Indigenous centres. The progress has not been consistent or steady, and there are still cases, even now, of evaluations that pay little attention to the concept of "evaluation by Indigenous people for Indigenous people".

Another pattern that emerged was the difference between Indigenous evaluation in New Zealand and Australia, with developments in Australia lagging years behind those in New Zealand in terms of Indigenous people's roles in evaluation.

Stakeholder perceptions of change

It was originally planned that interviews with a number of stakeholders – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – who presented at AES conferences and/or had worked for a decade or more in evaluation with Australian Indigenous peoples would also reveal patterns of change between 1999 and 2014. However, the responses turned out to be rather more diverse than had been anticipated, and some apparently contradictory views emerged at a late stage of the project. Resolving the apparent contradictions and identifying patterns would have required more rigorous research over a longer period of time than was available in the period for which ethics approval had been granted; resourcing further research was also an issue.

One finding that did emerge was that the respondents' perception of whether there had been progress – and if so, how much and in what areas – depended to a large degree on how they were defining 'Indigenous evaluation' as they answered. Those who noted as an important factor the ability of community leaders to decide whether or not to welcome external evaluators, for example, thought that there had actually been an erosion in Indigenous evaluation rights in recent years. Governance and policy changes have taken this option away from communities that used to have it.

A few respondents were able to cite multiple cases where Indigenous people, including community members and elders, were comfortable with the community's role in an evaluation process from design through analysis to dissemination. However, even those who cited such cases noted that it was difficult to achieve this result – and it often required saying 'no' to evaluation tenders that would not enable this way of working.

Some respondents expressed that there had been improvements in Indigenous people's paid involvement in evaluation, with a growing number now working as professionals rather than as unpaid advisers. On the other hand, some were able to point out cases where Aboriginal community members in full-time employment, with extensive family and

community responsibilities, were still expected to devote substantial unpaid time to advisory committees when independent evaluations were scheduled. It was noted that at least some government funding bodies continued to have an expectation that this would be provided, and such contributions to externally driven evaluations were perhaps regarded by public servants as an obligation if a community received funding for one or more projects.

The lag between the apparent progress of New Zealand versus Australian Indigenous evaluators in achieving 'evaluation by Indigenous people for Indigenous people' (and to a degree 'as Indigenous people') was attributed to a combination of circumstances. These included the Treaty of Waitangi, and also an Indigenous population with a largely shared culture and language versus the Australian situation, where many language and cultural groups were dispersed over a large area with no Treaty mechanism to leverage progress.

In general, most respondents appeared to believe that there had been some progress for in both countries in evaluation 'by Indigenous people' although – particularly in Australia – the degree to which these evaluators were able to work 'as Indigenous people', and the degree to which they were able to work 'for Indigenous people' rather than answering to a government body, or non-Indigenous employer, was less clear.

Little consensus appeared on the best path forward to formally recognise Indigenous evaluators' knowledge and skills. Some favoured qualifications that would be specifically designed to recognise Indigenous specific knowledge and skills, including cultural brokerage. On the other hand, one responded:

> *Any formal training or credentialing systems that map the pathway or process should not be distinct from non-Indigenous pathways. However, mechanisms for recognising alternative knowledge systems as a form of prior learning should be incorporated. Acknowledgement of cultural competency, experience in alternative methodologies and traditional valuing systems, as examples, should be acknowledged in any process that involves judging qualifications.* (Interview respondent)

Attempts were made to check back with respondents prior to writing up this section; some asked what others had said and were informed of the range of answers that had been received. In many cases, the respondents then wanted to rethink their initial contributions. It became clear that, to do more substantial research on this topic, a reflective process would be desirable, rather than phone interviews. This indicates that group discussions – where participants could discuss and generate ideas together in the course of the discussion – would be useful.

Conclusion

This small-scale study into Indigenous roles in Australasian evaluation conferences provides some insight into an under-researched topic. The responses noted here should be regarded as preliminary, and further research in the area is clearly required. The AES has identified Indigenous evaluators and evaluation as an important area of interest, and developments in response to new AES initiatives deserve scrutiny. Conference location also emerged as an important factor on the proportion of Indigenous focused presentations, so that the impact of any decision to restrict the number of AES conferences in Wellington and Auckland would also be worth documenting.

One area where there was consensus from virtually every respondent in this research project, echoing the statistical evidence, was that progress to date has been inconsistent. Conference presentation themes reflect external developments; further changes in areas such as valuing Indigenous knowledge and community-responsive framing of evaluations will be required before conferences can present Indigenous program evaluations consistently conducted by Indigenous evaluators working as and for Indigenous people.

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