Can Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) add to Program Evaluation Methodology Frameworks?

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DECLARATION

Student

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is the result of my own independent research, except where otherwise acknowledged in the bibliography. This material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Eric Svanberg  Date  21 / 11 / 2011

Supervisor's Certificate of Approval

I certify that I have read the final draft of this thesis and it is ready for submission in accordance with the thesis requirements as set out in the School of Social Science policy documents.

Dr Patricia Short  Date  21 / 11 / 2011
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<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
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ABSTRACT

Indigenous research methodology (IRM) is a framework that allows a researcher to undertake critical research and analysis from an Indigenous perspective. Program evaluation for remote area Aboriginal housing has an historical legacy of poor outcomes. Some authors have been critical of past program approaches as they fail to reflect Aboriginal social, cultural aspirations but despite much literature to support this proposition program success remains limited and program evaluation has not determined the reasons for this. This research finds that current program evaluation is constrained by an approach that focuses on managerialism and Western economic frameworks that limit the opportunities to gain useful knowledge to improve program success. This theoretical analysis of the barriers to IRM in evaluation finds that IRM can be utilised as an additive methodology rather than synthesised within current evaluation practice and should be supported with collaborative and participatory techniques with the program recipients at the point of program delivery. However the approach will require time to develop appropriate evaluation relationships at the local level and political will to enact institutional change. IRM has the potential to enhance program evaluation but this report recommends further testing of the framework in the field.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I started out on this new career path at UQ, officially in 2007. This however, was preceded by a notional idea almost a decade before this, that I was less interested in the practical aspects of my former career, and far more interested in the people I serviced professionally and their life stories. Following a significant amount of thinking, and surfing of university websites I found myself continually returning to the School of Social Science at UQ. Along this path my concerns regarding the situation of Aboriginal people, that I had witnessed when spending 24 months in the north and north west of Australia, emerged as a recurring focus of my Masters program. This has subsequently led to my active involvement in volunteer work with Aboriginal communities as part of my commitment to reconciliation.

They say it is useful to be passionate about a topic when you undertake a thesis. I can vouch for that. And allowing for my passion on this topic, to which my Wife Maria and family will attest ...and wish sometimes they had earplugs, it goes without saying that a thesis is a long, challenging, interesting but sometimes stressful experience. This challenge is made significantly easier with the support of the people around you.

I wish to sincerely thank the following people for there time, energy, patience and support.

To Dr Trisch Short, for her persistence in encouraging me to keep at it in times of self doubt, her insight into other ways to approach the research encounter and for her abilities as a wordsmith. Academic advising for a supervisor, I now understand, is just as much a roller coaster ride as it is for the student.

To Dr Sally Babbage, whose assistance with my earlier literature review allowed to to make great gains in academic writing. Although my final thesis morphed into something else again knowledge gained is always valuable.
To my wife Maria and my family, who have allowed me to do what most others might think was an indulgence or a folly. They have supported me financially and emotionally, with care, love and a dash of humour to ground my enthusiasm and attempts at pontification.

I would also like to express my thanks to Indigenous Community Volunteers and the communities I have visited over the last 2 years. Although they have no direct involvement in this thesis, the opportunities to visit and work alongside the people in these communities has provided an appreciation of remote area Aboriginal life and have added to my understanding. The experiences have been personally satisfying, hopefully of use to the communities, and more importantly has hopefully contributed to reconciliation.

Thank you all so much
1. INTRODUCTION

The broad intent of program evaluation is to tell stakeholders if a program is needed, if the program is working well or not, if it is providing good or poor value for money and if it is having a positive or negative effect on those that the program is directed toward. Despite the use of program evaluation in government programs for many years, remote area Aboriginal housing programs remain unsuccessful. Current program evaluation in these areas obtain much data (Qld.Govt, 2010e; SCRGSP, 2011) but little of this provides any understanding of the needs, aspirations or impacts on the Aboriginal recipients and relies solely on Western frameworks for evidence. Aboriginal perspectives could play a crucial role in improving success in housing programs. The recent development of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) might provide a useful framework for evaluation that provides a process that is legible form both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives.

There has been a long and often contentious period of social intervention into the lives of Indigenous Australians living in remote areas by Federal and State governments (Read, 2000; Walker, Ballard, & Taylor, 2002, pp. 10-11). Despite significant expenditure and a generally bipartisan approach from successive governments, mainstream Australians believe little has been achieved (Henderson, 2010). Some argue life has deteriorated for Aboriginal people (Altman, 2011b, pp. 28,45). Aboriginal remote area housing, in particular, has a poor history and is considered by some authors to be the political and social product of opposing worldviews about how people live (Sanders, 2000, pp. 237-240). Aboriginal remote area housing is also seen as both the location of paternalistic intervention by non-Aboriginal Australians intended to change Aboriginal peoples lives but, also one of resistance to change by Aboriginal Australians (Sanders, 2000, pp. 237-240). Further, the continued poor housing outcomes in remote

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1 The word Aboriginal in this context is used to narrow the focus of this research to exclude those persons that identify as Torres Strait Islander to allow a focus on program evaluation of housing in remote mainland Australia.

2 The term 'remote' is used to refer to remote and very remote as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) - 2011 - ABS cat. no 1216

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Indigenous housing and settlement programs leads some to argue that the social world of Aboriginal people living in remote areas is sufficiently different to prevent housing programs designed under a Western philosophical tradition from being broadly successful (Morphy, 2008).

Housing provides shelter from the elements but, from a Western perspective, housing can also influence other effects on social life and well-being through improved health and wealth creation through ownership (SCRGSP, 2011, pp. 8.1.9.1). One downside of house ownership, particularly in Australia, can be the constraining financial liability of home loan mortgage repayments (Vitis, Ware, & Gronda, 2010). From a Western perspective, adequate housing and the ability to pay a mortgage through regular employment, can be observed as an important life course objective for personal, family and community well-being. Although there have been changes in political ideologies over time that have impacted the intensity and manner of remote area Aboriginal program delivery (Sanders, 2010a), the most recent program approach effectively consolidates previous programs and links housing with health, employment and education (Qld.Govt, 2010e, pp. 46-47) to satisfy a broad policy objective to reduce disadvantage (SCRGSP, 2011, p. 1). The reason argued for this consolidation was that fragmented program delivery was the cause of previous program failures and a ‘joined up’ government response would be the solution (Barrett, 2003, p. 6)\(^3\). Some also consider this to be a feature of centrist administrations (Politt, 2003, p. 36). However, privatisation of service delivery, fragmentation of departments, creation of independent boards and agencies have all created additional complexity to public sector program implementation and co-ordination (Bevir, 2003, pp. 470-471). In Australia ‘managerialisms’ demands for accountability, cost effectiveness through performance reporting across sectors and departments, has added additional complexity to governance (Barrett, 2003, pp. 1-4) and therefore to evaluation. Will such an approach just perpetuate the program failures of the past or lead to program success?

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\(^3\) The necessity for change is not explored in detail by Barrett but may be based on new Institutionalism or Political ideology.
Are there alternative explanations that might explain program failure? And how will we know success?

There has been much research undertaken to explain housing use, social requirements and policy issues for housing intended for use by Aboriginal people (Long, Memmott, & Seelig, 2007a; Musharbash, 2008). However, recent investigation criticises the lack of involvement with the remote area Aboriginal program recipients and considers this a significant reason for housing program failure at both the individual house and settlement planning level (S. Fisher et al., 2011, pp. 94-96). A number of authors have argued that higher levels of engagement and participation by Aboriginal people will improve program outcomes (Fien et al., 2008, pp. 94-96; Walker, et al., 2002, p. 23) and others have advocated for the active involvement in evaluation by Aboriginal people to reflect their needs and aspirations, and a greater focus of evaluation toward outcomes and impacts would lead to greater potential for program success (S. Fisher, et al., 2011, pp. 69-70). However, little of this work has progressed to a form that provides for the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives that inform housing program evaluation. If, as Morphy argues, remote area Aboriginal peoples conceptualisation of a good life is different from Western concepts, why is it that these conceptualisations of a good life continue not to be taken into account for program design and evaluation? Further, this suggests that barriers exist that prevent the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. One explanation may be the crowding out of other forms of evaluation practice by the complex requirements of accountability and performance measures required by managerialism illustrated by the evaluation critique of S. Fisher (2011). Alternatively it may be that there is insufficient capacity on the part of non-Aboriginal program administrators to engage with Aboriginal program recipients and meet at the ‘recognition space’ between the two worldviews and make clear what the intended outcomes of a program should be. However, one possible way to navigate through this complexity is to include the use of IRM principles in the evaluation framework.

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3 See (S. Fisher, et al., 2011, p. 92) or Taylor’s (2008, p. 116) version for social indicators
IRM has recently been addressed by Australian Aboriginal academics and presents an opportunity to consider Aboriginal perspectives broadly.

Walker et al. (2002; 2003) utilised IRM to develop a rights based framework and indicators for evaluation and applied this approach, through consultation, to existing program level settings in ‘major city’ and ‘inner regional’ settings with some positive results and a recommendation for further research.

The intention here is to test the proposition argued by Christie (2006, p. 80) that IRM is a framework of understanding that is intelligible to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from either perspective. I will seek to determine if barriers to the use of IRM exist for its use in evaluation of remote area Aboriginal housing programs. Unlike Walker et al. (2002, 2003), in this research, IRM is considered theoretically as additive, not synthesised. IRM in this arrangement is not intended to supplant current evaluation forms or exclude local participation but, to provide another lens for policy and program planning analysis and an entry and starting point for local participation and collaboration. New governance and participatory arrangements would have time and political ramifications however, if successful, could lead to significant gains in program effectiveness.

2. WHAT IS THE CURRENT PROGRAM EVALUATION APPROACH?

Evaluation, in an Australian context, according to Owen (2006, p. 1) is a ‘process of knowledge production which uses rigorous empirical enquiry to enhance policy and program interventions that are designed to solve or ameliorate problems in social or corporate settings’. The Queensland Government Department of Communities6 (2010b, p. 2) defines program evaluation as ‘the process of determining the merit, worth or value of things’ and states that this is undertaken as a ‘systematic and objective assessment of an on-going, completed service, program or policy’. The Australian and State government approach to program evaluation flows

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5 The term ‘major city’ and ‘inner regional’ as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) - 2011 - ABS cat. no 1216
6 In this research, I have used the Qld.Dept. of Communities as an example of State level program delivery and evaluation
from a worldwide trend in economic theory from the 1980’s that sought to minimise the size and costs associated with government bureaucracies by assessment of internal performance (Sharp, 2003, pp. 10,12; Wallis & Dollery, 1999, p. 62). The devolution of management responsibility to the ‘service delivery interface’ consolidated the link with internal auditing and financial accountability (Keating in Sharp, 2003, p. 10) and led to managers and ministers questioning the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of government programs (Sharp, 2003, p. 12). This is now entrenched in evaluation along with ‘cost benefit’ in the case of the Queensland Government (Qld.Govt, 2010c, p. 7). The Queensland Government evaluation methodology exemplifies the current approach and positions internal stakeholders as the generators of program theory with other stakeholder participation occurring after a program planning phase (Qld.Govt, 2010d). Additionally, program recipients are neither prioritised nor specifically required to be included in any evaluation governance arrangement (Qld.Govt, 2010a).

However, this organisation acknowledges that ‘It is important for them [stakeholders] to be given opportunities to contribute and have their opinions taken seriously.’ (Qld.Govt, 2010b). Despite this, the various documents do not state how engagement outcomes are managed in the event that stakeholder views differ from the intent of the previously designed program or evaluation. The resultant effect of this centrist approach to program design and dominant focus on internal evaluation and collection of socio-economic data is that program evaluation takes on the outward appearances of an objectivist ontological understanding of reality. This is a reality with causal laws (i.e. the laws of economics) to provide understanding of the structures and social forces that operate on people and shape most if not all of their actions (Neuman, 2003, pp. 81-87). Neuman (2003, pp. 82-83) suggest this is representative of the common sense, ‘what you see is what you get’ approach to an understanding of the world by Anglo-European societies.

Sewell (2008), although arguing on temporal notions of economics, remarks that the capitalist framework is so entrenched and increasingly absorbed into aspects of social life across much of the world that capitalism’s abstract concepts are accepted as normal. Enmeshed in a world that sees economic life as normal, to describe and assess the social world in terms of socio-economic
statistical indicators, also seems normal, even common sense. Aboriginal authors in the field of Indigenous research methodology disagree with this position. I will outline the theoretical position of Indigenous research methodology and highlight the critiques by these Aboriginal authors of Western perspectives on social research, which holds for program evaluation.

3. WHAT IS INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY?

Aboriginal authors argue that a different approach to social research is necessary to explain the social circumstances of Australian Aboriginal people. They argue that their understanding of the world is different due to their different historical circumstances when compared to a mainly Anglo-European population (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 3). Aboriginal people understand reality as societal relations with ‘country’ (Martin, 2003, pp. 207-208; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 3; West, 2000, p. 39). By situating Aboriginal understandings of reality in this manner, IRM ontology contrast with the objectivist approach of program evaluation where reality is assumed to be universal. The IRM epistemological assumption is that knowledge is gained through reciprocal, integrated relationships and lived experiences (Martin, 2003, p. 209; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, pp. 3,12; Rigney, 1999, p. 116; West, 2000, p. 38). Rigney (1999, p. 116), Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2010, pp. 7,12) and West (2000, p. 275) underscore the importance of using this knowledge for emancipatory objectives whereas Martin (2003, p. 205) prefers the usefulness of the approach as a positioning strategy. The understanding that knowledge is constructed through relationships and lived experience as a theoretical position according to Rigney (1999, p. 116) builds upon feminist research perspectives. IRM authors, by theorising on concepts such as power relations, racism, dispossession, white patriarchy, colonisation (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, pp. 7,12), adapt the epistemological and political approach of feminist critical, and standpoint theory to argue that (in this case Aboriginal) experiences provide a more accurate account of social reality.

7 I define ‘country’ as land that is understood as the site of belonging by traditional owners and their language group. According to Bird (Rose, 1996, p. 7) the word is both a common and proper noun and is understood in animate terms by Aboriginal people.
(Abbott, Wallace, & Tyler, 2005, pp. 44-46, 373-375). According to Neuman (2003, p. 100) critical theorists take a transformative perspective, with the intention of realigning subjective understandings with external objective realities to create action for change and new understandings. The heterodox approach by IRM researchers to knowledge and evidence contrasts with the objectivist approach of current program evaluation methodology. However, one area of similarity between program evaluation and IRM is that these approaches seek to improve the outcomes for those who are researched. The aim of this research is to consider IRM for its capacity to inform evaluation from a theoretical perspective at a policy, program and contextual level in Aboriginal remote area housing settings. The approach conceived of here, is that IRM is additive to program design and evaluation rather than synthesised into current evaluation approaches. I argue that this approach sidesteps the difficulties that the ontological, epistemological and axiological differences might present if an attempt at synthesising of IRM into program evaluation were undertaken. This allows IRM to be considered on its merits as an opportunity for additional and constructive input to evaluation.

I will now consider the barriers to the use of IRM in remote area Aboriginal program evaluation by applying a range of theoretical scenarios to housing program evaluation contexts to assess the usefulness of IRM. In adopting this approach I am informed by the work of Ross et al. (2011) which, although published late in this research process, has been a useful framework for adaptation to this research. They argue that barriers that prevent the co-existence, of Indigenous knowledge and science on an equal basis are due to dichotomous perceptions about each knowledge system based on ideology and power/knowledge asymmetry (Ross, et al., 2011, pp. 50-51). When viewed as a pluralist endeavor, co-existence of these knowledge systems can lead to institutional transformation (Ross, et al., 2011, pp. 50-51).

Table 5.1 (below) provides an overview of the analysis undertaken, here, using a similar framework to that presented by Ross et al.
4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In considering IRM and remote area Aboriginal housing the analysis that follows is guided by the following specific research questions.

- Can IRM illustrate the limitations of current PE frameworks?
- What are the barriers to the use of IRM in alongside current PE frameworks?
- Does IRM suggest alternative approaches to PE that could lead to improved evaluations methodologies?

5. BARRIERS TO THE USE OF IRM IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

Following Ross et al. (2011) Table 5.1 is presented in the form of perceived barriers. However, in this instance, the analysis of IRM and program evaluation shows contrasting theoretical positions at all levels of theory. My approach here is to capture these additional dimensions but position these within the domain of remote area Aboriginal housing. To do this I have extended the format to include not just the epistemological and institutional barriers of Ross et al. (2011) but barriers associated with the theoretical positions of IRM ontology and axiology. I use these theoretical positions to illuminate the potential limitations of current program evaluation by using issues surrounding remote area housing programs.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>BARRIER</th>
<th>CURRENT EVALUATION APPROACH</th>
<th>IRM ANALYSIS</th>
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<td><strong>Ontological barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Aboriginal Ontology not useful to housing evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation ontology based on a partial Western worldview of economic theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemological barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Contextual qualitative evidence not suited to program delivery or evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation evidence based on expert driven empirical observation of generalisable data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Local understandings conflict with standard measures used to evaluate program outcomes</td>
<td>Evaluation results provide evidence of accountability to the state/civil society as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Evidence is too complex to measure</td>
<td>Evaluation evidence is partial and segmented but relies on standardised comparative measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiological barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Aboriginal perspectives on the value of housing not included</td>
<td>Privileging of Western worldview on the value of housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Aboriginal knowledge not transparent</td>
<td>Evaluation knowledge is available to and tailored to particular audiences of the evaluation and may not be understood by program recipients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Aboriginal governance arrangements not suited to Western programs accountabilities</td>
<td>Program design and evaluation controlled by the state with accountability from point of delivery upward to government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1 ONTOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

Aboriginal ontology not useful for housing evaluation (A)

Current evaluation practice relies on Western ontological concepts for the formulation of program plans. Schwandt (2003, p. 353) argues that evaluation of programs relies heavily on these ontologies by following Western scientific principles for the methodical, systematic, logical and technical procedures and processes to gather evidence to support claims of efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes as is the case for evaluation in Queensland (Qld.Govt, 2010c, p. 7). These processes are further supported by perspectives from the field of institutional economics focused upon performance indicators designed to minimise the potential for program failure (Wallis & Dollery, 1999, p. 62). Further, program outcomes and impacts are based on economic theory that associates financial wealth with improvements to well-being (SCRGSP, 2009, pp. 8.38,38.39).

These ontologies differ significantly from IRM. They are segmented, firstly, by a focus upon particular aspects of social life, and secondly, through a reliance on generalisable theory and limited context based evidence, by separation of the program from context. Aboriginal people understand reality as embedded within people, country, kinship ties, ancestors and metaphysical relationships that are interrelated and inseparable (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 6; West, 2000, p. 39).

IRM would ask questions about the relationship that Aboriginal people have with country and how housing programs can improve or maintain this interrelationship and connectedness. Current programs associated with housing exclude this connectedness and allow housing and settlement planning to be separated from this ontological framework. Moran (2009) and Morphy (2005) critique this separation of housing from an understanding of Aboriginal concepts of identity. These critiques argue that the program intentions for the consolidation of regional centres at the expense of smaller communities and outstations, through housing provision, will lead to social and cultural disruption. Current evaluations, by focusing on
generalisable, statistical indicators, do not take account of these embedded relationships and in their absence, is it not possible to assess adequately program success or failure. Instead, failure in these circumstances can only be assessed after program completion as an unintended consequence. Program evaluation methods that rely on surveys to elicit a response from program recipients overlaid with the priorities of government and regional institutions to deliver equitable allocations of infrastructure and services, as is the methodology in Queensland (Williams, 2006, p. 3), may not elicit an understanding of, nor allow a response to differences between Western and Aboriginal ontology.

5.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

Contextual qualitative evidence not suited to program design and evaluation (B)

Evaluation of Aboriginal programs in Australia utilises evidence based frameworks based mainly on the collection of statistics (Pholi, Black, & Richards, 2009, p. 3). This evidence is typically drawn from aggregated data derived from the broad Australian population to form a comparative judgment about the circumstances of Australian Aboriginal people in relation to these predominant societal norms. Aboriginal people understand that evidence is obtained or revealed through relational, shared and lived experiences (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, pp. 6,12). These attributes describe social and communal knowledge creation through an oral, iterative process that is essentially a qualitative experience.

Indigenous Research Methodology would question the relative absence of this contextually derived qualitative data, as evidence, and seek an explanation for the privileging of concepts of knowledge creation that come from the professional expertise gained through university education (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 12), and data drawn from a Western values perspective that sees Aboriginal people as ‘others’ (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010). Nakata (cited in Pholi, et al., 2009, p. 9) expands on this by arguing that statistical approaches condemn Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) people to the choice of either being described narrowly as deficient relative to mainstream Australia, or adopting mainstream values and
losing authenticity as Aboriginal people. What is unclear with the current evaluation methodology is how top-down programs can effectively evaluated local contexts to demonstrate success without engaging more comprehensively with program recipients at this qualitative level and maintaining a reliance on comparative aggregated statistics. Does increased school attendance indicate a good life or a more coercive state?

Some program frameworks in remote area Aboriginal communities indicate opportunities for participation in evaluation. One example is the north west Queensland township of Doomadgee. However, this framework limits the approach to a monitoring and implementation evaluation role within a team of stakeholders over of a centrally conceived program that follows a Western logic model approach (FaHCSIA, 2009c, clause 2.3). Further, the program framework indicates only limited local discussion on house design. In the case of Doomadgee these were intended to be agreed via a technical working group in association with the Doomadgee Shire Council (Qld.Govt, 2011, p. 22) and there is no specific reference within the framework that addresses housing consultation or participation with the Doomadgee community excepting advice on house allocation (FaHCSIA, 2009b). In any event, it is unlikely that opportunities to address the detailed issues surrounding housing circumstances that indicate crowding as a result of young parenthood and familial responsibilities described by one Doomadgee resident (Katter, 2009) were available. This specific situation indicated alternative social norms that suggested this house required larger bedrooms when compared to a standard housing response. These arrangements could only be understood through critical and detailed qualitative inquiry that draws out situated contextual understandings of family arrangements and housing use. Fisher (2008) noted the impact of a housing program at the North Queensland township of Yarrabah that involved a more detailed analysis of the program recipients requirements and, as a result, garnered a sense of ownership and improved well-being. Fisher (2008) argues that this was unlikely to occur with a mass produced ‘top down’

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8 Subsequently a range of ‘relocatable’ houses have been delivered to Doomadgee include a house and ‘Granny flat’ these demountable homes usually only cost effective when built to standard plan form.
solution. Fisher’s post occupancy evaluation does not investigate why this approach lead to the sense of ownership and wellbeing improvement but the account suggests that these communicative and qualitative experiences are important for Aboriginal people requiring housing.

IRM would explore Aboriginal peoples worldviews that requires an understanding of knowledge as a lived and shared experience (Hall in West, 2000, p. 38) associated with family, society and Institutional racism, oppression and dispossession (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, pp. 6-7) that explain the importance to well-being associated with direct involvement in house procurement. Aboriginal epistemological theory suggests that knowledge and understandings about housing are not a separate and independent activity but require integration into the lives of Aboriginal people through relationships and shared experiences (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, pp. 6,13). Through communication, housing extends beyond the object, as measured in evaluation as a statistic of output or as a reduction in overcrowding, to the relationship that housing provision has in the context of these lived experiences. The reciprocal obligations and responsibilities that come with a new house are not just to the institutions that provide them but to the community within which they are situated. This includes those that engage with Aboriginal people in housing provision. These worldviews allow Aboriginal people to embed the new knowledges of housing within there domain. For evaluation to understand success in housing programs, these notions of integration need to be captured within an evaluation framework that can seek out the appropriate indicators that best describes them.

Local understandings conflict with standard measures used to evaluate program outcomes (C)

As noted above, evaluation evidence for program success in remote area Aboriginal housing is understood in terms of an overarching principle of the delivery of statistical equality (Pholi, et al., 2009, p. 3). This approach is heavily influenced by economic thought (Morgan, 2003, pp. 13
and a reliance on comparisons within population health statistics (Pholi, et al., 2009, pp. 8-9). Housing supply as a program outcome is seen to improve health as it will reduce overcrowding which, on Western evidence, contributes to ill health (Qld.Govt, 2010e, p. 48).

For remote area Aboriginal housing, impact evaluation would require answers to the question about outcomes (Owen, 2006, pp. 47-48). In this instance, and considered statistically according to current practice, additional housing measured against an aggregated population would indicate improvements to overcrowding. However subjected to a more detailed ground truthing, observations might reveal deficiencies in the strategy indicating that the needs of the program recipients have not been met (Owen, 2006, pp. 47-48).

An IRM approach would investigate the implications for evaluation were the program recipients’ worldview given precedence over the current Western paradigm (Rigney, 1999, pp. 117-118) and investigate how this might alter data collection and interpretation (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 12). This in turn may lead to an analysis of the state’s attempt to provide equality and improved health that suggested an alternative housing program response.

In an example of statistical overcrowding, Musharbash (2008) illustrates the example of the township of Yuendumu9 where, large groupings of Aboriginal people congregate in housing situations. Musharbash (2008) observes these groupings to be arranged by marital status, gender and familial association and that there is fluidity in size and dependent on the social circumstances, with numbers significantly larger than the statistic intended as the basis of comparison. The large groupings in Musharbash’s womens’ camp were associated with socio-cultural responsibilities for the spiritual and practical safety of members (Musharbash, 2008, pp. 31-32). These larger Aboriginal household sizes in remote areas are not unique to Yuendumu (Sanders, 2005, pp. 15-16). Folds (2001, p. 80) similarly explains the social

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9 Yuendumu township is located north west of Alice Springs and is located in the country associated with the Warlpiri people.
imperative of large groupings that, from the Pintupi\(^{10}\) perspective, contribute to well-being in contrast to Western concepts. These socio-cultural requirements are also noted by other authors (Long, Memmott, & Seelig, 2007b, p. 8). The primacy that Pintupi place on their responsibilities to relatives results in some houses overflowing whilst others are empty due to the passing of a family member or absence for ceremonial purposes (Folds, 2001, pp. 80-81). Folds (2001, p. 80) links this necessity of Pintupi to congregate to the states notion of equality and argues this program approach is futile.

This does not suggest that the respective Aboriginal groups construe the current circumstances in these settlements and townships as a good life, rather, it points to the inadequacy of current evaluation indicators to provide such evidence. Indeed, by understanding local reciprocal responsibilities and the differences these can bring to housing use, IRM approaches can enhance program success whilst providing meaningful evaluation to program recipients.

Local evidence is too complex to measure (D)

Current program evaluation evidence that is collected for remote area Aboriginal housing provides for a limited range of dimensions that include numbers of houses provided, numbers of houses refurbished and statistics associated with overcrowding and house ownership. Taylor (2008, pp. 117,122-123) argues that this is driven by a Western perspective and suggests statistics of this nature are intended for the bureaucratic processes of government and policy action and do little to inform local issues of community development. Taylor (2008, pp. 115-116) also indicates that differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews make the development of specific indicators complex, not just through contradictory notions about wellbeing, but through a lack of understanding. For example Taylor (2008, p. 120) points to the tension between policies associated with socio-economic equality which requires migration and integration compared to choice and self-determination which allows difference and remote living. Taylor (2008, p. 116) suggests this area for discussion on the meaning and usefulness of

\(^{10}\) Pintupi people belong to the country west of Alice Springs and near the Western Australian border
indicators occurs in a ‘recognition space’. Although he proposes an approach that considers broad arrangements between Government and Aboriginal people, his work does not extend to the detail of analysis of program outcomes, suggesting only that the debate on evidence appears to concern debates on precision (Taylor, 2008, p. 124). Christie (2006, p. 80) defines IRM as that meeting point with the Western research perspective that is ‘recognisable and legible’ but from an Aboriginal perspective is ‘that part that is shaped, governed and understood within Indigenous knowledge traditions. In practical terms Christie (2006) identified a number of features of IRM, in a Yolngu context, that are relevant to evaluation. IRM improved communication, solutions emerged only in context, action and solutions occurred simultaneously, some knowledge remained incomprehensible, old knowledge could be given new meaning in a new context, and research questions could emerge from discussion and negotiation (Christie, 2006, pp. 82-88).

One recent example of the complexity within this ‘recognition space’ in the context of housing, concerns the relocation of an entire family group from the Northern Territory town of Yuendumu to Adelaide. This relocation resulted from a dispute between two kinship groups over the death of a young man from cancer (Neill, 2010). According to a local Aboriginal worldview, sorcery was involved which, in Aboriginal law, required tribal punishment through spearing (Neill, 2010). However, one of the protagonists admitted that tribal punishment may not be carried out correctly due to the loss of skill due non-Aboriginal interventions over time (Neill, 2010). Despite mediation by the NT police service, this dispute has lead to violence and a murder (Neill, 2010). With regard to these social circumstances traditional owners signed a document banning a return to Yuendumu of the kinship group, rioting occurred and a number of houses were vandalised and ransacked.

An IRM approach would investigate the significance of shared experiences of familial relationships, societal, institutional racism and political oppression and statutory dispossession (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 7) and would seek to critically analyse the historical
government policies for settlements that has led to congregations of much larger groups and how this has contributed to the current social circumstances and understandings of ownership. Morphy (2005, pp. 7-9) and Moran (Moran, 2009) critique current government programs that seek consolidation of remote area Aboriginal populations into larger settlements on socio-cultural grounds in similar contexts elsewhere in the Northern Territory. Further, Folds (2001, p. 33) notes another situation where the Pintupi `felt like strangers’ without power, whilst they remained at the settlement of Papunya located on the traditional lands of others.

IRM would also seek to question the relationship between local understandings of law (Rigney, 1999, p. 117) and how these interact with the acts and regulations of state agencies. Aboriginal people from these areas of Northern Territory recognise the authority of Traditional Owners. In the situation described over, by Neill, local understandings of Traditional Ownership at Yuendumu appear to transcend other rights and allow the Warlpiri people to ban certain groups from the area. This can be observed as a socio-cultural action in response to a dispute not a property management response and suggests that property ownership, as understood from a Western perspective is different, and needs to realign with local understandings of ownership for programs to be successful. In asking questions about these relationships it might be concluded that the destruction of property was a cultural response to resolve conflict and a manifestation of the collective responsibilities to carry out punishment in the situation where a non-Aboriginal intervention has prevented application of tribal punishment. The attempt by non-Aboriginal people to influence a social outcome by first removing one group of people and then seeking mediation has influenced an outcome that resulted in property damage. The original riot that lead to a stabbing, caste as murder by the police service, could be seen as a tribal punishment, through violence, gone wrong through lack of practice due to historical intervention, introduction to alcholoh and the clash of cultural norms (dé ishtar, 2005, pp. 376-377). As confronting as this analysis may be, settlement planning cannot be separated out from the social context within which it, is placed or, has created. Settlement
planning is contingent on an understanding of these complex concepts of ownership and responsibility and the responsibilities of ownership that need to be agreed between the recipients and providers of programs. If Government wishes to provide individuals with home ownership in an environment conducive to long term sustainability and Aboriginal people require frameworks of governance that differ from mainstream approaches, settlements and housing occur within this ‘recognition space’ and form part of these agreements. However housing location and settlement planning in this reading has significant influence on Yuendumu society and may be better decided by kinship and country affiliations rather than location relative to mainstream services as argued by Morphy (2005).

5.3 AXIOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

Aboriginal perspectives on housing not included (E)

As discussed earlier Western perspectives, equate house ownership with material wealth and improvement in health and well-being. Current programs embed these ideas, and evaluation proceeds on this basis. From this perspective of materiality, individuals can provide benefits, fulfill responsibilities to their family members, and obtain choice and self-determination. This position requires active involvement in the mainstream market place through employment and the purchase of housing. The Cape York Institute (CYI) represents a number of Cape York Aboriginal communities and argues for this approach (CYI, 2007, p. 37; FaHCSIA, 2009a, pp. 70-79, 89). The CYI program approach privileges a western perspective on the value of housing and this is reflected in the evaluation indicators. However, not all Aboriginal people accept the CYI position.

Godwin (2009, p. 13) illustrates an alternative perspective of the Aboriginal people of the north west Queensland town of Dajarra that understand the value of housing only for its utilitarian use for shelter and storage. For these people, the country they inhabit and the kinship relations, not the physical structure, is representative of home and the thing they most value (Godwin, 2009, p. 11). Musharbash (2008, pp. 33-35) and Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. (2008)
extend this concept of home to be spatial, temporal, relational and metaphysical. These broader meanings of home as ‘country’ and kinship contact are reflected in mobility patterns that contradict Western notions of a settled society with single home ownership (Prout, 2009, pp. 178-179). Further, Godwin (2009, p. 13), Folds (2001, p. 80) and Musharbash (2008, pp. 30-32) all note the preference for outdoor living suggesting the importance of housing for its utility as shelter is diminished to the level of particular weather events.

These are contrasting positions. IRM would explore with remote Aboriginal communities the historical and contextual factors (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 7) that led to the absorption of elements of Western views and constructs and the relationship these have to ‘core values’ that can be retained within an Aboriginal community, as argued by Martin (2003, p. 211). Understanding if these Western constructs were accepted and absorbed, supplanted through separation and dispossession, or imposed via colonising practices, provides depth to an analysis of ‘core values’. Further, determining if the ‘core values’ are supportive of, or damaging to, a communities well-being can assist program design to build communities not just the physical infrastructure of settlements.

The alternative positions on housing related above underscore the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia in different settings. Although the CYI (2007, p. 37) argues for acceptance of a largely Western construct in Cape York11, Christie (Christie, 2006) observes and collaborates in ‘two-ways’ learning in North-East Arnhem land, and Folds (2001, p. 122) describes the appropriation of elements of Western society by Pintupi as they see relevent for their life course similarly to Godwin’s (2009) account. These different approaches to acceptance or resistance to Western programs describes significant local variation and can confound a program design that seeks to deliver unified outcomes. In the scenarios described here, some communities will not be inclined to take up private home ownership.

Understanding the differences in local values attached to housing can inform local

11 Current evaluation indicators do not extend into matters of cultural difference although this is a notion supported by Noel Pearson of CYI.
implementation, strengthen evaluation knowledge and provide a more accurate measure of program performance.

Aboriginal knowledge not transparent (F)

Current evaluation practice sees the value of knowledge as a means of communicating performance within the bureaucracy of government, to the parliament and ministers who, in turn, can demonstrate accountability to the society they represent (Owen, 2006, pp. 241-242). In an example of this, the Queensland Government department, responsible for delivery of remote Indigenous housing, aligns the focus of evaluation within a paradigm of effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness that further includes ‘cost-benefit’ (Dept.Communites, 2010a, p. 10) which could broadly be described as a suite of tools to assist management performance of programs internally (Owen, 2006, p. 237). Owen (2006, p. 10) considers that this focus is, not only a broad objective of government (and not-for-profit) to spend public moneys wisely, but that this occurs more so in Australia in a climate of fiscal restraint. However, in addition to this monitoring evaluation focus, Government also undertakes outcomes evaluation which in the Queensland remote area Aboriginal housing programs is reported in statistical terms (Qld.Govt, 2011). These public reports provide basic information on the gross expenditure and the number and locations of houses constructed or refurbished, and associated activities. However monitoring evaluation reporting is not available in the public domain. Although this may be sufficient to satisfy the broader public requirement to know that ‘something is being done ‘to ‘overcome Indigenous disadvantage’, this manner of knowledge production obscures the program recipients understanding of the performance of the program. One author suggests that the manner of public reporting is opaque in any event (Altman, 2011a, 2011b).

Aboriginal knowledge production is understood to be partial, contextual, relational and conferred (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 4). IRM would question how this concept of knowledge production and the historical circumstances of colonisation, that yields unequal
power relationships between Aboriginal people and the state (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 12) might impact on their expectations of government reporting processes.

Aboriginal peoples’ understanding of knowledge production could provide an explanation for their acceptance of this asymmetrical information flow, as they might acknowledge the information received as recognition of a particular relational attribute where, at some later point in time other information may be revealed. Folds (2001, p. 117) illustrates the opaque nature of government processes to the Pintupi in relation to a local understanding that income improvement could be achieved by obtaining money directly from the Canberra mint. In his position, as a ‘whitefella’ government representative, it was assumed by an Aboriginal colleague, that Folds had direct access and control over the methods for printing money, and Fold’s indication of amusement at this suggestion was taken as a polite refusal to reveal secret ‘whitefella increase business’ (2001, p. 117). Although this might seem be an exceptional example, Aboriginal understandings of non-Aboriginals as the ‘Boss’ or as government ‘middle men’ and providers of resources is noted in other Northern Territory Aboriginal groups by dé Ishtar (2005, pp. 372-373). Other cultural reasons associated with knowledge production, such as dispute minimisation (Folds, 2001, p. 150) and cultural norms regarding the asking of too many questions (Burbank, 2006, p. 6; Harris, 1988, p. 4), also limit the possibilities for Aboriginal people to ask the critical questions about the nature of programs and their outcomes and reinforce this asymmetrical information sharing12. Brown (1991, pp. 262-263) argues that understanding information flow and seeking symmetry is one way to ensure democratisation in development. However, this could only apply to information that was local, contextual, and relational. The observations noted in this paragraph lead to the conclusion that current program evaluation practices are not transparent to remote area Aboriginal people and reporting, in any event, is unlikely to make sense.

12 I have focused on values and norms here but in remote areas where English can be the 3rd language this can be a constraint to information flow
5.4 INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

Local obligations and reciprocity conflict with program governance and accountabilities (G).

The issue of governance in remote Aboriginal settings has played out across the media, political, policy and academic domains (Ivory, 2008, p. 233) at a heightened level in the years leading to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)\textsuperscript{13}, and subsequently, led to governance becoming an element of current programs. These public statements promoted the unilateral view that remote Aboriginal Australian communities were dysfunctional, this had led to a social crisis in these communities and ‘self-determination’\textsuperscript{14} as a policy agenda had failed. As a consequence, it was argued, these communities were incapable of self management and state intervention was necessary to reinstate community norms and re-build governance capacity (CYI, 2007, p. 38).

In reality, there are success stories of remote area Aboriginal governance of organisations that predate this recent commentary, and have shown flexibility to transcend a range of different policy environments and are noted by other authors as successful examples of Aboriginal governance. Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation has developed a governance arrangement that synthesises informal Aboriginal negotiation practices with formal Western governance that includes the integration of empathetic non-Aboriginal executive officers amongst ‘heterogenous’ groups of Aboriginal people (Altman, 2008). Thamarrurr Regional Council/Development Corporation utilises a system of network governance based on the ways of understanding negotiation and conflict resolution that has developed organically amongst the related clans over time (Ivory, 2008). In effect those people within the clan can inherit responsibility or have their role conferred by the clan with the understanding of their reciprocal responsibility, they are monitored and they ‘have to report back’, and they look after and are nurtured by the clan (Ivory, 2008, p. 250). These roles can also be based on gender (Ivory, 2008, p. 250).

\textsuperscript{13} This has now been renamed the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Self-Determination’ was a policy period from 1972 to the NTER, which was an attempt by the state to move away from assimilationist policies to Indigenous autonomy but, within Western governance structures such as councils and incorporated bodies.
p. 235). This presents a contrasting governance arrangement to Western forms where representation confers decision making status on behalf of the group until the role is relinquished. Liberman’s account (1980, pp. 38-39) points to the importance of deliberative practices within social gatherings that affirm solidarity of opinion in Western Desert\(^\text{15}\) Aboriginal Society. Alternatively, Waanyi Mining Services, a commercial arm of Waanyi National Aboriginal Corporation, has a governance model based on Western concepts (NPC, 2008a; Qld.Govt, 2008, p. 51). Folds (2001, p. 82) presents yet another alternative where, from external appearances, governance is ‘unruly’, unequal and with favouritism toward specific families but is actually controlled through ‘rigorously enforced mechanism of checks and balances’ significantly different from Western worldviews. There are numerous other examples of successful but alternative governance forms that respect and integrate local cultural values in remote Australia (ANTaR, 2010). These variations are not described by current evaluation nor assessible at the aggregated level reporting by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) (SCRGSP, 2011).

Significantly these organisations have developed different governance models, but in all cases, they highlight the importance of their relationship with their respective communities and the significance of the organisation’s role for the maintenance or promotion of cultural values and financial support of culture (BAC, 2007; NPC, 2008b; TDC, 2010). Most organisations deliver services for the state and rely heavily on funding from these sources\(^\text{16}\). However, in articulating their governance arrangements, these organisations position their responsibilities toward their communities and in tension with government notions of service provider accountability to the state. Government appears to understand these notions with the most recent OID (SCRGSP, 2011, pp. 11.11-11.49) reporting. This report acknowledges these existing governance arrangements and recognises the importance of ‘cultural match’ in organisation governance. However, within the constraints of the deficit model reporting of OID, the reporting is limited to

\(^{15}\) Western Desert aboriginal people belong to country to the west of Pintupi

\(^{16}\) In this brief overview Waanyi Mining Services demonstrates a commercially aligned model another example would be the ALPA stores in Arnhem Land.
the economic viability of organisations, and programs delivering governance education through Western education models of business (SCRGSP, 2011, pp. 11.11-11.49). Further, governance training is reported at an aggregated national level, as an example, 15% of university and VET students were enrolled in governance related education (SCRGSP, 2011). However, in remote Australia this is not useful data. One example is the Thamarrurr Regional Council/Development Corporation area\textsuperscript{17}, with less than 2% of the Aboriginal student population undertaking education in business (ABS, 2006) and is significantly less than the aggregate statistic.

In an evaluation environment where outcomes are focused on the importance of socio-economic indicators of wealth, housing, education and the like, and where remote communities, according to policy, are expected to transform from predominantly welfare and state provisioned settlements, to towns operating in a marketplace, questions need to be raised about the nature and meaning of governance, and how data are used and assessed to describe successful organisations.

IRM would inquire into the use and values attached to these data that seek to explain an aggregated relationship of the state to a local context, where statistical data at the local level has little relationship to aggregated data as a whole and where governance is prioritised as a local concern. IRM would ask questions about the unilateral implementation of policy and program implementations when successful governance models existed that could be built upon. And further, IRM would also seek explanations for the absence of program components that might allow local communities to apply their own innovations to governance. And finally, IRM would also explore the values that relate education to governance in local organisations, that present different governance arrangements when compared to the governance models understood by the state, to gain an understanding of how successful governance is understood in these situations and what barriers exist to their use.

\textsuperscript{17} 2006 ABS local government area
As mentioned earlier (see 5.2) Current evaluation in Australian and Queensland Government social programs is heavily influenced by ideologies that seek to minimise government failure in the delivery of programs (Wallis & Dollery, 1999, pp. 62,65-71). Knowledge in forms that illuminate the efficiency, effectiveness, appropriateness and cost benefit of the program are said to improve program performance and indicate program success. According to Schwandt (2003, pp. 359-360) this evaluation approach seeks to ensure accountability of the state to civil society as a whole through the mechanism of performative analysis. As also discussed (see 5.3) this accountability process is facilitated upwards from the site of program delivery toward the seat of government (Owen, 2006, pp. 241-242). By contrast, responsibilities within Aboriginal governance are understood as a reciprocal arrangement predicated on the importance placed on relationships not on material wealth (Altman, 2008).

The form of governance observed in an Aboriginal organisation can be associated with the importance that particular communities place on the role of the organisation and its objectives but, alternatively the governance arrangements may reflect the power relationships between the state and the community (Smith, 2008, p. 76). Evaluation measures based only on Western perspectives entrench that value position and maintain the historical power relationship allowing the state to maintain control over the structure and output of these organisation. Reporting to a funding authority program success or failure, attributable to either sufficiency or lack of capacity to attain a Western standard, can never convey success or failure to meet community responsibilities and cultural development needs as understood by both the community or organisation. Recent Australian Government Office of the Coordinator General of Remote Indigenous Services (CGRIS) recognises these deficiencies and seeks alternative worldviews to evaluation of accountability.

We need to also move more quickly to ensure that local communities have a greater role in the accountability systems. Accessible community-specific data and a meaningful role for local communities in the evaluation of the approach are critical. It
is also important to identify strategic issues which contribute to progress. (CGRIS, 2011, pp. 85-86)

To undertake this evaluation role government will need to understand the local differences in governance and accept that reciprocal responsibilities will influence statistical outcomes. A framework of program evaluation research that takes account of governance models that include linkage to broader community social and cultural development outcomes rather than specific economic outcomes is likely to create a better measure of program success. However this model of evaluation methodology moves away from government technical and expert assessment of broad criteria to a participative evaluation by the community at the community level. This approach is a move away from the theoretical and scientific toward the political, practical and interpretive analysis of the social, historical and cultural contexts, with the potential to bridge difference (Schwandt, 2003, p. 357). Programs enabling Aboriginal peoples’ understanding of governance in small businesses associated with housing, or governance training in larger organisations delivering housing and employment of Aboriginal people, need to be designed and evaluated within a framework that acknowledges not only the material wealth that these roles might bring to individuals, kinship relations and communities, but how these roles enhance the interrelationship between social and cultural prospects for the individuals, groups and communities. Although this example of governance training in housing is limited, it does not take a great leap in thinking to understand the broader implications of this approach.

6. DISCUSSION

A recurring theme that is brought to the surface with the lens of IRM is one of variability where comparison is made across different local contexts. This is a challenge to the current evaluation approach that aligns with the notion of a large sweeping approach to program design and housing delivery. These local differences suggest that there is a need to ask questions about the adequacy and nature of evidence at these broad scales and how, by excluding these local differences, the effectiveness of program design and implementation of programs, and the
worthiness or success of program is assessed. Further these local differences lead to questions about who should make decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of evidence and which evidence should count. At the institutional level this can be a question of power relationships and representation. In outstation/homelands communities cohesive governance and decision making is more often uncontested. But in growth towns conceived by government as centres as economic activity this becomes more problematic.

Economic theory and ‘managerialism’ have entrenched an approach to program management that significantly focused evaluation on the wise expenditure of public funds. For the tax paying public this is relevant. There is also worthiness in reporting statistically where these statistics produce meaningful information for all stakeholders including the ‘good numbers’ for Aboriginal people as argued by Walter (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 12). However, Walter (2008, p. 29) also points to the limitations of these statistical indicators which I will discuss later.

My analysis of barriers to IRM in program evaluation indicates that local qualitative encounters can provide a rich source of data that can better inform policy, program and program evaluation. However, this analysis also poses questions about the relationship between Western and Aboriginal epistemological traditions, who decides what is counted as evidence, how are data collected, and how will they be assessed across nationally defined goals?

There are a range of positions that are held on the validity of combining qualitative and quantitative data in research. Sarantakos (2005, pp. 34, 36, 45-49) provides a succinct discussion of the debates and arguments which I will not present here, I will however rely on his conclusion that each method has particular qualities that make them suitable for examining ‘particular aspects of reality’ and that the evidence collected should be the most useful and meaningful available. This infers that where local contexts differ, local data should be the most useful. These arguments are also known in the world of economics in debates arguing for ‘pluralism’ in
response to ‘formalism’ (such as those suggested in the of current context of ‘Close the Gap’ initiatives) that is separable from context and is set in opposition to the common-sense, imperfect, partial Keynesian theory that may apply in some circumstances (King, 2002, p. 84).

In my analysis of barriers, I note the socio-economic focus and the exclusion of Aboriginal values, which brings to the surface the question of decisions on assessment of program impacts. This is not just a technical question to which I will return, but also one that considers concepts of equality and democracy. If we accept the proposition that Aboriginal people have a different understanding of what it means to have a good life and that societal improvement comes in other ways than material wealth, then the conception and understanding of evaluation of social justice and measures of equality needs to be reconsidered. Walter (2008, p. 29) argues that statistical comparison cannot discover reason for disadvantage, provide solutions or provide a meaningful understanding of the complexity of Indigenous life. Young (cited in McLaughlin & Baker, 2007, p. 63) is critical of equity concepts focused on material goods and argues for equity based an assessment of social relationships both between people and between groups. This is a broad reading of Young but, in the context of Walter’s (2008, p. 29) observation regarding the powerlessness and marginalisation of Aboriginal people, a participatory approach that has a focus on relationships within groups and re-engagement with the state through rebalanced power relationships appears a useful way forward. Cornwall (2008) notes the slippery slope and dangers in the processes of participation with the broad range of contested meanings and opportunities for the powerful to reshape the agenda. This potential for sidelining of the process of participation is also noted by S. Fisher et al. (2011, p. 94).

Seeking participatory approaches in contexts wherein, as my analysis suggests, social, cultural and local contextual circumstances variously shape access, presents some difficulties, including language barriers. I argue that these could be overcome with local representation. The experiences of Bawinanga suggest empathetic non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal people familiar with

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18 ‘Close the Gap’ is the colloquial term for The agenda, endorsed under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) between the Commonwealth of Australia and the states and territories.
non-Aboriginal processes do form suitable conduits, that could also apply in the participatory evaluation process.

7. POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

The analysis of barriers indicates that IRM may provide a useful framework to add to program evaluation as a process, and suggests that evidence obtained about the context of a program at a local level will provide a more accurate understanding of the program requirements. The analysis also points to the value in relationship building in order to develop a clear and shared understanding of the program outputs and outcomes, and address unequal power relationships. It points also to collaborative and participatory arrangements as possible ways forward.

7.1 COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL RESEARCHERS

Holmes (2010, p. 112) provides an account of ethnographic fieldwork methodologies that respond to the contemporary imperative of research as a social and reciprocal co-production, that is relevant to the needs and research interests of the participants. In his research on Warlpiri ecological knowledge he utilises anthropological fieldwork practice over an extended period of time to build relationships with the community to undertake research (Holmes, 2010, p. 115). The output reflects the needs of, and importance to the community of both maintaining cultural practices and traditional knowledge and integrating these practices into their ‘hybrid economy’ (Holmes, 2010, pp. 261-262). Significantly, for this research to be relevant to the Warlpiri of the township of Lajamanu, it was necessary for Holmes to co-produce a methodology that enabled an understanding of ecological knowledge from a Warlpiri perspective, as determined by the Warlpiri (2010, pp. 128, 142-219). This required Holmes to ‘let go’ of his own cultural framework (Holmes, 2010).
Christie et al. (2010, p. 77) when discussing a Yolngu\textsuperscript{19} education project similarly indicates the importance of long standing and ethical relationships in collaborative research and reinforces the relevance of situating knowledge production within country. They make the point that inquiry does not begin with a question but with a discussion of the issues allowing the story to unfold (Christie, et al., 2010, p. 72). A demonstrable outcome of this flexibility in research agenda is that this project shifted from Elder participation to control over education pedagogy and output (Christie, et al., 2010, p. 70).

These accounts suggest \textit{inter alia}, that the context of time or timeliness, and personal and institutional commitment have a significant influence on the ability for these methodologies to be integrated into current state sponsored or financed programs with their political and budget planning cycles.

\subsection{7.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR)}

Henry, et al. (2002) undertook an analysis of research methodologies considered useful to the Indigenous research reform agenda. They note that PAR research methods and techniques were designed to allow community control, discussion, decision making and resolution of local issues (Henry, et al., 2002, p. 8) and, in Indigenous contexts, could create shared ownership of research and provide community based analysis that provided a focus for community action (Henry, et al., 2002, p. 8). Henry et al. (2002, p. 9) indicate that although there is literature that supports this methodology, in the field of Indigenous research but, a range of issues exist that can prevent a successful outcome. These issues are firstly, the potential power imbalance between the researcher and the disadvantaged group such that the researcher’s ‘worldview’ may be imposed on the group (Henry, et al., 2002, p. 9). Secondly, participants may not represent an homogenous group which can lead to a range of positions on the research ‘problem’ and the possible solutions (Henry, et al., 2002, p. 10). Thirdly, the positioning of the researcher may be such that the empowerment of the research agenda by the community is

\textsuperscript{19} This spelling is more commonly used in the literature to describe the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land and differs from Christie's source document.
impossible due to funding or institutional priorities or the self-interest of the researcher (Henry, et al., 2002, p. 10). However, Henry et al. (2002, pp. 10-12) do point to a possible solution to these issues by including reflexive praxis as part of the researcher's work allowing an Indigenous co-researcher to facilitate this praxis to ensure the privileging of Indigenous voice.

Comments by Henry et al. on institutional priorities play heavily on the proposals in this research to decentralise control and decision-making. Do we place trust in our institutions to act on our behalf or, do we place faith in local communities, supported by government, to make their own decisions to bring about the changes as they see necessary for a good life. This theme, at least rhetorically, has traversed the policy landscape for non-Aboriginal Australians since 1901 (Sanders, 2010b). Sanders (2010b) sees this as an ongoing debate about equality or difference, and choice or guardianship but overlaid with varying forms of political ideology. According to Sanders (2010b, p. 317), recent policy and programs have returned to guardianship. My analysis suggests the possibility that a return to choice may lead to improved program outcomes. I outline my preliminary ideas for an IRM evaluation framework that enhances choice through government support.

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20 Some States and the Commonwealth have allowed all citizens to vote since 1901 but this was not well known or publicised to Aboriginal people. The Menzies reforms of 1961 and changes to the Queensland electoral act in 1965 are more reflective of the reality of representation (Stretton, n.d.).
8. IRM FRAMEWORK

Figure 8.1 – IRM EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

In constructing this graphic of the IRM framework, I have intentionally moved away from a flow chart style of diagram and adopted a form that might be more amenable to Aboriginal ways of understanding. In doing this I am informed by the work undertaken by Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box (2008). In this framework, I suggest that Government programs are peripheral to, but impact on Aboriginal peoples lives. By envisioning Aboriginal people at the centre of program design and evaluation, the IRM framework operationalises (De Vaus, 2002, p. 14) the ‘recognition space’ described by Taylor (2008, p. 116) wherein remote area Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people can come together to create policy, program design, program implementation, and evaluate housing program outcome and impacts. Conceived this way opportunities exist for Aboriginal program recipient participation at all stages of the program. My analysis suggests that program work should be informed by the realities at the local and contextual level, and in turn, inform how implementation should proceed, and how the Aboriginal program recipients measure success, or worth of the program. It is important to note
that in this arrangement, a definition of 'local, contextual level' requires refinement and agreement through participatory processes with the program recipients. This embeddedness of the program recipients through the program cycle also returns experiential knowledge of program performance to the policy level whilst, providing empowerment and ownership of the program to the recipients. The framework indicates IRM abutting an Aboriginal worldview. Here IRM fulfills the dual requirement of making culture understandable to non-Aboriginal people but also as an initial perspective on Aboriginal culture and worldviews, as a starting point for dialogue with Aboriginal program recipients. The idea behind the link to other programs is to alert us to other existing programs that may impact or influence and/or the possibilities of supplemental programs or projects. Of additional note is the IRM framework, graphically, touches remote area Aboriginal culture 'lightly'. This is intentional and signifies the notion that Aboriginal people have control over this arrangement and that researchers are to follow strict codes of behavior and protocols. I will now turn to the detail of the diagram.

Remote housing program design
The IRM framework can apply an Aboriginal lens to the broad implications of policies and programs for remote area Aboriginal housing. The framework is intended to operate in both directions, in that it can both inform policy, prior to drafting or, it can cast a critical and filtering lens over policy proposals. This is represented by the chequered pattern. Also indicated here is participatory involvement at the program level, providing for a monitoring function that reinforces the reciprocal and relational arrangements between policy and program planners and the Aboriginal recipients.

Aboriginal people
The IRM framework places Aboriginal people at the centre of program concerns. This series of concentric circles represents remote area Aboriginal people, their social and cultural life and their knowledge system. In this way, design, implementation, and output must pass via the evaluation lens of Aboriginal people and be sensitive to the impacts of the program on
Aboriginal social and cultural life. In this schema, evaluation of Aboriginal life is embedded within Aboriginal knowledge systems and brought to the surface through the IRM framework, and through participatory and collaborative processes, to allow program insight and improvement. This graphic also imbues program implementation with participatory and collaborative objectives.

Housing program

The IRM framework is intended here as a starting point for discussions with the program recipients about a housing program. It is possible, from my analysis, that elements of the IRM framework will be accepted, some will be rejected, others will gain more prominence as these participatory and collaborative encounters unfold. It is quite possible that this framework will be assessed and modified by participants to create meaning, and relevance, in much the same way that I have adapted and modified the work of Pawu-Kurlpurluru, Holmes and Box (2008). In doing so, the program participants can formulate responses that both have meaning to them, and can be interpreted through the framework to provide direction for program design and knowledge building for policy improvement.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Brown (1991, pp. 261-262) in considering non-government organisations in 'Third World' development two decades ago presented arguments that I would argue are relevant to the current OID program evaluation focus. Brown(1991, pp. 261-262) argued that there are a number of fundamental problems with social programs designed for social change in a 'Third World' context. First, these programs are 'highly subjective' in designing value changes presumed necessary from the evaluators 'own worldview' (Brown, 1991, pp. 261-262). Second, an inherent 'dualism' that privileges the elite 'modern' world view ideology against the 'traditional' worldview permeates program design such that interpretations of outcomes must be observed from this perspective to indicate success or problematise the recipients of the program (Brown, 1991, pp. 261-262).
I have argued that IRM is a potential way forward in that it allows a framework that can inform policy and program design at the broad level but also informs program implementation and evaluation at the local, situated, contextual level.

In this thesis I investigated the theoretical barriers that minimise Aboriginal remote area residents’ contribution to evaluation in housing and showed that an IRM framework has the potential to strengthen our understanding of the nature of evidence that could adequately describe housing program success (or failure) for program recipients and providers alike.

Further, I have argued the significance of participatory and collaborative approaches as a necessary and integral component of an IRM evaluation framework to allow a nuanced understanding at these contextual local levels that show considerable variation between each context and mainstream Australia that cannot be capture by current evaluation frameworks. An approach such as this extends the role of evaluation beyond current boundaries and, the nature of this approach, has a time and cost implication. Time, in the sense that meaningful relationships need to be built between collaborators and the state. And the approach to cost needs to extend beyond narrow budget considerations to think more about efficiency and effectiveness if program planning and evaluation continues to be poorly delivered designed and implemented over the longer term. In addition there is a need to address the political will of the state, to move away from a narrow economic agenda and immediate constraints of the political cycle.

However, the suitability of IRM as a framework for remote area Aboriginal housing needs to be tested in the field, at the site of program delivery and is therefore a necessary area for further research. Moreover, the nature of this research was constrained within the limitatations of Masters thesis requirements and therefore confined to consideration of remote area Aboriginal housing. It is also possible that the direction of research could extend beyond this program area.
The purpose of the suggested application of IRM is not to circumvent the worldviews of the program recipients nor to supplant the program intentions of the state but to provide a common gateway for analysis and framing of discussion at the contextual level.

My analysis indicates that there is no singular worldview amongst Aboriginal recipients of housing programs but that through IRM, situated contextual ideas about how to obtain a good life and how housing contributes to that good life can be explored without limiting the evidence of effects to generalisable statistical hypotheses or entrenched policy positions that underscore the majority society norms. As Schwandt (2003) suggests, this nuanced and more complex engagement with the ‘rough ground’ of contested ideas might disentangle the complexities of life and allow us get on with each other. In this way IRM can contribute to housing program evaluation.
REFERENCES


*CAEPR Discussion paper No 275/2005*. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU.


