The complexity and simplicity of evaluating Kaupapa Māori programmes

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Foreword

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the New Zealand Psychological Society for developing this award to support the development of Māori focussed psychological research and to the Scholarship Committee of 2008 for determining my research as worthy of this award. I would also like to thank Nga Pae o te Māramatanga (Māori Centre for the Development of Research Excellence) and BRCSS (Building Research Capacity for Social Sciences) for their support of my research along the way as well.

This paper is intended to provide a (very) brief snapshot of my doctoral thesis. While it's not possible to provide context to my thesis in its entirety, my intended purpose of this paper is twofold; firstly to provide a quick overview of key research themes; and secondly in the hopes that this creates enthusiasm to read future publications I intend to produce from this study.

Introduction

As a multidisciplinary endeavour, evaluation draws upon the disciplines of psychology, education, economics, sociology and the political sciences. With its links to measurement, evaluation was traditionally tied to the scientific paradigm of inquiry in the study of social phenomena. It is for this reason that evaluation is both simpler and more complex than either individual conclusion: simpler at the meta-level, more complex in detail.

Well documented over the past two decades has been the negative experience Māori have had with research and researchers.

An examination of evaluations history reveals developments influenced over the years by the social and political climates of the day in both the United States and Aotearoa. While experiences here have been more closely aligned to managing Treaty relationships and the delivery of Māori appropriate services, the political influences still prevail. The decisions as to what types of programmes are funded, and how their success is determined continues to reflect government policy, direction and focus.

Well documented over the past two decades has been the negative experience Māori have had with research and researchers. Gains made by leveraging off Māori towards: gaining professional and academic qualifications, perpetuating the process of colonisation, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and maintaining gate-keeping mechanisms in academia have been long recognised (Awatere, 1981; Bishop, 1994; Bishop & Glynn, 1992; Pihama, 2001; Robson, 2002; G. Smith, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999; Te Awekotuku, 1991; Walker, 1990; Watene-Haydon, Keefe-Ormsby, Reid, & Robson, no date).

Method

The focus of my research was on gaining an understanding of how evaluation practice in Aotearoa captures the cultural values of programmes derived from an indigenous epistemology – in this context Matauranga Māori.

My orientation to the research has been to place culture at the centre; a process familiar with international indigenous research. Often referred to as cultural centredness the key elements involve recognition of the indigenous epistemological influences on decision making processes (Agrawal, 1995; Allwood, 2002; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Hendrix, 2002; Masolo, 2003; Meyer, 2003, , 2006; Schreiber, 2000). By following a Māori research approach (as described by Mead (1996)) that took Māori ethical processes into consideration my intention has been to ensure that Māori cultural values, practices and aspirations are taken for granted as the norm throughout the project.

With the use of case studies I engaged a phenomenological project that explored the experiences of providers, programme recipients and evaluators to understand the complexity and simplicity with which people manage the evaluation of Kaupapa Māori programmes in Aotearoa.

Findings

In keeping with the need to provide a brief, yet meaningful summary of my thesis results, I have chosen to present, one positive issue from each of the participant groups (whānau, providers and evaluators). Please remember that this is a very simple overview of matters that are more thoroughly considered within the thesis.

Whānau perceptions of a local programme's success were determined by its ability to capture their local needs, aspirations and cultural practices. Given the negotiated development of a programme to include such matters whānau were

clear that measures of success in an evaluation should reflect a local ontological base. Cultural values, practices and teachings as a means to support community development in response to local needs were considered an appropriate means for determining the influence of a programme on its local community.

Providers were critical of funders failing to maintain the level of support for outcomes and processes that were verbally negotiated during the establishment phase of a programme.

Providers of Kaupapa Māori programmes had negotiated processes within their organisational structures (eg. Iwi, Māori and mainstream provider organisations) to allow for the inclusion of cultural practices within established and developing programmes. To some extent the level of acceptance within the organisation has worked well. Less successful has been the acceptance of cultural practices by funders when it comes to determining effectiveness. Identified problems occurred when accountability measures placed emphasis on numerical outputs that carried a heavy weight in funding decisions regarding the future of a programme. Providers were critical of funders failing to maintain the level of support for outcomes and processes that were verbally negotiated during the establishment phase of a programme.

When reflecting on their experiences, evaluators were similar to providers with regards to the level of success they had with getting cultural values, concepts and processes accepted by funders. Particular challenges had been experienced with including cultural values of the programme in evaluation reports to government funders. While some had succeeded with embedding cultural references throughout their reports, editorial feedback from funders (principally government agencies) of draft reports that directed the removal of such were particularly challenging. Evaluators noted that the

continued focus on tangible measures (such as numerical data to determine milestone achievement) still prevailed by ministries (as commissioners of evaluations).

(Very brief) Discussion

The presentation of my findings and analysis here are only a superficial reflection of the complexity of issues that require an equally complex response. Unlike recruitment and retention strategies that have agreed targeted outputs; developing relationships with Māori whānau and providers is a political activity (Masters, 2005) that fluctuates depending on multiple factors; including which political party is leading government at any point in time (Mataira, no date).

My research participants comment that there have been and continue to be genuine attempts to integrate recognition of cultural values in the delivery and evaluation of programmes derived from a local ontology by some. However, the acceptance of such culturally-centred practice varied hugely across the programmes. Despite the growing number of models that encourage an explicit examination of a programme's effectiveness for Māori (Cunningham, 1995; Durie, 1994; Ratima, et al., 1995) evaluation of social service programmes developed from a Matauranga Māori epistemology are primarily being considered (where funder interests are concerned) by numerical outputs that do not adequately reflect the culturally-centred nature behind programme development and implementation.

Partnership dynamics and the recognition of true partnership relationships, where power and control are equally distributed, are not present despite commentary that suggests they exist in these contexts.

Experiences shared by participants show that funders (of Kaupapa Māori programmes and the evaluation of Kaupapa Māori programmes) are willing to accept cultural values as

relevant during negotiation phases. However, the acceptance of those same values in determining success measures is less evident. The impact of research and evaluation has thus not shifted from those experienced by Māori, and noted by academics over two decades ago. Partnership dynamics and the recognition of true partnership relationships, where power and control are equally distributed, are not present despite commentary that suggests they exist in these contexts. This lends itself to the argument that cultural consideration within evaluation is less about the usefulness and adaptability of the tools, but more so about power and control issues.

Conclusion

Although Māori evaluators, providers, and communities have attempted to incorporate cultural concepts into evaluations of programmes derived from a Matauranga Māori ontology, the extent to which the depth and complexity of these cultural processes, skills and knowledge are incorporated in meaningful ways into outcome measures are minimal, because those who fund evaluation of Kaupapa Māori programmes have barely changed reporting and contracting processes in the past twenty years.

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