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Culture Writes the Script: On the Centrality of Context in Indigenous Evaluation

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Abstract

Context grounds all aspects of indigenous evaluation. From an indigenous evaluation framework (IEF), programs are understood within their relationship to place, setting, and community, and evaluations are planned, undertaken, and validated in relation to cultural context. This chapter describes and explains fundamental elements of IEF epistemology and method and gives several examples of these elements from evaluations in American Indian communities. IEF underscores the importance of putting context ahead of method choice and suggests that context exerts an even greater impact than previously recognized. © Wiley Periodicals, Inc., and the American Evaluation Association.

In proposing her unified theory of context in evaluation, Rog (2009) defined five aspects of context: problem context, intervention context, setting, evaluation context, and decision-making context. She located culture as one of six dimensions within each aspect. This chapter uses the example of an indigenous evaluation framework (IEF) to illustrate the centrality of context to one's evaluation approach or methodology. In so doing, we argue that culture plays an even larger role than Rog has envisioned. IEF demonstrates how culture infuses all contexts and defines methodology itself; it is not simply one of several descriptive but separate dimensions that could be

included or omitted, considered or not considered. One cannot step outside cultural context in practicing evaluation. Although considerations of culture must never be ignored, particular cultural identifications (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, community affiliation, language, social class, age, health status, disability, immigration history, gender, sexual orientation) may be more or less salient within a given evaluation context. Rog posits the five aspects of context working together, so careful examination of the problem context, the program context, the setting, and the decision-making context sheds further light on these salient cultural intersections. Rog's intent is to get to actionable evidence. To do so requires attention to epistemology, which sets the parameters of legitimate knowledge and is itself culturally defined.

The IEF was developed in response to requests from tribal colleges to have an evaluation model that would be more respectful of their settings than Western models imposed by external funding organizations. With support from the National Science Foundation (grant number REC-0438720) to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Joan LaFrance and Richard Nichols developed the model with assistance from expert advisors and focus groups and pilot tested it with tribal college personnel and Indian K–12 educators.

Bringing context from background to foreground is not new for indigenous evaluation. IEF is a framework defined by context and understood within it. Context defines the methodology of an indigenous approach, inclusive of both epistemology and method. Pragmatic concerns of budget and other resources of time, data, and capacity, while still relevant, yield to more fundamental concerns of what counts as evidence, how knowledge is gained, and what evaluation approach will benefit the community, both through what is learned during the evaluation process and through the findings or results.

The primary focus of this chapter is the context of evaluation; however, this chapter also speaks strongly to setting as a defining aspect of methodology. IEF is defined by its physical and cultural location, in a way that expands Rog's (2009) definition of setting as the "environment surrounding the intervention/program." In that definition, the focus is on intervention, the surrounding environment blurring in contrast with the sharper programmatic image. In IEF, the setting defines everything, including the understandings of what constitutes a social problem, appropriate responses to that problem, meaningful evaluation of the problem and/or the response, and useful knowledge to advance the well-being of the tribal community.

Rog begins with method choice as her focal concern; posing the question, "What methods provide the highest quality and most actionable evidence for whom in which contexts?" Her explicit intent is to push back against a "methods-first approach" (i.e., one that privileges certain methods irrespective of context) and to make more nuanced selections that are "context-sensitive." Her five aspects of context are ones that she deems important to consider "in choosing methods and in carrying out an evaluation (from design to reporting)" (Rog, 2009).

Indigenous evaluation takes the focal concern back to methodology, inclusive of both epistemology and method choice. IEF is a context-first approach. It is, in a sense, the epitome of context-sensitive evaluation practice, though our interpretation of this concept may extend beyond Rog's vision, as discussed below.

Overview

Indigenous evaluation is not just a matter of accommodating or adapting majority perspectives to American Indian contexts. Rather, it requires a total reconceptualization and rethinking. It involves a fundamental shift in worldview. Indigenous methodology challenges us to rethink both epistemology and method. Although methods of indigenous evaluation share common ground with qualitative methods, the two are not synonymous. Not all indigenous methodology is qualitative, nor are all qualitative methods congruent with indigenous contexts.

The fundamental elements of epistemology and method within indigenous methodology are illustrated in the work of Margaret Kovach (2010) and Vivian Jiménez Estrada (2005) as well as previously unpublished case examples of two American Indian evaluators, Carol Davis and Dawn Frank. Together, they help map tribal epistemologies and illustrate a blend of culturally specific and culturally adapted evaluation methods. Storytelling and metaphor also serve as methods to anchor indigenous evaluation to symbolic and textual references holding deep ties to the culture of a people and place.

An indigenous framework also has implications for validity. Context is critical to valid inference; programs can be accurately understood only within their relationship to place, setting, and community. Working deeply within indigenous cultures and communities simultaneously supports validity and expands validity arguments. Methodological justifications of validity such as those argued by Rog must be placed in cultural context, supported by justifications grounded in theory, life experience, interpersonal connections, and concern for social consequences. Each of these justificatory perspectives will be illustrated with indigenous examples.

Consideration of consequences bridges, in the following section of this chapter, to a brief but important discussion of issues of sovereignty and ownership of evaluation data and of the process itself. The next section reflects on the implications and limitations of the indigenous framework for evaluation practice within and outside of American Indian contexts. Depending on the evaluation question, an indigenous approach may or may not be useful even in an indigenous context. The chapter closes with reflection on Rog's model, specifically on her proposal that context be moved from background to foreground, from a character role to a leading role in our evaluations. But what if the role is cast even larger? An indigenous framing of evaluation illustrates how context in fact writes the story itself.

Ways of Knowing: Epistemology as Methodology

Research and evaluation are about creating knowledge. Generally, the epistemological orientations for evaluation stem either from a Western positivist paradigm that posits a neutral or objective stance toward the natural world or from a constructivist position that recognizes subjective and multiple realities. Both of these paradigms are based on Western constructions of knowing, not indigenous epistemologies. Contextualization of research and evaluation involves not only assessing and being sensitive to environment, but also examining the epistemological paradigms underlying the ways in which knowledge is viewed. Epistemologies that define the knowledge creation and axiology or values for use of knowledge are mediated by culture. Increasingly, indigenous scholars are giving voice to indigenous epistemology and defining its role in shaping their research (Estrada, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Weber-Pillwax, 1999). Cree scholar Margaret Kovach (2010) argues that indigenous methods do not come from Western philosophy but rather flow from tribal epistemologies. She recognizes that there is similarity among tribal worldviews; however, she would further contextualize indigenous epistemologies to a specific tribal situation.

An indigenous worldview embodies the notion that all things are living, spiritual entities and interrelated, including knowledge. Also, there is a profound sense of place woven throughout native thought (Basso, 1996). It is this sense of place that gives rise to a tribal culture. For example, Plains Indian culture is defined by those tribal peoples' relationship to the Plains' physical geography, its landmarks, and the stories that relate to them, as well as the creatures that inhabit those spaces. Creation stories define human life in concert with the earth and sky, which differs from a worldview common in Western culture where a supreme being is separate from nature and humans are given dominion over the material world. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) defines models, causality, interpretation, and explanation in ways that go beyond objective measurement but honor the importance of direct experience, interconnectedness, relationship, holism, and value. He writes:

> It is the depth of our ancient human participation with nature that has been lost and indeed must be regained in some substantial form in modern life and modern science. The cosmological and philosophical must once again become "rooted" in a life-centered, lived experience of the natural world. (p. 5)

Indigenous knowledge values holistic thinking that contrasts with the linear or hierarchical thinking that characterizes much of Western evaluation practice. As Kovach argues, "knowledge is neither acultural nor apolitical" and there is a need to recognize distinctly indigenous ways of knowing that influence one's approach to doing research and by extension, evaluation (Kovach, 2010, p. 30).

Figure 4.1. Indigenous Evaluation Model
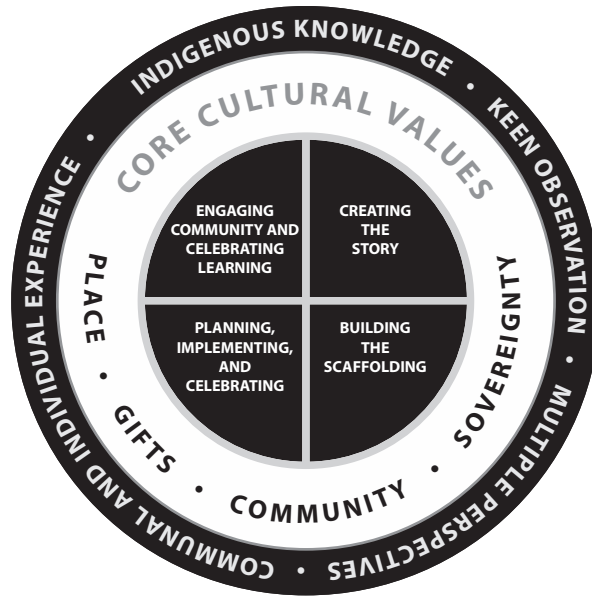
Introducing indigenous ways of knowing into evaluation practice provides a foundation for IEF. In the IEF model (see Figure 4.1) indigenous knowledge encircles the framework. It provides the foundation for understanding the world and is found in the traditions of a people, their creation stories, clan origins, and the encounters of their ancestors. It also includes empirical knowledge gained through careful observation from multiple perspectives and revealed knowledge acquired through dreams, visions, and ceremony.

Knowledge has function and, as a living entity, it has moral purpose. The late Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (1999) explained that the elders were interested in finding the proper moral and ethical road upon which humans should walk and, for knowledge to be useful, it should be directed toward that goal. Everything that humans experience has value and provides some aspect of instruction. Deloria notes that

Absent in this approach was the idea that knowledge existed apart from human beings and their communities, and could stand alone for "its own sake." In the Indian conception, it was impossible that there could be abstract propositions that could be used to explore the structure of the physical world. Knowledge was derived from individual and communal experiences in daily

life, in keen observation of the environment, and in interpretive message they received from spirits in ceremonies, visions and dreams. (p. 44)

The holistic framing of an indigenous worldview and the extensive sense of interrelationship, community, and family require privileging indigenous views of the source and purposes of knowledge and situating evaluation within a sense of place and time. The notion central to empirical methodology that one can separate out program variables for independent analysis is neither useful nor congruent with an indigenous way of knowing. Learning and knowledge derive from experiencing the program, and it is the subjectivity of this experience that leads to meaning and understanding. Deloria (1999) explains that the elders cautioned, "we cannot 'misexperience' anything; we can only misinterpret what we experience. Therefore, in some instances we can experience something entirely new, and so we must be alert and try not to classify things too quickly" (p. 46).

Indigenous knowledge cannot be standardized (Kovach, 2010); however, Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999), a Métis researcher, has described principles that should guide methods based on indigenous ways of knowing. The first, based on the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things, is the mandate for respect, which goes beyond knowing rituals and practices and protocols. It is: "believing and living that relationship with all forms of life, and conducting all interactions in a spirit of kindness and honesty" (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, p. 41). Respecting relationship requires a motivation to contribute to the community and a belief that as an evaluator/researcher you will benefit only to the degree that your work benefits others. She explains that the foundation of research is the lived indigenous experience and this must ground the work, not theories or ideas that are brought to bear on this experience. Theories will "spring from the people themselves—theories that explain the many facets and connections of our individual and collective lives" (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, pp. 42–43). Transformation results through internalization of the learning. This assumes that the evaluators/researchers take responsibility for transformations and take into account the broad community interrelationships when making decisions regarding research choices. Finally, and most important for the theme of this chapter, indigenous research is grounded in the integrity of the community. If the research methodology is right, it is right only for that community, because it is only there that it has integrity.

Indigenous epistemologies are realized through their expressions in specific, grounded tribal epistemologies. Kovach (2010) describes *Nēhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin* (Plains Cree knowledges) that includes a tribal-based holistic epistemology, story, purpose, experience, ethics, ways of gaining knowledge, and a consideration of the historical colonial relationships of her people. Vivian Jiménez Estrada (2005) draws from her Maya culture to describe the *Ceiba*, The Tree of Life. Using this cultural metaphor, she examines how it

defines research methodology within an indigenous context. She finds direction through the representations of each element of the tree: the bark that provides structure to ensure values respecting time and place are respected, the trunk with its life-promoting energies that respect the ideologies with which she allies her research, and the branches that inform the responsibility to "share the protocols with the respect and reverence that not only participants deserve, but life itself" (p. 50).

Dawn Frank (2010) describes how the Lakota concepts of *Mitakuye Oyasin* (all my relations) and *wolakokiciyapi* (learning Lakota ways of life in community) influenced the development of her research methodology. A three-dimensional braided model represents elements of Lakota ways of knowing and respect and elements of Western scientific inquiry. She explains how, after being assimilated into Western science culture to develop a researchable hypothesis for her dissertation, she had to return to her Lakota roots to reevaluate the research and then develop a model and methodology that considered Lakota laws and protocols.

In an NSF-funded program led by Dr. Carol Davis (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), the North Dakota Tribal College Faculty, in collaboration with the North Dakota University Faculty and the North Dakota Association of Tribal Colleges, developed a context-specific model for guiding undergraduate student research in science (Davis, Long Feather, & Padmanabhan, 2007). The process of building students' knowledge and skills is grounded in an inclusive circular model of mentoring students that recognizes the influence of family and community as well as faculty members within the Tribal College and the University. Research results are scrutinized in terms of their value to the community, their relationship to traditional cultural knowledge, and their impact on community members now and into the future, out to the seventh generation. The possibility of harm is considered alongside concerns of reliability and validity. Sharing of research includes culturally appropriate presentation of information, with specific attention to relationships that need to be addressed in reporting, including use of ceremony, approval of elders, and discussions with community. The sharing stage is also seen as an opportunity to inquire and explore new research, honoring the cyclical nature of research and evaluation under this model.

These examples illustrate that indigenous epistemologies share common understandings while also being shaped into culturally and tribally specific methodological models. The IEF acknowledges that we need to privilege our own epistemologies. It defines general characteristics of these epistemologies without claiming to define one standard. Rather, the framework suggests that those who want to apply an indigenous approach to research or evaluation consult tribal cultural experts to understand tribal ways of knowing for that community. This process is often implicit. It can be brought to life through language, protocols for behaving, deeply held relationships within the community and with the land, and the people's lived experiences.

Values and Methodology

In the IEF model, indigenous knowledge forms a circle around core values. The axiology of indigenous research and evaluation is connected to epistemological notions of relationship. Values become central to methodology based on relationship or what Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) describes as *relational accountability*. "In essence this means that the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)" (p. 99). In the IEF, the core values of place, community, honoring individual gifts, and sovereignty inform an evaluation methodology that reinforces the relationship and responsibility to land, community, individuals, and nationhood.

Honoring a sense of place requires evaluation to fit within the contours of the location, including its history and contemporary realities. Honoring community requires transparent methods that embrace inclusion and participation. Honoring the gifts of each individual necessitates respectful assessments of performance and progress. Ross (1992) describes how he came to understand this value from Canadian aboriginal elders:

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

Finally, honoring sovereignty recognizes nationhood. It reaffirms place, community, culture, language, and political presence. Indigenous evaluation methodology is explicitly related to nation building (Robertson, Jorgenson, & Garrow, 2004). It seeks to contribute to the health and well-being of the community first and foremost rather than to generalization to larger audiences or other settings.

Although these values resonate in most tribal communities, the IEF does not suggest that they are the only values or the defining values that influence indigenous evaluation. As with tribal-specific epistemologies, the values that guide research and evaluation methods need to be defined at the tribal level and are understood through a community's traditional knowledge, lived experience, and spiritual expressions.

Story as Metaphor and Method

Telling stories is fundamental to being indigenous peoples. Stories are a method and means for understanding the consequences of lived experience. Indigenous evaluation is about telling stories. Stories can employ lexical form as well as visual symbols or metaphors, song, and prayer. Both the story and related metaphors are culturally nuanced and contextually situated

(Kovach, 2010). Aware of the power of metaphor and story, the authors of the IEF sought ways to use them to explain evaluation from an indigenous perspective. Eric Jolly, one of the advisors for the project, provided both the metaphor and story for the IEF by sharing what he had been taught by his grandmother while learning to weave a Cherokee basket. He explained that the basket-making process begins by interweaving two pairs of thin honeysuckle vines into a square or cross that forms the base of the basket and which symbolizes the four directions and elements of creation. On the journey of life, this represents the beginning of spiritual awareness. Additional pairs of vines are woven together, and with the original crossed sets of vines, they begin to form interwoven triangles that give shape to the basket. The interconnection symbolizes the spiritual relationships of the creator with humanity, animals, and all that is on earth. As the weaving continues, there are sets of concentric circles that form inner and outer walls that are held in tension, giving the basket its strength. It is this strength that gives the basket its integrity, for a strong basket is a useful basket. Also, as the basket is being woven, it is continuously turned to ensure that it forms a balanced whole.

The story of the Cherokee basket became a metaphor for the relationship of indigenous evaluation to program implementation: Each is interlaced with the other. Evaluation requires this continuous reflection and learning to ensure that multiple perspectives are included in the interpretation of the program experience (LaFrance & Nichols, 2009).

The IEF invites the creation of culturally rooted metaphors as a way to begin the process of story creation. Metaphor replaces the Western concept of the logic model, which is based on a linear and a causal relationship between actions and outcomes. The metaphors created with the use of the IEF do not necessarily have to represent a causal model, but they symbolically represent images that have meaning within the cultural context of the program and its evaluation. The following are examples of program metaphors, developed by four different tribal college personnel using IEF.

An Ojibwe group from the Great Lakes used a canoe as the metaphor for a program that had a goal of building an environmental science curriculum based on the 13 moons of the Ojibwe calendar. Thirteen moons surrounding a canoe represented the seasonal content of the curriculum for each month. Various elements of the canoe represented cultural values guiding the curriculum philosophy based on the wisdom of elders and the seven teachings of the Ojibwe, and the roles of elders and youth. The image captured the relationship of elders and youth, traditional values and curriculum philosophy and content, which are all the elements of the program. It also illustrated the relationship of the program (the canoe) with evaluation (the oars), and it is the oars that guide the navigation of the program.

In another example, a Plains tribe's Winter Count—a buffalo hide calendar with pictures or symbols depicting memorable events—was used as the metaphor for a comprehensive project to introduce students to science, nursing, and mathematics. Among tribes of the Great Plains, the Winter Count

was used to record important events over the course of a year, from first snowfall to next first snowfall. The group used this metaphor to represent key relationships and activities of the program. These included environmental restoration, engaging youth with elders, and using the outdoors as classrooms.

A group from a desert tribe drew a mural as their metaphor for their bridging program, which prepares students for employment or enrollment in the tribal college's transfer program. The mural represented various pathways for students to take and the program resources (such as child care, transportation, and financial aid) to support their journeys. In the history of this tribe, journeys were made from the desert to the ocean to collect salt, which is considered a powerful medicine. Success in the program is represented by salt needed all along the journey. Thus, the word *salt* appeared several times along the various program pathways as it represented the spiritual sustenance needed by each student to successfully complete the journey.

A Pacific Northwest tribal group used the metaphor of a cedar tree for their program, a first-year experience that is a set of interdisciplinary courses for those just entering college. The cedar tree is used in tribal ceremonies and has great cultural significance and meaning. The roots of the tree represented the traditions and language of the people. The trunk of the tree was the program with its strength representing building trust, strengthening school–community relationships, and changing pedagogical practices. Various branches of the tree reflected program elements of the first-year experience, including learning communities, place-based learning activities, engaged faculty, and co-curricular activities. The image illustrated core tribal values that at this tribal college are reflected in respect for the teaching of the ancestors and elders, care of the community and the land, and respect for culture and language. Finally, the upper portion of the trunk was the program evaluation.

These examples illustrate the power of symbols and place among tribal peoples. Use of stories has always been a means for passing on "teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective" (Kovach, 2010, p. 95). IEF establishes metaphor as a way to create story by replacing the "proposal language" of goals, activities, outputs, and outcomes with images that have rich cultural grounding. In this way, evaluation becomes the process of telling the story and reflection on the lessons learned.

To tell the story, the IEF model proceeds to the next phase of evaluation, building the scaffolding. It describes evaluation design and processes in ways that deeply respect tribal values. Elements or plot lines are selected for examination (forming the evaluation questions), the data to be gathered and their sources are identified, timelines are established, and analysis and reporting procedures or tasks are specified. This phase is somewhat analogous to evaluation design but involves taking account of cultural and community

considerations. For example, the IEF illustrates ways to shift evaluation questions, which may be seen as rude and/or intrusive from a tribal perspective, to evaluative statements. From an indigenous perspective, data-gathering tools such as interviewing, especially when dealing with tribal elders, involve taking time to build a relationship of trust, through conversation rather than quizzing for information. Furthermore, the use of cultural and/or tribal protocols becomes a matter of personal growth for the indigenous evaluator. These are matters not only to be "taken into consideration," but to be learned, practiced, and internalized, resulting in cultural reaffirmation.

The next two phases of the IEF model are planning, implementing, and celebrating evaluation; and engaging community and building capacity. These phases are also based on indigenous cultural values. Planning and executing the evaluation are inclusive processes, with the evaluator viewed as a partner in the lived experience of the program. This positioning enables ongoing reflection and learning. It also makes the process of evaluation transparent and provides opportunities for capacity building. Respect also means negotiating ownership of information and a willingness to work with tribal internal review boards or research committees (LaFrance & Crazy Bull, 2009). Often, permission to disseminate one's evaluation work products must be sought on a case-by-case basis. The dissemination of evaluation findings within the community or tribe also becomes a celebration, the culmination of a knowledge-creation process.

The tools used in doing indigenous evaluation may be similar to those used by nonindigenous evaluators. However, culture is guiding their use and may dictate the development of new tools or the use of tribally specific tools. Evaluation, as storytelling, is culturally and contextually bound, just as understanding what has merit and worth is mediated by culture and community.

To summarize, the IEF involves a fundamental paradigm shift in which the nature of knowledge itself expands beyond empirical knowledge to include traditional knowledge and revealed knowledge. It redefines culturally bound understandings of "actionable evidence" and privileges place-based, experiential knowledge as valuable to learning and improving both programs and the broader communities of which they are a part. IEF expands and enriches method, inclusive of both designs and information-gathering strategies and tools. Designs are often emergent, time frames generous. Evaluators step in rhythm with the community rather than setting their own pace. Holistic understandings of interconnectedness are valued more than the postpositivist notions of isolating variables to explore causality and generalizability. Information-gathering strategies are relational, reflecting the nature of knowledge itself. Communities may create and utilize new strategies specific to their local context or they may take fresh approaches to strategies already recognized as legitimate tools of data collection.

Culturally Contextualizing Validity

Rog's (2009) focus on context is in the service of achieving high-quality, actionable evidence. Though the language may differ, none would question the need for trustworthy information with which to guide programs or policies. Based on her professional training and extensive experience, Rog (2011) is fundamentally concerned with attaining the strongest possible inferences of causality. Accuracy of causal inference is an important and relevant validity concern, though not the only such concern, even within a traditional Campbellian typology (Chen, Donaldson, & Mark, 2011). When one moves beyond inquiry grounded in postpositivist epistemology and explores alternatives such as constructivism, critical theory, or culturally specific epistemology, the construct of validity must expand accordingly. Narrow definitions of validity constrain how scientific rigor is understood and operationalized, limiting professional legitimation of culturally based paradigms (Johnson et al., 2008). Mirroring Rosaldo's (1993) call to expand and redefine what we mean by culture, Kirkhart (2005) has argued that the construct of validity must be capacious enough to encompass work guided by both traditional and alternate paradigms. Working within IEF, indigenous epistemology calls us to rethink traditional understandings of validity and broaden the bases on which validity is argued. The five justifications of multicultural validity identified by Kirkhart (1995, 2005) can assist in that process. They are: experiential, interpersonal, methodological, consequential, and theoretical.

Indigenous evaluation does not emphasize causation as it is framed in a postpositivist epistemology; however, it does emphasize relationships with a context. Genuine understandings are grounded in place, setting, and community. Experiential justifications of validity, those grounded in the lived experiences of participants, are central to an indigenous framework. As noted above, knowledge is derived from individual and communal experience in daily life, in keen observations of the environment, and in interpretive messages received from spirits in ceremonies, visions, and dreams (Deloria, 1999). Local language may be required to capture the meaning most closely related to the English-language expression of validity. For example, Kovach (2010) writes,

> In considering research validity, I hear the Elders' voices: Are you doing this in a good way? There is a Cree word, *tâpwê*, which means to speak the truth. This is about validity or, relationally speaking, credibility. To do this means to tend to the process in a good way, so that no matter the outcome you can sleep at night because you did right by the process. (p. 52)

Doing the process in a good way involves community accountability. Validity under indigenous epistemology is holistic and relational. Interpersonal justifications are grounded in relationship, though here the person-centered

terminology fails to capture the full scope of relationship to context, inclusive of animals, nature, and the cosmos. Methodological justifications here refer to measurement and design procedures that support validity arguments. In general, they are the most similar to Western arguments, but in the details, they may appear quite different. For example, Frank's (2010) methods of conducting interviews with tribal elders were grounded in three unwritten *Woope* (Lakota laws), which may be thought of as custom law, natural law, and spiritual law.

> Lakota protocol included presentation of a gift and an opportunity to pray to the creator for what was discussed in the interview and for mentioning any individuals in our discussion who may be deceased. The deceased were also honored with a tobacco offering after the interview was completed. This Lakota protocol provided comfort to the elders, knowing that their deceased relatives would be respected. (p. 58)

Interestingly, indigenous epistemology shares Rog's commitment to action; it is action oriented (Kovach, 2010). Consequential justifications of validity are therefore extremely important. Inquiry is expected to give back to the community and support tribal sovereignty and well-being. The value of the evaluation is judged in part by what it contributes to the collective good. Understandings that do not translate into community benefit may be flawed or incomplete. Theory-based justifications may draw upon characteristics of indigenous theory itself or be adapted from Western theoretical frameworks. Maori scholar Graham Smith (cited in Kovach, 2010, p. 47) describes indigenous theory as located within a culturally contextual site, born of organic process involving community, reflecting an indigenous worldview and focused on change. Examples of Western frameworks that have been adapted include: relational theory, participatory action research (Wilson, 2008), and critical theory (Kovach, 2010). When invoking Western theories in this justification, the intent is not to seek external validation, but instead to provide "a complementary framework for accepting the uniqueness of an Indigenous research paradigm" (Wilson, 2008, p. 16). To support validity, theory must be congruent with the context of practice (Kirkhart, 2010).

Our intent here is to illustrate how the terrain of validity arguments necessarily widens when reflecting on the quality of evaluation undertaken from an indigenous perspective; we do not wish to reify categories. These (and quite possibly other) justifications work singly and in combination in response to setting, to support strong, trustworthy understandings. Rather than thinking of the five justificatory perspectives of multicultural validity categorically, the image of a web (Kovach, 2010) may more accurately reflect the process of weaving strong validity arguments. It is also important to note that while Kirkhart's multicultural validity framework approaches validity through a cultural lens, it was still developed within a Western perspective and

may therefore be an inadequate representation of validity from an indigenous perspective.

Guardianship and Issues of Sovereignty

The historical record of the use and effects of evaluation among Indian communities has often resulted in marginalizing tribal communities and peoples. For example, when being compared to standardized norms of educational performance, Indian children and youth are labeled as underperforming, as these norms do not consider the special gifts of individual students. The consequences of this historical record have resulted in skepticism among indigenous peoples about the value of evaluation. IEF was built around a reaffirmation of cultural values in the practice of evaluation in indigenous communities. Furthermore, the role of evaluator within those communities comes with great responsibility. Kovach (2010) notes that "[a] researcher assumes a responsibility that the story shared will be treated with the respect it deserves in acknowledgment of the relationship from which it emerges" (p. 97). The IEF is based on a core value of commitment to tribal sovereignty, especially regarding "ownership" of evaluation data and of the evaluation product itself. Indigenous evaluators must take special guard to ensure that the uses of their work are in concert with tribal values and respectful of the nation-building aspect of evaluation.

The implications and limitations of the IEF for evaluation practice within and outside of American Indian contexts are also worth consideration. It has been noted that the IEF utilizes a definition of knowledge that is considerably different from the Western research model. Knowledge, for example, may be derived from spiritual sources and involves the use of cultural protocols that may be specific to particular tribal settings. The IEF, therefore, may not always be applicable outside indigenous settings. Great care and consideration should be given to adaptation of the IEF practices and methods. As Kovach notes, "story, as a method, is used differently from culture to culture, and so its application falters without full appreciation of the underlying epistemological assumptions that motivate its use" (2010, pp. 96–97). Although the IEF may be adapted to other settings, it should be understood that there would be a fundamental adjustment in its epistemological grounding.

Reflections on Rog's Context of Evaluation Model

The IEF described here offers strong support for Rog's argument that considerations of both evaluation context and setting profoundly influence method choice and implementation. The importance of putting context ahead of method choice cannot be overstated. Rog (2009) expertly illustrates the limitations of a methods-first approach to effectiveness evaluation, showing how it can lead to avoiding important questions. She proposes an alternative

to a methods-first approach, which she labels *context-sensitive evaluation practice*. IEF is certainly congruent with this conceptualization.

IEF also suggests another interpretation, one that takes the argument even further and suggests that, despite its strengths, Rog's model still significantly underestimates the impact of cultural context. Context goes beyond notions of accommodation and adaptation to contextual conditions; rather, it defines the entire evaluation landscape, including how it is viewed, understood, designed, performed, and used.

Rog (2009) places context alongside relevance and rigor in pursuit of actionable evidence, but indigenous evaluation tells a different story, one in which context plays an even larger role. Rather than sitting alongside relevance and rigor, context actually *defines* them. Moreover, context also defines what counts as actionable evidence, the ultimate end of Rog's model. Relevance, rigor, and actionable evidence are all culturally and contextually located, defined by values, assumptions, and circumstances. None can be understood outside of context. We propose that this holds true for all evaluation; however, context may often go unrecognized, unnamed, and unexamined, as Rog has noted. IEF makes it visible and its role explicit.

Rog has advanced considerations of context from background to foreground, from a character role to a leading role in our evaluations. An indigenous framing of evaluation illustrates how context in fact writes the script and staging and directs the entire performance.

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Endnote

The protocol for introducing indigenous scholars includes their full name, tribal affiliation, family lineage, and geographic location of significance. We have honored this protocol although shortened it here to author's full name and tribal affiliation.

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