

Amplifying the voice of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET stakeholders using research methodologies: Volume 1.

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Abstract

Researchers in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts within Australia are frequently faced with the challenges of working in an intercultural space where channels of communication are garbled with interference created by the complexities of misunderstood worldviews, languages, values and expectations. A concern of many researchers in these contexts is to ensure that the voices of research participants in remote communities are not only accurately represented, but are allowed to transcend the noise of dominant paradigms, policies and practices.

This paper brings together the experiences of five researchers in the space of remote vocational education and training. The authors present three vignettes from research in the context of health, employment and education. These vignettes highlight some of the conundrums for researchers as they attempt to harmonise the aims of research with the expectations of organisations involved. Wrapped around these vignettes, the authors highlight the progressive thinking associated with Indigenist and culturally responsive methodologies, and draw together conclusions that may assist other researchers in their attempts to find ways that support the credibility, integrity and validity of the research process while at the same time doing the same for the voices of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

Introduction

Those conducting research and evaluations in cross-cultural contexts are faced with the complexities of working in or across diverse cultural spaces. These complexities are accentuated by the cultural distance between researchers and research subjects. Nevertheless, despite the challenges, we as researchers and evaluators in the education and training space have found ourselves working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, often in remote communities and sometimes with little understanding of local cultures or languages. We have seen researchers and evaluators come and go, delivering reports and writing journal articles that fail to accurately represent the voices of research subjects they have analysed. Consequently, recommendations made to program funders can be devoid of the reality that is embedded in the lives of those living in remote or isolated contexts. We find this disturbing. Ethical research and evaluation should reflect the reality of the context in which it is conducted.

Because of these concerns, this paper is about methodology. It is also about the experiences of five academics who for a number of years have worked in remote communities of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. While none of us (as researchers) would pretend to have perfected the art (or science) of research and evaluation in the contested

and complex spaces we work in, our experiences have led us to position our methodological approaches in such a way that wherever possible the voices of those we work with are amply strengthened to allow the research process to be of benefit and value to all concerned. To this end we offer three vignettes from our work in three vocational contexts: in language research, with Aboriginal community researchers, and with health workers. From these brief stories, we distil some practice principles that could be applied more generally to vocational education and training research, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

But first, we turn our attention to the literature. We consider the pragmatic and ethical challenges for commissioners of research projects and researchers in remote contexts with all its complexities. Then we review literature about methodological responses to research in intercultural contexts.

Literature review

Challenges for commissioners and researchers in intercultural contexts

There is nothing simple about research and evaluation in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Attempts to simplify research processes are fraught with challenges of time, cost, distance, language, culture and ethics. Some of these can of course be ameliorated by good professional practice (Downe et al. 2012) but arguably formulaic approaches do not overcome the challenges of the complexity itself. The challenge for researchers is often as much about complexity as it is about cultural difference.

There has been considerable discussion about complexity in the field of evaluation research. Rogers (2008), following arguments presented by Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002), differentiates between simple, complicated and complex evaluations. Simple interventions are those where there is a clear cause and effect relationship (Patton 2008: 372). Complicated evaluations are those where interdisciplinary and cross-jurisdictional governance structures result in the need for more negotiation to secure agreement on evaluation parameters to occur. At the same time, there are multiple and simultaneous causal strands, and different causal mechanisms for this in different contexts. Complex evaluations, by contrast, are those where outcomes are achieved through non-linear feedback loops and where outcomes are emergent—and where measures cannot be determined in advance. Rogers (2008) suggests:

...it is complex interventions that present the greatest challenge for evaluation and for the utilization of evaluation, because the path to success is so variable and it cannot be articulated in advance. (p. 31)

She proposes that for complex interventions an evolving logic model may be required or alternatively ‘a series of logic models can be developed alongside development of the intervention, reflecting changes in the understanding’ (p. 39). Funnell and Rogers also suggest that what is required is ‘an agile heuristic that can be revised and combined repeatedly’ (Funnell and Rogers 2011: 79).

Complexity however, is not just about predicting outcomes or their causes through a single strand or simultaneous or multiple cause and effect diagrams. Evaluations are also complex because of the context. That is, depending on context, a theory of change model may work well in one context and not in another. Burton et al. (2006: 307) suggest a number of context factors that contribute to complexity. These include (among others): history of previous attempts at involvement; socio-demographic profile; the state of local voluntary and community sector; availability of resources; and timing of interventions.

Besides complexity, part of the challenge in the intercultural context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community research lies with the researchers and evaluators themselves (Guenther 2008). In some cases, there is an uneasy tension between being an apparently objective researcher, as is often expected in summative evaluations, and an actively involved 'insider' (Guenther and Falk 2007) as happens often in formative or developmental research and evaluation processes. Is it possible to maintain an appropriate balance of objectivity and subjectivity when formative and summative approaches are merged?

Others have grappled with the same issues and have acknowledged the potential for conflict of interest and ethical compromise (Conley-Tyler 2005; Caracelli 2006; Yang and Shen 2006). One way that research institutions try to address these concerns is through the promotion and requirement for ethical processes and procedures to be followed (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2011; Australasian Evaluation Society Inc. 2013). However, having policies and procedures in place does not necessarily mean that research and evaluation will be truly ethical (Williams et al. 2011). The following example offered by Roorda and Peace (2009) in New Zealand, focuses on the ethical issues in the first stage, when evaluations are being designed and commissioned.

The evaluation objectives were defined by the agency prior to the RFP being posted on the Government ... website. Contractors responding to the RFP were expected to put forward an evaluation approach as part of their proposal (due three weeks after the RFP was posted). This approach allowed little opportunity for considering Māori interests and the level and nature of Māori involvement in the project... few officials are aware of just how much time is "sufficient time" or the kind of resources necessary to allow more than a cursory consultation with community stakeholders... at the end of the day, the deadlines for reporting are a more persuasive motivation than perfect process. (*pp.* 82-84)

Although Roorda and Peace were writing about New Zealand processes, Australian processes are very similar, leading to the situation described by Scougall (2006) below.

The expectations placed on an evaluator working in an Indigenous context are often great. The ideal is someone in close relationship with the community, employing culturally sensitive methods, fostering broad community involvement, transferring evaluation skills and contributing to a process of empowerment and positive social change. The hard reality is that evaluators are most often outsiders with limited resources and precious little time to spend in the field... They are typically short on contextual understanding and need to work across many project sites. (*p.* 49)

These design and commissioning issues can lead to problems in the fieldwork phase. With overly rigid parameters, if new insights arise from the interaction of Indigenous community members and the evaluators, the timing and the parameters of the contract may not allow them to be addressed. Chesterton (2003) gives an example where the evaluation task was to look at placement options for Aboriginal children in Australia, but where the importance of family support that would decrease the need for such placements emerged as a more important issue during the evaluation. However, the framework was set in advance, and was not suited to the inclusion of broader issues.

Many of the ethical breaches raised most often by evaluators concern the final stages of projects, when reports are finalised and when the information in the submitted reports is used for decision-making. Issues cited (for example in Markiewicz 2008) included managers or funders trying to influence evaluations, applying pressure to report a more positive or a more negative result than the evaluators felt was warranted, or to use information gained in an evaluation focused on program improvement for other purposes, such as 'accountability'.

Accountability can be conceptualised in many ways, including community accountability (Scougall 2006), but in this case the term appears to refer to programs being held accountable for justifying their funding by delivering targets. Note that in these examples the ethical breaches were caused by the actions of those commissioning and/or using the evaluation information, rather than by anything the evaluators had done. Ethical evaluations involve many stakeholders.

Methodological responses to intercultural research

How do researchers and evaluators deal with these challenges? There are several methodological approaches that researchers work with in the intercultural research space. To varying degrees, the methods discussed below allow (or do not allow) for involvement of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.

At one end of the spectrum there are those who would argue that indigenous peoples should be the only ones to engage in research on or about other indigenous peoples. This is in part a reaction to colonisation and imperialist views of the world and the subsequent struggles for self-determination among indigenous peoples (Smith 2012). It is also a reaction to being researched 'on'. The term 'Indigenist' research is a way of recognising the importance of indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing—epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies and methodologies—as an alternative paradigm separate from western paradigms (Rigney 1999; Martin 2003; 2008; Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009; Chilisa 2012).

Indigenists resist the positivist and postpositivist methodologies of Western science because these formations are too frequently used to validate colonizing knowledge about indigenous peoples. (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 11)

There are however indigenous critiques of Indigenist research. Nakata et al (2012) in particular, challenge the validity of 'teaching students to 'resist' Western inscriptions of the Indigenous and take up Indigenous ones' (p. 136). They suggest instead an approach:

that makes spaces for the exploration of ideas, that insists on critical reflection on the limits of all thinking on both sides, and that requires the development of better language for navigating such intricate and complex entanglements of meaning. (p. 136)

A recognition of the contested nature of knowledge led some academics to promote the idea of the 'cultural interface' (Nakata 2007; Yunkaporta and McGinty 2009) where new knowledge could be created that was not necessarily 'Indigenous' nor western. The simplistic idea that taking on an Indigenous standpoint necessarily divorces the researcher from the colonised and hegemonic space of western research philosophies is not universally supported. There is a recognition by some that the complexity and contested nature of knowledge along with the nature of the researcher's role as both an insider and outsider is a reality (Tur et al. 2010).

What does this then mean for non-Indigenous researchers? One consequence of the Indigenist movement may be to dissuade non-Indigenous researchers from engaging in the contested space and so decolonise the field. Some non-Indigenous researchers may ask if their contribution can be legitimate or how to reconcile the complicity in whiteness while 'acknowledging Indigenous sovereignties' (Koerner et al. 2009: 204). Surely there can be a 'productive dialogue between indigenous and critical scholars' (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 2). Chilisa (2012) suggests that this can be achieved through collaborative partnerships between researchers and communities and 'partnership of knowledge systems' (p. 297).

The non-Indigenous researcher can never adopt Indigenist methodologies nor claim to operate from Indigenous standpoints. However, they can adopt positions that are congruent with the goals and needs of indigenous peoples in a respectful way. This is partly achieved through

cultural sensitivity (Liamputtong 2010). It could be argued that ‘insiders’—those who belong to the group of those being researched—are better placed to conduct meaningful research than those who are ‘outsiders’. However, the binaries of insider and outsider are not necessarily as straightforward as they may seem. It is possible for example, for Indigenous researchers to be outsiders in their cultural group by virtue of the knowledge and power they hold or their ‘class, gender and perceived outsider status’ (Liamputtong 2010: 121). Bishop (2011: 18) argues that researchers in Kaupapa Māori contexts need not attempt to empower or emancipate subjugated others, but rather ‘to listen to and participate with those traditionally “othered” as constructors of meanings of their own experiences and agents of knowledge’. The point here is that cultural outsiders can play a role in meaningful research in Indigenous contexts.

Notwithstanding the above caveats, there is a case for intercultural methodologies that are collaborative, participatory and reflexive. Nicholls (2009) argues that these methodologies require the researcher to cede control of the research agenda. Christie (2011) goes further in his argument for ‘generative research’ where the control of the research agenda is built collaboratively from the ground up. In a similar way, Bainbridge et al (2013) advocate for a merging of decolonising methodologies with constructivist approaches of grounded theory for the ‘coconstruction of knowledge’ (p. 286) for the purpose of ‘delivering social change for the common good’ (p. 277).

There are of course other methodological approaches which would not privilege Indigenous voice in the ways described above. Methodologies that work on positivist assumptions (see for example Lincoln et al. 2011), which are widely used in the fields of science, could not contemplate the notions of alternate realities, let alone the possibilities for subjective, reflexive or interpretive approaches to data gathering and analysis. We set any arguments about those issues aside for others to debate. However, based on our understanding of the literature and our own experiences in the field, we see the importance of research and evaluation that draws on and amplifies the ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies of those we engage with. It is to these experiences we now turn.

Vignettes

The following vignettes give some practical examples of VET research in the context of very remote Australia, which describe an array of issues and approaches. The vignettes have one element in common. They all relate to research in a challenging vocational learning setting. The first considers language research with language workers; the second draws on the experience of working with community researchers in a project about vocational pathways in remote communities; and the third involves research on Aboriginal Health Workers with vocational qualifications.

Vignette 1: Language research

This vignette highlights the importance of collaborative approaches to cross-cultural work and draws on language research and adult learning in the context of the longitudinal ‘Aboriginal Child Language Acquisition’ project in the research site Tennant Creek, to explore this. Collaboration in this project involved discussions with community members to jointly set the research questions, to regularly review findings and develop ways to disseminate information. To achieve this, we held regular community meetings and engaged Indigenous researchers, who co-authored research outputs (Morrison and Disbray 2008). At the end of the project, we workshopped and created a video newsletter to share the findings. These practices were integral to the research process, rather than demands or add-ons, and it was fortunate that the commissioning organisation was supportive of this approach.

The Indigenous people involved in this study were motivated to take part to influence change, in this case in their children's educational lives. Having a voice is intimately related to one's own language. Across Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have expressed deep commitment to their traditional and contemporary languages; as means of communication, expressions of identity and symbols of cultural attack and survival. This research offered opportunities for language speakers to engage in and own the research.

As research 'outsiders' working on project-based learning in language related work in remote Australia it was essential for us to 'let go of the reins' and allow ground-up formulation and development (see Woods and Carew 2008). Working collaboratively, in contexts such as research or education and training, can present challenges in meeting organisational demands and constraints. These have to be mediated, and in this project the researchers' roles included this function. For Aboriginal people, research often means a loss of voice. Sincere and thoughtful collaboration, as used in this language research project, can avoid this.

Vignette 2: Engaging community researchers

In recent data collection activity, the Pathways to Employment project within the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) conducted a series of conversational style interviews across the APY (Anangu Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara) lands in central Australia to document community experiences and perceptions of school based and post-school training opportunities that have a particular focus on employment pathways. In the scoping stages of the research the principal researcher attended a research training workshop and travelled through APY country with an Anangu researcher and a colleague who is a former APY lands educator, with fluency in one of the local languages. During these activities work orientated and social relationship building opportunities occurred and shared understandings around the theoretical frameworks and aims of the study naturally developed between all three people. This initial investment of funds and time by the principal researcher paid dividends for the future stages of the project.

As the project progressed it had to be acknowledged that the time and funds that would have been required for the principal researcher (based in Darwin), to build the necessary relationships that enable relevant and meaningful data collection was beyond the scope of the project resources. In response to this, the principal researcher engaged the Anangu researcher to conduct the required interviews, with on the ground support from by the former APY educator. As there was already an established relationship and a mutual understanding of the project, preparation for the interviews could occur through telephone conversations without the need for the principal researcher to travel to the APY lands. The Anangu researcher and former APY educator did not have the limitations of the principal researcher's distance and disconnect from the field. As already locally embedded and connected individuals they were able to quickly identify relevant interview participants. By drawing on their long standing relationships and existing trust, a deeper level of conversation was far more easily arrived at during the interviews. Investing project funds in this engagement of locally connected and embedded individuals has provided the project with significantly more meaningful data than if the principal researcher had collected information on a fly in fly out basis. Alternatively the costs and time associated with the principal researcher building relationships and developing at best a minimal sense of local connectedness would have been exorbitant.

Vignette 3: Aboriginal health workers

In this research we were tasked with gathering personal information on health and wellbeing among a group of Aboriginal workers in a selection of remote communities across the Northern

Territory. Previous research with non-Indigenous workers from the same agency had relied on an online questionnaire. However, it was predicted that gathering personal information in this cross-cultural setting could pose particular challenges and tensions, and we decided that a focus group approach would provide a better response rate and better quality information.

Both data collection approaches are underpinned by western ideological and philosophical perspectives, and have well known and documented strengths and weaknesses. When choosing methodologies, we weigh up advantages and disadvantages, while maintaining the integrity of our data collection approach. In substituting a questionnaire with a focus group method, we felt it vital to work with an Indigenous researcher. We were able to engage an Aboriginal elder with extensive networks and integrated relationships across the communities in question and who had or could build trusting relationships in a short period of time. This is not possible for a non-Indigenous outsider without already established relationships in that community. Inclusion of the Indigenous researcher's cultural knowledge in the design, data collection, and reporting of the project were also crucial. Importantly, the Indigenous researcher was able to establish the family and land connections between herself and many of those in the focus groups, thus enabling cultural and social elements such as kin obligations and reciprocities to be drawn upon.

In this project, the non-Indigenous researchers remained a support to the Indigenous researcher—on the one hand enjoying the social discussion that needs to take place, while attending to monitoring and data collection protocols and acting as a 'critical friend'. This 'critical friend' role meant we spent time challenging our own assumptions and adding to our learning—an important part of the collaborative approach.

Discussion: Common threads and key lessons

Our collective experience shows that remote communities are often complex and contested spaces where various clans are attempting to live and, to various degrees, manage a range of cultural, social and political issues. In general there is suspicion of research, and in some locations a distinct distrust and dislike based on being researched 'on' (not 'with'). Moreover there is concern with not seeing their real voices emerge and not having any say or control over the research or the use of its results. More importantly we are talking about a different cultural milieu with a different ontological and epistemological base to western culture where, for example, who owns, authorises and expresses knowledge may be a mystery to a non-Indigenous person; and where protocols and communication processes frame and mediate all relationships within the social and natural world through ritual, ceremony and language.

Investment in time

In each of the vignettes, there is some description of an extended planning and preparation process that included local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in adjustment and adaptation of methodologies, community consultation and information dissemination. This investment of time needs to be accounted for in the scoping, project management and budgeting processes of the research or evaluation project. While this may cause tensions for commissioners and funders with time and financial pressures, it is vital for the sake of quality research processes, that this time is planned.

Importance of relationships

Another common thread in the vignettes (and related to the investment of time) is the significance of building relationships—both with local community researchers and to some extent with communities. The vignettes highlight several ways that this can be done. It can be

done through community meetings and consultations (as demonstrated in the language research vignette), through a collaborative approach used to workshop the frame of the project (as in the community researcher vignette) or vicariously through the mediation of a trusted broker with existing relationships and connections into communities (as demonstrated in the health worker project). In all of these examples, the trust that is built up or pre-existing allows for a much freer flow of information from respondents.

Long standing relationships affirm the understanding that researchers have ethical and relational responsibilities to participants and the broader community in the research process. Insider researchers are often aware that conducting ethical and responsible research is of utmost importance to preserve and protect the long term, multifaceted relationships that already exist.

Ownership and relevance

The language research vignette demonstrates how the relevance of a research project can motivate local people to own the research process and its outcomes—the research itself is part of the community’s desire for cultural maintenance and for expression of its identity. In a similar way, the community researcher example allowed for local people to engage in a discussion in their own language in such a way that would allow for Anangu theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to be incorporated into the design of survey instruments and the subsequent analysis of data. The challenges faced by the commissioners of the health worker evaluation were related to this as well. On the one hand they wanted to understand the perspectives of local Aboriginal people living in remote communities, but the survey instrument they had recommended was disconnected from the ways that those remote health workers saw the issues. The shift away from a structured quantitative survey instrument to a more open semi-structured instrument allowed for the participants to more freely express their views about the issues presented. In all cases described, the process allowed for local engagement in the research.

Improved data quality

One of the consequences of the forgoing factors is that data quality is better than it would have been without time, relationships, ownership and relevance. By ‘quality’ we mean that the data has greater trustworthiness, validity and reliability as they relate to the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions of those being researched (see Chilisa 2012: 171 for a discussion on a 'postcolonial indigenious framework' for validity). The research and evaluation projects behind the vignettes are built on an understanding that attention to the factors discussed will allow for local participants’ voices to be better articulated.

Outsider and insider roles

None of the vignettes adopted Indigenist methodologies. While we do not deny the importance of Indigenist approaches (see page 4), there are some benefits that accrue from the bringing together of western and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophies and practices. One of the reasons is that while Indigenist approaches will also result in improved data quality, a collaborative approach drawing on the knowledge systems of non-Indigenous outsiders will allow for the amplified voices to be relayed, translated and interpreted in such a way that ensures the integrity of the research participants. Again, it may be possible for an Indigenist approach to do justice to this. However, the importance of having a critical friend from the alternative, hegemonic knowledge system can ensure that the intended outcomes of a commissioned piece of research or evaluation are conveyed with integrity to the research planning process, along with the opportunities that meaningful knowledge exchange brings from the data gathering and analysis process. This is where the ideas of Nakata’s (2007)

‘Cultural interface’ concept comes into its own. The knowledge that is created is neither indigenous nor western. There is something of a generative approach to the knowledge creation process as proposed by Christie (2011).

Working collaboratively, in contexts such as research or education and training, can mean facing challenges in meeting organisational demands and constraints, for example in delivering prescribed outputs, which may not have meaning in the remote community. These demands have to be mediated. For Aboriginal people, it often means losing their voice. Sincere and thoughtful collaboration can avoid this. Engaging well connected and trusted community members as researchers creates opportunities for non-Indigenous researchers to be responsive and adaptable to community events and circumstances, and allows room to quickly explore alternative opportunities where remote community situations can tend to be unpredictable. The brokering of insider/outsider relationships in the role of researcher allows the research to quickly move through the necessary stage of building trust and highlighting the mutual benefits of engaging in research with participants.

Managing complexity

None of this should suggest to the reader that what we are proposing is simple. There is an inherent complexity associated with the kind of work described in the three vignettes. That complexity is exemplified in the community researcher vignette where the principal researcher was based 2000km away from the research site. It is also exemplified in the health worker project where the expectations of the funder for neat measurable quantitative findings had to be managed so that the methods shifted to qualitative processes and analysis. The messiness of research and evaluation in remote contexts (as discussed earlier, page 2) is par for the course for experienced researchers but is nothing less than a double bogie for the research commissioner, who looks for answers to the problems governments want to address in policy. For example, in the community researcher project, which looked at training and employment pathways for Anangu, the simple solution might involve connection between training and a real job, say at the Ayers Rock Resort. The result of the research, while not discussed in the vignette, threw up the complexities of managing expectations of potential employers and potential employees.

Ethical issues

Interwoven through all of the above are a several ethical issues and tensions. Some of these tensions arise for researchers and evaluators as they go about their work, though more often than not, as discussed in the literature (see page 3), the ethical issues relate to the application of findings. For example, in the health worker example, the evaluators had no control over what happened to the report, despite the best intentions of all concerned to ensure that the voices of participants were reported accurately and with integrity, giving respect to their ontological and axiological positions. The report could sit on the shelf (and nothing might happen), the recommendations may be accepted and then not acted on, or the report could be used for genuine reform for the benefit of health workers. These are consequences that are hard to predict at the planning stage of a project despite the best intention of all parties involved in the process to ensure that ethical guidelines are not simply given lip service, but fully embraced.

Conclusions

In this paper we have attempted to draw together the research and evaluation experiences of five non-Indigenous researchers, working in vocational learning contexts in the complex intercultural milieu of remote Australian communities. We have done this to highlight the concerns we have about the way that research is conducted and used in remote contexts—

where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are sometimes muted as a result of research processes, rather than amplified as they should be.

There can be a temptation for those of us who are non-Indigenous to not engage in the discussion about research in this kind of cross-cultural research because of our race status, aligned as it may be to the hegemonic power structures of the dominant culture. However our experiences, as illustrated briefly in three vignettes, support a view that non-Indigenous researchers and evaluators can and should play a role in research that is genuinely collaborative and respectful of the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions of those we work with in remote communities. That role is one of a mediator and a trusted critical friend—an ‘outsider’ that works collaboratively and constructively with ‘insiders’.

Our experiences confirm what much of the literature tells us, that this is a complex, contested and somewhat messy space to work in. They also confirm a few important practice principles that are worth bearing in mind. Firstly, if research work in this space is to amplify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice it must allow for enough time for a mutual understanding and negotiation of the space. Secondly, trusted relationships are of paramount importance. Failure to attend to this principle leads to distrust and suspicion and muting of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice. Thirdly, if the process is owned by those who are the participants in research, then it will be embraced and valued by them. Fourthly, as a consequence, data quality will improve. Fifthly, when there is good collaboration, outsider and insider roles complement each other. Sixthly, while complexity is a given for those of us who are experienced in this space, it is not a given for commissioners. Expectations therefore need to be managed. Finally, and cutting across all of the above are a number of ethical issues which are hard to predict. The hardest of these is what happens to the research after it is completed.

We acknowledge that the research and evaluation community has a long way to go on the path which leads to amplification of voice beyond volume 1. And in an alternate sense, this very brief overview of issues and principles is just volume one of a multi-volume work.

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