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Gladys ([00:04](#)):

Tansi, Greetings. Welcome to Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast. I'm your host, Gladys Rowe. I'm so grateful you are here. Each episode I will sit in conversation with Indigenous evaluation practitioners, leaders, researchers, and scholars who are working in, thinking about, and supporting Indigenous evaluation: to share the learning they've experienced along the way. My hope is that these episodes allow you to reflect on how to design, implement, learn from, and support evaluation by, with, and for Indigenous families, communities, organizations, and nations. Join me and my guests as we open up our evaluation bundles to share what we've gathered in our journeys and bring them together in this space. I hope in these stories you come to understand how we can collectively contribute to de-colonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

Gladys ([01:00](#)):

Dr. Melanie Nadeau, aka Dr. Mel, is an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in Belcourt in North Dakota. She completed both her master's in public health and community education with a concentration in health disparities and her PhD in Social Behavioral Epidemiology at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Dr. Nadeau is a community-engaged scholar and has worked more than 18 years on various research and evaluation projects within the American Indian community. She has successfully engaged a multitude of tribal health stakeholders from across the nation and is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Native communities. Dr. Mel currently serves as graduate program director and assistant professor for the Indigenous Health PhD program housed within the Department of Indigenous Health at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Dr. Mel also serves on the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Research Review Board; the American Public Health Association's American Indian Alaska Native Hawaiian Board; and as program co-chair for the American Evaluation Association, Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation Topical Interest Group. All right. Welcome, Dr. Mel. I'm so excited to share the space with you today and to jump both feet into this conversation that we've been waiting a while for. So before we get into, you know, some of the questions that I have prepared for you, I wanted to see is there an introduction to yourself that you wanted to share into this space before we formally begin?



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Melanie ([02:38](#)):

Yes, thank you. Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to spend some time with you today. And Melanie Nadeau indizhinikaaz. Zhaawani Ghizigo Ikwe Indigoo. Makwa Indoodem. Mikanaak Wajiw indoonjibaa. Alvarado, MN indaa. So my name is Melanie Nadu. My spirit is known as Southern Sky Woman. I'm Bear Clan and Turtle Mountain is where I come from: Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. I live in Alvarado, Minnesota.

Gladys ([03:11](#)):

Thank you so much for bringing yourself in in that way. I wanted to start, because I know, in the introduction that I shared about you, there's so many different roles that you hold and focuses that you have. And I know that this has been kind of a journey that you've taken over a couple of decades anyway, so I wanted to hear a little bit from you about what has this journey into Indigenous evaluation looked like for you? Where did it begin and how have you gotten to where you are right now?

Melanie ([03:45](#)):

Yeah, so I was very fortunate when I went to the University of Minnesota School of Public Health to get my master's degree. I ended up getting a graduate research assistantship right away with the Children, Youth and Family Consortium. And as soon as I got there, that was my first position and I was tasked with working with stakeholders that were involved around trying to improve parent involvement with their children's education. And I ended up doing my master's thesis with that group and conducting an evaluation of that particular collaborative and, you know, really explored the intersection between health and education disparities and how that impacts the education of these youth in the school systems. And it was very eye-opening. And in my master's program I did take an evaluation class and I was working on my master's in public health and community health education with a concentration in health disparities and really getting trained to be a research methodologist at the core of that.

Melanie ([04:48](#)):

And the evaluation for me, when I very first started my journey, I was really trying to figure out how does evaluation differ from research? And so that was one of the things that intrigued me about evaluation. And I realized, you know, very early on that it was a different process and a different way of going about doing the work. The next semester I ended up getting another GRA [Graduate Research Assistant position] with the American Indian Community Tobacco Projects in the Twin Cities. And I ended up conducting the evaluation for one of their initiatives. There was a couple of initiatives underneath that, the American Indian Community Tobacco Survey where I really started learning how to write surveys, how to make sure that they were culturally appropriate, looking at the harmful effects of commercial tobacco, but then also honoring the medicine, the traditional tobacco for the people, and how do we write that into a survey? because there was so much good about the traditional medicine, all good actually.

Melanie ([05:51](#)):

And so I started working with state stakeholders to really ground the work culturally so that it was digestible to the community and that it was important to them and that it was coming from their



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perspective. And then another initiative that was underneath those tobacco projects was circles of tobacco wisdom. And circles of tobacco wisdom was these various cohorts of elders that would come together monthly and they would have talking circles and, you know, prayer circles. They'd open up with smudge. I mean there was an elder there, they would pass around the feather and take turns talking a loud space in the circle. No one was above the other, and everybody was equal. And I was tasked with the evaluation of these gatherings with these elders and there was four different cohorts of elders that I worked with. And it was just really, really sacred work. And I feel so very blessed that I was able to be involved in that work in the Twin Cities where you can feel very disconnected, being in an urban setting. But, because I was able to work on those types of projects, I felt very connected to community even though I was, you know, seven hours away from my reservation, my community, the Turtle Mountain down to Chippewa Indians. And so I don't think that I would've done as well as if I hadn't been involved in evaluation from the onset.

Gladys ([07:16](#)):

Those are some wonderful examples and thank you for sharing kind of the experiences that initially, you know, sparked your interest and really moved you forward from your master's program there. I was wondering if you could share with me – I love the example you shared with the four cohorts of elders. What were some of the mechanisms that you used when you were gathering the information to evaluate that work?

Melanie ([07:43](#)):

It's so interesting that you asked that because <laugh>, if I'm gonna be honest about it, it's like I didn't know what I was doing <laugh>, and they said, hey, you're gonna be in charge of evaluating this. I was a graduate research assistant. I didn't have experience really doing that, and I had taken a class, but it didn't really grab me at my core. And I think looking back at it now, it's because evaluation wasn't presented in a way that made sense to me. And now that you know this many years later, and I've been practicing this work for 19 years now, I look back and I realized that it didn't grab ahold of me because evaluation is very values-based, and if you're working within somebody else's framework, it doesn't translate well to the work that we do. Fortunately, I was working with Native people on these circles of tobacco wisdom with these elders.

Melanie ([08:37](#)):

So I was given a space to be creative, to explore, to be innovative. And they trusted me. They're like, we trust you, Mel, like, you know, and so I followed my heart. I followed my heart in the work that I did, and I just operated and functioned in a way that felt good and felt right. So I just stayed true to my intuition. And when I was working with the elders, I would gather the information and I'd go home and summarize it and I'd go back to them and I'd say, hey, you know, did I get this right? And we'd go over it together and they said, no, you know, that's not really what we meant. This is what we meant. And they would teach me how to translate their information as a collective. And so then I would make those adjustments and then I'd give them a copy.



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Melanie ([09:32](#)):

And the one elder he had lived in the city since he was younger, he was a relocation individual who had been relocated out to the Twin Cities. He just said, you know, Mel, he said, I have been involved in a lot of initiatives, he said, and you're the first person that has ever given back the results. And I just stood in that moment and it just struck me. It's like, because that's not in alignment with our values, you know, there's this underlying piece, you know, value that if you ask somebody for something that you should be willing to give. And you may be asked to serve in a different capacity, than you know what you're doing because you're viewed as a resource. Your gifts are honored and you know, the people that you work with might ask you to do X, Y, or Z and it might not be in in direct alignment with the initiative that that you're doing.

Melanie ([10:26](#)):

And I think that's a piece of the work that is unique, but also that I really appreciate. And so that really stuck with me and I thought, you know, the first people that I'm always gonna think about, whether I'm doing research or evaluation, are the people that this information's coming from. And they're always gonna be a priority and they're always gonna take the front seat when it comes to getting back the results. And I have another example that I'll share with you on that as we kind of go down my journey. But then the other things, you know, working with the elders, I let them define things. So, you know, they bought t-shirts, we had money in our grant for t-shirts and they drew the turtle on the t-shirts. They would make, they made a cake with their turtle, they just loved their turtle and they put that turtle on everything.

Melanie ([11:18](#)):

They had journals, they had the turtle in Boston on their journals. But the T-shirts were to honor people in the community. And they said, well, who can we give the t-shirts to? And I said, anybody you want, you know, anybody that you would like to honor. Well, and they were so used to being told how to operate within their projects. They didn't feel safe and comfortable making that decision. And I was like, no, you can actually give them to whoever you want. You know you get to define what success is, what does that mean to you? You get to define that. And so one elder said, well, you know what, my niece, she tried to quit. You know, she didn't, she didn't make it very far, but she tried. And that's the important thing, that she tried to quit, and so I'm gonna honor her with a t-shirt.

Melanie ([12:07](#)):

And I said, that's great, that's wonderful. The other thing that was really unique in working with the elders is that they made their own brochures and each cohort created a different brochure and we would present. You know, I have always looked at myself like a vessel. The community leads everything that I do, even for my research. And I love being a methodologist because I bring my toolbox and I say, here's some ideas. What do you think? And, you know, if they want me to make the decision, then if they ask me to, then I will. Otherwise I give them the space to do that. And so on the brochures they included and they all came out different and they were all so beautiful. And two of the cohorts actually brought in their grandson or granddaughter to put the art. And so they actually honored their grandchildren and put their art on their brochures.



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Melanie ([13:01](#)):

And so a lot of really neat things happened with that project. They learned how to, you know, grow traditional tobacco and they all started their seeds. And it was really interesting at the end of that whole thing, we worked our way all the way up to the policy level, policy considerations. And once they found out how the tobacco industry manipulated them, you know, manipulated our people, the elders were really offended. And we actually had a few elders that quit smoking even though they had smoked all of their life. Just knowing that they were being targeted and manipulated by the tobacco industry totally changed their perception. And they actually started going into schools and going to the capitol and being really involved at a political level. So we kind of started at this individual level and then we ended up at this political level. And then there was people that would go and work in the schools and teach and you know, at the community level.

Melanie ([13:54](#)):

And so they kind of stand [for] the whole social ecological model in the presentation of their work. But yeah, I would say that it was very sacred work because it was done in a traditional way. And then with the elders in the cities, they all come from different nations and some were from the same nation, but it was a very diverse group. And that's what I try to explain to people. I say, Native people, you know, they're the smallest population, you know, in this country. We represent the smallest population, but we also represent the largest diversity. And I really had firsthand experience with that going in because we'd have traditional speakers come in for the different nations to share cultural teachings. And that information was translated, you know, with regard to tobacco in different ways for each nation.

Gladys ([14:46](#)):

Thank you for sharing those examples. It resonated quite a lot for me in terms of, you know, how you shared in your master's education: you took one evaluation course and then you got out there as a graduate research assistant and realized <laugh> that you needed to actually start from a different place. And so in the work that I do, I talk about my evaluation journey, my evaluation learning: I actually continue to learn a lot more from community than I did from the evaluation courses that I took back in my master's program. So, you know, there's a lot to say about how that needs to change, itself, but also there's so much value in our ways within our communities and how we can just continue to learn about the implementation of our values in evaluation. So I'd love to hear, you know, kind of where you went from there in terms of your evaluation journey. And you said you kind of have this realization looking back that, you know, the work that you do is really values-based. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that and where you went next.

Melanie ([16:00](#)):

So I ended up, well, I went on for my doctorate, in social behavioral epidemiology. And you know, I worked for the community tobacco projects for five years. And so I had the honor of working with these elders for about five years. And then I got recruited out of graduate school to launch the American Indian Public Health Resource Center at North Dakota State University. And it was pretty interesting cause it's like, okay, you're gonna start August 8th, and your team will be there, you guys are all starting the same day, you're gonna have four public health professionals. We kind of took a four-pronged approach to public health and looking at policy, research, services, and education. And so I had a master's level public health professional in each of those arenas. And then I was the operational director



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that was tasked with launching the center that would provide technical assistance to tribes in the state of North Dakota, the region (I think that was our five-year goal),

Melanie ([16:53](#)):

and then nationally was our 10-year goal. Well, we reached our national reach within one year <laugh>, You know, so after we got the center going and we started traveling a lot and going out and providing technical assistance to communities. And then all of a sudden an opportunity came up and we were doing some evaluation here and there and on some meaningful projects. But the one that I really wanna touch on is our work with the Minnesota Department of Health. And so they put out a call for an entity that could work with Minnesota tribes on the statewide health improvement plan projects to implement an Indigenous evaluation framework. And we were like, oh my gosh, what? You know, and it was the first time that they had ever allowed the space for that. And I'll actually have a publication coming out in *Roots and Relations* this summer that really goes into depth just from a process standpoint, from our center, how we did the work and how we actually applied a framework.

Melanie ([17:56](#)):

Because frameworks are nice. They give you a lot of nice ideas, but they don't really translate to the ground. How do you translate that framework into actually doing the work? And so we decided that what we were gonna do is we were going to work with the communities, meet them where they were at, and build capacity around evaluation. Because evaluation, much like research, had a bad name and we needed to work to destigmatize that process. And there had been things that had been done before that communities were like, oh great, we gotta do evaluation. And it's just like, ugh. You know? And the way that it was being done was so – I would just say that it was very limiting. It was limiting the process. And I feel very comfortable working on the frontline. I feel very comfortable not knowing the answers. And I feel very comfortable being innovative and allowing space for creativity.

Melanie ([18:53](#)):

And I feel like in the evaluation space, a lot of professionals struggle with that. And so I stood strong in my belief that this work had to be done in a different way. And so we created a number of activities and we went out and, you know, we talked about the CDC [Centre for Disease Control] model of evaluation and then we rolled into the Indigenous evaluation framework. And you know, one of the things that I noticed early on when I started translating into – and I wouldn't even say translating, we actually just started creating a process that would make sense from an Indigenous perspective. But we also said, hey, here's the CDC model, you know, so that we could see how things were different. And one of the things that I knew right away that was different between the CDC and the Indigenous evaluation framework model is that the CDC model will say, you must be willing to report the good just as much as the bad.

Melanie ([19:55](#)):

And that does not resonate with tribal communities. It just kind of puts things in a different space that – it doesn't go so well. The Indigenous evaluation framework, however, says all knowledge is good knowledge and even if you learned something that you didn't anticipate, that's a win. And that's, you know, that's innovation and that's something that we can work with. That really resonated with the



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tribes. You know, we worked with 10 of the 11 tribes in Minnesota and that stood out to them. And then we went into this activity where, you know, they had to introduce themselves. We did an icebreaker and we said, okay, you're gonna sit down, you're gonna draw out who you are. You don't have to be an artist, you know, draw whatever's important to you and then we're gonna pick up your card, we're gonna scramble them in the front of the room and then call you up and you pick a card, but you can't read your own card.

Melanie ([20:49](#)):

But if you read your own card, you have to put it back and select a different one. And then, you know, someone would come up and pick a three by five card and say, oh, okay, you know, this person likes to fish and hunt, looks like they have two dogs. And, you know, sometimes they'd get it right, sometimes they'd say something funny. And it was just a really lighthearted way of everybody getting to know a different side of one another. And these people, you know, they already knew each other because they worked together at the programmatic level. Of course they didn't know us. So there was a mixture of both people that knew each other and people that were just getting to know each other. But everybody touched on, you know, their animals, their children, their culture, the things that were most important to them at their core, what they valued, right?

Melanie ([21:33](#)):

So those introductions, everybody just got to know each other in a way that was meaningful to them. And then we went on and you know, we'd have training and then we'd have another activity and we had the stakeholder activity where they would identify all the stakeholders for their project. And I mean they identified stakeholders like at the community level, at the institutional level, the state level. I mean they just had all these stakeholders that they were connected to. And then we also had another activity that we did that was cultural grounding. And we said, okay, now we're gonna do a values activity. So we want you to think about, you know, your values in relationship to your programming. And so they'd write out their values and you know, maybe there was the word love – and love was always present, <laugh>, it was always there. But love, trust, bravery.

Melanie ([22:26](#)):

And they would write out all of these values that were important to them, and then we'd say, okay, now define that within the context of your work. So they would go, you know, they'd go through and they'd say, okay, like how do I describe this word within the context of my work? And they wrote it all out and you know, but it just really got them grounded into their theoretical framework, their worldview. And so they got to start from a place that was important to them. Then we went on and we did this process of reverse logic modeling. And so we had a big sticky wall and it just literally covered the whole wall and we had all these different sticky notes and facilitated the conversation. And I guess that's another thing that was different with our evaluation is that we did it as a team and the communities really liked that.

Melanie ([23:15](#)):

So it wasn't just one person coming out saying, well, I'm here to evaluate, you know, gimme your information and I'll come up with something. It was really a process right from the beginning. And so,



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you know, we did this reverse logic modeling process with them and we said, okay, you know, start what I should say. It didn't start right from the beginning of the project. It started, you know, cause they had like two years with the mainstream evaluation, but it wasn't working out. So that's why they decided to hire someone to do an Indigenous evaluation, you know, the state to come in and work with the tribes. And so they already had a couple years behind them on their projects and we got to come in and reset them within an Indigenous evaluation framework and we said, okay, let's talk about your long-term goal. And we didn't ask them for that.

Melanie ([23:57](#)):

We actually worked with them to develop a statement that was relevant for where they were at in their programming. And so they come up with their long term goal and then we worked back, you know, what's your intermediate, what's your short term, all that fun stuff. And then we'd do a lot of shifting depending on, because you know where things are at depends on the context of everything that's happening, the big picture. And then we fleshed all this out and they were just blown away. They're like, wow, we didn't realize we were doing all of this work, and we didn't realize that all of everything that we do is connected to this long-term goal. And that's when I realized that our communities really could benefit from, you know, cause I always kind of poke fun and say everything's connected, Native people know that. We know that everything's connected.

Melanie ([24:45](#)):

So when it comes to framing and doing a concept model, that should be no problem for us because we know everything's connected and that everything affects everything else. You know, and that's something that's actually strength for us. And I think that we can build our capacity in that way as Native people around programming to get our initiatives funded in a way that makes sense for us. And so, you know, we fleshed out all of their work and then we compared it to the state work plans and we realized that over 50% of the activities that these programs were doing were not being reported on the state tool because the tool was from the state perspective and it wasn't allowing space. It was actually stifling their reporting process and it wasn't allowing the space from a cultural-based view to share their successes.

Gladys ([25:37](#)):

Wow, what a journey. And I cannot wait for that article to come out in *Roots and Relations* to be able to share that everywhere. It sounds like it was quite an experience for you and your team to be able to support communities in that way. One of the things that you touched on there was about like, well a lot of the things, about why Indigenous evaluation is important and I wondered if I could just kind of probe a little bit to ask you to make some of those connections explicit. So, for you, why is Indigenous evaluation important for us and our communities?

Melanie ([26:12](#)):

For me as a methodologist and as a community member, and I always say, hey, I'm Native first, I'm all these other things, you know, second <laugh> or whatever, but at my core it's Native first and you know, it allows me the space to be who I am in community and I just, I really love that. And I love the fact that evaluation and I'm doing some pretty innovative things with evaluation methods. Like even



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now I've just grown so much over the years and it's kind of fun to see where I'm taking it. And I always like to say I'm breathing life into it. I'm breathing life into this process and letting it go where it's meant to go. But yeah, for me, the other thing that I really appreciate about evaluation is that it allows space for our artists and everybody has some artistic vibe in them.

Melanie ([27:08](#)):

You see it come out a little bit in, ah, I'm not an artist, you know, and but the people that really do translate that at the community level, but they are our knowledge keepers and their art holds teachings and stories. And I would even go as far as to say that the artistry at the community level is our worldview and our theoretical framework from that perspective. And so to me our evaluation is just an underutilized tool. It's misunderstood and I feel like it's an opportunity that we can really build capacity with in a way that makes sense for our communities and we can actually advance the health and wellbeing of our communities using this tool. When we were working out with the Minnesota tribes, all of them would say, how do we measure community-wide impact? We wanna look at things – we don't wanna look at, you know, Joe smoking, or you know, diabetes.

Melanie ([28:13](#)):

They were working on diabetes, nutrition, education and then tobacco projects. But it's like we don't wanna look at like these individuals, we wanna look at the collective. We wanna see how this is impacting our community as a whole. And so being a methodologist and a researcher, I'm like, you can do that. You can actually apply a research methodology to your evaluation implementation and measure community-wide impact. And that is something that they wanted to do. And so, you know, one of my publications that I recently come out with, I just said that, you know, the more that we can identify opportunities to build protective factor-rich environments and invest in that. Yes, investing at the community-wide level is expensive. But I would say that we are dealing with the largest health disparities in the United States and that we are the smallest community. So I think it's a good value for the money and it would be a good investment to invest in that approach.

Gladys ([29:18](#)):

Absolutely. And that question around impact I think is all over the place right now. You know, really wanting to think about like, what is the collective impact that investing in these kinds of opportunities, like you said, the protective factors, what can that mean for the next generation, the generation after that for, you know, seven generations forward. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about evaluating for impact and some of the things you might be thinking about or questions you might have or what you might have learned in your time evaluating that.

Melanie ([29:54](#)):

Well, a couple of things. Well, as far as the impact goes, and this goes more of my research realm, but it's still relevant, like I said, because I'll be – I'm actually joining these processes to advance health and wellbeing. But, you know, looking at impact, I just did a mixed methods literature review cause we know, like for our youth, we know that sexual health leads to cancer over the lifespan. Well, sexual health indicators, we know that diet, physical activity, nutrition-related indicators lead to cancer over the lifespan. We also know that substance use-related behavior leads to cancer over the lifespan. What



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we don't know is what is the risk in protective factor for those cancer related indicators for our youth. And I'm currently, that's my main research that I work on. I'm currently working with my community and I'm just now working with my community to build capacity to do this work.

Melanie ([30:54](#)):

And I have an individual that works for me, a doctor that works for me that's Internal Mountain and he's currently scheduling key informant interviews and focus groups. And I work with the community to figure out the process, like how they wanted the focus groups done, who they wanted interviewed, what they want done, and to build this tool and to explore what are these risk and protective factors that are present with Internal Mountain. And eventually we're gonna, you know, create this tool. We're gonna validate this tool and then we're gonna administer this tool to the youth. So, you know, at one time, back to my younger self, I never would've thought that, cause I've always wanted to work with youth ever since I started. In fact, my elevator statement before I went on to get my master's degree was I wanna create culturally-grounded interventions and hopes of posing the health disparities gap with my people of Internal Mountain, you know, and that is still true to this day. My goal hasn't changed.

Melanie ([31:51](#)):

What I realized though when I went to the university is that there's no data. And then the data that is collected, it's so poorly collected that it doesn't tell you anything. The use of national data is abused. I say unless you're doing a count, there's no reason to use national data to predict things. We need to advocate for meaningful data collection within our communities because we haven't been given that privilege and data translates into opportunities for our community. And so then I realized that, you know, our communities weren't involved in the tool creation process. So I'm like, well, okay, I'll work with them on that and then I have to collect data. And so I'm hoping that, you know, a few years down the road I'll have the data that I need and then I can go back to the community and say, okay, this is what showed up.

Melanie ([32:37](#)):

This is the risk and protective factor profile for substance use. What do you wanna focus on for intervention? And so, you know, my community, they make all the decisions and I had this plan going in saying, okay, I'm gonna do focus groups with the youth. I'm gonna do key informant stakeholder interviews with adults who work with youth. And then, but I said, they're gonna have the final say. So I brought them my ideas and they're like, well no, you know, we want you to approach it this way, that way. They adjusted my questions and then they said, we want you to actually interview the youth and we want you to interview adults, but we want you to have focus groups with behavioral health specialists. We want you to have focus groups with like principals and, and things like that in the school systems, administration.

Melanie ([33:25](#)):

We want you to have a focus group with the teachers and then we want you to have a focus group with the, cultural knowledge bearers. And so they totally flipped my design right on its head <laugh>. And I



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welcomed that. I was happy, I was like, this is great. You know, and they just felt like the touchy subject would not be good for the youth to be in focus groups together and that they would need to have their private space to do those things. So coming back, you know, to impact, I think that evaluation can definitely measure impact at various levels. But you know, the point that I wanted to make is that there's so much in the literature that we can use to our advantage to say, hey, we know X leads to Y, or Y leads to Z, but we don't know what X to Y is, but we know what Y to Z is.

Melanie ([34:13](#)):

And so we can use that in framing our initiatives. And you know, when I was younger I would say, oh geez, there's no way that I could find out what the risk and protective factor profile is for cancer on the youth. Well now today I know I can because I know how to frame data that's existing and what we know and what significant findings and salient findings have been found on the aggregate. And I can use that to translate for the intermediate or risk and protective factors that are present. But we know that they lead to these long-term health impacts over lifespan.

Gladys ([34:48](#)):

Thank you so much for drawing that out for me and for the listeners. And when you shared that you're a researcher, you're an evaluator, you hold all of these roles, but they're all, and, they're all interconnected, of course they're interconnected. And I was, you know, reflecting on the kind of pathway or iterative cycle that happens of research to intervention, to funding, to evaluation, to results to this cycle that happens around knowledge production, knowledge generation. It all really – when you think about, you know, Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous research – it matters who is doing this work. And I know this is said in so many different spaces, but I just wanted to bring it into this conversation because the examples that you've been giving really illustrate that, you know, who is doing this work matters. It matters at the research level, it matters at intervention design, it matters at tool development, it matters at evaluation,

Gladys ([35:55](#)):

it matters in funding spaces. So who is doing this work matters because the way that we see the world and tell the stories of the world is different. And it goes back to kind of the connection that you made to listening to your gut at the beginning when you were, you know, a graduate research assistant working in those community circles. Like what does our gut tell us? Our gut is connected to our worldview and our values. I sound really excited because I am excited. I'm like, oh, you just have this thread that has gone through all of the conversation that I just wanted to honor. So thank you for drawing that out.

Melanie ([36:37](#)):

Yes. And I would even go as far as to say that, you know, there's two other things that I'd like to touch on specifically, but even when it comes to the translation of the information out to community, that step is so very important as well. And I'm working with an individual, you know that I mentor other Native scholars on how to publish their dissertation work. And through that process, you know, I'm like, ooh, I evaluated your data, you know, <laugh> like we had this question and she's like, oh, there was a few of us. And I'm like, okay, how did you frame it? How did you frame? Because, you know, they had this cultural immersive experience for professionals and really, really good cultural immersion, a retreat



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for non-Native professionals so that they could, you know, be more aware in their clinical practice. And so I said, well, okay, that's good, you know, and – but I was looking at the data and the findings and I'm like, boy, this doesn't feel like a cultural retreat reading the findings, you know?

Melanie ([37:41](#)):

And I said, who, who did this? And she's like, me and a couple others. And I'm like, okay, how did you decide on your translational framework that you would use? And she said, well, you know – she started talking shop about basically the academy view for the school that she was in. Well, that's typical, right? But you know, it didn't feel right to me because this was a cultural immersive event. And I said, okay, you worked with an elder. What did the elder think when you talked to her? Did you ever talk to her about how this was gonna be framed or translated? You know, when you wrote up the results? And she said, yeah, actually I did. Well, what did the elder tell you? She said she wanted me to frame it within the seven teachings. Oh. I said, wow, that's really cool.

Melanie ([38:30](#)):

Hey, why don't we pull your data and reframe it in a cultural perspective, in a cultural framework? <laugh>. So now I'm moving into the space of actually reframing the translations of findings from a cultural view that makes sense from the community perspective. And then she's so excited, she's like, oh my gosh, I'm so excited for this. And I said, okay, now, these values, you need to define them within the context of your work. So now it's kind of the backend process, right? You know, normally you do that in the beginning, but then if you're gonna do that for results, then you do that on the backside and you frame it within that to translate it back out so that it makes sense within the context of the work that's being done. Another thing that's really been fun is I teach Indigenous evaluation frameworks.

Melanie ([39:13](#)):

And I have students that come in and I teach them how to relate tribal processes, tribal teachings and processes with evaluation process, or you know, we ran a data science academy. Can you align tribal process with the data science cycle? And, you know, I have this student that's really good at it. I'm like, you're gonna be a theorist. I already see it. You're – that's what you're gonna do. And she said, okay, you know, they had the horse and travois and she breaks it down, you know: this is built this way and this is the point of this. And the whole process breaks it down. And then she aligns it with a data science process. And so she's able to translate that information. And then she did another one, you know, using the lodge and the role of genders within the lodge and cause our gender instructors are different as well, you know, so she just does this amazing work.

Melanie ([40:09](#)):

And you know, we went and facilitated some conversations. I was asked, kind of impromptu, hey, can you come facilitate some conversations with some tribes? And I said, yeah, I'd love to do that. You know, it's been a couple years with Covid. I wanna get outta the house and be around people again. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, count me in. But I have one condition. What is that? I said, you're gonna have to dump whatever idea you have and let me lead. You know, you're gonna have to trust me and you're gonna have to trust the process. And they said, okay. And I had to pull 'em in a couple times, say, hey,



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remember now I told you trust the process, you know. And now that they're seeing what's coming out from this work, and we're gonna be presenting at NIH [National Indian Health Board Conference] in Alaska at Anchorage, or the community partners are gonna be, and then, you know, my student, they're gonna be presenting.

Melanie (40:59):

But you know, she went in there and like we had these – me and the student, we just worked together to facilitate these conversations. And you know, the first day we had them broke out into groups and then they all these stickies everywhere. And then we reframed them within the social ecological model to see what level things were falling at. And then we translated all this information, you know, back into a community report. And then the people that pulled me in, they said, well, what about a report? Because we wanna write a white paper. I said, well, write a white paper then <laugh>. I said, I'm doing the community report. That's what I came in and you know, remember I said that's my first priority when I do this work. And that's where everything goes is into the community report. And people are just not used to that.

Melanie (41:42):

But now that they're seeing what's coming out of it, because my students, whenever the individuals at that session were, there was probably like 60 individuals that we're introducing themselves, and we actually managed to get them to introduce themselves in 60 minutes, believe it or not. How did we do that? The three by five card, write who you are, draw who you are. We gave them five minutes to draw who they were. And then they stood up and described their card and they were able to do that within a minute. So we went through 60 introductions in an hour and then she [my student], when they were introducing herself, she was sitting there, you know, and she created a word cloud. And the biggest thing in that word cloud that came that rose to the top was family. Then, you know, all these other, you know, the animals, being together, healing the mountain, the environment, the land, just everything that we already know as Native people that's at our core.

Melanie (42:31):

It all came out in that word cloud, you know? Well, and then she put that into the community report. She put it within the shape of a buffalo, you know, when she did the community report, she started the report out with a traditional teaching that grounded into, you know, the teaching that came out around that mountain. And so, I mean, it was just amazing. And then another part of that session, she actually used graphic imagery, strategic illustration I think is another way of calling it. And she actually used all of these little images and created this mountain with these people. And you know, she described the cycle of going up the mountain on the west side, going up the mountain and sliding back down and being stuck in this western model of healing that just doesn't quite get us over the mountain.

Melanie (43:20):

Some people get over the mountain, but they don't arrive down with all the people. And she's like, we're not gonna heal until we're all together. But she created a storyboard, you know, and she shared that storyboard and she said, hey, did I hear you right? This is what healing sounds like. This is how we



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go from trauma to resilience. Did I hear you right? And everybody there was just blown away, you know? So, yeah, I have a lot of fun with the work I do, bringing these methods that are rooted in Indigenous evaluation and actually applying them across the continuum. And it's been very effective.

Gladys ([43:55](#)):

That sounds like an amazing opportunity, and I love that you share that you're teaching Indigenous evaluation frameworks within the program, and what an opportunity for building capacity for Indigenous evaluators, which is needed so badly <laugh>, you know, that capacity for us to do this work for our communities alongside with our communities. When you think about the field of Indigenous evaluation and, you know, new evaluators, emerging evaluators, what else is needed to support or strengthen this field based on your experiences and observations?

Melanie ([44:39](#)):

I think that, you know, the more opportunities that we can have to work in partnership with community, because you can't learn Indigenous evaluation in the classroom. You know, you can hear examples, but until you're out there actually doing these processes and seeing how effective they are, like my student. She's just like blown away and she's like, oh, I love evaluation <laugh>, you know, and just wants to keep going down that road. And on this journey together, framing of health and wellbeing in the community in a way that makes sense for the community. But I feel so strongly about Indigenous evaluation, that we really have an opportunity here to advance the health and wellbeing of our people as a collective in that if we can have more opportunities to do this work in a way that honors the process, because it's heartfelt work. If you're gonna do good work, you gotta allow space and time for this process to unfold. You know, you're not gonna have your report in a week. It takes time and thoughtfulness and reflection, and you have to give that space to this process in order to do the work in a good way.

Gladys ([45:52](#)):

So, so, so true. I was wondering if you had – I'm sure you have lots of insights and wisdom that you share with your students, but I'm wondering if you'd like to share that with the audience of Indigenous evaluators who listen to this podcast. What do you want to share to them specifically?

Melanie ([46:12](#)):

So, you know, one of the things that I've been working on, and it's coming, it's gonna be coming out. I'm just trying to figure out how to translate this process within the classroom. The last, you know, well this fall will be the third time that I'm teaching the class. And so the first two years I had the cohorts, their final project is to create an Indigenous evaluation toolkit. And you can imagine, I mean, we have 48 students in our classroom, and I think during my class, I have maybe 10 to 15 students at a time for each cohort. But you know, they represent people from across Turtle Island. So having a toolkit that brings up these general things and considerations that apply to us all. And that's really what I want to come out of this Indigenous evaluation class is this collective, because I have this opportunity.

Melanie ([47:10](#)):

Never in my lifetime would I have thought that I'd be sitting at a university. You know, I co-launched the Indigenous health PhD program with Dr. Donald Warren, and now, you know, he's moved on to Hopkins



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and I'm sitting here with this program and I'm just like, I never thought I'd be in this space, in this place of teaching majority Native doctoral students. And I feel so very privileged and honored to be in this space. And so I really wanna tap into that collective knowledge that they bring because we're a post-masters program. And so the Indigenous health PhD program. And one of the criteria that we have is that you don't have to be Indigenous to be part of our program, but you have to have lived experience working within community. And so otherwise you cannot attend our program. If you can't show me that you've worked with Native communities, you can't get in.

Melanie ([48:11](#)):

And so we have all of these working professionals, you know, 45 of our students out of the 48 are Indigenous to Turtle Island. And just, it's so powerful. I really can't describe how powerful it is to be a part of this group. And we have our students saying that they're healing. I mean, how many students have you heard saying that they're healing by going through their PhD journey, <laugh>, you know? But when we do things in a good way and we do things in a way that makes sense to us, it is very healing and it's very gratifying. And it's the first time that they've been in an academic space and felt validated at their core that they were welcome in the way that made sense to them. We welcome our students to start our classes out with prayer or in any way that makes sense. Some of them do meditation, they'll do some stretching, mindfulness, share a poem, they'll share a fun fact or something that made them smile this week.

Melanie ([49:09](#)):

And so they have all of these resiliency tactics that they just ground themselves in a good place before they get to the work. And we've allowed that space for them to do that. And so I just feel very fortunate and really wanna tap into the collective knowledge because I'm learning being in their presence, you know, just as much, if not more, than they're learning being in my presence. And I want to tap into that collective knowledge and try to bring it to Indigenous people across Turtle Island in the form of an Indigenous evaluation toolkit that really taps broadly on those considerations, around ethical considerations, around the importance of positionality and knowing where you come from and how that impacts the process of the people that you're working with and owning that, you know, so the future looks bright for sure.

Gladys ([50:01](#)):

It certainly does look bright. What an inspirational space. And I have to say, as someone who just finished a PhD a couple and a half years ago to say that they're feeling like they're healing in that journey, wow. I cannot wait to read and to learn from this amazing collective of PhD students from your program.

Melanie ([50:25](#)):

Yeah. And they are, they're really amazing. And of course have their moments, you know, every PhD does. I mean, it's definitely tough. But yeah, it's just been a beautiful experience and you know, maintaining that rigor, but then also trying to allow that space to where they can be creative and grow as Indigenous health scholars so that they can do the good work when they get out into the community.



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Gladys ([50:43](#)):

Exactly. We are getting to the end of our time together. It's flown by and I have certainly appreciated all of the stories that you have brought into this conversation. I wanted to offer an opportunity if there's any closing thoughts or words or anything that you wanted to make sure to share to the audience before we close off our time together.

Melanie ([51:06](#)):

You know, I just, I guess I really, and I talked to you a little bit before we began today, but I just really do wanna bring it back to that space. And thank you, Gladys, for doing the beautiful work and allowing space to have these conversations. You know, I've [listened to] your podcasts and listened to all the beautiful teachers that you have brought in and, you know, being it's women's history month this month, I really wanna honor the matriarchs that shared their stories and I could relate to all of the teachings that they shared and, you know, feel their collective voice as well. And this is such important work that you're doing, and you know, by doing this, you're allowing me to breathe life into the process of evaluation at another level. So I thank you for that. Miigwetch.

Gladys ([51:58](#)):

Ekosani, I thank you so much as well for the generosity of the sharing that you have brought today, and I look forward to continuing to learn from you. So wishing you a lovely rest of your day.

Melanie ([52:13](#)):

Thank you.

Gladys

I'm so glad you spent time with us today. I have a few notes to wrap up this episode. If you're enjoying the podcast, please subscribe on your favourite streaming service, including Podbean, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts so that you don't miss an episode. Also, this podcast is self-supported and I'm hoping to make the work more sustainable. So if you're finding the content interesting and valuable, please consider supporting Indigenous insights through Buy Me a Coffee. You can find the link in the show notes. Finally, I would like to extend an invitation. If you are someone who has an interest in Indigenous evaluation and would like to have a conversation on this podcast, I would love to hear from you. Please send me a note and we can connect about your work, what you're learning, and the questions you're thinking about. That's it for this week. I look forward to sharing the space with you again soon. Ekosi.