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**Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast  
Season 1 Episode 13: Aneta Cram**

<https://gladysrowe.com/s1e13-indigenous-insights-aneta-cram/>

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

Tansi. Greetings. Welcome to Indigenous Insights. I'm your host, Gladys Rowe, and I'm so grateful you are here. Each episode I 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 into this space. I hope in these stories you will come to understand how we can collectively contribute to decolonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

Welcome. I am so glad to be here today with Aneta Cram, who is a doctoral candidate with the School of Health at the Victoria University of Wellington in Aotearoa. Her doctoral research explores what Indigenous evaluation frameworks currently exist, how they were developed, and the impact that they're having with the communities that they were developed for, in order to provide guidance to support other Indigenous communities in developing their own community-specific evaluation frameworks. So excited to have you here today, Aneta. I'm wondering if you would like to introduce yourself into this space in any other way before we get started on our conversation today.

Aneta Cram ([01:42](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much, Gladys. He uri tēnei nō Ngāti Kahungunu me Ngāti Pahauwera Greetings everybody. I just shared how I connect with the land of Aotearoa New Zealand, so connecting with the mountain, Tawhirirangi, the river Mohaka and my tribes Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Pahauwera as well. Thank you.

Gladys ([02:13](#)):



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Thank you so much for sharing those relations that you bring with and connect to into this space. I've been really looking forward to this conversation for a long time, but I had a lot of patience because I know you're working on your PhD right now and that is quite the journey for sure. And so I'm glad to spend some time with you today and I'm wondering if we can start off, maybe if you can share a little bit about how long you've been working in the field of Indigenous evaluation and how did you make your way into this space?

Aneta ([02:45](#)):

Sure. So, how long have I been in the field? I've been working on and off for the past 10 years, and I actually came into the field through my aunt, Dr. Fiona Cram, a Māori researcher and evaluator here in Aotearoa. So how I came into the space, I had finished my undergrad in 2013, I believe, in an area that was absolutely unrelated to evaluation. I did my degree in philosophy and religious studies and I started working for Fiona. She just invited me along to get a little bit of work experience and see what this whole evaluation thing was all about. And I got involved as a research assistant working with her on a kaupapa Māori evaluation of a Māori boys' afterschool program, which was looking to connect young men to their roots. And I got a little taster of that and thought it was really interesting. They wanted to continue on from there. Yeah.

Gladys ([03:56](#)):

So your aunt hooked you into this work? <laugh>.

Aneta ([03:59](#)):

Yeah.

Gladys ([04:01](#)):

So in your experience and in that time, what drew you to be interested? I'm assuming you're still interested because you're doing your PhD in this work. What drew you forward to say, this is something that's really important to me?

Aneta ([04:13](#)):

I think part of it was the relational aspect, connecting in with different groups of people that were looking to really make change for their community. And seeing that and hearing different stories – I don't know if beautiful is the right word, but it was really motivating, and to also to see the impact that evaluation can have, whether that's just getting a little bit of funding or putting down onto paper people's experiences, and the impact of that, if that makes sense. That someone can actually read that quote and be like, oh, that was my experience and yeah, it makes sense what you've written about me. So that was part of the driver. I've been in and out of different evaluation spaces: Māori Indigenous and in other parts of the globe as well as very Western spaces.

And I did my masters in evaluation in Australia a few years ago. And for me, that was getting a real taste of how Western evaluation is taught and what's expected. You know, some of the philosophical foundations as well as the methods that are privileged, and my education there was



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very, very Western, with only small considerations being given to culture and really nothing that focused on indigeneity, and to me, and especially after having a few conversations with others about it and being told that my reflections on evaluation weren't correct, as having started off from that kaupapa Māori background and, and knowing the importance of that culture has an evaluation practice. Yeah. So being able to see the difference and be like, oh, actually what I'm being taught here is very different from what I know to be true. And I just felt not so much anger, but more of a drive to push for Indigenous thought and evaluation. And that's what led me to a PhD.

Gladys ([06:33](#)):

Yeah, it sounds like those were two very stark experiences and I was gonna ask you how did that feel? But you told me it gave you drive and motivation. What are some of the differences, or what just stood out for you as you were in that Western evaluation space versus the experiences you had with kaupapa Māori, you know, backgrounds and understandings of those ways of doing evaluation that are more in line with community priorities?

Aneta ([07:04](#)):

Yeah, interesting question. I guess what stood out for me was that I was taught, not that this is wrong, but I was taught to focus on the program, right? And the program logic, what was happening in the program, how they were using funding and what they were doing and the best sort of qualitative, quantitative tools to be able to assess what's going on in the program. And it's like, yes, of course that's important, but what I had learned from my experience with Fiona and also other Māori evaluators and Aotearoa was also the importance of the process involved, and you need to have those relationships. Relationships are so important in evaluation as well as knowledge of culture and context, where hearing the experience of an Indigenous person going through a program might mean something completely different to a non-Indigenous evaluator versus an Indigenous evaluator who's from that shared background to the person that they're speaking with, if that makes sense.

Gladys ([08:21](#)):

Yeah, that makes sense. It's like with that shared background, there's an underlying code of what you're listening for, what you're listening to learn about.

Aneta ([08:34](#)):

Yeah, and there's also that trust as well. And something that I've found is that people recognize that you get it, and that allows them to feel comfortable and open up a little bit more and entrust you. There's a lot of trust that goes with people sharing their stories and it's a privilege to hear it, as we know. So yeah, I think that was one of the biggest things, is that what I was learning in this masters course didn't feel like I was getting a full education, especially being in Australia and on the land of other Indigenous peoples, and that not being brought up at all during this masters program.

Gladys ([09:24](#)):



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Yeah. So it sounds like that experience served as an impetus or a catalyst to where you are today. And I'm wondering if you want to share a little bit about your PhD journey and what you've been thinking about and working on.

Aneta ([09:37](#)):

I'm in my fourth year at the moment and looking at Indigenous evaluation frameworks. And part of why I wanted to dive down into this particular area was after having a few conversations – again, one with my aunt, she comes up a lot in my story and how I became an evaluator – having conversations about where we are heading in terms of Kaupapa Māori evaluation and also Indigenous evaluation more broadly. And it's really this idea that we're at a place where communities want to develop their own frameworks, getting more local, which is a really, really exciting place to be in. So I wanted to look at what's currently out there, what frameworks have been developed, how they've been developed, who was involved, what knowledge was privileged, and what sort of contextual factors influenced the development of these frameworks. So I started that a few years ago and ended up really focusing in on four frameworks from different parts of the globe. So the Ngaa bi nya framework in Australia, evaluation with Aloha framework from Hawaii, and – I will not be able to pronounce this correctly, but I'm gonna give it a go – Na-gah mo Waasbishkizi Ojijaak Bimise Keetwaatino: Singing White Crane Flying North framework, which as an author and developer you know a lot about, and the framework in Aotearoa. I wanted to look at them, looking at the literature that informed the development and that kind of thing. So that's where I'm at the moment, is writing up different chapters for each of these frameworks.

Gladys ([11:33](#)):

Thank you for sharing a little bit about your journey through your PhD and where you're at in this moment and I'm really excited to celebrate you when you get to the point where you're all done this work and to read and reflect on the learning and, and what you're drawing forward. So I'm excited for that. I'm wondering if you're in a space where you might be able to reflect on what has this experience been like for you learning about building relationship with these four frameworks, and what are you sitting with or thinking about in this moment right now, knowing that you're not really at the end of your journey yet and things might shift and grow.

Aneta ([12:17](#)):

I'm sitting with how different they are and how important that is because they're developed by different Indigenous peoples and really grounded in the cultural base that they were developed with, and some sort of reflecting on some of the learnings from that and what that might mean for Indigenous evaluation moving forward. And especially for other communities that might be looking to develop their own framework: what do we really need to consider when we think about evaluation within our own communities? Sure, of course, it does need to consider protocols and also how we conduct evaluation that's aligned with the culture and priorities of our people. But also, what about these external factors like policies, programs that are being developed for us but not by us. What does that mean for evaluation if we want to do that right, these funding considerations, what does it mean when a lot of government agencies do not see the legitimacy in Indigenous evaluation approaches? How do we speak back to that pushback



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against that? And also another thing which I've had across the PhD is also the privilege of getting an insight into the different lived realities of different groups of peoples. And what a gift that is to have people share their stories with me and have me hold these stories and care for them and so I can give them back in an appropriate way.

Gladys ([14:08](#)):

So beautiful. Thank you for embracing my question when I know that it probably is (from my own experience) challenging to try and speak about your work when you're so immersed and in it, in your day-to-day right now.

Aneta ([14:22](#)):

Thank you.

Gladys ([14:24](#)):

And some of the points that you brought forward point to the answers to this question, but I want to ask you explicitly, in your experience from all of the work and the wisdom that you carry forward to where you are right now, what would you say, if someone were to ask you why is Indigenous evaluation important? What are some of the pieces you would share with them?

Aneta ([14:49](#)):

I think it's important because it needs to happen, right? We live in <laugh> these Western colonial societies and have lived and are living by an imposed structure, imposed ways of thinking. And the great work of so many Indigenous people, Indigenous communities and activists who are pushing back against that and fighting for the right to speak their own language, have Indigenous histories being taught in schools, added to university curriculum, those sorts of things, have programs being developed and undergirded by cultural practice and knowledge. And I think it's just right that Indigenous evaluation – well, the field of evaluation – follows suit. We need to have evaluation approaches and evaluation tools that can help to tell the stories of these communities, of these organizations, of these programs in a way that is true to what is actually happening.

Because I think there's so much that gets missed when the tools, the frameworks or the ideas do not align with what is actually happening. There's also – I don't know if the listeners have heard of this – but Nan Wehipeihana created a model looking at the impact that having evaluation that is done onto you can have on a community, on Indigenous communities. So having a spectrum where it's from the evaluation that's done onto you versus when it's led by Indigenous communities. And when it's on the other end of the scale, when it's done onto communities, there is that greater potential for harm to be done, for stories to be misunderstood, which can lead to funding being cut or the process of evaluation leaving people not sitting well. So I think it's really important as a way of not only asserting Indigenous ways of thinking in the evaluation space, but also mitigating that continuous harm that can be caused by neo-colonial practices and living in these very colonial Western societies.

Gladys ([17:17](#)):



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Thank you for sharing those reflections. I will definitely look up that paper, is it an article that you just referenced?

Aneta ([17:26](#)):

I'm not sure that she's written up as an article, but it's definitely online. It was a presentation that she did for the Australian Evaluation Society.

Gladys ([17:36](#)):

Awesome. I will search for that. Yeah, and I think that points also to one of the points that you made previous to this question around there's not value, or understanding or funders or decision makers not really believing that Indigenous evaluation is as important, maybe. And so there's a whole undoing of mental models or ways of thinking about Indigenous knowledges, that I think evaluation, like you shared, has an important role and accountability in, you know, in the field of evaluation. Like in Canada there's the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and so if we're looking at reconciliation through evaluation practices, it's about sovereignty over who is telling the story, the evaluation stories, and even deeper, who then is providing the evidence that is designing the programs in the first place. And it just kind of weaves together for me the paradigm shift that needs to happen in order for so much of our wellbeing and our self-determination and our sovereignty as Indigenous nations globally to be positively impacted. And evaluation has such a significant role in that. And that's not really something that I understood when I started <laugh>, you know, as an undergrad or a master's student. And I'm not sure if you have a reflection, your thoughts on that.

Aneta ([19:14](#)):

Yeah, I didn't either. And the PhD has been a big, big learning journey, but I think it's definitely – it feels a little empty sometimes when people make these claims or state that, you here we're going to honor Te Tiriti, which is the the foundational document for Aotearoa that was signed between the British and and Māori leaders back in 1840, which was really around partnership. And when you make those statements that the university's going to align with Te Tiriti and uphold it, and then their actions or their policies go against that, then it just feels like empty words and it's just that <laugh> it's just that reminder that I guess the fight isn't over. Even if you might have the Truth and Reconciliation Act, it's these other government agencies, organizations still need to be told how to do things better and also to step aside as well. There's still that paternalistic idea that they know best: they're going to implement policies and programs that will fix the problem that they caused. And yeah, I think it's that need to recognize that they shouldn't be leading this work and they need to really take direction from Native people.

Gladys ([20:54](#)):

Mm-hmm. So much more depth needs to happen for sure. So, so much needs to change. And also so much great work is being done in the realm of Indigenous evaluation. And so thinking about, ideally, what can an Indigenous evaluation look like from design to implementation to end? And that's a really big span. So if you want to jump in at any point there and share some of your reflections on what does this need to look like?



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Aneta ([21:29](#)):

Yeah, so, that's a tough question because it's so unique to different people in different places. But from what I've learned, if we're talking about an evaluation that has been commissioned by a government agency, then ideally what that would look like is having the funder being hands-off, there being minimal strings attached to the evaluation, and for there to be flexibility around funding and time. Because as we know when working with people, sometimes it takes longer, because we need to do it right and it needs to be done in the right way and also if at all possible led by an Indigenous person from the community that they're working with. But you know, sometimes that's not possible. So there being a little bit of a partnership approach there could also be ideal, whether that's with an advisory group or sort of supporting evaluation capacity within the community. So bringing people on to help with data collection and learn. Because that's also a way of putting some of that funding again into the community.

And then, if we're talking about the actual ideal of what an Indigenous evaluation could look like, it's – and I think it's very much an ideal, given the world that we live in – it's when communities already have those resources and whether they have internal evaluation knowledge and capacity or they can have access to an external evaluator that is Indigenous and of their community where there are those relationships already in place and there's an intimate knowledge of the place and culture. I think that's a very important component of good Indigenous evaluation. I guess really an evaluation that is conducted, is grounded in cultural protocols, is done with great respect, there is a focus on relationship, and community priorities are privileged. Yeah.

Gladys ([23:56](#)):

Yes, absolutely. Thank you for tackling that really big <laugh> broad question and bringing it down into the need for local context, the need for resources. And I love that you started off with the responsibility of the funder in that space as well and thinking about how funding expectations and reporting and the strings that are attached also needs to shift in order for Indigenous evaluation to be able to flourish. Right now, in this broad thing called Indigenous evaluation, what are you excited about?

Aneta ([24:33](#)):

Well, <laugh>, this might be an unexpected answer, but I'm excited about frameworks! I'm excited about communities developing their own tools for evaluation because it's quite common now. Nowadays you've got communities starting to think, oh, actually, why don't we just do this ourselves? Or we can do this and we can add our own flavor. So I'm really excited about what has been developed, including the four frameworks that I mentioned before, but also, what isn't currently available from a quick Google search, that people are keeping to themselves, that they're developing their own evaluation capacity. And, yeah, just excited to see what comes out of that and how our field evolves as we move forward. How as we learn from each other and move from that whole, that global space, to more of a local space.

Gladys ([25:34](#)):



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Yeah. I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit more about that global to local. You know, at the beginning you talked about the importance of the move from the global to the local as Indigenous evaluation continues to evolve and become more honed in on context and languages and land. Do you have any examples local to you that you can share about what these practices have looked like at a local level?

Aneta ([26:05](#)):

Yeah, sure. So here in Aotearoa Indigenous evaluation looks like kaupapa evaluation, so evaluation that is by Māori for Māori with Māori and as Māori. So where Māori ways of thinking and doing are considered normal, and that's how evaluation is framed. So that's been sort of how we've thought about evaluation with Māori for at least 15 to 20 years now. And so what we're seeing here is iwi, tribal groups, picking up the mantle or working with evaluators to come up with their own local ways of doing evaluation. One example is Te Korekoreka, one of the frameworks that I've included in my research. So as a framework developed by an iwi group from down south, Kai Tahu group. And they have developed a model that is informed by one of their creation stories. So it's so it's based on the idea that life emerged in three stages.

So it was te kore, which is the nothingness, and then te pō, which is the night, and then te ao, which is, you know, the world and life around us. And so they've taken that idea and it's informed how they're thinking about not only evaluation, but also it's driving program development, how their organization runs. And it's those phases of learning where you move through te kore, to te pō into te ao. So you're moving from these phases of sitting in the darkness and seeing what emerges, what comes forth as you move into te ao, into conceptualizing your thoughts and putting them down. So that's one example. And this is also an example of a group where they do their own evaluation work as well as work with funders to do evaluation. So it's really driven by their own priorities and what they want for themselves.

So that, again, it's having that resource, flexibility of time and funding, which has actually come out of my research has been really quite important when we are thinking about Indigenous evaluation is that need for flexibility and not to be told when things need to be done by. But they're also using this framework as a tool to push back against funders as well, and to educate them on what evaluation looks like within their communities. So for example, if a funder wants X, Y, Z, then they have conversations bringing in their framework and being like, can we align these two? This is what we prioritize within our organization, and can that align with what you're expecting from us? So that's I think a really cool example.

Gladys ([29:41](#)):

Yeah, thank you. And I like how in the foundation of that framework then the expectation is for that funder to enter into a different kind of relationship where there is that conversation about what is going to be measured. And I imagine that there is often some movement that needs to happen from the funder's perspective about what's important to measure and how the community might measure that in a way that's meaningful. The episode just before this one, I finished speaking with Dr. Kim Vanderwood here in Canada from Reciprocal Consulting, and she tells a story about her unlearning of a Euro-Western paradigm of evaluation and going into community





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and sharing a presentation about all of these disparities and inequities and challenging health outcomes that Indigenous peoples face and the statistics, and a youth in the audience puts their hand up and says, it sounds like maybe you're measuring the wrong kinds of things <laugh>. And it kind of draws forward into this conversation that we're having around measuring what matters to Indigenous communities and that can feel really different for funders and funding relationships, I think.

Aneta ([31:02](#)):

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I've heard this a couple of times, where evaluators talk about how people aren't talking to them; you know, it's just, oh, what's wrong with these communities? Why aren't they giving me, or why aren't they responding to my tools? And it's like, the community is not the problem, it's that you're approaching this in the wrong way and you might not be asking the right question. Yeah, for sure.

Gladys ([31:29](#)):

Yeah. So, I love the things that you're excited about and it totally makes sense that you're excited about frameworks. That's something that you are so living within right now, and I'm glad that you're still excited about the work that you are doing for your PhD. I wonder if you have anything that you would like to share for emerging Indigenous evaluators? If you were to speak to them in this space right now, what would you love for them to know about their work, about maybe things that you've learned along the way?

Aneta ([32:00](#)):

Something about my journey and that I'm very grateful for is that I came into the field through the mentorship and the guidance of my aunt who's an already established kaupapa Māori evaluator. So having that support and that guidance has been really invaluable. And I know that that's not the case for a lot of emerging Indigenous evaluators. And I think what's difficult is, especially if you're coming through university, these Western institutions and, as your previous guest mentioned, it's hard to unlearn these Western ways of thinking about evaluation. And I guess something that I would like to share with emerging Indigenous evaluators is to find your people. If you can't, if that's not other Indigenous evaluators, then your family or people in your community, just as that reference point, that post that you can always go back to and be like, ah, right, this is what I'm doing it for. And there's a different way of doing things than what I've been taught. And even if you don't have those people, then going to the literature, you know, having these texts, which we do have: Linda Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* is always the one for me. But it's just that reminder of what we're doing it for; we're doing this work for our people and we don't have to follow these Western approaches in order to do that.

Gladys ([33:54](#)):

Mm, thank you. And I love those words of wisdom: find your people. It's definitely, I know for me, when I'm in a space where I don't have to start from the beginning explaining everything that has brought me to the moment of whatever I'm feeling, having a shared understanding or shared context or shared experience of doing work in Indigenous evaluation, finding your people can



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feel like a breath of fresh air, can feel like a big hug, can feel like a warm cup of tea together, all of those lovely feelings. So I love that. Thank you for sharing.

Are there any other pieces, as we thought about our time together and met and chatted about it, were there any other pieces that you were thinking about that you wanted to draw forward into this conversation or right now in this moment, reflecting on? Is there anything else that you want to make sure to share into the space for the listeners to think about Indigenous evaluation and this work moving forward into the future?

Aneta ([34:57](#)):

Yeah, it's something that I reflected over when I started doing my PhD studies and that question of am I just looking local within Aotearoa or do I want to expand and look at frameworks in other Indigenous spaces with other Indigenous communities? And something that I've thought about how to do that work, how to engage with different cultural groups that I don't belong to, and to really think about how I'm going to approach that, how I'm going to approach different people from different cultures, how I'm going to engage with the knowledge that they share with me, how I'm going to engage with the different way that these people see the world. So part of my methodology is called manuhiritanga, which in English means the way of being a good guest. And to me that was my approach to my research is using a kaupapa Māori methodology.

So taking that a little bit further, really grounding down in who I am as a Māori person, what that means to me and, and who I am as Māori and also as an Indigenous person. And then taking these principles of maanakitanga which is caring, of whanaungatanga, of connecting and relationship building, and applying that to how I go about and engage with Indigenous peoples from different parts of the world. I don't know if that's enough detail on that, but it's definitely how – for other Indigenous evaluators, especially if you find yourself working with cultures or communities that you don't belong to, I think it is that point of reflecting on who you are as a person within your culture, but also being mindful that you're stepping into a space where you're a guest and there are different protocols to follow, there's a different way of holding yourself that you need to be a little bit mindful of. But yeah, I'll stop there. Thank you.

Gladys ([37:24](#)):

Yeah, thank you for drawing that forward and I will definitely link to, I know you have a blog post on the American Evaluation Association about being a good guest in different cultural spaces, so I'll make sure to link that as well for listeners. And I'm so glad that you included that in your reflection as well. I'm so happy to have shared the space with you today and to have gotten to hear a little bit more about your PhD work and how you came to this journey. And yeah, thank you. Thank you so very much for spending time with me today.

Aneta ([37:59](#)):

Oh, thank you. It's been a real privilege.

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

Wonderful.



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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 favorite 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. Ekosani.