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**Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast**

**Season 1 Episode 3: Indigenous Insights: Michael Hart**

<https://gladysrowe.com/s01e03-Indigenous-insights-michael-hart/>

**November 14, 2022**

Gladys ([00:03](#)):

Greetings. Welcome to Indigenous Insights and Evaluation podcast. My name is Gladys Rowe and I'm so grateful that you're here. What is Indigenous evaluation? Who's doing this work and why? And what have we learned so far? 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 how they're doing their work and the challenges and insights they've experienced along the way. Are you an evaluator, a funder student, or an organization or community who wants to learn more about Indigenous evaluation? Would you love the space to reflect on how to design, implement, learn from support, and share insights? Great. This podcast is for you. Join me and my guests as we open up our evaluation bundles to share the gifts, knowledges and hopes that we've gathered in our journeys and bring them together in this space. I hope in these stories you will come to understand why this is such important work and how we can contribute to decolonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

Gladys ([01:12](#)):

Dr. Michael Hart is a citizen of Fisher River Cree Nation and the Vice Provost Indigenous engagement at the University of Calgary. He's a strong and visible role model for members of the university community on Indigenous engagement and being a good relative. While Michael continues to be supported throughout his work with the guidance of elders from various nations, he spent several decades of focused learning about his own people's traditional values, beliefs, and practices. He held a Canada research chair in Indigenous knowledges and social work through the University of Manitoba from 2012 to 2018 when he joined the University of Calgary. Dr. Hart also led the development of the Master of Social Work and Indigenous Knowledges program at the University of Manitoba and was the inaugural director for the program. He was the founder of the Aboriginal Social Worker Society and a board member for 17 years. Since its launch in 2001, his work has spanned from Canada, including Manitoba, Quebec, and Yukon, and includes many internationally based projects and events in such places as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Norway.



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Gladys ([02:12](#)):

These projects include being the editor of the Journal of Indigenous Social Development since 2015. Dr. Hart holds a BSW MSW and PhD in Social Work from the University of Manitoba, as well as a BA in Psychology from the University of Manitoba. Beyond these many roles and positions that Dr. Hart holds and works to be accountable to, I do wanna add that he has also been so foundational in my own Master's and PhD work as my advisor and mentor and also in my journey in learning what it means to be working in a good way to support the wellbeing of Indigenous communities. His mentorship over the past 14 years has transformed the pathways that I have taken personally and professionally. Welcome Michael. I'm so glad to be able to have a conversation with you today.

Michael ([02:55](#)):

Tansi Gladys Michael Hart **New**, and I'm Michael Hart and I'm from, my home, my heart is in Fisher River, Cree Nation.

Gladys ([03:07](#)):

Can you share some of the experiences, so we're here, we wanna talk or I wanna talk about Indigenous evaluation and some of the foundations of Indigenous evaluations. So I was wondering if you could start off by sharing a little bit about what experiences you've had in this area of designing and implementing evaluations from an Indigenous foundation or supporting Indigenous organizations.

Michael ([03:33](#)):

That's actually a bigger question than it appears, because Indigenous evaluation, there isn't any one particular form it's going to span and be influenced by a number of things. What I mean by that is usually when you're doing evaluation, it's based upon a request, whether it's the organization itself, whether it's funders, whether it's even a third party or other possibilities. So they will often come with a particular focus and scope for the evaluation to be completed. What they put down for that focus and scope for evaluation will influence how you'll be able to do an evaluation generally, but also influence the kind of approach that you may take in terms of Indigenous evaluation. So for example, I've been involved a while ago now in terms of reviewing First Nations health programs and the scope of it was really determined by Health Canada and the particular focus within it was more so influenced by the First Nation itself.

Michael ([04:39](#)):

So that's where they had some say in terms of the kinds of things that they wanted to pay attention to in terms of the kind of perspective or kind of lens that to take when looking at those things, those will influence the kind of evaluation you take with that particular First Nation was able to still reflect the typical things of what government body would expect, but also highlight in some of the analysis, the focus and perspective that the First Nations wanted to attend to. On the other hand, I've done evaluation with Indigenous organizations, so First Nations, Metis, and Inuit organizations and they had far more control over the evaluation, so they were able to say we wanted an Indigenous based evaluation as opposed to one that focus includes an Indigenous lens. The difference between these two parts on a continuum is that with an Indigenous based one we're able to pre-identify particular values that we want to focus on, predetermine the focus or particular the scope, predetermine even the methods that's going to be used within evaluation. So on one hand in terms of the First Nation



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organization having to follow the government body and what they're expectations are a lot of it was predetermined questions and reviewing records.

Michael ([06:00](#)):

On the other hand, with the Indigenous organization having more control, we're able to reflect the values, the mission statement of the organization in the evaluation process, and use methods such as sitting down in circle or engaging in a discussion with families, incorporating some aspects such as smudging or even going way off to a different direction, hearing the family talk about other dynamics related perhaps to colonialism or perhaps to ceremony. So there's far more flexibility on the Indigenous based one. So when you ask your question, Indigenous evaluation is really about a whole spectrum of methods, of approaches, of foundations. So my experience has been from that range and a number of ways in between, it includes a mix of those things.

Gladys ([06:54](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate you jumping into my massive question there. So what I'm hearing is I speak often also about this continuum and the spectrum and where on one side, like you said, it's about the funder kind of already comes with a set of parameters and communities try to do their best within those parameters versus organizations or communities being able to determine right from the beginning. So it's really, there's some power dynamics there that can then really influence the way that evaluation can be implemented and whether what kinds of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing could potentially be a part of the evaluation.

Michael ([07:34](#)):

When I think about that piece, what you just mentioned is that whole dynamic is also reflected over the, I would say the past 20 years or so and where there was funders having far more control over evaluation and what they wanted attended to, et cetera. They still have a fair amount of control, but I am hopeful that funders are realizing that evaluation can be used as a tool of colonial oppression. What evaluation does in that is try and force an organization, a program to follow particular expectations and often those expectations are determined outside of any particular nation or organization or group. And you combine those two things, the ability to direct somebody and directing them in ways that you want them to behave. You're getting, falling right within the parameters of colonialism when little attention is given to the Indigenous peoples, Indigenous values, Indigenous aspirations, et cetera. I have faith that we're shifting from that. So the last evaluation I did for a program within an Indigenous organization, the organization was strong to be able to speak against those kind of dynamics and emphasize the need for Indigenous based evaluation. So I do think over the past 20 years maybe it's a bit more that evaluation is shifting to recognize the voices, aspirations, the experience, the expertise of Indigenous peoples.

Gladys ([09:08](#)):

Thank you. Yeah. So ultimately if we're working towards a stronger grounded way of evaluating or way of learning that's grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing that is cognizant and driven by the priorities of Indigenous organizations. Tell me a little bit about why that type of work itself is important.

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



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That's a good question because they always take it as self-evident. And so to be asked that I have to get out of my usual ways of going forward and remember my roots and my foundations. The reason that would be important is that as Indigenous peoples, we've experienced such a long history of colonial oppression and I'm of the opinion that it's still here, still being exercised, it's still influencing whether it's our communities of long ago or whether it's a community within a city or a community within a large organization such as a hospital or university, that it's still present. It's still having others exercising and determining things for Indigenous peoples. And in order for things to be switched around, whether it's being more successful in education, having better health outcomes, having better programs, addressing the needs of Indigenous peoples, even on the for-profit side in terms of evaluating the service, evaluating the kind of products that are coming out, the more that we are able to follow Indigenous visions and aspirations based upon Indigenous values and beliefs, the more that we're exercising our own way forward and setting our own path forward, the less that we're able to do those things in terms of follow our own values and our own expectations for ourselves.

Michael ([10:55](#)):

And the more that others are impinging upon that, the more that we're continuing along that colonial path. And so for us to be better off health wise, dream wise, knowledge wise ecetera, we really should be setting our own agenda and seeing whether we're following an agenda set by ourselves.

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

Thanks for sharing that. It really makes me think about some of the work of Linda Tuhwai Smith for example, who talks about research by, with, and for Indigenous peoples. And so this is really evaluation by, for, and with Indigenous peoples and nations. It looks to some of the principles of self-determination and self-governance towards resurgence and or decolonization. And I know a lot of the work that you do really centers Indigenous perspective rather than trying to center Indigenous in relation to a colonial relationship. And so I'm wondering if you had a little bit to share about that idea of starting from a place of Indigenous priorities without always being in relationship to colonialism in relation to evaluation.

Michael ([12:09](#)):

I would be happy to do that. I'm thinking that I'm going to do it in a little bit different way and so I will have to be nation centric to some degree in terms of for myself being of the Cree Nation and how I've been taught by the Elders of the Creenation, I think it's applicable to other nations, but by no means speak for others inappropriately. So when we look at our own ways of going forward, we have one is that we've learned to live with our colonial neighbors, with our settler neighbors, I'll say. But we also have many that are maintained practices and understanding and perspectives that have been from long ago and many of our Elders, variety of nations speak about to know where we're going, we have to know where we're at, to know where we're at, we have to know both who we're and where we come from. And so when looking at evaluation and centering ourselves, then to know where we starting off, where we come from, have to understand our long history of how we practice the values that we hold, our belief systems, we have to still relate to our ancestors and our main way of relating to them is through our Elders,. The way, the main way we relate to our practices, the knowledge of those practices.

Michael ([13:29](#)):



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And by having that understanding, we could see what our values were, we could see who we were, we could see our belief systems and we could look at ourselves now in relation to that to see whether how well we relate or how well we want to relate to all of those things. Because it's not to say that we won't grow and change in different ways per se, but we need to do that from a point of awareness, understanding about what it's we're growing towards, but also what we're growing away from. And ideally it should be conscious choices about how we want to move forward. By understanding those things where we come from, who we are, where we're at right now in relation to those things, we could start setting an agenda of where we want to go because those things will be the points of reference we would have to know where we're headed and how to change our course in terms of our visions and aspirations of where we want to be. Some people say you could just go ahead and do that.

Michael ([14:31](#)):

I'm of the view that the better able we have those intergenerational connections, the better off we'll be as a peoples. When I look around at settler society, my own personal view is that one of the difficulties they have is that they're a loose compass because they have difficulties knowing their roots and which way they want to go based on the roots. It's very goal. orientated. So back to our own ways, that's not what I want to do. I don't want to be just this goal chasing something just for the sake of chasing it. I be able to know my connection to land. I want to be able to know my connection to my ancestors. I wanna know what I have to pass on my children and if I'm blessed grandchildren so that they'll have a foundation that they can stand on to do what it's that they want to do. And by having all that in place, I think will be better able to set our aspirations, our dreams or goals.

Michael ([15:30](#)):

We're, indeed, we have ceremonies that help us in those processes. So all of this, what I'm just speaking about is consistent with some of our traditional practices, whether it has to do with going out fasting, whether it has to do with cleansing ceremonies or Sundance ceremonies, et cetera. They help us set that foundation towards what our vision is for ourselves, for our contribution to our family, to our community. So in my eyes, the better that evaluation reflects all of those processes, meaning that it's based upon our values and our beliefs, our practices, and the better it is able to support individuals, organizations, communities, to reach our visions and goals that are based upon who we are as Indigenous peoples. I hope I answered that question that you just asked.

Gladys ([16:22](#)):

You definitely did. And I appreciate you really putting that within the context of Cree Nation because like you said, there's different understandings and different ways of relating to sense of purpose, et cetera. And there might be overlap like you shared as well. Yeah. And so I really see that and feel what you shared there as this grand vision of where myself as a Cree evaluator would like to work toward. And so I'm going to ask a question that kind of seems a little obvious, but are we there and how do we get there? <laugh>, big question again for you.

Michael ([16:57](#)):

Are we there in terms of being able to exercise Indigenous evaluation based upon

Gladys:



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Yes

Michael:

no <laugh> and I say no because on different levels we are still dependent upon others and terms of financing evaluation, financing programs, et cetera, that we still have to rely pretty heavily on the benevolence of our settler relatives. And so what I mean by that, Canada is the one primarily supporting a number of Indigenous organizations. And because of that, they still believe they have a say in what our goals and visions are for our organizations. Even I would say they influence our nations about whether it's Inuit, Metis, or First Nations, they still influence what us reaching our goals and aspirations. And I would go as far as at times to even try to control that. So are we there yet? No, we're not there yet, at least cause of that. But also us as a peoples, we need to spend that time and this is an ongoing thing, it's not just this particular timeframe, this generation or generations here.

Michael ([18:08](#)):

We have to take the time to make sure we do that groundwork and looking at where we come from and who we are and those kinds of pieces of what is the context. And we need, in my eyes a greater number of us to have an understanding of that and to be engaged with one another talking about it. So we can have that shared understanding as community, whether it's a community within an organization or a community in terms of political community or other forms of community, we need to be talking about who it is we are and where we come from. So we are making those choices, whether we choose to reflect our own goals or values or happen to bring on colonial expectations of on ourselves. And even that it's still a choice. We may see that there's something beneficial about the colonial process. So I'll give you an oversimplified example is that I would prefer to live in a well-built house as opposed to something less than that. And the reason I say that is because right now housing expectations is based upon other people setting what the standards are.

Michael ([19:20](#)):

And I'm OK with that right now. And what I do hope is that we'll have such a grasp on that in the very near future that we'll be setting up our own standards based upon our own political entities. So even those colonial processes we have to evaluate and decide what it's we're going to take on and adopt it and use to strengthen. Another example would be my own community and the importance of geothermal heating and cooling and our use of that. But it could be other things in terms of our people have often talked about intergenerational trauma and we're modern, or sorry, mainstream or settler science. The larger form of science is starting understand that through epigenetics. So that information that's based upon epigenetics that's incorporated into a program still may be useful information, but I need to be able to understand it and use it in a way that I think is most applicable as an Indigenous person.

Gladys ([20:19](#)):

Thank you for those examples. I'm really hearing that it's about choice and determination and power and who gets to determine what's right and what's going to fit based on our own values and belief systems, which you shared earlier. This is still in a space, Indigenous evaluation is still in a space where so much of that is still determined by funders, by government, by legislation. And so to move towards a



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space of Indigenous evaluation, we really need to address some of those power differentials and where we begin to think about.

Michael ([20:53](#)):

Yeah, you summarize it well <laugh> just, it's about power and choice. I guess that's the Coles Notes version of it.

Gladys ([21:01](#)):

Just helping me to follow along with the stories that you're sharing and I'm loving the examples as well. So one of the things that it got me thinking about, cuz you shared that it's important for us to start having these conversations as communities, as nations, but I'm also thinking about community of Indigenous evaluators. One of the things that I really see happening right now is just like the rush for universities to Indigenize and decolonize, there's this rush for Indigenous evaluation. And so funders I think are really excited at this opportunity and Indigenous evaluation unfortunately might be seen as this checkbox thing that can be included with the end of an RFP that says, oh yeah, we please also tell us how you're going to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing it into the evaluation. And so I think that there's a lot of excitement, which is great because then there's a potential for the conversation to change. And also, I don't know if there's a lot of us who are out there doing this kind of work yet or are supported to do this kind of work. And so I'm wanting to kinda ask you where does this field as a field need to go and how can we support more Indigenous evaluators to be doing this kind of work and what kind of support do they need? Lots of questions there.

Michael ([22:24](#)):

I'll start in terms of that checkbox piece, when we go back to the concept of a continuum of how we do evaluation. Just having a check is really on one end of evaluation that it's really more of the, in this case, non-Indigenous evaluation based upon whatever institute is providing mandate and/or funds. So check boxes, is the most basic way that you include Indigenous content for lack of better words. To the other side is that an evaluation request, an Indigenous format or expecting Indigenous format would have that all the way through in terms of what the evaluation is about. An example of that being all the way through is recognizing Indigenous methods of gathering your data, recognizing Indigenous methodology in terms of the bigger piece tied to evaluation. So looking at the foundations to the evaluation, what is it based upon? Is it Indigenous perspectives and principles or is it something else?

Michael ([23:23](#)):

So all of those things contribute to how an evaluation would be potentially framed in terms of expectations on the evaluator. So that brings me to the next piece is that for an evaluator to be able to best exercise this, and I'm not saying they're the only one, is that they would have a firm understanding of what Indigenous values of the particular nation or nations or peoples. Organizations would have a firm understanding of that. But they would also have their own understanding of where they are situated in relation to Indigenous values and belief and practices and histories and experiences and visions that an evaluator wouldn't just be an example of a checkoff box that they say, well I could check this off, I could do these ways of knowing it, et cetera. And it wouldn't be just a checkoff in terms of an individual saying, I'm Indigenous, so it's an Indigenous evaluation.



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Michael ([24:15](#)):

It has to be deeper than that. And so where do we go as we establish an Indigenous evaluation community is recognizing all of those dynamics. I think there'll be strength in that someone would have a number of ways of approaching evaluation. So the better that you're able to come from that place, understanding your own values, practices and beliefs, the better you're able to work from the organization and community, et cetera, own values and beliefs that really will become your foundation and you could address more along that spectrum. So a group of people who are able to support one another to develop those abilities along that whole spectrum, including that self-reflection piece, the stronger we would have in terms of Indigenous evaluators organization, for example. So where we're at right now is I don't think we're doing that very well. We have to watch out in the same way we have people stepping forward claiming they're Indigenous and they're not. I'm not saying anything one way or another about any of that. But I would say that if we don't spend time looking at that, then somebody else potentially is setting agenda for Indigenous peoples again. But the difference is that that's coming from within. And so the better that we could explain the need to understand our own values, beliefs, practices, et cetera, the better that we could demonstrate that and demonstrate support for all of that, the better off we will be. And so as a group of evaluators, the more that we can hold one another, I don't know if I would go as far to say accountable, but to relate to one another with those common things, the better we are able to say somebody's on track, somebody's off track. So I think we have a ways to go, but I think we started that walk.

Gladys ([26:07](#)):

Thank you. Yeah, as you were saying that, I was thinking of relational accountability or even just relationality of some sort. Where is the space where we hold each other to a standard and also support each other to come to that standard, whatever that standard is that isn't something that's imposed upon us, but an understanding based on values and principles and ways of being in relation with one another and within this work of Indigenous evaluation? I agree that there definitely is a long way to go, but I appreciate hearing your perspectives on what it would take to get there and maybe some of the foundational pieces to start bringing that type of community together.

Michael ([26:48](#)):

I think about whether it's a nation or nations with societies or clan systems, et cetera, those dynamics will inform us about how we may choose to come together and be in relational accountability. As you just mentioned, there are expectations. We do have organizations such as societies and roles and clan systems. We do have expectations ourselves, and one another. And if we do understand that we will be better able to relate to one another as Indigenous evaluators from a perspective that's rooted in our own ways of coming together and supporting and growing and challenging.

Gladys ([27:32](#)):

Mm-hmm. Definitely leaving me with a lot to think about. I hadn't included that in my thoughts. Thank you for bringing that forward. When you think about evaluation, and I'm kind of going to go off in a little bit of a different direction, but when I was doing the work in Winnipeg with the Indigenous Learning Circle and supporting them to bring together what was the Indigenous evaluation bundle, the knowledge keepers that were sitting in circle with me, one of the things that came forward is they shared that they're really this word that they could find, that they could draw on that would exactly





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mean this idea of evaluation. So they were demonstrating just kind of the incongruence of this western imposition of evaluation, but instead they shared something that you talked about previously in our conversation was that one of the elements that they could think of in this process, which for them they really described this as a process similar to what you shared, was that we need to be able to look back in a way that allows us to move forward. So I was wondering your thoughts on that and I was wondering if there's some, is there a Cree word that comes to mind when you think about the embodiment of Indigenous evaluation?

Michael ([28:44](#)):

I don't think my Cree strong enough to think of a particular word. So I encourage yourself, myself, others, listeners, et cetera, to give that a good point to reflection. What does come to mind is that whole process of *mamatowisowin*, in terms of that process of recognizing that energy, that spirit that runs through everything and how we look inside to come to an understanding to come to know not just ourselves but all the life around us cause of that which runs through everything. So when I think about those processes, it takes me also to our ceremonies which guide some of those processes and I could mention fasting or sweat lodge for example. In that internal look inside to come to understand that which is all around us and I look at other things in terms of how an Elder would guide somebody through either those processes or through that journey. And so they don't say whether something is necessarily that you got an A or a B or anything along that lines, but they would say whether some, at least the Elders I spend time with would say things along the lines of whether you need to keep working at it to keep going at what you're learning.

Michael ([30:02](#)):

So there's usually a lot of encouragement around that piece or they may say that you've finished this step and you're ready to move forward in your journey onto the next step. So the reason I outline all that is that we have these concepts, we have these ways of coming to know our ourself our circumstance or situation and whether that's an individual or organization or even a ceremony. And so when people attended ceremony, they'll comment about how it went, what happened, what they followed or didn't, cetera. All those are our own ways of evaluating through our systems. So if we look at those things like how we've done ceremony, how we've done gatherings, how Elders have provided guidance, how we use our oral systems, we'll unfold what our evaluation is for us that's firmly rooted in our own practices.

Gladys ([30:59](#)):

Yeah, definitely I appreciate the connection back that inner knowing, that inner journey, that opportunity for inward reflection and what that means as a part of the evaluation work as an evaluator.

Michael ([31:14](#)):

Yes. So one of the key pieces about that is not only that we do that inner journey, but we see how that relates to all that which is around us. So I'm going to think, I dunno, I'll pick up a program that's helping youth to address mental health matters. It's one thing to work with the youth, work with the people in the organization, work with the community members, work with Elders perhaps tied to it or knowledge keepers who facilitate ceremonies for them and ask them to do that in relation to that for the program and people within the program to do that inner looking. But it's also to bring that out and to engage in



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terms of what people are saying and how we relate to one another. That's part of that process as well. And the next step is also knowing how all of that fits within that larger context. All of those is tied to all the things I mentioned earlier in a more practical kinda way. So that would be evaluation based upon our own ways of doing things. And I think we have those, we just need to uncover them and use them in today's context.

Gladys ([32:28](#)):

Right, and to be supported with resources and time and structures that allow that to be built into the evaluation processes as well. One of the things that I see, and it's prevalent in research as well, is just that lack of recognition of the time that it takes to establish the relationships and the trust to be able to work in this way that's aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. I was wondering what you thought some of the other challenges you've seen in this field so far, and if you had any examples that you could share.

Michael ([33:02](#)):

There's a few things that come to mind and I'll try to address at least a couple of them. One of them is when we are brought into a system, the larger system, the settler systems, and we may come from that from an educated spot in terms of the settler education system or we may come without any education and just our experience with the system. What ends up potentially happening is that self-reflection process of where we're at in relation to our own values and practices, et cetera. We may not be there and someone may need to guide some of that process so that the individuals within an organization, the organization itself understands where it's at. That in itself would be part of an evaluation in my eyes and not every organization would see the relevance of that because, of lack of connection to our own ways of doing things.

Michael ([33:56](#)):

That's one of the challenges is that we need to support people to strengthen the connections they have with their own understandings, their own practices. Another example of some of the challenges has to do with just as you're mentioning, the time needed to do evaluation. The tendency is still there and it's been there as long as I've been doing things tied to evaluation, to just tack on evaluation at the end of the program to say, ok, what is it that you did and how did we do? As opposed to nurturing that whole process throughout an organization or programs life cycle. And at the very minimum to at least do it over a seasonal cycle. And in terms of preparing and getting things ready for evaluation. So in my eyes, evaluation is, and mainstream also speaks to this is an ongoing process. So as soon as the program starts or soon as that strategic plan is going to be implemented or developed, you have to have the concept evaluation in mind and we have to have that continuous self-reflection.

Michael ([35:04](#)):

But that's not always seen as desirable until the very end by so many entities, including funders at some point at many times. So that's the whole other area of challenge, is to recognize evaluation is greater than something pinned on at the end, especially Indigenous evaluation that if it's going to be relationship based that you relationships. So I would say those are two of the bigger ones that I can come up with. A third one would be the colonial impositions that come up with evaluation. That evaluation is still a means of controlling an organization, a nation, a group of individuals, what have you.



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Evaluation that comes from that colonial mindset is still a significant problem and we have to recognize how if it still has to go through that way. How do we survive that kinda evaluation? So that's another challenge area. So those are three examples.

Gladys ([36:04](#)):

Thank you for sharing those. And that last one really makes me think about connecting back to power. So if there was an opportunity that a funder came and there was a new way of building relationships with organizations as funders working towards a vision of wellness or for children and families for example, what it would take to even just begin to trust one another that there is a new way of working would take a lot of time because there's so much experiences out there that evaluation is used to control, like you said, a flow of resources. And so what kinds of new relationships could take place if we thought of evaluation as a different way or for a different purpose towards a different goal?

Michael ([36:51](#)):

So if I was in the funder's position and I wanted to work against that idea of control by outside entities or imposition of colonialism amongst the things I be doing, my own reflection about how wide can I be in surrendering that control over the funds. And so some I would be saying, okay, I think we need to support the process that they're going to look at themselves and they're doing and they're going to look at themselves in relation to their own vision and visions and practices and that they have a way they come out outta that with a way of doing things that's going to help them move forward closer to their vision. And as a funder than my focus is mainly around that vision and trying to support them to do those steps that I just mentioned as opposed to predetermining any of that.

Michael ([37:45](#)):

Now, I think there are funders that try to do that, but they still come from a position saying, oh, they gotta learn more, I gotta teach them more about this. And once we start doing that, we're inching in, widening those cracks for us to be, being this benevolent dictator about what they should be doing. So as a funder, we have to watch out from out about ourselves about how we're going to do that and have trust and faith with the organization or people involved that it will be done in a good way to address those things. And that means I gotta be open to establishing relationships with these organizations and have some degree of commitment to that. So I could demonstrate on my end that my interest is about supporting them to meet their own visions.

Gladys ([38:33](#)):

Thank you. Yeah, definitely some important points to think about as funders who are really wanting to think about working in a different way, in a new way that fosters Indigenous self determination.

Michael ([38:45](#)):

Mhmm.

Gladys ([38:45](#)):

So thinking about Indigenous evaluators turning towards Indigenous evaluation and evaluators again, do you have any insights over your time doing this work that you'd like to share with emerging Indigenous



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evaluators? Do you have any words of wisdom or experience that you'd like to offer people who have those kinds of roles who might be listening to this podcast?

Michael ([39:08](#)):

I think that from my perspective and my bias, it would be if I wanna strengthen how I'm able to do evaluations, I have to expand my perception and expand my toolkit, but also to strengthen my own foundation so that I understand where I'm coming from, who I am, and what I'm coming forward with. So as an Indigenous evaluator, I wanna have that firm grounding in my own Indigenous roots and my own Indigenous ways of being. And so if there's anything that I would encourage evaluators to be able to do regardless of their background, is to be able to do that and to recognize that's your center location, where you're going to be coming from, the center location of how you're going to be seeing things and the center location of how you're going to be doing things. You would of course relate that to whichever place an organization or nation or program, you're going to come with that foundation in relation to these other things. But you still always have that foundation and the better that you can understand it, the better able you could be aware of when you're imposing or not imposing, the better you could speak of how you go forward in your evaluation and the better able, you would have a wide repertoire of skills and understandings and doing an evaluation.

Gladys ([40:34](#)):

Yeah. I really appreciate that. And I'm just sitting here thinking how much <laugh>, even after all of these years that I've known you, I still take so much away from our conversations and I'm so grateful that you're willing to come and share some of your experiences and some of your hopes about a way forward for Indigenous evaluation and the purpose and how we can think about getting towards that vision. Is there anything else before we wrap up that you wanted to share? When I sent you this invitation, was there something that just jumped out saying, oh, I need to make sure to tell Gladys this?

Michael ([41:07](#)):

Yeah, actually, one of the things that this stands out is that I recognize that all of us are on a continuous journey. That we're always continuously learning and that we're all going to make mistakes. I'm going to make mistakes. I'm going to look back and see whether I was on track or not at different points in my life. And Gladys, it's such an honor to be able to participate in this. I deeply believe in what you're doing. I think if I'm able to contribute anything, it's just a small piece with all that you have and do and will offer others. So I commend you on this work and on the podcast and you have nothing but my support.

Gladys ([41:51](#)):

Well, that's a wonderful way to leave off. Thanks so much, Michael. I really appreciate it. I'm so grateful for you.