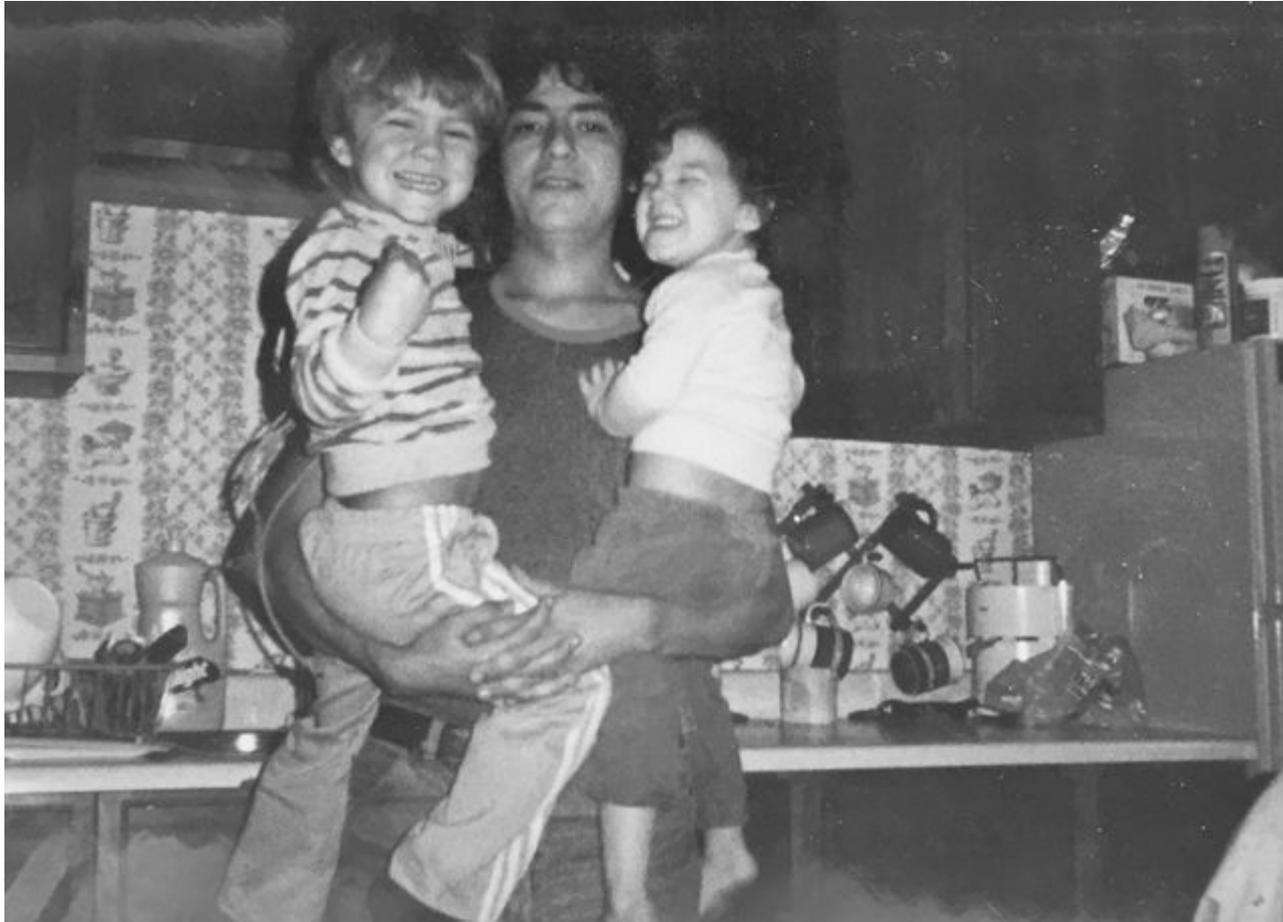
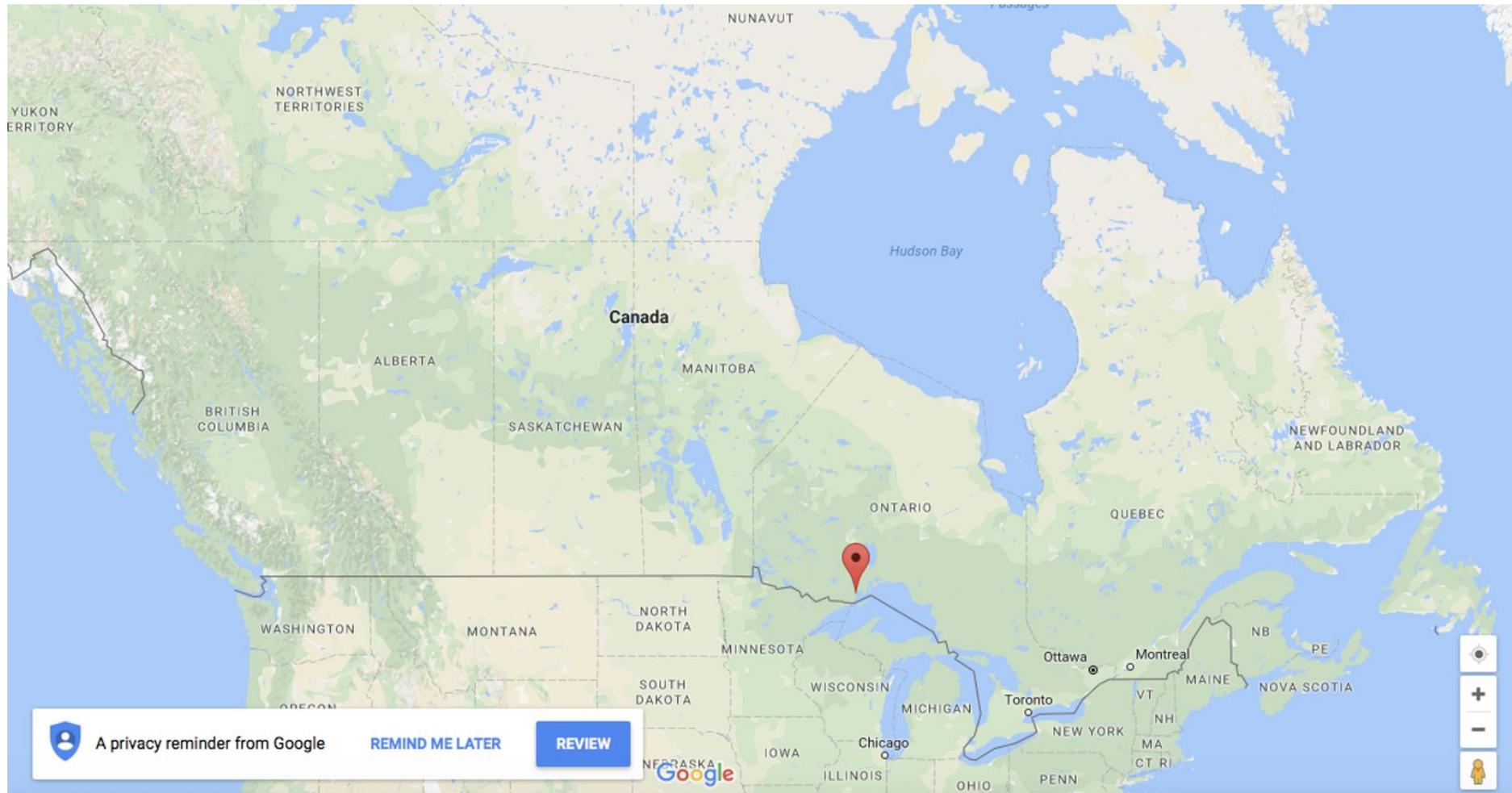


ENGO-First Nation Partnerships Assessment: *A Kinship-Based Approach*

Damien Lee, PhD
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c.1984





Story: *Woman who married a beaver*

J.B. Penesi qtd in Truman Michelson, ed. *Ojibwa Texts*. Vol. VII, Part II. Publications of the American Ethnological Society. New York: G.E. Stetchart & Co., 1919, 251-258,
<https://archive.org/details/ojibwatextscoll00unkngoog>.

Definitions

- Indigenist
- Colonialism & Decolonization
- Kinship



Indigenist defined

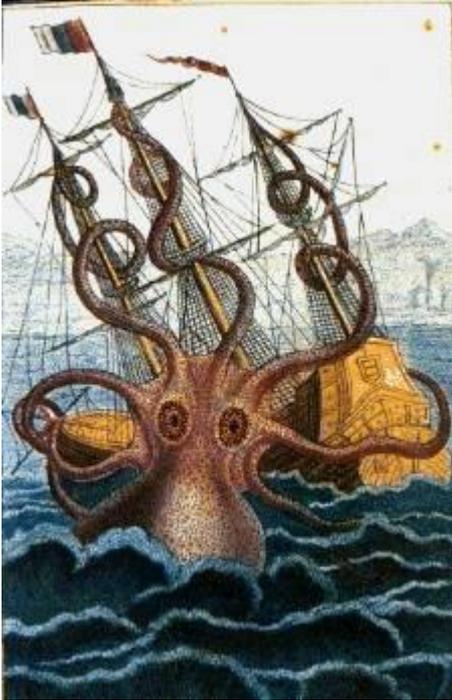
- Indigenous peoples' intellectual and political are valid unto themselves;
- Centre specific Indigenous nations' worldviews in research and assessment;
- Privileges Indigenous voices and ways of knowing;
- Decolonization is the highest political goal;
- Indigenist projects do not just define a problem, but also invest energy into envisioning an alternative.

Indigenist defined

“It is possible (and it always been) to conduct research abiding by the intellectual traditions of Indigenous Peoples without relying on western theories of knowledge, western research methodologies, western ethics review processes, and western ways of distributing “new” knowledge.”

(Simpson, 2009, 144)

Colonialism



- An economic, geopolitical, and psychological project of domination;
- In Canada, settler colonialism is not simply an action or policy, but the context we live in;
- Also known as the anti-trickster (Henderson, 2000);
- Decolonization is therefore fraught with entanglement.

Decolonization

- Not about “going back”;
- Rather, about Indigenous worldviews taking up more space;
- Strengthening the presence of Indigenous peoples’ ways of being;
- Indigenous knowledge system acting upon the world, in service of Indigenous communities (first and foremost).

Kinship

Kinship

- Family-based concept, but broader than nuclear;
- Establishes duties and responsibilities;
- Kinship obligations are reciprocal (Keewatin, 20)
 - “To be related to another in a system of kinship is to expect assistance from that other person and to expect to be asked for an be ready to render assistance as well” (Williams, 1999, 63).

Kinship - A political principle

- Foundational principle to many Indigenous nations' political orders;
- Example: asis of clans in many Indigenous nations;
- But also a guiding principle for treaty making - the basis of “establishing relationships with outsiders” (Devine, 2004, 209)

What others
have said

Literature review...

Assessment challenges - Neoliberalism

- Neoliberal technologies given primacy:
 - "fundamental to working in [the Indigenous evaluation] space is not always technical experience but rather understanding, a willingness to exercise humility, respect, and transparency, and relinquishing control over the evaluation project." (Shepherd and Graham, 2020b, 459)
- What does “neoliberal technologies” mean in this context?
 - Containing civil society activity through contractual relationships;
 - Fiscal surveillance of citizen organizing through reporting;
 - Instituting audit and accountability culture congruent;
 - Shift from core funding to project-based funding ushers in audit culture. (Tomiak, 2016)
 - Redirect Indigenous leaders’ accountability away from their nations and toward the
 - Canadian state. (Shewell, 2004, 20)

Assessment challenges - Whose needs are centered?

- Who sets the terms of engagement, analysis, and reporting?
- Whose interests are being served?
 - “interests of non-Indigenous partners ... are overriding the wishes and/or concerns of local Indigenous peoples” (Austin et al., 2018, 377)

Assessment challenges - What's next? (1)

- Scholars and practitioners have defined the need for Indigenous approaches to evaluation, but few have proposed culturally-rooted solutions.
 - **“Aside from acknowledging that there are indeed conceptual differences in approach at the broad level of epistemology, there are also challenges of axiology, ontology, and methodology,** as determined by such factors as language, cultural norms and practices, governance of evaluation and research, community decision making, and what is accepted as evidence in decision making.” (Shepherd and Graham, 2020a, 392)

Assessment challenges - What's next? (2)

Shepherd and Graham:

“Evaluation as a field has yet to figure out how to make a contribution to evidence that aligns with Indigenous ways of knowing and also meets the varied purposes of donor governments.” (2020a, 393)

Assessment challenges - What's next? (3)

Shepherd and Graham:

“Even less available in the [Indigenous evaluation] literature are approaches that can be described as effective or even appropriate.” (2020b, 459)

Assessment challenges - Reproducing colonialism

- Evaluators might inadvertently reproduce colonialism in while evaluating First Nation-led projects or partnerships if our colonial context is not accounted for, and b) Indigenous approaches to evaluation are not given space.
 - “Bringing an awareness or open-mindedness to learning about concepts of Indigenous evaluation (original evaluation) needs to be done without dominion. To do this requires starting from the beginning. What is the Western/colonizer “creation story” and that of the institutions and systems from where evaluation begins? How is the Western/colonizer “creation story” informed by policy and funding? If it is unknown, then trying to use evaluation as a tool for emancipatory and empowering practice to solve social and other issues will be a fleeting effort. **Worse than that, evaluators are likely to be replicating trauma and harm, whether or not they realize it.**” (Waapalaneexkweew, 2019, 347)

Good practices - The Notah Begay III Foundation

*“1. Commit to a long-term, stated investment policy and action plan for Indigenous youth and communities. 2. Invest in the self-determined success of Indigenous communities. 3. Begin and sustain relationships built on mutual respect and community engagement. 4. Co-create processes that are mutually beneficial and meaningful with maximum benefit. 5. Value, prioritize, and respect Indigenous knowledge and practice. 6. **Let the partner/community set the evaluation framework.**” (2020, 7)*

Good practices - DeLancey

*"Several authors have addressed the need for non-Indigenous evaluators working in Indigenous contexts to practise **evaluation that is grounded in the cultural context of the community in which the evaluation is taking place**, respects Indigenous beliefs and protocols, applies culturally relevant measures that flow from community-defined values, and meaningfully engages Indigenous people in the design and conduct of all stages of the evaluation." (2020, 502)*

Good practices - Firestone et al. (1)

“Decolonized evaluation centralizes Indigenous knowledge and values, ensures that processes and outcomes are aligned with Indigenous community goals and worldviews...” (2020, 417)

Good practices - Firestone et al. (2)

*“**Inter-relationality**: Inter-relationality, or the connection and interdependence between all things including information, is an important and cross-cutting concept in Indigenous knowledge systems and practice...” (2020, 418-419)*

Good practices - Firestone et al. (3)

“An additional challenge was the need to address different literacies, interpretations of language, and understandings of core concepts between evaluators and Indigenous communities. Mainstream evaluation terminology as expressed in oral and written English may not translate into local Indigenous languages or represent familiar concepts and local ways of knowing and doing”
(2020, 417)

What if we thought of
evaluation not in technocratic
terms, but in terms of kinship?

A kinship-based approach would...

- Re-conceptualize partnerships as treaties
 - Equal in power (nation-to-nation);
 - Needing to be renewed;
 - Based on responsibilities to each other, rather than a technocratic state/core;
 - Based on maintaining good relations in service of community well-being.

A kinship-based approach would...

As Cram puts it:

*“Evaluators working in Indigenous contexts should know how to **build and strengthen relationships**. When [others] describe the importance of evaluators understanding cultural protocols, they are implicitly speaking into a relationship space whereby **protocols maintain and strengthen relationships**.” (2018, 123)*

Nobody cries at Bingo

Dumont, Dawn. *Nobody Cries at Bingo*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 2011.

Bingo!

- Bingo is a site of governance;
- It is a space where community issues are discussed:
 - kinships are rehashed, and
 - challenges are mulled over;
 - even solutions are imagined.

Draft Assessment Tool



Design: Shawn Hedican

Why a bingo card?

*“Indigenous evaluators are breaking down the historical barriers of distrust by grounding evaluation approaches in Indigenous values and cosmologies, **using methods that are familiar and appropriate in local Indigenous contexts** and changing the language of evaluation to be **more responsive to Indigenous ways of knowing.**” (DeLancey, 2020, 506)*

Why a bingo card?

It is:

- accessible;
- flexible;
- open to any age group;
- fun;
- familiar.

Why a bingo card?

- It is not for ENGOs to use directly;
- It is for Indigenous communities to use to assess ENGOs and their relationships with them.

Thus...

- Nation-specific approaches;
- Center knowledge and norms;
- Accessibility
- Evaluate ENGO's ability to respect/engage in kinship law (foundation of nationhood).



Thank you

Damien Lee, PhD
416-979-5000 x 556212
damien.lee@ryerson.ca

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