

ETHICS MATTERS

The Processing of Indigenous Research in Higher Education

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Nulloo Yumbah
Central Queensland University

January 2000



Nulloo Yumbah

Place of Indigenous Learning & Research

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Preface

This report was researched and written by Jane Melville and Phillip Rankine of Nulloo Yumbah, Place of Indigenous Learning & Research, Central Queensland University. It is the result of an internal research grant from CQU and Nulloo Yumbah.

The impetus for the grant application was the changing status of the Indigenous centre on campus. The centre at this time is building on its student support role to encompass an academic role within and outside of the university. As such it is seeking to set up Indigenous research infrastructure within Nulloo Yumbah and within its umbrella institution. It seemed timely to investigate what similar Indigenous centres and institutions were attempting in this regard and to document the processes already in place, along with their long term goals.

It is hoped that this sharing of information may benefit not only Nulloo Yumbah and CQU but all other participating Indigenous education units.

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Ethics Matters: The Processing of Indigenous Research in Higher Education seeks to investigate ***the inclusivity of Indigenous issues and involvement of Indigenous education centres, in the assessment of Indigenous research proposals***, in terms of ethics and the use of appropriate protocols. The study focuses on four Indigenous centres in higher education institutions, one Indigenous research institute and one exclusively Indigenous higher education institution. In this way a variety of approaches are examined, from those operating within broader umbrella institutions to those operating more autonomously. The project is also interested in the influence that the Indigenous centres may have on their umbrella institutions on the one hand, and the influence of the umbrella institution on the Indigenous centres, on the other.

The research has found that for those centres operating within a broader institution ***most have extremely supportive environments*** in terms of Indigenous research. Four out of the five interviewed were included in decisions made about Indigenous research proposals. The exclusively Indigenous education institution operated fairly autonomously in consultation with the Indigenous community, in terms of processing Indigenous research. In addition all their processes and procedures are documented in official policy.

However in most cases ***involvement was informal and not documented*** in official policy or any other research documents of the university or Indigenous centre. It seems that the supportive and inclusive environment is more a result of goodwill and dependent upon individual positions and personalities of Indigenous centre staff and other university staff. The one Indigenous centre who felt excluded by their institution from participating was the only one centre proactively seeking to influence their university's culture through official channels, documentation and through policy development.

It appears that ***the processing of Indigenous research is at a crossroads***. A balance between the control of research and researchers on the one hand, and the protection of Indigenous stakeholders on the other, needs to be achieved. Perhaps a compromise between compelling the university research community to adhere to Indigenous ethics through policies and documentation, and allowing an ad hoc arrangement to continue, could be reached.

It is a complex situation. The ***issues involved in whether or not to document process and to develop and implement policy***, as well as considerations in the actual assessment of, and production of Indigenous research, ***raise questions of ethics***. Such ***ethical issues matter***, not only to Indigenous research communities but to all research communities, in their pursuit and production of knowledge.

Definitions

For the purpose of this project Indigenous Research is defined as any research undertaken which involves Indigenous Australian people, or issues. This includes research into the past, present or future. Indigenous research may be research undertaken by Indigenous or non-Indigenous persons or institutions. Research includes the collection, interpretation, analysis and presentation of data.

The term Indigenous education 'centre' is designed to include a research institute, an Indigenous education institution and four Indigenous education units within universities. The four units were originally student support units and have recently expanded their functions to include academic and research roles. The other two participating institutions were set up originally for their present functions. The term 'umbrella institution' is used to define the university within which five of the centres operate.

Overview

'Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labeling Aborigines and Aboriginality' (Dodson, 1994, p. 3).

Indigenous people in Australia have been the subject of much research for over 200 years. Who has done the research? Why has the research been conducted? Where is this knowledge now? Indigenous research today, raises extremely sensitive issues, due to its history and some current practices.

The stimulus for this project came from a desire to deconstruct such practices and identify areas at the grass root level which could be used as possible avenues for the empowerment of Indigenous communities in the research process. One such area identified by the researchers is the process of ethical assessment of research projects in higher education institutions. A small, albeit crucial stage in the determination of whether or not research may proceed, and if approved, how research may proceed. Consequently the project seeks to identify the level of involvement of Indigenous education centres in the assessment of Indigenous research and in the dissemination of information regarding Indigenous research issues, in the higher education sector.

The project is seen as a small step on the long journey to facilitate ways for Indigenous communities, through their representation in Indigenous centres, to have meaningful and effective control over the processing and assessment of their own research. The small step at this stage however is to highlight a variety of current situations that exist and in so doing stimulate debate, analysis and if required action, amongst individual Indigenous units. The research project does not purport to resolve issues or pinpoint best practice models. It sets out to collate and present information about the level of inclusion of Indigenous issues in the ethical assessment of research proposals.

At a practical level and within a more immediate time frame, the project aims to investigate how Indigenous research proposals are currently assessed, processed and monitored in universities in terms of the employment of appropriate ethical considerations and protocol. It aims to investigate the role of the Indigenous unit on campus and the role of an Indigenous institution, in the processing of Indigenous research. This will include infrastructure which is designed for their own research community and infrastructure that is designed to impact on the research community of the umbrella institution. It also aims to document perceptions of the ideal way for the processing of Indigenous research in higher education institutions.

Research Methodology

The research application came out of the need for Nulloo Yumbah to develop its own Indigenous research infrastructure within Central Queensland University, and from contact made the previous year with a variety of centres who were involved in a similar stage of development. The concept is supported by a recent publication investigating the inclusivity of Indigenous research in universities, which was researched by CQU and Nulloo Yumbah. It recommends;

That universities make apparent their commitment to facilitating Indigenous research needs by ensuring appropriate, sensitive and beneficial research is conducted in accordance with Indigenous ethics, values and protocols and that this commitment is explicitly expressed within university policies and practices. (Anderson et al, 1998, p.84)

A total of six Indigenous education units and learning institutions are participating. The institutions were selected in a way which reflected the older, newer and regional universities and which were representative of a few states and as it turns out both territories. One institution which is fairly autonomous in its Indigenous research development and which operates largely outside an umbrella institution, was included. It is however acknowledged that this institution differs in another aspect, in that it currently does not offer higher degrees. Research was only conducted with the Indigenous centre on campus and does not include interviews or document analysis with the umbrella institutions.

The researchers were careful to ensure a personalised approach to both the initial liaison with potential participants, and in the interview process itself. They were also very careful to ensure that participants knew what would be expected from them and what their own obligations were as researchers. Research was pursued with directors, primarily with whom both or one of the researchers had already some professional or personal link. Initial contact was made via email to the director and if interest was forthcoming, more information was sent via email and a tentative date and time for the visit was set. A letter, overview of project and consent form was then mailed, with confirmation of the date and time. Consent forms were then either mailed or faxed return to Nulloo Yumbah. Times and dates were confirmed a week prior to departure.

The development of Interview Proformas took several drafts and trials to reach a suitable outcome. In the main the researchers had to be mindful to keep the focus narrow. They tried to find a balance between keeping a narrow and workable focus and not having questions or topics for discussion which were leading in any way. Firstly the main achievable outcomes of the project were identified, then broad headings developed. Gradually the gaps were filled in. The topics for discussion include a description of the current situation, an overview of written documentation concerning Indigenous research processing procedures, and a survey of research committee structures. The relationship between the Indigenous centre and the umbrella institution in terms of ethical assessment

of research proposals was sought. Participants were then asked to assess the current situation in terms of advantages and disadvantages. The second phase of the discussion sought opinions on the ideal way to process Indigenous research.

It was decided that only the Indigenous units on campus would be contacted, as the project was only concerned with the realities as told by the representatives of the Indigenous units. There is no distinction between student or staff research in either the interviewing or report writing phases, as the researchers felt this was irrelevant to the sought outcomes of the research.

The interviews were conducted in person. Participants were provided with an overview of the discussion so they would be aware of how the interview was structured and to keep a tab on progress. Both researchers were involved in the interviews. This was important as it brought a broader perspective in terms of personal, professional and academic backgrounds, to the collection, analysis and most importantly interpretation of data. In addition the researchers decided against using a tape recorder as they thought this may be too intrusive and may restrain some comments. Thus having two on board to recollect, transcribe and interpret rough notes was invaluable.

Interviews were then more fully transcribed and formatted into the original interview proforma. In some instances questions proved to be superfluous or not necessary for this project, and in other instances extra themes which had come up during the course of the interviews, although not initially planned, proved to be very pertinent to this project and were thus included. In other words it pays to be flexible and to talk individually with participants rather than asking participants to complete a survey in isolation. The personal interaction proved invaluable for gaining additional information and ascertaining the value and relative importance of particular areas.

The third stage was to write a readable and useful report. It was decided to write a mostly descriptive report with assessment of the situation from the individual participants. This was decided so that the researchers did not be seen to be comparing one centre with another. It was decided to write the report in as anonymous terms as possible so as not to identify particular centres, except in the acknowledgments. The report will only be distributed to participants and they may decide where else they would like to share it. A brief official report on a prescribed form also must be submitted to the funding body.

Lastly the researchers are aware of the limitations of a research project of this nature. For example they acknowledge that what they are reporting is the result of a relatively minor amount of evidence gained from approximately two hour interview/discussion sessions and thus know there is probably much more that could have been discussed. It is recognised that some of the participants they knew better than others and with some it was their first meeting and that this also influences the working relationship and flow of information.

Collation of Data

Current Situation

This phase of the interview sought to establish what currently occurs in terms of the processing of Indigenous research.

Assessment of Indigenous Research on ethical grounds

In all institutions Indigenous research was processed through the university's ethics panels in the same way as any other type of research. This included research emanating from the Indigenous centre, unless as in one case, it involved an outside tender. However in most instances, as an addition to the above, Indigenous research proposals were also scrutinised in various ways and to various degrees by the Indigenous unit or institute on campus.

In fact in all but one institution, Indigenous research proposal assessment had input from the Indigenous centre or institute on campus. In one, an Indigenous academic sat on the university's ethics panel. This was official policy enshrined in the founding act of the university. In the other four where the Indigenous centre was involved, Indigenous research proposals landed on their doorstep for a variety of reasons. These actions were not enshrined in policy and relied on a combination of the goodwill of potential researchers and the position and personalities of the Centre directors.

In one instance the Director had to give the 'all clear' before research could be fully sanctioned by the university's ethics panel and then commence. The proposals were sent via the university's ethics committee and back again. This is actually a conscious decision on behalf of the director not to have a representative on the university's ethics panel and to have only Indigenous applications referred to them. This is to avoid unnecessary increase in their workload. Research in both instances can only commence if the Indigenous centre has given it the all clear.

In another two Indigenous centres, proposals made their way to the Indigenous centre directors at various stages. Often applicants would come for advice in the writing of the proposal. And one of these directors then had to approve it before the university ethics panel could sanction it. In one centre, an (Indigenous) Ancestral Remains Committee is established and has a 50% Indigenous membership. Any research dealing with Indigenous remains must get ethical approval from this committee and this committee only. The mainstream ethics panels will not 'touch it'.

In the centre which is excluded from participating in Indigenous research proposal assessment, Indigenous research is assessed the way any other research is. There is no Indigenous representative on the university's ethics panel nor are any proposals referred to the centre for advice or clearance. This is despite moves on the part of the centre to be included in the process.

In all cases where the Indigenous centre is involved, it is the director to which the proposals are referred. In most cases they are the only individuals who will look at the proposal. However in two instances they may confer with another staff member. One director said as it is their signature which must appear, they will always read everything personally.

No-one was concerned about time frames being imposed except in the case where an Indigenous member was on the university's ethics committee. In fact one had no idea about when or how often the university ethics committee met, and said that the research proposals just dribble in for their comments and approval. Another could not actually say for certainty that there was no Indigenous representative although they are sure there is not, because the membership of the ethics panels are not disclosed by the university.

At this stage no disagreements have ever arisen between assessment by the university ethics panel and the Indigenous centre. However if a disagreement did arise none of the participants were sure whose decision would prevail. They thought theirs probably would, but nothing to this effect is documented. And to those to whom it is referred on an adhoc basis, only a small percentage actually gets to them. One director estimated that about 95% escapes them.

A different story however exists in the exclusively Indigenous education centre. All research proposals are submitted to an assessment process by the research committee and then the ethics committee. This is also enshrined in policy and documentation. Forms are completed and submitted as a part of the process.

Research Infrastructure within the centre: Committees

One centre had an Indigenous research committee up and running. Interestingly this is the centre which has no Indigenous involvement in the processing of proposals. All of the other centres, at some stage, had engaged an Indigenous committee or Indigenous research reference group, however for various reasons they were disbanded. One reason cited for this was that the particular phase of Indigenous education where extra institutional contact was needed, is now over. They now have Indigenous academic staff on board so there is no need to seek this from outside. That belonged to the days when Indigenous academics did not exist in the tertiary sectors. Others included lack of attendance by members and political feuding.

The purpose of the Indigenous research committee currently in operation, is to offer advice on the setting up of Indigenous infrastructure, to document their concerns as local Indigenous community members who have been exploited by research, and to identify local research priorities. The purpose of the now defunct committees was never to oversee ethical & protocol assessment but to act more as a general advisory group. The exclusively Indigenous institution however has a research committee and an ethics committee to which research proposals are referred. In addition a community council is established. The membership of these committees and council are predominantly

Indigenous. The research and ethics committees meet at prescribed times throughout the year and not on an ad hoc needs basis.

Documentation

One Indigenous centre had just finalised a Research Management Plan, and a Research Procedures Manual for its own staff. A Code of Conduct for Indigenous Research and a Research Policy for the entire research community of the university had also been developed recently by the centre. The documents have not been through the approval procedure yet. One other centre had a Research Management Plan. Two others had Code of Conduct documents (outlining ethics and protocol). These were for any researchers of Indigenous issues, but only distributed on request. In all cases they are guidelines and not official policy however. Only one centre is seeking to have their documents officially endorsed in university policy.

The exclusively Indigenous institution has a number of documents relating to the processing of Indigenous research, including a Research and Ethics Policy and a Plain Language Statement version, and a variety of forms to be completed by researchers, specifically addressing issues pertinent to Indigenous research. All have been written and approved over the last three years.

Indigenous Research Infrastructure outside the Indigenous Centre: Committees

In one institution an Indigenous representative was on the university human ethics panel. In two others, once they have their own research committees established, then the chair of this will sit on research committees (which are not ethics committees). In addition one of these was a full member of senate of which the research committee was a sub-committee.

In another centre a position on academic board was allocated to the director of the centre, of which the research committee is a sub-committee. In the other two no positions were held on university committees. However the directors of all but one were confident if they wished to be involved they would be welcomed.

Documents

In one institution a section of the university's research code is devoted to Indigenous research. This was written by the Indigenous centre. In another, a similar code written by the Indigenous centre, is about to be included in the official university documents. In all other institutions no other specific Indigenous research policy or documentation has been contributed to by the Indigenous unit on campus. Most centres, except one, said that if they wanted to contribute they would be welcomed however.

Indigenous community involvement

Aside from the one centre mentioned and the exclusively Indigenous education institution, there were no formal structures in place to link with the local community on research issues. On an ad hoc basis, one centre referred research proposals to the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), and another institution would refer potential researchers to qualified Indigenous academics within Australia. One centre deliberately recruited Indigenous academics from the local area in order to preempt the necessity of formal external links to the local Indigenous community.

The exclusively Indigenous education centre has a council with representation from its ATSIC regions. Research is very much on their agenda as they are seeking to become more proactive in their approach. They have been consulted on the writing of all research related documents and have officially endorsed those currently in operation.

How has the present situation developed

The two centres who had most influence over the ethical assessment of Indigenous research proposals said that this was due to the contemporary 1980's politics of Aboriginal education which had then been encapsulated in their umbrella institutions policies or Founding Acts, combined with their development into academic and research centres respectively.

The exclusively Indigenous centre has been using their structures and documentation for the past three years. Others weren't sure for how long their current situation had been in operation, except the one whose centre has no impact on the assessment of Indigenous research proposals. For them this had always been the case.

Monitoring of Indigenous Research in university

None of the centres participating currently monitored Indigenous research in the university in which they operated. Most felt no need for this. This was attributed to many reasons including the overwhelming number of students and staff in the bigger universities, because they had informal or formal links with other faculties, which meant they were regularly informed, or due to lack of hours in a day. One centre did say they would like to be able to monitor how research was handed back to communities. However current lack of resources would not allow for this. One Indigenous academic questioned "How much can you do?" indicating it would not be an efficient use of limited resources.

The Indigenous institution monitored its research through its ethics committee officially through which all research must be cleared.

Participants Assessment of current situation

This section sought participants comments on the current operation as is previously revealed. Advantages, disadvantages and issues of concern were investigated.

Advantages

The four centres who played a role in the assessment of Indigenous research, and the exclusively Indigenous institution, were generally happy with the current situation. They felt they exerted appropriate influence and that they operated within environments supportive of Indigenous education and participation in the research assessment processes. Those who are not yet members of university committees or who have not yet contributed to university documents, all felt that they have an opportunity to do so when they are ready and that the only barrier to this at the moment is themselves. They felt once they are ready to participate and define their own goals, they will be welcomed. One centre expressed that an advantage of the current situation, whereby researchers come for advice, was that they had a lot of human contact with others when they wanted to discuss research, even though this is time consuming.

Disadvantages

A general negative comment regarding the referral of proposals to the Indigenous centre for comment was that the workload was onerous and often too much for one to handle. Secondly sometimes they had to offer advice in areas which were not their areas of expertise. Tight time frame turn arounds were not an issue, except for the centre who had representation on the university's ethics panel.

The centre with a member on the panel in fact believed that this had become so time consuming that they would prefer to be sent only those proposal dealing with Indigenous research. Currently total proposals to assess amounted to 500 per year. Approximately 10% would be Indigenous. The one centre however who was excluded, felt dissatisfied with the current situation and did not feel their participation was welcomed.

One centre director expressed concern that there were no criteria for assessment, nor criteria to set the degree to which the proposals could be assessed and it was all done by 'feeling'. The institution who has an Indigenous member on the university's ethics panel also said they assessed many by feeling but this reason was due to time constraints. The Indigenous institution felt that although they had documentation, it was not implemented 100% of the time. They feel the need to find a way to ensure that the processes become a part of the culture, to ensure that all researchers are willing participants and can understand the reasons behind such infrastructure.

Issues

- Three interviewees expressed concern about defining the nature of "Indigeness" and Indigenous ways of doing thing. They believed this really needs to be fleshed out and a way paved forward, as for too long now they have been rejecting the

mainstream way but are not coherent as Indigenous centres, on what exactly they want to replace it with.

- The institution with an Indigenous representative on the ethics panel, felt they did not need to set up individual Indigenous bodies as the university was very supportive. On another level as was expressed by two other institutions to whom proposals were referred on an adhoc basis, concerns were expressed that you do not want to be too specific in your documentation and it can backfire or can be 'bastardised' and used against you.
- Being on the official ethics panel can restrict decision making due to deadlines, which can ultimately lead to disadvantaging the community you originally intend to protect by gaining access to the ethics panel.
- The exclusively Indigenous institution was concerned that not all research conducted by external researchers, or through other higher education institutions, was scrutinised as formally as other research proposals through their procedures. Formalising measures are now in place.

Ideal Situation

This section sought to investigate ideas for a utopian world in terms of assessment of research proposals. The purpose being to determine if Indigenous centres are being constrained from broader involvement in ethical assessment and contribution to research decisions, by their umbrella institutions.

Ideal

Most centres stated that they would like more community involvement. One in particular wanted more collaborative research work with the community whereby the communities would set the research agenda. Two did not state this because one already had sufficient community involvement and the other did not feel the need due to the centre's employment of local Indigenous academics.

Including outside Indigenous community participation was seen as a way of increasing Indigenous participation in the research process without having to increase staff, for which they have limited resources. One institution stated that consultation and development of ethics and protocol should have a link from grass roots community level via a variety of stages to senior executive.

Two expressed concern that there is no tab on research conducted and the returning of results to the community. One suggested a thesis allowance for students to ensure they deliver their results in an appropriate manner to the community involved, and suggested that perhaps the ethical and protocol procedures should not be racially based but on an insider and outsider (of community) status. Three said that they will seek to be proactive rather than reactive.

The centre who is currently excluded expressed the need to have an Indigenous ethics panel to assess Indigenous research proposals and an Indigenous Research Advisory

Committee which could set research priorities and to which prospective researchers can refer for advice, from the writing of the application through all stages of the research.

Plans for the Future

This section investigated what may be done in the future on practical level.

Documentation

All who have not already done so, decided that it was time to enshrine their good practice in documents for the university and for future reference.

Those who were happy with the current situation agreed it was time to entrench this in university documents.

The one with all processes already enshrined in documentation, felt the need to review it.

University committees

One planned to be removed from the university's ethics panel and instead have only Indigenous research proposals referred to them, while the centre who is currently excluded, aims for the inclusion of an Indigenous representative on the university's ethics panel.

Community Involvement

One said they would be setting up an Indigenous Education Advisory Board which would incorporate research functions. They would set priorities and ethics and protocol . This it was recognised takes time as they do not want it to be a 'rubber stamp affair'.

The exclusively Indigenous institution expressed their desire to link more with communities in the research process. Collaborative research could be pursued whereby Indigenous communities defined issues of concern, and then worked with the academic institution to find solutions. One Indigenous academic expressed the institution's vision for this occurring : "This place can be a thinking site for Indigenous communities".

Conclusion

How involved in the research proposal assessment phase are Indigenous centres?

Most Indigenous centres and the one Indigenous institution were satisfied in general terms with their involvement in the assessment of Indigenous research.

All but one of the centres *felt they had the support of their umbrella institution*. They believed that when they are ready they would be able to become more involved in the development and implementation of their university's research infrastructure. They believed there would be no resistance, in fact that they would be encouraged, if they became more proactive in their approaches. They said they could be more involved, if they had the time or the staff, with university management of Indigenous research, writing documents both for the university and their own centres, and applying them to all researchers of Indigenous issues.

To what extent are Indigenous research processes documented?

Various centre and institute directors stated that they would like to have their current successful research processes documented and maybe enshrined in policy. They recognised that at the moment *the situation is quite an ad hoc affair*. Two institutions openly admitted that it currently worked so well because of their own personalities and positions within the university. The one working outside an umbrella institution has all processes and procedures already enshrined in documentation and policy.

To implement or not to implement?

The practicalities of how to ensure documents were made applicable to the whole university, however, has not been an issue with any centres except for one. For example ethics and protocol documents or code of conduct for research, developed by some centres, were *merely held up as guidelines*. Thus it is up to researchers who firstly seek to find such a document, to obtain it, and then to follow only if they so desire. It seems any documents written by Indigenous centres are really for them only. *Nothing at this stage is there to compel other researchers to adhere to them*. They are strictly guidelines. If a researcher does approach the centre for such a document and then decides to abide by it, it is due to individual whim and conscience. Similarly the exclusively Indigenous institution found that not all researchers are willing to follow their policies and procedures all of the time.

Goodwill and personality

At this stage much of the positive outcomes are being achieved as a result of goodwill on behalf of university mainstream staff and students, combined with the personality and position of the Indigenous centre directors. Most centres are currently *satisfied because the situation is working for them*.

How long will it last?

However this means that the possibility of institutional change is limited. The importance and *validity of Indigenous involvement and its value to the umbrella institution has not yet been put to the test*. Indigenous involvement in research seems currently incumbent upon those who are there. There may be no substance or longevity to this. What happens with mainstream staff turnover? What happens when directors or staff of Indigenous centres move on?

Reality and rhetoric

Furthermore *there could be a real gap between what centres believe they can do within the university and what they will actually be able to achieve*. Some for example, expressed that if they had more staff or time they could do so much more. Perhaps if their umbrella institutions were as committed as they appear on the surface, then resourcing to participate more fully, would be forthcoming.

Why rock the boat?

Through most of the interviews there was a definite *element of restraint when discussing the implementation of specific Indigenous ethics and protocols for the entire university* research community. This was partly due to the fact obviously that if the situation is working well now why 'rock the boat'? Others who were currently operating successfully believed that as ethical issues are universal, there is no need for a separatist type of approach in relation to Indigenous ethical concerns.

How far is too far?

In addition there was the fear that going too far *may jeopardise positive outcomes* as extra documentation and regulations imposed on Indigenous research may *backfire* and even be held against the Indigenous centre. For example extra documentation or achieving an Indigenous representative on the university's ethics panel may give the appearance of extra protection for Indigenous communities participating in the research process. In reality there may actually be no way of monitoring and enforcing the documented regulations. Thus a *false sense of security* is given to the communities whom centres seek to protect. Secondly, obviously extra documentation, regulations and bureaucracy can simply *put supporters and colleagues offside*.

Two extremes uncovered

This research has discovered *two extremes at work*. The Institution working outside an umbrella institution which has strictly coded procedures for the conduct of research which is implemented through documentation in policy, committees and community involvement on the one hand, and on the other hand, the lone Indigenous centre, who has not been able to exert influence on their university. On another level, at one extreme, we find a centre lobbying to be included on the university's ethical assessment panel, and at the other extreme, another centre is lobbying to get off. The latter having already completed the full circle and reassessed their options.

Dilemmas

Should the lone centre continue to lobby, or continue to be excluded from involvement in the processing of Indigenous research? Perhaps this centre is the most persistent because it exists in an environment of least support and most resistance. Or is its persistence creating negative results? *Is it best to let things go on as they are, if they are working?* After all it is the centre which is most vocal and proactive in its documentation and lobbying within its umbrella institution, which is still being excluded. And yet the only institution operating fairly autonomously is the one who has successfully created Indigenous research infrastructure and implemented such processes through documentation and procedures.

Striking a balance

It seems a balance needs to be struck. Should good practice for Indigenous research in universities be documented and enshrined in university policy in a way in which it must then apply to all potential researchers of Indigenous issues or people? What does institutional change really mean? *Do people and their actions make the culture of an institution or do organisational regulations develop the culture?* If the practice through individuals is there maybe this will evolve the institution without the need for documentation.

Best practice?

The project does not intend to come up with any conclusions regarding best practice. Firstly, the researchers recognise the diversity of the centres participating and appreciate the complexity of each centres situation, which draws issues from their umbrella institution, internal politics, working relationships, resources available, community needs and expectations, as well as individual personalities. Secondly this project is about describing the situation as it is, and collating individual perceptions on how it ideally could be.

The above has however posed some dichotomies which have emerged to the researchers during the course of the project. In addition, some general practical ideas based on the research are presented below in *The Future-Food for Thought* section.

The Future-Food for Thought

Within own organisation

- Would it be useful for the future to document successful research practices for internal or external use?
- Is it useful to monitor Indigenous research?
- How can you implement appropriate Indigenous research processes?
- What do you want in terms of control over Indigenous research in the university?
- What is feasible to achieve? Work backwards from your ideal outcomes.
- How far can you really go in the involvement of Indigenous issues within the Umbrella institution? How far can you test your institution without making losses.
- Do Indigenous research issues have a high enough profile in your institution?
- Are your local Indigenous communities empowered in the research process?
- Are there advisory role positions available to Indigenous community members?
- Is training in research available to Indigenous communities?

Umbrella Organisation

- Are Research Services areas of universities inclusive enough in their practices?
- Are there any Indigenous research support positions in Research Services areas?
- How amenable to change is your institution?
- Is there any documentation supporting or ensuring Indigenous participation in the research assessment phase ?
- Are Indigenous research issues enshrined in university policy? How is it monitored?
- Is there an Indigenous presence in any or all layers of the university research hierarchy?
- Does your centre contribute to University research documents?
- Are university research staff and potential Indigenous researchers knowledgeable about Indigenous research issues?
- Is there meaningful Indigenous involvement in the ethical assessment of Indigenous research proposals?

National

Could a National Linkup be maintained for the following?

- collaboration with centres who may need assistance
- sharing various areas of expertise.
- developing national moral codes of conduct and protocols for Indigenous research
- publicising the gap between legal and moral considerations of ethics panels.
- In line with findings of EIP Report which states ;

One university is concerned that while it complies with NHMRC guidelines these guidelines do not require Indigenous representation on research ethics committees and do not allow for Indigenous ownership of research (Anderson et al 1998 p.79), reassess NHMRC guidelines and their applicability to Indigenous research. Deconstruct and shift paradigm from western science to Indigenous epistemology.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Overview of Project
Sent to participants with consent form
The Production of Indigenous Research.

Overview

This is a small research project funded by Central Queensland University. The chief investigators are Jane Melville, Research Co-ordinator and Phillip Rankine, Indigenous Studies Co-ordinator both of Nulloo Yumbah, CQU.

The project will be conducted and completed during 1999. The field work will be finalised by June and the report completed by November. Results will be disseminated to the participants by December.

It is a project about the processing of Indigenous research in higher education institutions. It aims to investigate how Indigenous research proposals are currently assessed, processed and monitored in universities. It aims to investigate the role of the Indigenous unit on campus in the processing of Indigenous research. This will include infrastructure which is designed for their own research community and infrastructure that is designed to impact on the research community of the umbrella institution.

It also aims to investigate the ideal way for the processing of Indigenous research in higher education institutions and to document the principles which underpin such ideals. Comments on the current situation and future models will be sought.

The project aims to collate a variety of models currently in use with opinions about the advantages and disadvantages. The overall anticipated outcome is to facilitate ways to allow for Indigenous education centres to have meaningful and effective control over the processing and assessment of their own research.

A total of six Indigenous education units and learning institutions will be participating representing units from a range of higher education institutions. It must be emphasised that the research will only be conducted with the Indigenous unit on campus.

What is required of the participant (Research Co-ordinator or Director of Unit)

- Interview/discussion of approximately 2 hours.
- Written consent
- Possible follow -up telephone or email correspondence

What do you get in return

A copy of the research report with results which will give you an insight into the way other institutions process Indigenous research.

The project is based on the following principles:

- Respect for Indigenous communities
- Recognition of the exploitation of Indigenous communities in the research process
- The right of Indigenous communities to manage their own research
- The recognition of and respect for Indigenous realities

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Sent to and collected from participants prior to interviews

CONSENT FORM
for participants of
THE PRODUCTION OF INDIGENOUS RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Research Project

I _____

of _____

do agree to participate in the research project *The production of Indigenous Research in Higher Education* being conducted by Jane Melville of Nulloo Yumbah, Central Queensland University.

I have been satisfactorily briefed about the project.

I have been advised that:

- I may withdraw from the research project at any time
- I have the power of veto over the findings
- I will be informed throughout the research process
- My details will not be disclosed in the research report if I desire this to be so
- My participation will be acknowledged if I so desire

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

_____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE OF DIRECTOR (if different to participant)

_____ DATE _____

Please contact the Central Queensland University's Research Services Office on 07 49309 828, should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project.

Appendix 3: Overview of Discussion Topics for Interview

Handed to participants at start of interview.

A. CURRENT

1. Processing Research Proposals

Explain the steps involved in applying to conduct research.

2. Assessment of research proposals

- How
- By whom
- Indigenous representation?

3. The role of your centre

Does your centre have any of the following:

- Body/ Documents to oversee Indigenous research?
- What are their functions?
- Do they apply to university research community or only your centre?
- Does your centre contribute to the development of any research related documents set down for the university community?
- Does your centre have representation on any research committees of the university?
- Does any Indigenous research in university come through you or an Indigenous body

4 Issues

- What do you believe are the needs to address in the current processing and assessing of Indigenous research and the production of Indigenous research?
- Do you believe Indigenous research needs are currently addressed by your university/your centre?

5. Assessment of current situation

B. THE IDEAL FUTURE

1. Towards an Ideal Model

What would be the ideal way to process/assess Indigenous research?

2. Principles

What are the underlying principles guiding this?

3. Advantages and disadvantages of ideal model

4. Indigenisation

Future role of your centre in the processing of Indigenous research in university?

5. What are your plans for the future in this regard?

C. OTHER

D. DOCUMENTS Do you have any documents which we can refer to?

References

Anderson Lynette, Singh Michael, Stebbens Clare, Ryerson Lyn (1998) *Equity issues: Every University's Concern, Whose Business? An Exploration of Universities' Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' Rights & Interests*. Canberra: DEETYA,

Dodson Michael (1994) The Wentworth Lecture 'The End in the Beginning: Redefining Aboriginality' in *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. Canberra: AIATSIS Press. no. 1 pp2-14

Melville J & Rankine P, 1998 *To What Degree Indigenous Realities? Redefining Australian Indigenous Studies* Paper presented at Cultural Studies Association of Australia Conference, Adelaide December 4-6 1998