



NLC Community Planning and Development Monitoring and Evaluation workshop About Ground Up Monitoring and Evaluation – 23rd March 2020

As part of the workshop, the CDU Ground Up researchers have been asked to provide this one-page explanation to help people understand the origins and principles of our Ground Up work.

Key points:

1. Our methods have been developed over many years, starting with 'both ways' education in bilingual schools in Arnhem Land in the 1980s, leading into the development of the Yolŋu Studies teaching and research practices at NTU now CDU, and to contemporary research, consultancy and service delivery.
2. Since the work on 'both ways', we have always taken seriously the knowledge and cultural authority of Aboriginal elders. Our work is collaborative, but not democratic. It starts with the sovereignty of Aboriginal people-places.
3. In each setting we are careful to elicit, elaborate, articulate and mobilise local Aboriginal knowledge and governance. Often this entails starting with stories from involved Elders, and taking these stories seriously then often provokes the collaborative (re)negotiation of received concepts. In the NLC case this has included concepts of 'community', 'planning', 'development', 'monitoring' and 'evaluation'.
4. There is a close connection between our work and the field of Science Studies where the unpacking of assumed givens (e.g. matter, space and time) is seen as opening pathways for meaningful intercultural engagement.
5. We also acknowledge a tradition in western pragmatist philosophy which takes the world as unfolding in the context of 'the problems of the moment', and its many different participants in collective action. Thus, we see our work as generative – it results in changed action rather than objective statements and does not stand apart from the work it monitors or evaluates.
6. Taking seriously Aboriginal sovereignty entails engaging, recognising and paying relevant elders, engaging local Aboriginal researchers who are approved by the elders, engaging mentorees as part of the ongoing work of keeping local knowledge and governance practices alive, and using local languages and undertaking close reading of the imperatives and perspectives that may be buried inside them.
7. Also, critically important is the knowledge and governance practices of the funding body – whether it be the NLC, the NTG or an NGO. Our work entails collaboratively negotiating ways of going forward together in good faith that takes seriously imperatives from both sides.
8. We have only recently and somewhat reluctantly given this practice the name 'Ground Up' – to distinguish it from other institutionalised practise of research, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. We run the risk of our methods been taking as a sort of 'brand' – a methodology or recipe book that can be transferred from one setting to another rather than a set of moral, political, strategic and metaphysical commitments and sensibilities which frame and underpin our work.