A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building

Hallie Preskill
Shanelle Boyle
Claremont Graduate University

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) has become a hot topic of conversation, activity, and study within the evaluation field. Seeking to enhance stakeholders' understanding of evaluation concepts and practices, and in an effort to create evaluation cultures, organizations have been implementing a variety of strategies to help their members learn from and about evaluation. Though there is a great deal of ECB occurring in a wide range of organizations, there is no overarching conceptual model that describes how ECB should be designed and implemented to maximize its success. If ECB is about learning how to think evaluatively and how to engage in sound evaluation practice, then something is missing in our work. The purpose of this article is to describe a model of ECB that may be used for designing and implementing capacity building activities and processes as well as for conducting empirical research on this topic.

Keywords: *evaluation capacity building; learning; model; sustainable*

Years from now, evaluators may well look back on the first decade of the 21st century and note that these years marked an important evolutionary stage in the evaluation profession's history. They might observe that it was during this time that participatory, collaborative, and stakeholder forms of evaluation became commonplace. They might also note that it was when evaluators and organizational leaders became interested in, and committed to, building the evaluation capacity of their members. Perhaps, the catalysts were 2000 American Evaluation Association's (AEA) President Laura Leviton's (2001) conference theme, "Evaluation Capacity Building," and 2001 AEA President Jim Sanders's (2002) theme, "Mainstreaming Evaluation," which sparked the profession's enthusiasm for this topic. Or maybe it was a result of evaluators' increasing commitment to involving stakeholders in the evaluation process and the recognition that they were learning from and about evaluation through their participation. Whatever the reasons, evaluation capacity building (ECB) has become a hot topic of conversation, activity, and study. Evidence of this interest in ECB can be seen in the (a) 242 AEA conference sessions between 2000 and 2007 that had at least one paper related to ECB and the (b) birth of AEA's Organizational Learning and Evaluation Capacity Building Topical Interest Group in 2006. Most recently, a study of AEA's membership found that of the 49% ($n = 2,657$) who responded to an online survey, 54% engage in ECB (AEA, 2008).

Seeking to enhance stakeholders' understanding of evaluation concepts and practices, and in an effort to create evaluation cultures, many organizations have been designing and implementing a variety of strategies as a means of helping their members learn about and engage in evaluation practices. The most often cited definition of ECB is the one offered by Stockdill,

1

Baizerman, and Compton (2002), which reads, "ECB is the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine" (p. 14). Others have defined evaluation capacity as "the ability to conduct an effective evaluation (i.e., one that meets accepted standards of the discipline)" (Milstein & Cotton, 2000, p. 1) and "the extent to which an organization has the necessary resources and motivation to conduct, analyze, and use evaluations" (Gibbs, Napp, Jolly, Westover, & Uhl, 2002, p. 261).

Although there have been many articles, presentations, and discussions about ECB over the years, there appear to be few comprehensive conceptual frameworks or models that could be used to (a) guide practitioners' ECB efforts and/or (b) empirically test the effectiveness of ECB processes, activities, and outcomes. In this article, we attempt to fill this gap by offering a multidisciplinary model of ECB that illustrates and describes a set of factors that may influence the initiation, design, implementation, and impact that ECB activities and processes have on sustainable evaluation practice. In addition, we offer the following definition of ECB, which reflects the concepts presented in the model:

> ECB involves the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice. The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action. For evaluation practice to be sustained, participants must be provided with leadership support, incentives, resources, and opportunities to transfer their learning about evaluation to their everyday work. Sustainable evaluation practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that help embed evaluation work into the way the organization accomplishes its mission and strategic goals.

As noted in the definition, we describe ECB as occurring within organizations. However, we acknowledge that ECB often takes place with clusters of programs in geographically diverse locations as well as across organizations. We believe that the model presented in this article applies to all ECB contexts.

Overview of the Model

Drawing on the fields of evaluation, organizational learning and change, and adult and workplace learning, our hope is that this model provides some cohesion, organization, and perspective that are required to maximize the success of any ECB initiative (see Figure 1). In this section, we provide a brief overview of the model as a means for describing the "big picture." The rest of the article describes each of the components in detail.

The left side of the model represents the initiation, planning, designing, and implementation of the ECB effort. The outer circle reflects the goal of ECB being the development of *evaluation knowledge, skills, and attitudes*. Within this circle, we acknowledge that those who initiate ECB activities and processes have various kinds of *motivations*, are operating under a set of *assumptions* about evaluation and capacity building, and have implicit or explicit *expectations* for what the ECB effort will achieve. These motivations, assumptions, and expectations ultimately affect the design and implementation of all ECB activities.

In the middle circles are 10 ECB *strategies* that reflect various teaching and learning approaches for helping people develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to think evaluatively and to engage in evaluation practice. Although it is often tempting to choose one or more of these strategies based on experience or expertise, we argue that it is critically important that ECB facilitators consider several *design* issues. These involve identifying whose capacity is

Figure 1
A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)
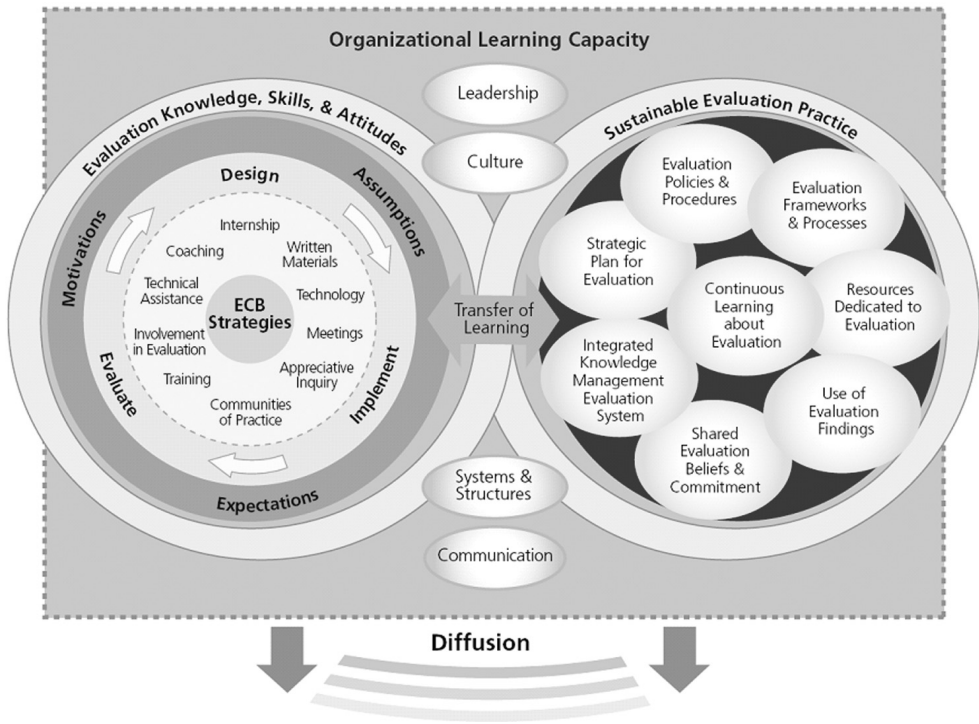
to be developed and to what level, the instructional goals and objectives of the ECB activity or process, available resources, and relevant evaluation, learning, or change theories.

Though an ECB activity may be well designed, the *implementation* component of the model suggests that the timing of the ECB effort, the facilitator's expertise and effectiveness, the participants' frequency and quality of participation, and the extent to which the activity is implemented as designed will also affect how well participants learn from and about evaluation. And it is not surprising that facilitators should *evaluate* their ECB efforts to determine their effectiveness and impact on the participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the organization overall.

Connecting the two large circles is a double-sided arrow, *transfer of learning*, which refers to the application of evaluation knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the work context. This transfer of learning arrow links the ECB effort to what is required to sustain evaluative thinking and practice. But before we describe what contributes to sustainable evaluation practice, we highlight the importance of understanding the *organizational learning capacity* of the system in which the ECB is occurring. We propose that the extent to which and the ways in which the organization's *leadership* values learning and evaluation, creates a *culture* of inquiry, has the necessary *systems and structures* for engaging in evaluation practice, and provides *communication* channels and opportunities to access and disseminate evaluation information will significantly affect not only if and how people learn about evaluation but also the extent to which evaluation practice becomes sustained.

This brings us to the large circle on the right side of the model. In this circle are the processes, practices, policies, and resources we believe are required for *sustainable evaluation practice.* Although it may be difficult to achieve all of these in one organization or system, we see these as goals or aspirations for those who see evaluation as a means for achieving individual, group, and organizational learning.

The final component of the model is *diffusion*, as depicted on the outside of the model with two arrows pointing outward. We believe that as ECB participants learn about evaluation, they have the potential for sharing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes with a wide range of audiences. Our hope is that as they share their evaluative thinking and practices, others will be inspired to learn about and engage in evaluation practice as well.

Motivations, Assumptions, and Expectations of ECB

We start by acknowledging that there is usually some "trigger" or motivating reason that the organization or system decides to build the evaluation capacity of its members. For example, we know from the literature that external demands or conditions often provide the incentive for initiating an ECB effort. These include (a) a need to meet accountability requirements (Compton, Baizerman, Preskill, Rieker, & Miner, 2001; Corn, Byrom, Knestis, & Thrift, 2006), (b) changes in the external environment (e.g., national economy, increased acceptance of evaluation nationwide, new political appointees; Compton, Glover-Kudon, Smith, & Avery, 2002; Newcomer, 2004), and (c) a desire to enlighten and support government policy making and planning (Mackay, 2002).

Sometimes, however, the motivation to engage in ECB stems from internal needs and conditions, such as (a) changes in the organization (e.g., reorganization, new leadership or vision; Compton et al., 2002; Forss, Kruse, Taut, & Tenden, 2006; Milstein, Chapel, Wetterhall, & Cotton, 2002), (b) a mandate from leadership to increase the learning function of evaluation (Taut, 2007), (c) a perceived lack of internal evaluation knowledge and skills (Brandon & Higa, 2004; Donaldson & Gooler, 2003; Forss et al., 2006), (d) a desire to seek new or increased funding (Compton et al., 2001; Stevenson, Florin, Mills, & Andrade, 2002), (e) a perceived shortage of evaluators with expertise and background in specific program content or specialized organizations (Huffman, Lawrenz, Thomas, & Clarkson, 2006), and (f) a desire to use evaluation to make program improvements (Gibbs et al., 2002; Solomon & Chowdhury, 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). Understanding the organization's motivation for engaging in ECB not only helps determine if the timing is right for such an undertaking but also provides insights into who should participate and which teaching and learning strategies might be most beneficial.

Concomitant with this motivation to develop the members' evaluation capacity are the plausible assumptions that evaluation is a "good" thing to do, that evaluation can contribute to effective decision making, and that evaluation adds value to the organization. Assumptions organizational leaders and evaluators might make that are relevant to building evaluation capacity might include (a) organization members can learn how to design and conduct evaluations, (b) making learning intentional enhances learning from and about evaluation, and (c) if organization members think evaluatively, their programs will be more effective. The importance of acknowledging and discussing these assumptions at the beginning of an ECB effort should not be underestimated. If these beliefs are not shared among key leaders, then one might question whether the ECB effort can be successful and if it is worth doing in the first place.

The motivations to engage in ECB, the underlying assumptions leaders and evaluators have about evaluation in general, and the role of evaluation in their organizations in particular lead to a set of expectations or goals for the ECB effort. For example, supporters of ECB might expect that, as a result of their members' increased evaluation knowledge and skills and improved attitudes and beliefs about evaluation,

- Evaluations will occur more frequently
- Evaluation findings will be used more often for a variety of purposes (including program improvement, resource allocations, development of policies and procedures, current and future programming, and accountability demonstrations)
- Funders will be more likely to provide new, continuing, and/or increased resources
- The organization will be able to adapt to changing conditions more effectively
- Leaders will be able to make more timely and effective decisions
- The organization will increase its capacity for learning

The motivations, assumptions, and expectations of any ECB effort need to be fully thought through and articulated prior to taking any of the next steps in designing and implementing an ECB effort. Failure to do so may result in making decisions that limit the effectiveness of when, how, and where members learn from and about evaluation.

The ECB Process

In this section, we first present 10 ECB strategies and then describe several factors to consider when choosing which of the strategies to employ for any given ECB effort. We understand that, in some organizations, some may call training *technical assistance* or use technology as a means for providing technical assistance. As such, some of these strategies are used in overlapping ways.

ECB Teaching and Learning Strategies

The following strategies (which may go by other names in some settings) represent a variety of approaches that can be used for building the evaluation capacity of individuals and groups:

1. *Internship:* participating in a formal program that provides practical evaluation experience for novices
2. *Written materials:* reading and using written documents about evaluation processes and findings
3. *Technology:* using online resources such as Web sites and/or e-learning programs to learn from and about evaluation
4. *Meetings:* allocating time and space to discuss evaluation activities specifically for the purpose of learning from and about evaluation
5. *Appreciative inquiry (AI):* using an assets-based, collaborative, narrative approach to learning about evaluation that focuses on strengths within the organization
6. *Communities of practice:* sharing evaluation experiences, practices, information, and readings among members who have common interests and needs (sometimes called learning circles)
7. *Training:* attending courses, workshops, and seminars on evaluation
8. *Involvement in an evaluation process:* participating in the design and/or implementation of an evaluation
9. *Technical assistance:* receiving help from an internal or external evaluator
10. *Coaching or mentoring:* building a relationship with an evaluation expert who provides individualized technical and professional support

When choosing from among these 10 strategies, it is important to recognize that various strategies satisfy certain learning objectives and produce different kinds of learning outcomes. Some of the strategies focus on *knowing how*, some on *knowing what*. Some support the *cocreation of meaning and understanding* and *building stronger relationships*, whereas others provide opportunities for *skill development and feedback.* However, before we jump into designing an ECB effort, we should acknowledge that how we design and implement learning evaluation practice matters—a lot.

Designing the ECB Initiative

Once the commitment has been made to build members' evaluation capacity, it is tempting to immediately select the learning strategy—for example, training. However, just as we teach new evaluators to focus the evaluation (develop a program logic model, identify stakeholders, develop key evaluation questions), before determining the evaluation's design and data-collection methods we must also consider a variety of factors before selecting one or more of the 10 teaching and learning strategies for building evaluation capacity. The selection of strategies should at least take into account the participants' characteristics, available organizational resources, relevant evaluation, learning, and organizational change theories, and desired learning objectives and expected outcomes.

Identifying ECB participants' characteristics. ECB typically occurs with a wide range of organizational members. ECB participants may be program designers, program staff, managers, volunteers, office staff, board members, and, in some cases, program recipients. Individuals within each of these groups, as well as the group overall, may have certain experiences, responsibilities, or needs relative to learning from and about evaluation processes and findings (Gilliam et al., 2003; Kiernan & Alter, 2004; Milstein et al., 2002; Newcomer, 2004). For example, several authors have highlighted the need to assess the evaluation competence of potential ECB participants before designing and implementing an ECB effort. In one article, the author describes how she used a five-stage continuum of evaluation capacity, which ranges from "*doubters* (individuals who see little value in evaluation) to *scholars* (those who develop considerable expertise in evaluation and actively share their expertise outside the organization)," to assess the ECB participants' levels of evaluation capacity before and after implementing an ECB initiative (Arnold, 2006, p. 258). Given this range of capacity, different ECB strategies may be called for depending on the needs and preexisting knowledge, skills, and beliefs of the participants. For example, it may be important to understand participants' beliefs about evaluation, their motivation to learn about and engage in evaluation, and their current level of evaluation knowledge and skills.

Determining available organizational resources. Another factor to consider when choosing which ECB strategies will be most effective is the organizational resources that will be necessary to design and implement the ECB effort. These include available financial and personnel resources, time for evaluation activities, space, technology, and materials.

Some writers have emphasized the importance of securing sufficient resources for ECB. Arnold (2006), for example, noted that the success of her ECB effort was dependent on resources such as computers, software, money, space, and professional development support. Similarly, Taut (2007) suggested that "sufficient resources must be made for ECB, including facilitation, and time must be officially dedicated to such practice" (p. 57). If resources are not allocated specifically to capacity building early on, a tension may develop between spending time and

resources toward data collection and producing high-quality evaluation reports, and implementing activities and processes designed to help participants learn from and about evaluation.

Relevant evaluation, learning, and individual and organizational change theories. To ensure that the ECB effort is designed in ways that are appropriate, culturally competent, and effective, it is useful to draw on theories from several disciplines. These might include theories about (a) evaluation (e.g., participatory, empowerment, utilization-focused, and organizational learning), (b) adult learning (e.g., social constructivism, transformational learning, experiential learning), (c) workplace learning (e.g., situated learning, transfer of learning, and incidental, informal, formal learning), (d) individual change (e.g., employee commitment, motivation and rewards, self-efficacy), and (e) organizational change (e.g., Lewin's three-stage model, systems theory, Weick's episodic/continuous change, Roger's five-stage diffusion of innovation). Each of these theories addresses some aspect of how the individual, group, or organization might respond to learning and change relative to the ECB activities and processes.

Various authors have referred to theories that have influenced their ECB work. For example, Compton et al. (2001) used Himmelman's collaboration for change model, which emphasizes the roles of networking, coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating, to help design a program to develop evaluation capacity within the American Cancer Society. In another case, the Penn State Cooperative Extension leadership and evaluator created a Web site, based on the principles of empowerment evaluation and adult learning theory, to help build the evaluation capacity of educators and administrators. According to the principles of empowerment evaluation, they designed the Web site to help learners reflect, learn, experiment, and improve themselves and their programs. As for adult learning theory, they incorporated a "range of teaching devices to appeal to an array of learners and to sustain attention" (Kiernan & Alter, 2004, p. 123). By considering different theories of evaluation, learning, and change, we can be more purposeful and mindful of how, where, when, and why people learn (or do not) from their engagement in ECB activities and processes. Drawing on such theories can ensure that our teaching and learning strategies have the potential of having the desired impact, that is, of achieving specific ECB learning objectives.

ECB objectives. Though those supporting and facilitating ECB often have a sense of what they want their participants to learn from engaging in ECB processes and activities, it is critically important to identify the specific objectives for this work. For example, we could choose to focus simply on increasing members' understanding about evaluation (knowledge objectives), and/or we might want certain participants to develop a set of evaluation-related behaviors (skill objectives), and/or we may wish to improve the beliefs members have about evaluation (affective objectives). Without having a clear sense of what it is we want people to learn from their engagement in evaluation activities and processes, it is difficult to design effective learning strategies. As is made clear in the instructional design literature, a program's design, implementation, and evaluation should flow directly from the desired goals and objectives (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Smith & Ragan, 2005).

A variety of articles written on ECB have mentioned objectives relevant to each of the three domains. Regarding cognitive learning, the following objectives have been identified: (a) knowledge of how to select or develop methods for conducting evaluations (Brandon & Higa, 2004), (b) an awareness of basic concepts of program evaluation (Valery & Shakir, 2005), and (c) an understanding of how evaluation can be useful and contribute to individual, team, and organizational learning (Taut, 2007). Several authors have also referred to behavioral objectives: (a) managing evaluation contracts effectively (Newcomer, 2004), (b) using

Table 1
Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) Objectives

Knowledge—ECB participants understand:
  That evaluation involves purposeful, planned, and systematic activities
  Evaluation terms and concepts
  The relationship between research and evaluation
  How evaluation processes and findings can contribute to decision making
  The strengths and weaknesses of different evaluation approaches
  The strengths and weaknesses of different data-collection methods
  How to apply basic statistical analyses to quantitative data
  How to apply basic content and thematic analyses to qualitative data
  How politics can affect evaluation processes and findings
  The importance of using culturally appropriate and responsive evaluation approaches and methods
  What constitutes ethical evaluation practice
  That various stakeholders may have differing opinions, experiences, and perspectives about an evaluand
  The relationship among a program's goals, objectives, activities, and expected outcomes
  What knowledge, skills, and experiences to look for when hiring an evaluator
Skills (behaviors)—ECB participants are able to:
  Develop a program logic model
  Develop key evaluation questions
  Write an evaluation plan
  Design data-collection instruments
  Choose appropriate and relevant data-collection methods
  Collect credible and reliable data
  Analyze quantitative data
  Analyze qualitative data
  Interpret results and draw conclusions
  Develop an evaluation budget
  Communicate and report evaluation processes and findings using a variety of strategies
  Use the Program Evaluation Standards and/or the American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators
  Teach others about evaluation
  Develop an evaluation strategic plan
  Manage the evaluation process
Affective—ECB participants believe that:
  Evaluation yields useful information
  Evaluation can be a positive experience
  Evaluation should be part of a program's design process
  Evaluation contributes to a program's success
  Evaluation adds value to the organization
  Evaluation is an important part of their work
  Evaluation is worth the time and money

logic models to plan and evaluate programs, and (c) drawing useful conclusions from evaluation data and results (Stevenson et al., 2002). Others have discussed focusing on affective objectives, such as (a) reducing stress and anxiety surrounding evaluation (Arnold, 2006), (b) improving attitudes toward evaluation (Brandon & Higa, 2004), and (c) increasing ownership of evaluation processes (Taut, 2007).

Based on our own work and what we have gleaned from the literature, we have identified 36 potential ECB objectives. As can be seen in Table 1, these objectives are organized by the *knowledge*, *skills*, and *affective* domains.

One distinguishing characteristic of ECB, and one that differentiates it from process use,[1] is the inclusion of clearly identified objectives. We believe this intentionality makes ECB a strategic process that maximizes learning from and about evaluation (Harnar & Preskill, 2007; Preskill & Boyle, 2007).

Implementing the ECB Initiative

Once the ECB strategies have been selected, the objectives of the ECB effort have been determined, the participants have been identified, and the relevant theories of evaluation, learning, and change have been considered, it is time to implement the ECB activities. A good way to begin the implementation process is with clear and effective communication about the ECB efforts.

Communications about ECB. How potential participants learn about the organization's interest and investment in ECB activities and processes can affect their level of interest, engagement, and commitment to learning from and about evaluation. As such, ECB facilitators should consider the ways in which information about the ECB's purpose, goals, and expectations is communicated with the intended participants. This involves carefully planning and managing communication (a) methods, (b) sources, (c) content, (d) targets, and (e) frequency to successfully engage participants in the evaluation activities and to cultivate demand and excitement among participants to learn about and conduct evaluations.

Various authors have also emphasized the importance of communications during an ECB initiative. For example, Compton et al. (2001), Gibbs et al. (2002), and Shumer, Moon, Otieno, Chessin, and Schnaubelt (2006) have discussed the importance of communicating participants' roles, funders' expectations regarding ECB activities, and the purpose of the ECB initiative. Some of the methods used to communicate about ECB initiatives included meetings, brochures, videos, and teleconferences (Compton et al., 2001; Lennie, 2005; Stevenson et al., 2002). Lennie (2005) noted that a lack of clear understanding about the ECB project in the initial stages negatively affected participation in evaluation activities. Therefore, ECB practitioners must be mindful of the language and methods they use to describe the ECB activities and processes to ensure that participants will be fully engaged.

Timing of ECB efforts. As with any organization or community initiative, there are better times than others to begin a change process. ECB facilitators should discuss how participants will balance their other work demands with the evaluation activities and processes and what, if any, organizational issues might arise that may challenge their level of engagement as well as their ability to use their evaluation knowledge and skills after the ECB activity has concluded.

ECB facilitator's expertise and effectiveness. Who facilitates, her or his level of evaluation expertise and group process skills, and knowledge about the organization and its members may heavily influence the extent to which, and the ways in which, participants learn from and about evaluation. This component also addresses the roles and responsibilities of the ECB facilitator and her or his previous relationship with participants.

Frequency and quality of participation. Developing new knowledge, skills, and attitudes takes motivation, time, and practice. If participants do not show up or are not the right people at the right time or are not provided opportunities to fully understand and practice their learning, their ability to engage in future evaluation work may be diminished.

Fidelity of implementation. As evaluators know only too well, programs may be beautifully designed but fail to show impact because they were not implemented with fidelity; that is, in the implementation phase, the facilitator diverted from the original design. In our ECB efforts, we must also pay attention to how the ECB strategy is implemented. For example, some people have told us that they have used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and that "it didn't

work." On further questioning, we learned that the AI was not facilitated as it was intended—that when it "didn't work" it was really because of (a) the participants not experiencing the entire process, (b) little to no follow-up or use of what the participants learned, or (c) what was done was not really AI—it was something else altogether. To ensure that the desired learning outcomes are achieved, ECB facilitators should pay close attention during implementation to the ways in which participants' motivations and learning are affected by changes made in the ECB activity's design.

Evaluating ECB Initiatives

This component of the model stresses the importance of evaluating the extent to which the ECB objectives have been met as well as determining if any other outcomes were attained (secondary, unanticipated outcomes). In the literature, several authors have cited cognitive outcomes as a result of their ECB efforts. These include increased knowledge and understanding of evaluation concepts, terms, and approaches (Arnold, 2006; Kiernan & Alter, 2004; Trevisan, 2002; Valery & Shakir, 2005). Others have written about behavioral outcomes such as the ability to (a) develop logic models, (b) design data-collection instruments, (c) collect valid and reliable data, (d) analyze data, and (e) teach others about evaluation (Arnold, 2006; Atkinson et al.; Brandon & Higa, 2004; Trevisan, 2002; Valery & Shakir, 2005). Several authors have also discussed achieving affective outcomes, including (a) an increased commitment to evaluation (Compton et al., 2001; Dabelstein, 2003), (b) stronger positive beliefs about data and evaluation (Atkinson, Wilson, & Avula, 2005; Brandon & Higa, 2004; Solomon & Chowdhury, 2002), and (c) decreased evaluation anxiety and fear (Kiernan & Alter, 2004; McDonald, Rogers, & Kefford, 2003). Aside from cognitive, behavioral, and affective outcomes, a few articles have mentioned other kinds of achievements, such as (a) increased success at attracting external funds (McDonald et al., 2003), (b) enhanced credibility and accountability within partner organizations (Solomon & Chowdhury, 2002), and (c) improved program quality (Tang et al., 2002).

There is little in the literature, however, that has focused on the evaluation of ECB activities and processes. Referring to the importance of this phase, Compton et al. (2002) stated,

> Evaluating the unit's own work means "walking the talk" and making sure this is known outside the unit. Through evaluating the unit's work, the routine use of evaluation is modeled for unit staff and outsiders. This can lead to more skillful work with other units within the organization, as well as to a more effective evaluation unit and thus to more effective ECB. (p. 54)

Evaluating ECB efforts also (a) generates new knowledge about what works, for whom, and under what conditions, (b) helps ECB practitioners increase their own accountability by demonstrating the value of their work, and (c) collects evidence to help secure continued or new funding for ongoing ECB (Connolly & York, 2002). If the organization or system is serious about embedding evaluation into its culture and work processes, then it should also commit to evaluating how well certain ECB activities and processes are working and what impacts they are having on individuals, groups, and the organization overall.

Transfer of Learning

ECB is about learning; ultimately, it is the transfer of that learning to evaluation practice that we hope to see realized from our ECB efforts. *Transfer of learning* is commonly understood

as the use of principles, concepts, and skills learned in one context applied to another context in which they remain applicable. With regard to ECB, two main types of transfer are important: (a) near transfer (short-term application of evaluation learning) and (b) far transfer (longer-term transfer and the generalization of evaluation learning to new situations) (Holton & Baldwin, 2003).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the two-sided arrow that depicts *transfer of learning* connects what is learned from participants' ECB experiences to the sustainability of evaluation practice; it also illustrates that sustainability of evaluation practice supports and informs ECB efforts. Unless people are willing and able to apply their evaluation knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward effective evaluation practice, there is little chance for evaluation practice to be sustained. Though we have positioned this component of the model in the center, as a connector, it is important to recognize that, as ECB designers and facilitators, we must build *transfer of learning* into every phase of the ECB initiative. This includes (a) considering transfer when choosing ECB learning objectives, (b) ensuring that transfer is incorporated into the learning strategy's design, (c) communicating that transfer of learning is expected, (d) reinforcing the expectation for transfer during the strategy's implementation, and (e) evaluating transfer after participants have had an opportunity to apply their learning to an evaluation context or project.

Trevisan's (2002) research illustrated the need to ensure that ECB participants understand why they are learning about evaluation and that they will be expected to transfer their learning to their work contexts. In his study, he found that only half of the ECB participants in one case expressed concrete intentions to apply what they learned about evaluation to their daily work. In another study, Arnold (2006) noted that "although educators reported leaving the training with a good understanding of the logic model process, they often reported that it was challenging to apply the model on their own" (p. 261), thus suggesting that transfer of learning must be supported once participants complete an ECB experience. Similarly, Preskill, Zuckerman, and Matthews (2003) found that merely being engaged in an evaluation process does not in and of itself create transferable learning—that dialogue, reflection, and articulating clear expectations for what and how to transfer participants' evaluation knowledge and skills are critical for longer-term impacts of ECB.

Organizational Learning Capacity

Today's organizations are incredibly challenging places for evaluators. Between mergers, layoffs, leadership and staff turnover, shifting external demands, new or changing regulations, increasing competition, and financial crises, it is often difficult for evaluation to take hold. The *organizational learning capacity* element of the model reflects the importance of understanding the extent to which the organization has the necessary conditions to support ECB activities, and the long-term uses of evaluation processes. By *organizational learning capacity*, we mean the elements of an organization's culture, leadership, systems and structures, and communications that support and encourage organizational learning (Preskill & Torres, 1999). As can be seen in Figure 1, the development of members' evaluation capacity and sustainable evaluation practice is situated within this context. For example, if the organization already has a culture where members freely share information, trust one another, consistently ask questions, and take risks, then it is more likely that ECB efforts will be successful. Likewise, if leaders seek information when making decisions, are open to feedback from others, and reward employees for engaging in evaluation work, then again ECB activities and processes, and future evaluation work, may have a more lasting impact. Taut (2007) suggested

that the "endorsement and modeling of learning from evaluation by organizational leaders and senior-level managers is necessary to set the tone that learning from evaluation is valued" (p. 57). She found that lack of leadership support proved to be a major barrier to building evaluation capacity in a large international development organization. As in this case, if there are gaps or perceived weaknesses in the organization's infrastructure, as they relate to supporting inquiry and learning, then ECB practitioners may use this information when planning, designing, and implementing their ECB efforts to maximize their effectiveness and strengthen the organization's infrastructure.

Preskill and Torres's (2000) Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation (ROLE) instrument might be particularly useful in the context of assessing an organization's infrastructure for ECB.[2] Using the ROLE in the beginning of an ECB initiative could help identify existing learning capabilities as well as areas that may need further development. In general, the ROLE may provide helpful insights into which ECB strategies might be most effective for whom and when as well as the readiness of the organization's infrastructure for supporting evaluation practice.

Sustainable Evaluation Practice

This component of the model represents the long-term, fundamental goals of ECB. If the organization truly believes in evaluation and the role it can play in its future, then evaluation practice must be sustainable. This means that the organization is committed to internalizing evaluation processes, systems, policies, and procedures that are self-renewing and evolving. Sustainable evaluation practice is dependent on the ability to take a holistic, proactive, and conscious approach to evaluation that incorporates the following elements (see Figure 1).

Evaluation Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures an organization develops are intended to provide the structures and means by which evaluation becomes institutionalized in the organization. This might take the shape of creating an evaluation unit or team that is responsible for evaluation and capacity building (Compton et al., 2002; King, 2002; Valery & Shakir, 2005; Volkov & King, 2007), ensuring that jobs are designed to include evaluation roles and responsibilities (Volkov & King, 2007), as well as developing internal processes for embedding evaluation into the daily work practices of its members (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Evaluation Frameworks and Processes

Developing organization-wide frameworks and processes helps guide evaluation practice and clarify beliefs and expectations about which evaluation approaches and methods may be most appropriate given specific organizational contexts and purposes for conducting evaluation. Some organizations develop evaluation handbooks and manuals that describe the practical steps and processes organization members should follow when designing and implementing an evaluation (Brandon & Higa, 2004; Duignan, 2003; Gilliam et al., 2003; Milstein et al., 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). The more these guidelines for evaluation practice are comprehensible and meet the field's standards for quality evaluation practice, the more likely they will be to make a long-term, positive impact on the sustainability of evaluation practice within the organization.

Resources Dedicated to Evaluation

Without question, quality evaluation activity requires a variety of financial, personnel, and material resources (Arnold, 2006; Volkov & King, 2007). For example, organizations that wish to sustain evaluation practice might consider developing a line item for evaluation in their overall budgets. If this is not possible, strategies for securing evaluation funds from each grantor or donor should be considered and sought after. Evaluation budgets could be used for hiring professional evaluators or others with particular expertise, travel costs, memberships to online survey development Web sites, refreshments for meetings, or evaluation-related books and materials. Continued funding for ECB should also be included in the budget. In addition to financial resources, the organization must also invest in personnel with evaluation expertise who can champion ongoing evaluation activity and provide evaluation assistance to staff members as needs arise. Personnel also need adequate time and opportunities to engage in evaluation activities and processes. The third type of resource critical to sustaining evaluation practice is technology. Organizations must be able to provide current, user-friendly, and appropriate technologies for designing and implementing their evaluations. Such resources might include computers, printers, software (for document production, data analysis, and communicating and reporting evaluation findings), databases, digital recorders, and cameras.

Use of Evaluation Findings

Several authors have advocated that the use of evaluation findings is an important outcome of ECB efforts (Compton et al., 2001; Cousins, Goh, & Clark, 2006; Cousins, Goh, & Elliot, 2007; Dabelstein, 2003; Mackay, 2002; McDonald et al., 2003, Patton, 2008). For evaluation practice to be sustained, organization members must not only use evaluation findings for decision making and action but also communicate and celebrate the uses of their findings. As evaluation findings are used to improve programs and make important decisions, it is likely that evaluation will become more embedded in the organization's culture.

Shared Evaluation Beliefs and Commitment

For evaluation practice to be sustainable, organization members must believe in the value of evaluation and should be committed to ensuring that it becomes part of the way the organization accomplishes its goals. As the organization develops an evaluation culture, these beliefs become manifested in the ways members talk about evaluation, their inclination to ask evaluative types of questions, their interest in using data for decision making, and their overall commitment to conducting meaningful, timely, and useful evaluations (Boyle, Lemaire, & Rist, 1999; Huffman et al., 2006; Kiernan & Alter, 2004; McDonald et al., 2003). Toulemonde (1999) underscored the importance of developing the demand for evaluation and reinforcing an evaluation culture through intense and sustained communication about evaluation. It is critical to keep the conversation going about developing and implementing evaluation activities, processes, structures, and systems that sustain high-quality evaluation practice. By doing so, organizations are in a better position to respond to the everyday challenges of organizational life that may otherwise interfere with ECB efforts (e.g., employee turnover, competing work demands, limited resources, and external requirements).

Integrated Knowledge-Management Evaluation System

Sustainable evaluation practice is in many ways dependent on the organization's ability to create, capture, store, and disseminate evaluation-related data and documents (e.g., data files,

data-collection instruments, evaluation reports) as well as processes, procedures, and lessons learned from evaluation efforts. Having such a system ensures that (a) what is learned from one evaluation can be of benefit to future evaluations, (b) data and findings are available to judge the impact of changes made as a result of an evaluation as well as for future program planning, (c) evaluation efforts are complementary and not unnecessarily duplicative, and (d) resources are used most efficiently. Furthermore, an integrated knowledge-management system would ensure that the evaluation system is aligned with the organization's other data-collection systems (e.g., marketing, quality, human resources).

Strategic Plan for Evaluation

Sustainable evaluation practice is enhanced when there is a clear vision with regard to why evaluations are called for at any given time. A strategic evaluation plan describes how, when, by whom, and to what extent various programs, services, processes, or policies will be evaluated (for details on developing an evaluation strategic plan as part of an evaluation system, see Preskill & Portzline, 2008). Decisions on when to evaluate may depend on various factors, including (a) the length of time the program has been in operation, (b) how the findings will be used (what kinds of decisions need to be made), and (c) how often the program is offered. A strategic evaluation plan also helps the organization be proactive about its evaluation processes and resources.

Continuous Learning About Evaluation

A persistent challenge for many organizations is employee turnover. This is particularly problematic if ECB is viewed as a onetime event because those who have learned about evaluation may be the next to leave. For evaluation practice to be sustained, the organization must provide ongoing opportunities for members to learn from and about evaluation practice. Thus, ECB needs to be supported at a cultural level (as communicated by leaders, by the organization's evaluation vision, by a living strategic plan for evaluation, and in the ways members talk about evaluation), within the performance appraisal and professional development systems, and in the organization's systems and structures (how work gets done and by whom).

Collectively, these elements create the conditions for long-term, sustainable evaluation practice. As a system, they are interrelated and in some ways overlapping. Although one might argue that sustainable evaluation activity may still be possible without one or more of these elements being fully present, we would suggest that this would likely result in "pockets" of evaluation work but not widespread organization-level evaluation practice (Preskill, 2008). Thus, the goal of any organization is to aspire to this level of evaluation capacity and to view it as a journey, just as many participate in the journey to become learning organizations.

Diffusion of Evaluation Practice

We believe that the goals of ECB should not stop at the organization's doors. Rather, we hope that ECB efforts may lead to creating a "social epidemic of evaluation" (Preskill, 2008), where the effects of ECB go beyond those who have participated in the various activities and processes. Therefore, we have depicted *diffusion* in our model as water or reverberations emanating from the organization outward. Diffusion of evaluation learning occurs when ECB participants share their learning about evaluation with others outside of their organization, who then also become exposed to evaluative thinking and practice. This might occur when they

make presentations to their boards or to other professionals at conferences or when they have informal meetings with colleagues from other organizations.

A few examples of diffusion are described in the literature. In one, the evaluators held annual meetings to create opportunities for ECB participants to share their learning and experiences (Compton et al., 2001). In another, participants shared their evaluation knowledge by using an evaluation Web site to build the evaluation capacity of external community partners (Kiernan & Alter, 2004). And Milstein et al. (2002) described an organization that developed an evaluation framework and distributed more than 60,000 copies electronically and by mail to others in their field. These examples of diffusion demonstrate ways in which learning from and about evaluation can go beyond organizational boundaries and have many positive unanticipated effects and consequences.

Conclusion

We believe that ECB represents the next evolution of the evaluation profession and, as such, has the potential for transforming the field in ways only imagined. As more people learn about the value of evaluation, the usefulness of findings, and what constitutes professional evaluation practice, the field may be in a stronger position to influence the development of more effective and humane organizations as well as a more just and healthy society. As Daugherty (2007) explained, "Transformation is taking action to move beyond our current form. . . . True transformation requires true willingness, converted into action" (p. xxi). For evaluation to be transformational, ECB efforts must be intentional, systematic, and sustainable.

In this article, we have attempted to bring together knowledge about evaluation, learning, and change into one unified framework for planning, implementing, and studying ECB. The development of the model was grounded in two goals: (a) to provide a set of guidelines for designing and implementing ECB efforts in ways that will result in the desired outcomes and (b) to offer researchers a framework and set of variables that can be studied using a wide range of designs and methods. We were motivated to develop a model for ECB facilitators and their clients because we were unable to find a comprehensive framework that would help people design and implement ECB in a purposeful, planned, and systematic way. None of those we reviewed seem to take into account the broader individual and organizational learning contexts for designing and implementing ECB activities and processes. Although using this model will most likely require additional thought and preparation given its systems approach, we believe that the outcomes will be well worth the time invested.

Regarding our second goal, we think it is time to begin building a more robust knowledge base about ECB through empirical research. Our hope is that this model provides a jumping off point for designing studies on how these variables interact and affect the quality and sustainability of ECB efforts. There are many questions still to be answered; ECB is an area ripe for exploration. We welcome any and all feedback on the model's design and its uses.

Notes

1. As defined by Patton (2008), "Process use refers to cognitive, behavioral, program, and organizational changes resulting, either directly or indirectly, from engagement in the evaluation process and learning to think evaluatively" (p. 108).

2. Contact Hallie Preskill at hpreskill@ca.rr.com for an electronic copy of the Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation.

References

American Evaluation Association. (2008, April). *American Evaluation Association internal scan report to the membership, by Goodman Research Group*. Retrieved August 5, 2008, from http://www.eval.org

Arnold, M. E. (2006). Developing evaluation capacity in extension 4-H field faculty. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*(2), 257-269.

Atkinson, D. D., Wilson, M., & Avula, D. (2005). A participatory approach to building capacity of treatment programs to engage in evaluation. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 28*, 329-334.

Boyle, R., Lemaire, D., & Rist, R. C. (1999). Introduction: Building evaluation capacity. In R. Boyle & D. Lemaire (Eds.), *Building effective evaluation capacity* (pp. 1-19). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Brandon, P. R., & Higa, A. F. (2004). An empirical study of building the evaluation capacity of K-12 site-managed project personnel. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 19*(1), 125-142.

Compton, D., Baizerman, M., Preskill, H., Rieker, P., & Miner, K. (2001). Developing evaluation capacity while improving evaluation training in public health: The American Cancer Society's Collaborative Evaluation Fellows Project. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 24*, 33-40.

Compton, D. W., Glover-Kudon, R., Smith, I. E., & Avery, M. E. (2002). *Ongoing capacity building in the American Cancer Society (ACS) 1995-2001* (New Directions for Evaluation, no. 93). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Connolly, P., & York, P. (2002). Evaluating capacity-building efforts for nonprofit organizations. *OD Practitioner, 34*(4), 33-39.

Corn, J. O., Byrom, E., Knestis, K., & Thrift, B. (2006, November). *Building capacity for formative evaluation of education technology projects in schools and districts*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Portland, OR.

Cousins, B. J., Goh, S. C., & Clark, S. (2006). Data use leads to data valuing: Evaluative inquiry for school decision making. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 5*, 155-176.

Cousins, B. J., Goh, S. C., & Elliot, C. (2007, June). *Organizational capacity to do and use evaluation: Preliminary results of a pan-Canadian survey of Evaluators*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Evaluation Society, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Dabelstein, N. (2003). Evaluation capacity development: Lessons learned. *Evaluation, 9*(3), 365-369.

Daugherty, A. (2007). *The power within: From neuroscience to transformation*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Donaldson, S. I., & Gooler, L. E. (2003). Theory-driven evaluation in action: Lessons from a $20 million statewide work and health initiative. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 26*, 355-366.

Duignan, P. (2003). Mainstreaming evaluation or building evaluation capability? Three key elements. *New Directions for Evaluation, 99*, 7-21.

Forss, K., Kruse, S., Taut, S., & Tenden, E. (2006). Chasing a ghost? An essay on participatory evaluation and capacity development. *Evaluation, 12*(1), 128-144.

Gibbs, D., Napp, D., Jolly, D., Westover, B., & Uhl, G. (2002). Increasing evaluation capacity within community based HIV prevention programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 25*, 261-269.

Gilliam, A., Barrington, T., Davis, D., Lacson, R., Uhl, G., & Phoenix, U. (2003). Building evaluation capacity for HIV prevention programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 26, 133-142.

Harnar, M., & Preskill, H. (2007). Evaluators' descriptions of process use: An exploratory study. *New Directions for Evaluation, 116*, 27-44.

Holton, E. F., & Baldwin, T. T. (2003). *Improving learning transfer in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Huffman, D., Lawrenz, F., Thomas, K., & Clarkson, L. (2006). Collaborative evaluation communities in urban schools: A model of evaluation capacity building for STEM education. *New Directions for Evaluation, 109*, 73-85.

Kiernan, N. E., & Alter, T. R. (2004). Can a Web site be used as a vehicle for organizational learning about evaluation? *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 10*(1), 121-134.

King, J. A. (2002). *Building the evaluation capacity of a school district* (New Directions for Evaluation, no. 93). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The adult learner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lennie, J. (2005). An evaluation capacity-building process for sustainable community IT initiatives: Empowering and disempowering impacts. *Evaluation, 11*(4), 390-414.

Leviton, L. C. (2001). Presidential address: Building evaluation's collective capacity. *American Journal of Evaluation, 22*(1), 1-12.

Mackay, K. (2002). *The World Bank's ECB experience* (New Directions for Evaluation, no. 93). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McDonald, B., Rogers, P., & Kefford, B. (2003). Teaching people to fish? Building evaluation capacity of public sector organizations. *Evaluation, 9*(1), 9-29.

Milstein, B., Chapel, T. J., Wetterhall, S. F., & Cotton, D. A. (2002). *Building capacity for program evaluation at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (New Directions for Evaluation, no. 93). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Milstein, B., & Cotton, D. (2000, March). *Defining concepts for the presidential strand on building evaluation capacity.* Working paper circulated in advance of the meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Honolulu, HI.

Newcomer, K. E. (2004). How might we strengthen evaluation capacity to manage evaluation contracts? *American Journal of Evaluation, 25*(2), 209-218.

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Preskill, H. (2008). Evaluation's second act: A spotlight on learning. *American Journal of Evaluation, 29*(2), 127-138.

Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2007, November). *Evaluation capacity building unplugged.* Think tank session at the meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Baltimore.

Preskill, H., & Portzline, B. Z. (2008). *Developing and implementing an evaluation system.* Unpublished manuscript. (Available from H. Preskill & B. Z. Portzline, hpreskill@ca.rr.com)

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. T. (1999). *Evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. T. (2000). *Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation instrument.* (Available from H. Preskill, hpreskill@ca.rr.com)

Preskill, H., Zuckerman, B., & Matthews, B. (2003). An exploratory study of the factors that influence process use. *American Journal of Evaluation, 24*(4), 423-442.

Sanders, J. R. (2002). Presidential address: On mainstreaming evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 23*(3), 253-259.

Shumer, R., Moon, B., Otieno, T., Chessin, D., & Schnaubelt, T. (2006, November). *Building research and evaluation capacity for service-learning through service learning.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Portland, OR.

Smith, P. L., & Ragan, T. J. (2005). *Instructional design* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Solomon, M. J., & Chowdhury, A. M. (2002). Knowledge to action: Evaluation for learning in a multi-organisational global partnership. *Development in Practice, 12*(3-4), 346-354.

Stevenson, J. F., Florin, P., Mills, D. S., & Andrade, M. (2002). Building evaluation capacity in human service organizations: A case study. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 25*, 233-243.

Stockdill, S. H., Baizerman, M., & Compton, D. W. (2002). *Toward a definition of the ECB process: A conversation with the ECB literature* (New Directions for Evaluation, no. 93). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tang, H., Cowling, D. W., Koumjian, K., Roeseler, A., Lloyd, J., & Rogers, T. (2002). Building local program capacity toward a comprehensive evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation, 95*, 39-56.

Taut, S. (2007). Studying evaluation capacity building in a large international development organization. *American Journal of Evaluation, 28*(1), 45-59.

Toulemonde, J. (1999). Incentives, constraints and culture-building as instruments for the development of evaluation demand. In R. Boyle & D. Lemaire (Eds.), *Building effective evaluation capacity* (pp. 153-174). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Trevisan, M. S. (2002). Evaluation capacity in K-12 counseling programs. *American Journal of Evaluation, 23*(3), 291-305.

Valery, R., & Shakir, S. (2005). Evaluation capacity building and humanitarian organizations. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation, 3*, 78-112.

Volkov, B. B., & King, J. A. (2007). *A checklist for building organizational evaluation capacity.* Retrieved January 14, 2007, from http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/ecb.pdf