Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) as a Vehicle for Social Transformation: Conceptualizing Transformative ECB and Kaleidoscopic Thinking

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

Program evaluation has become an increasingly urgent task for organizations, agencies, and initiatives that have the obligation or motivation to measure program outcomes, demonstrate impact, improve programming, tell their program story, and justify new or continued funding. Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is an important endeavor not only to empower program staff to understand, describe, and improve their programs, but also to enable programs to effectively manage limited resources. Accountability is important as public funds for social programs continue to dwindle and program administrators must do their best to fulfill their program missions in ethical, sustainable ways despite insufficient resources. While ECB on its own is a noble cause, as it can promote evaluative thinking and help build staff’s evaluation literacy and competency, ECB presents a ripe opportunity for program staff to understand the principles of equity and inclusivity and to see themselves as change agents for societal transformation. In the present study, I developed, tested, and evaluated the concept of transformative ECB (TECB), a social justice-oriented approach, rooted in culturally responsive evaluation, critical adult education, and the transformative paradigm, which promotes not only critical and evaluative thinking, but also kaleidoscopic thinking. Kaleidoscopic thinking (KT) is thinking that centers social justice and human dignity through intentional consideration (turning of the kaleidoscope) of multiple perspectives and contexts while attending to the intersectional planes of diversity, such as culture, race, gender identity, age, belief system, and socioeconomic status. KT involves reflexivity, creativity, respect
for diversity, and compassion on the part of the thinker when examining issues and making decisions.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Program evaluation has become increasingly important for organizations seeking to measure program outcomes, demonstrate impact, improve programming, tell their program story, and make the case for new or continued funding. Evaluation capacity building (ECB) includes training that is important not only to help program staff to understand, describe, and improve their programs, but also to allow programs to successfully “do more” with less. While ECB on its own is valuable, as it can help program staff become more evaluation-minded and skilled, ECB presents a ripe opportunity for program staff to understand the principles of equity and inclusivity and to see themselves as drivers of social change. In this study, I developed, tested, and evaluated the idea of transformative ECB (TECB), a social justice-oriented approach, rooted in culturally responsive evaluation, critical adult education, and the transformative (social justice-related) framework. The TECB approach promotes not only critical thinking and evaluative thinking, but also kaleidoscopic thinking, which focuses on social justice and human dignity. KT involves reflexivity, creativity, respect for diversity, and compassion on the part of the thinker when examining issues and making decisions.
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# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1  
Problem Statement .................................................................................................................. 1  
Purpose and Objectives ......................................................................................................... 5  

Chapter Two: Literature Review .............................................................................................. 6  
Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................. 6  
Leveraging Knowledge for Social Change: Cooperative Extension ........................................ 7  
  A brief history of Cooperative Extension: An attempt at social upliftment through community education ................................................................. 8  
Using Programs to Tackle Society’s “Wicked Problems” ........................................................... 12  
  Social justice ......................................................................................................................... 13  
Evaluation Capacity Building ................................................................................................ 15  
Transformation .................................................................................................................... 18  
  The darker side of transformation ........................................................................................ 19  
Transformative Evaluation ...................................................................................................... 19  
Cultural Responsiveness and Collaboration .......................................................................... 22  
Collaborative and Participatory Evaluation .......................................................................... 22  
Culturally Responsive Evaluation .......................................................................................... 25  
Attention to culture ................................................................................................................. 25  
Towards Transformative Evaluation Capacity Building ......................................................... 32  
  Overview of critical pedagogy ............................................................................................... 32  
  Power and relationships in education and evaluation ............................................................ 33  
Lessons on Andragogy (Adult Education) from Influential Critical Pedagogues ................ 36  
  Paulo Freire .......................................................................................................................... 36  
  Henry Giroux ......................................................................................................................... 37  
  bell hooks ............................................................................................................................... 38  
  Critical liberatory consciousness .......................................................................................... 41  
Applying the Transformative Lens .......................................................................................... 43  
The Value of Mixed Methods in Transformative Inquiry ......................................................... 45  
Reception Formations ............................................................................................................. 46
Problem Statement
As families and communities navigate various ever-pervasive “wicked problems,” such as inequality, poverty, and food insecurity, social programs, diverse in their structure and funding mechanisms, seek to provide various combinations of informational, material, and emotional support to promote human, family, and community development, particularly for vulnerable populations (Rittel & Webber, 1974, p. 272; Clark, 2002). In the United States, programs have been developed to address “wicked problems” since the early reform efforts of the 1800s, which included prisons, schools, hospitals, and orphanages (Mertens, 2002). Whether federally or locally operated, programs serving youth, families, and communities work to provide some combination of parent education, family empowerment, parent self-sufficiency, child and family advocacy, family health care and mental health services, referrals to community resources and agencies, as well as other services based varied population needs as well as funding opportunities.

Program evaluation has been a professional endeavor since the 1960s, with “the passage of the Great Society legislation that authorized such programs as Head Start to improve poor children’s chance for success in school” (Mertens, 2002, p. 367). Scholars have argued that “any good society with democratic principles of governance will evaluate its social experiments, seeking to improve conditions of life and to make its evaluation procedures better” (Cronbach et al., 1980, p. 85). They have advocated for principles such as: (1) “gradualism is better than revolution as a principle of order, given the fact of social change;” (2) pluralistic
accommodation, such as in a democracy, enables social change; (3) authority and power come from ongoing social experimentation at the local level in which people are empowered to make decisions and take actions as well as to understand the social implications of those decisions and actions; “(4) a democratic society is a learning society and evaluation is one way social learning occurs;” (5) government serves to facilitate cooperation among people for achievement of the common good; and “(6) securing such cooperation requires shared meanings—coming to know what events mean primarily through evaluative inquiry rather than scientific inquiry” (Cronbach et al., 1980, p. 85).

Though program evaluation can lead to scholarly publications and can inform research as well as be the topic of inquiry, program evaluation has a “higher calling”—an application for “social use,” as Cronbach and colleagues have articulated. Further, to the authors, the intent of evaluation is to assist in piecemeal improvements to the operation of social systems, not by valuing the program, not by dictating a decision, but by helping “members of the policy-shaping community deepen their understanding of a program, a social problem, or the decision-making machinery itself.” Evaluative inquiry should raise questions, produce clarifications (not answers as Michael Scriven would have us do), and provide alternative views that are otherwise unlikely to emerge.

Evaluative knowledge is for social use, not for libraries or for research programs. (Cronbach et al., 1980, p. 85)

As social problems persist and funded efforts to improve social conditions continue, there is “ongoing justification for the need for evaluation” (Mertens, 2002, p. 367). As Donaldson (2007) has explained, “early developments in social performance measurement recognized the importance
of demonstrating program impact by focusing on its efficiency and effectiveness” (p. 260).
Specifically, “the aim of social program evaluation was to measure the effectiveness of a program (achievement of objectives over inputs), as well as its efficiency (outputs over inputs)” (Zappalà & Lyons, 2009, p. 6). Program evaluation can help administrators understand how a program works, what factors are driving which outcomes, which desired outcomes are being achieved, and to what extent, as well as what unintended outcomes may arise. Program evaluation can help (re)direct a program’s approach, shed light on who the program is reaching, and inform changes that may improve the program’s quality, reach, or effectiveness.

According to Mertens (2002), “transformative scholars have provided a framework for critically examining the status quo and revealing those variables which can catalyze actions that are needed to achieve equity and justice” (p. 367). Mertens (2002) has declared that “the stage is set for the evaluation community to engage in critical self-reflection focused on examining how it can play a role in ameliorating the social problems that plague us” (p. 367). Mertens has argued that “the result of this self-reflection will be a picture of evaluation that builds on its past history, yet changes critical aspects of its theory, guiding principles, standards for performance, and practice so that a more just society can emerge” (p. 367).

Affirming Cronbach and colleagues’ (1980) assertion that “evaluation knowledge is for social use,” (p. 85) Mertens (2002) has urged “the evaluation community to engage in critical self-reflection focused on examining how it can play a role in ameliorating the social problems that plague us” (p. 367). She posits that self-reflection on the part of the evaluation community will allow us to realize the central roles of ontology, epistemology, and power in deeming certain phenomena for certain groups pathological, and in turn, determining whether intervention is possible, feasible, worthwhile, and appropriate. Without this reflection, scholars and practitioners
may overlook the pivotal roles of ontology (conceptions of reality and imagination),
epistemology (conceptions of knowledge and inquiry), and power, which inevitably influence
program work.

Evaluation can strengthen programs’ efforts to support child, family, and community
development by systematically assessing the process and impact of programs, which is important
in understanding how to best serve families and leverage limited resources to effect the most
change (Ravallion, 2007). Evaluation capacity building (ECB) can provide program staff the
opportunity to develop evaluation knowledge and skills to contribute to evaluation efforts as well
as the space to engage in evaluative thinking, which is critical thinking applied to evaluation
contexts (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Taylor-Powell & Boyd, 2007; Buckley et al., 2015). For
program providers working on community outreach programs, ECB may also be able to provide
a generative context for providers to engage more deeply in critical thinking about their
programs—both philosophically and practically. The blending of evaluative thinking activities
with the principles of the transformative paradigm can help program people develop what I have
come to describe as *kaleidoscopic thinking*, further described in Chapter Five.

Through the present study, I explore the relationships between ECB, cultural
responsiveness, critical pedagogy, and transformation, which are concepts that have been
explored independently but not yet intersectionally. One intersection of interest is an exploration
of how to make ECB efforts more culturally responsive—developing and adapting strategies and
practices that are relevant to the evaluation capacity building participants. The ECB practitioner
is charged, then, with working to not only respectfully honor culture, but also intentionally
weave it into the work, which is really their work together—hence the importance of the
collaborative approach.
Another possible intersection, which is central to the present study, is an ECB approach which focuses on instilling cultural responsiveness in the participants of the ECB intervention, throughout the course of their work together, as opposed to during one or two workshops or sessions on cultural responsiveness. This transformative evaluation capacity building (TECB) could foster the training that enables program staff to develop the motivation, knowledge, skills, and community, to think critically about the social justice issues that affect themselves personally and/or affect the participants in their programs, namely members of disenfranchised families and communities.

Purpose and Objectives
The purposes of this study were to (1) develop and explore the concept of TECB and (2) understand how TECB can influence social justice and outreach-oriented work. Towards these overarching purposes, I designed, implemented, and evaluated a TECB initiative that is grounded in the pertinent evaluation and adult education literature. I also explored what implications this initiative may have for scholars and practitioners in the fields of program evaluation and the “helping” professions. Theoretically, TECB has the potential to increase the evaluation capacity of family and community programs, scaffold providers in adopting a critical lens in their program evaluation efforts, and cultivate a community of practice among local providers to sustain a culture of evaluation.

The present study offers empirical insights on the development, process, and outcomes of a pilot transformative ECB intervention and proposes a conceptualization of TECB, in response to the guiding research questions:

1. a. How do the principles of the transformative paradigm contribute to shaping a transformative evaluation capacity building (TECB) intervention?
b. What are the distinguishing characteristics of TECB?

2. How does TECB affect providers’ perceptions about their programs?

3. How does TECB influence providers’ attitudes toward evaluation?

4. How does participation in TECB affect programming and evaluation efforts?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirding this study is comprised of transformative evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation, collaboration, and critical pedagogy. According to Mertens, the transformative paradigm offers an invaluable “meta-physical framework” that “directly engages the complexity encountered by researchers and evaluators in culturally diverse communities when their work is focused on increasing social justice” (2012, p. 804; 2009, p. 10). Each of the theoretical components contributing to framing this study is further discussed in this literature review. Figure 1 (below) depicts a conceptual diagram of the framework.
Leveraging Knowledge for Social Change: Cooperative Extension

Universities and other knowledge production enterprises have the opportunity to leverage science and research to catalyze social betterment. Land-grant universities have more than the opportunity to mobilize knowledge for the benefit of society—leveraging science for social good is the land-grant duty. Thus, land-grant universities play a critical role in providing communities with research-based outreach and support programs. It is my hope that this dissertation, by developing and exploring TECB in one particular case, can provide a useful approach that can be leveraged to effect change in numerous organizational contexts designed to redress social and economic woes. With its legacy of leveraging knowledge for individual, family, and community development that leads to social change, Cooperative Extension may be one such context for implementing TECB.

As publicly-funded agencies with increasingly limited funding, Extension systems have become more concerned with building their evaluation capacity to improve their ability to measure program outcomes and demonstrate impacts. Given Extension’s unique position as a bridge between scientific knowledge and social change, as well as its mission to educate “common” citizens, Extension may be a prime context for implementing transformative evaluation training.

A century before the Great Society legislation of the 1960s, which established educational and support programs like Head Start, the 1862 Morrill Act was passed so that land-grant universities would teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to
promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. (Morrill Act, 1862: section 4)

Land-grant universities are uniquely qualified, and actually are obligated, to bring knowledge “to the people” to uplift individuals, families, communities, and ultimately, society.

**A brief history of Cooperative Extension: An attempt at social upliftment through community education.** The history of Cooperative Extension begins with the establishment of the land-grant system, which awarded university land to states in exchange for educational outreach for social betterment. In 1862, a year following the inception of the Civil War, President Lincoln signed The Morrill Act, which had been previously vetoed by President Buchanan “because it violated traditional policy of the government, which generally left control of education to the states” (Comer, Campbell, Edwards, & Hillison, 2006, p. 2). Herren and Edwards (2002) have explained that the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 was passed “in the midst of the passion and strife of those horrific times” of the U.S. Civil War. They explain that “federal legislation was passed that was to have a healing effect on post-war society by bringing education and prosperity to a nation that would badly need it when the fighting ended” (p. 89-90). Herren and Edwards (2002) describe that “the bill’s passage marked the culmination of a five-year effort to bring about the creation of a university in every state that would serve the needs of common people” (p. 89-90). They further explain that “the land-grant concept involved not only a movement for educational reform but also the desire of common people for social change” (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 90). Thus, since its establishment, the land-grant system has been charged with bringing healing and knowledge to “common people”—at least to common White people.
According to Comer and colleagues (2006), under “separate but equal” legislation, states were permitted to establish separate schools dedicated to the education for Black citizens. However, since most of them were still enslaved at the time, only one was actually established—Alcorn State University in Mississippi. How could the land-grant system provide healing and knowledge to people in a divided nation—a nation where Black people were still enslaved for free labor and were being subjugated as a sub-humans? Comer and colleagues (2006) explain that “after the war ended in April 1865, many blacks were granted confiscated plantations for the development of black-owned family farms” and that “others were granted land under the Federal ‘forty acres and a mule’ land redistribution rulings” (p. 3). Finally, “in March of 1875, the Civil Rights Act, which recognized equality of all men before the law, was passed” (p. 3). Unfortunately though, Black Americans’ status as equal humans was short-lived with the devastation of “the panic of 1873,” a four-year recession which began a regression of the progress that had been made in the past decade.

This counterproductive period included a rise in hostilities against Black individuals, race riots, and the birth of domestic vigilante terrorist groups. These White supremacist domestic terrorist groups became so alarming that many members of the Republican Party began to be disturbed by the immorality of winning elections built on black suffrage. By 1876, however, “morality took a backseat to politics, and the Republican Party began making promises to overturn biracial decisions” (p. 3). Most biracial laws were overturned by the period between 1880 and the mid-1890’s and “in 1883, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. Southerners [unconscionably] began to rewrite their state constitutions establishing Jim Crow, making it illegal for Blacks to vote and attend schools with Whites” (p. 3).
As Comer and colleagues (2006) have asserted, “the land-grant was failing” (p. 3). Without equality for all Americans, the land-grant system could not fulfill “the original charge and purpose of the 1862 Morrill Act, [which] was to democratize higher education by establishing institutions” to teach “common Americans” (Comer et al., 2006, p. 3; Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 90).

As Comer and colleagues have revealed, “Blacks were an important component of the labor pool on the farm and in industrial factories” but “there was a shortage of teachers and a need to provide Blacks with training” and “the Southern states prescribed to bar blacks from the land-grants,” resulting in the “separate but equal” 1890 land-grant colleges, which were developed to serve as a parallel democratic knowledge enterprise system Black Americans (p. 3). With the passing of the second Morrill Act of 1890, “the emphasis … was to create a ‘broader education for the American people in the arts of peace, and especially in agriculture and mechanics arts’” (Comer et al., 2006, p. 3). Paradoxically, although “education was viewed as a means of preventing the ‘segmentation’ or ‘stratification’ of American society based on national origin” the land-grant system established perpetuated racial segregation (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 90).

Despite the land-grant system’s shortcomings and apparent apathy towards advancing racial integration, “Extension work began as a result of large groups of people working together to improve agricultural techniques and disseminate agricultural information within private organizations or agricultural societies” (Comer et al., 2006, p. 3). In this way, like other community-based programs and initiatives, Extension can be viewed as a grassroots movement, which therefore may make it particularly well-suited for a transformative approach to program evaluation. “In fact, the landgrant college ‘movement’ had been gaining momentum for several
years prior to the introduction of Morrill’s bill” (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 90). By 1853, many agricultural schools and colleges began to host farmers’ institutes where presenters disseminated agricultural education to the public. These institutes gave way to the demonstration movement, in which presenters held public demonstrations of new practices, similar to today’s notion of an outdoor classroom (Comer et al., 2006, p. 3). It is difficult to know whether the enslaved Black Americans were permitted to learn research-based techniques that could have lightened and optimized their arduous unpaid labor, but it is not likely since literacy was punishable by murder. Thus, white supremacy and racial inequality has been woven into the history of American social upliftment.

At least for those who were free persons, “the land-grant concept involved not only a movement for educational reform but also the desire of common people for social change” (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 90). After all, “‘education’ [w]as synonymous with an opportunity for ‘upward mobility’” (p. 90). Education for “common” people has always been central to the land-grant mission. The 1914 Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Extension Service as a mechanism for disseminating newly acquired information, knowledge, and innovations to those involved in agriculture, who could then apply the new methods in their own agricultural practices. (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 94)With the passing of the Smith-Lever Act, “the complete tripartite land-grant model—education, research, and extension—was then in place, an educational system that has subsequently evolved to become one that is envied by much of the world” (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 94).

Since then, “arguably, or for many unarguably, America’s land-grant universities are an unqualified success story” (Herren & Edwards, 2002, p. 89). Today, Cooperative Extension offers a wide variety of free or low-cost educational programs and classes to help individuals,
families, and communities lead healthier lives and to help solve their everyday issues related to farming, family process, parenting, youth development, and other practical needs related to society’s “wicked problems.” As Extension continues to grapple with how to best serve communities and how to reach underserved or marginalized audiences who may be particularly susceptible to “wicked problems,” the transformative approach to evaluation offers a particularly useful framework for Extension program evaluation.

Using Programs to Tackle Society’s “Wicked Problems”

“Wicked problems” according to Rittel and Weber (1973), are social or “societal problems” that are “inherently wicked,” such as poverty, (in)equality, sustainability, and health and wellness (p. 160). Rittel and Webber (1973) have argued that “as distinguished from problems in the natural sciences, which are definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable, [wicked problems] … are ill-defined, and they rely upon elusive political judgment for resolution (not “solution”)” (p. 160). Further, Rittel and Weber (1973) have explained that “social problems are never solved. At best they are only re-solved—over and over again.” Unlike the mostly “tame” or “benign” problems which scientists and engineers tackle, where “the mission is clear [and] it is clear, in turn, whether or not the problems have been solved,” “wicked problems, in contrast, have neither of these clarifying traits”—wicked problems are persistent and must repeatedly be re-examined and re-addressed.

Rittel and Webber (1973) have used “the term ‘wicked’ in a meaning akin to that of ‘malignant’ (in contrast to ‘benign’) or ‘vicious’ (like a circle) or ‘tricky’ … or ‘aggressive,’” but not “to personify these properties of social systems by implying malicious intent” (p. 160-161).

Yet, Rittel and Webber (1973) have cautioned us against treating “a wicked problem as though it were a tame one, or to tame a wicked problem prematurely, or to refuse to recognize the inherent
wickedness of social problems” (p. 161). Through a transformative approach to evaluation capacity building, program professionals can develop evaluation knowledge and skills, and in the process, engage in critical reflection on how their program work seeks to address “wicked problems” and advance social justice, a loaded term which requires operationalization for meaningful use.

Social justice. Social justice is regarded as the central goal of many endeavors, including transformative research and evaluation as well as family and community intervention and programming efforts. Tirmizi & Vogelsang (2016) have discussed the primacy of social justice, asserting that “in social sector organizations, we implicitly or explicitly promise to work on behalf of the most vulnerable populations around the world;” therefore, “this work to improve human conditions must be anchored in a commitment to social justice and driven by rights-based approaches” (p. 288). As the authors assert, “this commitment to social justice, in turn, requires that the highest standards of ethics must inform the organizational approaches, policies, systems, and stakeholder engagements” (p. 288).

Tirmizi & Vogelsang (2016) have warned us of “the importance of delicately managing rights, responsibilities, and accountabilities, in our work,” such as in the example of Big Data. Though big data can provide useful information “as we navigate various environmental and cultural boundaries, … it can also cause harm if it falls in the wrong hands” (p. 288). Tirmizi & Vogelsang (2016) emphasize that the social sector should be a role model in setting high standards for how it handles “the intricacies of working for the greater good” (p. 288). They argue that we must reflect on policies and practices “to ensure that we are not only working to improve the human condition, but, in doing so we are not inadvertently placing the people for whom we work in any harm” (p. 288). As Tirmizi & Vogelsang (2016) have stated, the social
sector is making significant contributions to advancing the common good and “its presence offers optimism, hope, and voice to those seeking social justice around the world. By giving primacy to social justice and focusing on human dignity, the sector will continue to have the authenticity and legitimacy to meaningfully advocate and serve” (p. 288). As evaluator-researchers strive for transparency with the community professionals with whom they intend to collaborate in the context of TECB, TECB mentors should also strive to be reflective and honest about their conceptualizations of social justice. Without reflective self-examination, TECB may not be more than ECB that pays lip service to a buzz word that seeks to signal “wokeness” (keen awareness of social injustices and the structures that propagate them and blame those subjugated by them).

As such, scholars and practitioners alike need to engage more deeply with their personal and professional notions of social justice to make progress towards that goal. According to Fraser (1998),

today, claims for social justice seem to divide into two types: claims for the redistribution of resources and claims for the recognition of cultural difference. Increasingly, these two kind of claims are polarized against one another. As a result, we are asked to choose between class politics and identity politics, social democracy and multiculturalism, redistribution and recognition. These, however, are false antitheses. Justice today requires both redistribution and recognition. Neither alone is sufficient (p. 4).

Evaluator-researchers must reflect on their own conceptualizations of social justice not only as an abstract ideological goal, but also as a product of our socio-political positions. Evaluator-researchers cannot operate in the absence of biases, as evaluation is an endeavor based on values. Thus, it is part of the evaluator-researcher’s work to examine their motivations for pursuing
social justice in their conceptualization of the hyper-utilized and under-interrogated term, “social justice.”

Evaluation Capacity Building

Evaluation capacity building (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” (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 444). Since 2000, ECB “has become a hot topic of conversation, activity, and study within the evaluation field” (p. 443). Thus, as a topic that is just under two decades old, ECB is ripe for more nuanced inquiry and development, building on the more general foundational work on the topic. Preskill and Boyle (2008) have asserted that it can be useful to draw on theory “to ensure that the ECB effort is designed in ways that are appropriate, culturally competent, and effective” (p. 449). As we continue to strive toward democratic evaluation, ECB initiatives have the potential to intentionally offer participants the opportunity to think critically about how their work fits within a larger system with various sociopolitical layers and power dynamics at play.

ECB has been summarized as “an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation” (Labin et al., 2012, p. 308). Preskill and Boyle (2008) have previously provided a more detailed description of ECB. They have explained that ECB as education to help individuals, groups, and organizations learn to practice effective, useful, and professional evaluation. Sustainable evaluation practices, “where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action,” is the ultimate goal of ECB (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 444).
ECB can include a combination of various educational strategies. Preskill and Boyle’s (2008) list of ECB strategies includes (1) internships, (2) written materials, (3) technology, (4) meetings, (5) appreciative inquiry, (6) communities of practice/learning circles, (7) training, (8) involvement in an evaluation process, (9) technical assistance, and (10) coaching or mentoring. They have urged evaluators to not focus on what strategy is the “best,” but rather which is the best fit for the program’s needs. Moreover, “regardless of how these capacity building initiatives are instigated and led, they have a common desire to better equip … organizations to both conduct evaluation and to use evaluation results” (Janzen et al., 2017, p. 163). According to Buckley and colleagues (2015), ECB instills evaluative thinking, which her team characterizes as critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action (p. 4).

Preskill and Boyle (2008) suggest that following staff participation in ECB,

- 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. (p. 447)
By fostering evaluative thinking, ECB initiatives do more than impart evaluation knowledge and skills. They also have the potential to transform providers into critically reflective practitioners who value data and strive for continuous improvement in their organizations and communities.

ECB “has become a hot topic of conversation, activity, and study within the evaluation field” (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 443), and for at least the past 15 years, “evaluation capacity building (ECB) has been attracting the interest of evaluators committed to increasing stakeholder understanding of evaluation and building evaluation culture and practice in organizations” (Labin et al., 2012, p. 307). Yet, in their research synthesis of the literature on ECB, which, “organized the literature according to a logic model that presents the need (why), activities (what and how), and results (outcomes) of ECB,” Labin and colleagues “demonstrated that the field of ECB has reported many outcomes, but it still has much room for growth and refinement” (Wandersman, 2014, p. 88; Labin et al., 2012, p. 329). Wandersman (2014) warns that “ECB is hard to achieve” and that there is still much work yet to be done in the field of ECB. Wandersman (2014) explains that

we have to define it and measure it; we have to know how to build it; we need to address the challenges it raises for organizations, funders, and evaluators; we need to translate new knowledge from concepts and measurement into practices that organizations can use to improve their programs and outcomes. [Further,] improving the theory, implementation, methods, measures, and practice of ECB will have a significant impact on the field of evaluation and on society. (p. 88).

Wandersman (2014) has emphasized “the importance of linking the science and practice of ECB” (p. 87). I argue that one such opportunity for growth is deeper engagement with ECB praxis, or the interaction between the theoretical underpinnings guiding ECB and ECB in
practice. In 2014, Suarez-Balcazar and Taylor-Ritzler asserted that in the field of evaluation, future research on ECB should focus on improving existing models, validating models that have not (yet) been validated, and further applying previously-validated models to larger, more diverse samples. The authors posit that current “models may be strengthened by establishing stronger relationships between existing models and their corresponding assessment instruments as to integrate and synthesize currently agreed upon components of evaluation capacity” (p. 96). I submit that the theory and practice of culturally responsive ECB (CRECB) needs to be added to this list of needs for future research and that TECB has the potential to inform the development of both culturally responsive ECB and ECB that promotes culturally responsive evaluation.

**Transformation**

Transformation involves “practices that situate us within a journey, reentering the world we are acting on and opening up ourselves at the deepest levels to learning—the transformation of our fundamental assumptions and beliefs about ourselves and our relationship to our environment” (O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p. 2). According to Takahashi (2004), “one of the major tasks of personal transformation is to break free and challenge the modern instrumental consciousness that creates destructive forces” (p. 172). Takahashi asserts that “if we are to teach peace, justice, and ecological sustainability, we not only need to teach it, but we must also enable students to hold such values and create them within themselves” (2004, p. 170).

Yet, quite contrary to positive transformation, schooling often has “disempowering effect on students by giving them a sense of powerlessness and despair” (Takahashi, 2004, p. 172). This sense of hopelessness persists through work-life, as we become myopic “achievers and users” who engage in “endless activities that do not seem to bring an enduring sense of fulfillment” (O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p. 2). Transformative pedagogy has the potential to
scaffold learners to find enjoyment in learning and in life and to depart from or transcend the hopelessness sometimes bred in traditional classrooms.

**The darker side of transformation.** While transformation can allow us to break “free from [the] myth of happiness” grounded in materialism and “to embrace a deep-rooted joy of life”—“a celebration of existence”—in spite of our “harsh realities” and “hardships,” we must acknowledge that not all transformation is positive (Takahashi, 2004, p. 174-175). Still, we must honor the realities in which people live, and examine “how the social, cultural, and legal context…shapes the nature of transformative learning and influences perspective transformation” (Morrice, 2012, p. 252). This means we must be willing to confront the “darker side of learning,” which can be negatively transformative (Morrice, 2012, p. 252). To truly explore all that is personal and social transformation, we must face that which is also dark, painful, and ugly about transformation. It is not possible to engage in deep transformation if we are not willing to face that which makes us uncomfortable.

**Transformative Evaluation**

The transformative approach to evaluation acknowledges that knowledge is not neutral, but rather, is reflective of social relationships and power dynamics, and that a central purpose of knowledge construction is societal improvement (Mertens, 1999). The transformative paradigm “focuses on the tensions that arise when unequal power relationships permeate a research context that addresses intransigent social problems” (Mertens, 2012, p. 804). Mertens (2012) has further explained that the issue of power arises in relation to privileges related to “economic status, religious beliefs, immigrant status, race, ethnicity, tribal identity, gender, disability, and status as an indigenous person or a colonizer, to name a few bas[e]s on which power differentials have been historically evidenced” (p. 804). In addition to paying necessary attention to the subjugation
of various marginalized groups, “the transformative paradigm also focuses on the strengths that reside in communities that experience discrimination and oppression on the basis of their cultural values and experiences” (Mertens, 2012, p. 804). Not only does the transformative approach center social justice, which ought to be the ultimate goal of all interventions, but it also acknowledges the roles of privilege, power, and culture in working with communities to overcome “wicked problems.”

Mertens (2012) has explained that when coming to ontology in the transformative approach, “the researcher has a responsibility to interrogate … issues of power that might be associated with economics, disabilities, gender, deafness, religion, geographic location, sexual orientation, and the myriad other variables that are associated with differential access to power” (p. 806). The transformative lens “perceives that different versions of reality are given privilege over others and that the privileged views need to be critically examined to determine what is missing when the views of marginalized peoples are not privileged” (Mertens, 2012, p. 806). Mertens has challenged us to consider an important question—“Which version of reality provides an understanding that can lead to changes in the status quo that will lead to furthering social justice?” (2012, p. 806). This suggests that there are multiple versions of reality and that some are necessarily privileged over others, such as those which are considered unintelligent or even deviant—those which are “other.”

Regarding epistemology, Mertens has argued that “to understand differing versions of reality and how they are synergistically related to power issues, the researcher needs to establish an interactive link with community members,” which involves seeking to understand “the historical and social contexts, as well as building relationships that acknowledge power differences and support the development of trust amongst the involved parties” (Mertens, 2012,
Mertens’s discussion of the transformative paradigm provides an invaluable framework through which to consider the politics of “help” and to develop a rationale for promoting cultural responsiveness and collaboration in family services, community intervention, and evaluation.

The transformative paradigm has enabled evaluators to position their work in the social justice context as well as “to design inclusive evaluations directed toward building a stronger bridge between evaluation findings and the transformation of society” (Mertens, 1999, p. 2). Further, like some of its participant-oriented counterparts, such as collaborative, participatory, and “empowerment” evaluation, transformative evaluation interrogates the meanings of constructs like credibility and evidence. For example, whereas some approaches may dismiss the values of participant input, Mertens (1999) has explained that “paying attention to what the beneficiaries of a program think about it is a hallmark of a credible study” (p. 3). Mertens has listed numerous benefits of collaborating with participants on evaluation work, some of which are more practical or technical in nature, such as “aiding in impartiality, gaining new information, and improving the sensitivity of evaluation” (1999, p. 3).

Mertens has also described three more benefits of participant inclusion, which are more philosophical in nature. The first is that an inclusive or collaborative approach “allows us to fulfill our moral and ethical obligations” as evaluators to consider diverse values and interests related to public welfare (Mertens, 1999, p. 3). Secondly, this approach acknowledges that since “we live in a symbiotic relationship with each other on this planet[,] when serious social problems are allowed to fester and worsen, there is a spill-over effect for all of us” (Mertens, 1999, p. 3). The third benefit, plainly stated, is that “without an inclusive approach, a realistic description of the program will not be attained, and without that, the wrong conclusion may be reached” (Mertens, 1999, p. 3). Thus, according to Mertens, the transformative approach, which
prioritizes inclusiveness and social justice, offers a framework through which evaluations can be more democratic, credible, and ultimately, valid.

**Cultural Responsiveness and Collaboration**

According to Askew, Beverly, and Jay (2012), there is an interplay between collaborative evaluation and cultural responsiveness, in which “the intentional application of collaborative evaluation techniques coupled with a culturally responsive stance enhances the responsiveness, validity and utility of evaluations, as well as the cultural responsiveness of evaluators” (p. 552). This conceptualization is important for the current study because it couples collaboration with cultural responsiveness. Although it does not focus on evaluation capacity building, it emphasizes that adopting a culturally responsive stance enhances the evaluation process, particularly when paired with intentional collaboration. As important features of the transformative approach, cultural responsiveness and collaboration are essential elements of transformative ECB.

**Collaborative and Participatory Evaluation**

Program participants can provide invaluable insights about the phenomena they are experiencing and should therefore be included as “experts” in program development and evaluation projects. On some issues, particularly those that are difficult to define and/or address, program participants can be integral in revealing nuanced explanations, such as stigma around participation in a specific community program or the shared history of some community issue. Participatory approaches are useful because they are “aimed at guiding collective thinking and ensuring that relevant interventions are developed on the basis of the perceived needs and problems of beneficiaries and on local capacities and lessons from experience” (Lefevre et. al, 2000, p. 1). An appreciation for community knowledge, which can be collected via qualitative
and mixed methods (such as interviews, focus groups, observations, photos, and surveys) in addition to academic knowledge, is central to participatory approaches. Although a distinction between academic knowledge and community knowledge is helpful for conversations about collaboration, it is important to move beyond dichotomizing types of knowledge to leverage their complementarity.

In the field of evaluation, the collaborative approach “has grown in popularity along with similar participatory, empowerment, and utilization-focused evaluation approaches” in the past decade (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012, p. 523). It is “an approach that offers, among others, many advantages in terms of access to information, quality of information gathered, opportunities for creative problem-solving, and receptivity to findings” (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012, p. 523). This type of approach cultivates “a culture of engagement and ownership of the process, and from our experience create[s] depth and breadth of perspectives at the table. These perspectives include lived experience, first hand program knowledge, and administrative and research oriented perspectives” (Janzen et al., 2017, p. 167).

In TECB, where evaluators strive to engage participants in culturally responsive ECB to promote a culture of culturally responsive evaluation, the collaborative approach to evaluation can address the multiple “asymmetric power relations” that are always at play in social learning settings (and further, in society at large) (Hopson, 2004, p. 12). Beyond its potential for tangible benefits for particular programs, the collaborative approach also provides a broader framework through which we can acknowledge and engage multiple, diverse perspectives to create solutions to social justice issues.

As Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) have articulated, “participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities…in order to address embedded social and economic
inequities” affecting their communities (p. 172). Qualitative and participatory approaches have the power to generate new knowledge that counters so-called scientific findings that can be harmful to marginalized communities, such as the detrimental Moynihan Report which propagated the “tangle of pathology idea, cornerstone of much contemporary poverty policy,” which presents a remarkable example of rationale for communities’ distrust of academics (Greenbaum, 2015, p. 65). According to O’Sullivan (2012), the collaborative approach to evaluation, like other participatory approaches, “systematically invites and engages stakeholders in program evaluation planning and implementation” processes (p. 518).

O’Sullivan (2012) has explained that “unlike “distanced” evaluation approaches, which reject stakeholder participation as evaluation team members, Collaborative Evaluation assumes that active, on-going engagement between evaluators and program staff, result in stronger evaluation designs, enhanced data collection and analysis, and results that stakeholder understand and use” (p. 518). However, in spite of the generative potential of qualitative inquiry and participatory methods, methodological strategies must not be left uninterrogated. For example, even in the case of Photovoice, a valuable qualitative tool in which participants use photographs to depict their narratives, Prins (2010) has drawn “on Foucault’s analysis of surveillance and power” to explain how “photography is a technology with contradictory potential for social control and surveillance, and for the recovery of marginalized groups’ subjugated knowledge” (p. 1).

Importantly, the collaborative approach to evaluation “intentionally incorporates program stakeholders into the evaluation process and views their participation as essential for generating evaluation findings that are meaningful, useful and effective” (Askew, Beverly, & Jay, 2012). Further, this approach contributes to the field’s goal to practice “deliberative democratic
evaluation” by meaningfully engaging diverse stakeholders in the evaluation process (Greene, 2000, p. 27).

For example, “Weiss commented on the tendency of evaluators to limit participation in evaluations to program staff. She acknowledged that it makes sense to include program staff, but argued that program clients also have a big stake in the program” and should therefore be given the opportunity to participate in the evaluation process (Mertens, 1999, p. 2). Weiss has expressed that the collaborative approach, which emphasizes including participants in evaluation work, should be “more widespread, especially [with] clients from marginal groups in society” (Mertens, 1999, p. 2). Weiss has asserted that “including clients in the evaluative process would also help redress the inequalities in access to influence and the imbalance of power that beset marginalized groups in their social interactions with the larger society” (Weiss, 1998, as cited by Mertens, 1999, p. 2). Thus, unlike in a traditional ECB initiative, where participant involvement may be presented as an option, in transformative ECB participant involvement would be presented as an important goal. This is one example of how transformative ECB is characteristically distinct from traditional ECB.

Since “evaluators aim to generate inclusive, emancipatory knowledge,” deep consideration of the significance of culture, oppression, and social justice is necessarily the work of an evaluator (Hopson, 2004, p. 12). Thus, TECB may create opportunities for evaluators to simultaneously (1) engage family support providers in ECB that is relevant to them as well as (2) scaffold providers’ conceptualizations of their work as transformative.

**Culturally Responsive Evaluation**

**Attention to culture.** The construct of culture has become increasingly salient in evaluation discussions and publications. However, “as a fairly new and emergent construct, there
remain many gaps in our knowledge about how to integrate notions of culture and cultural context into evaluation theory and practice” (Chouinard & Cousins, 2014, p. 457). Although potentially challenging and perhaps at times uncomfortable, intentionality and theoretical grounding can support evaluators as they continue to grapple with this complex construct that is critical to evaluation work. According to SenGupta, Hopson, and Thompson-Robinson (2004), “culture is an undeniably integral part of the diverse contexts of evaluation, and therefore an integral part of evaluation. Culture is present in evaluation not only in [program] contexts … but also in [program] designs … and the approach, stance, or methods evaluators choose to use in their work” (p. 6). They have explained that “a common thread between culture and evaluation is the concept of values. Culture shapes values, beliefs, and worldviews. Evaluation is fundamentally an endeavor of determining values, merit, and worth” (p. 6). Thus, while evaluation is systematic and larger than individual intuition, evaluation, unlike basic research, is rooted in values and therefore cannot be completely impartial or unbiased.

The discourse around the importance of cultural awareness in the field of evaluation has included concepts like cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, multicultural competence, cross-cultural competence, cultural appropriateness, cultural responsiveness, cultural humility, and so on. Although the terms “cultural responsiveness” and “cultural relevance” are the most recent reigning terms for the construct, I would be remiss to not include foundational literature on cultural competence in evaluation in this literature review. According to SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson,
cultural competence in evaluation can be broadly defined as a systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the
evaluative endeavor; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further use of the findings (2004, p. 5).

Hopson (2004) adds to this discussion the notion of the sociocultural perspective. He has explained that “those who attempt to study and advance knowledge of multicultural and culturally competent evaluation inevitably find that the central issue is to move beyond narrow culture-bound assumptions toward diverse sociocultural perspectives and experiences” (Hopson, 2004, p. 1). Hopson’s attention to the benefit of a more sociocultural perspective is noteworthy and calls us to recognize that culture captures diverse social experiences, not just limited “cultural features,” which may at times, contribute to the development of stereotypes and the propagation of unintentional “othering,” which I will further discuss later.

Outside of the field of evaluation, Cross (1989) was one of the first to articulate the importance of attention to culture in the field of health and human services. He explained that cultural competence “involves systems, agencies, and practitioners with the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called “dominant” or “mainstream” American” (p. 18). Cross describes culture as “the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group” and competence as “having the capacity to function in a particular way” (p. 18). Thus, based on Cross’s definitions, cultural competence can be described as “the capacity to function within the context of [a group’s] culturally-integrated patterns” (p. 18).

While Cross’ publication “focused on ethnic minorities of color, the terminology and the thinking behind this model applies to each person—everyone has or is part of a culture” (p. 18).
Cross’s (1989) monograph includes a discussion of cross-cultural issues, which “include such things as historic distrust, … culturally-biased assessment techniques, … and value conflicts” such as “punctuality, work, achievement, and independence” (p. 24). It is crucial, however, to provide nuances to such ideas, so as not to be co-opted as evidence for stereotypes, such as the longstanding myth that people of color do not value punctuality, work, educational achievement, or independence the way that White Americans do. This presents an example of how peripheral attention to culture can lead to stereotypes and unintentional “othering.”

**Othering.** While attending to cultural values and practices that “different” from their own, or from what they perceive to be “mainstream,” evaluators must be vigilant to not slip into the unproductive “othering” that can accompany attention to cultural differences. Emphasizing the interpersonal, social aspects of culture rather than focusing on the task of working across cultures can reduce the “othering” that may result as an unintended outcome of attending to diversity and inclusiveness. Further, it is important to not exoticize perceived “others” and to recognize that all humans, not just immigrants, communities of color, indigenous communities, or other seemingly exotic people-groups, “are cultural beings and have a cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage” (American Psychological Association, 2003, p. 380). Culture is a not a construct that is only relevant in certain evaluation approaches, such as the transformative branch. Rather, a broad “challenge for evaluation is to understand how awareness and knowledge of cultural differences in evaluation work can contribute to different kinds of understandings about what evaluation is and what it can be” (Hopson, 2004, p. 2).

Canales (2000) “proposes a theoretical framework for analyzing how we engage with Others, those perceived as different from self. This engagement, termed Othering, is presented as two particular processes: Exclusionary and Inclusionary” (p. 16). Canales (2000) has posited that
“conceptualizing Othering as both exclusive and inclusive processes expands the boundaries for understanding and interacting with those perceived as different” (p. 16). Further, Canales has explained that “Exclusionary Othering often utilizes the power within relationships for domination and subordination, whereas Inclusionary Othering attempts to utilize power within relationships for transformation and coalition building” (p. 16). Canales has presented a conceptualization of “othering” that is not immediately harmful. In this framework, Exclusionary Othering includes the alienation of those perceived as “other.” On the other hand, Inclusionary Othering recognizes difference but attempts to leverage interrelationships for social good.

**Deeper and broader engagement with culture.** In spite of the potential of unintended othering when this work is not done carefully, intentional attention to culture and cultural differences plays an important role in pursuing cultural relevance in program development and evaluation. Addressing the “extrinsic features of an ethnic group” such as “linguistic and geographic needs,” is important for functional purposes but inadequate, because “cultural relevance is more complex” (Barrio, 2000, p. 880). According to Barrio (2000), “cultural relevance can be productively viewed as a multidimensional and dynamic process by which the system of care engages in a cultural assessment, encompassing both objective and subjective cultural realities” (p. 880). Barrio has further explained that “when the objective is to design and provide services relevant to a particular culture, this process also appraises the fit between the service system and the unique ethnocultural qualities, needs, and expectations of the … the client, family, and support network” (p. 880).

I would argue that cultural relevance ought to be considered in program development and evaluation whether or not there is an explicitly articulated objective “to design and provide services relevant to a particular culture” (Barrio, 2000, p. 880). Committing to intentionally
engaging in this work regardless of our particular project can contribute to our ability to practice “deliberative democratic evaluation” (Greene, 2000, p. 27). Since “evaluators aim to generate inclusive, emancipatory knowledge,” deep consideration of the significance of culture, oppression, and social justice is necessarily the work of an evaluator (Hopson, 2004, p. 12).

**Principles of cultural competence.** According to Hopson (2004), there are five foundational principles involved in CRE. The first principle is that “the social location of the evaluator matters,” acknowledging the significance of the evaluator’s own background in the lens through which s/he works (p. 12). The second tenet is that “evaluators play a role in furthering social change and social justice,” as “evaluators ‘are more than technicians’” and have the ability, if not the obligation “to recognize asymmetric power relations to challenge systems and mechanisms of inequity and injustice in hope of dismantling oppression against cultural groups on the fringes of our larger society” (p. 12). This suggests that aside from paradigmatic alignment, evaluation work ought to always further social justice.

The third principle is “avoiding ethnocentricism means embracing multiple cultural perspectives” (p. 12). Hopson (2004) has articulated that “the culturally competent evaluator is able to shift between diverse perspectives, recognizes the limits of narrow culturocentric standards and ideas, and values reciprocal cultural understanding (p. 12). Reflexivity plays an important role in an evaluator’s realization of the ethnocentricism present in her or his own work.

The fourth tenet of cultural relevance is that “culture is central to the evaluation process” because of “the profound way in which culture (including racial and ethnic identity, social origin, class background, etc.) shapes worldview, values and norms, and thereby impacts the uses of, reactions to, and legitimacy of, any evaluation” (Hopson, 2004, p. 13). This tenet is crucial, as it places culture as an important part of evaluation in general—not only for some evaluation
subfield specializing in culture or social justice. Although some evaluators are particularly interested in and perhaps focused on cultural issues in evaluation, Hopson (2004) demonstrates that culture is important in all evaluation work.

The fifth and final principle of cultural relevance in evaluation is that “culturally and ethnically diverse communities have contributions to make in redefining the evaluation field” (p. 13). It is crucial to recognize that “the contributions of these diverse and culturally, and often marginalized groups ultimately triggers alternative ways for responding to evaluative processes of change and transformation both locally and globally” (Hopson, 2004, p. 13). These tenets suggest that the field of evaluation needs to intentionally work towards cultural relevance, include diverse persons in evaluation work, and disseminate findings about engaging in CRE.

Though crucial, engaging in this work cannot be easy, as it requires evaluators to confront their own assumptions about themselves and others, which can be an unsettling task. Yet, the field of evaluation can benefit from incorporating intentional reflexivity in the training of evaluators, whether graduate students in the university or with program staff in the community as part of an ECB initiative. The paradoxical nature of this task adds an additional layer of complexity, as we are challenged to simultaneously attend to cultural nuances while also recognizing the sameness inherent in our humanity.

Although there is no formula for addressing cultural differences, understanding the theoretical and practical assumptions associated with each approach will be useful in evaluators’ operationalization of cultural relevance. Cultural relevance is a goal shared by many, if not all evaluators, and has been an expressed goal of the American Evaluation Association since 2011 (American Evaluation Association, 2011). Critical reflection on how cultural relevance is
operationalized and how it intersects with other constructs within the field of evaluation will continue to propel evaluators in toward inclusiveness and social justice in evaluation.

Towards Transformative Evaluation Capacity Building

Although traditional ECB provides participants with evaluation knowledge and skills, the transformative element, has been under-explored, which is a disservice to family service professionals who could benefit from TECB. In her 1999 AEA presidential address, transformative evaluation scholar and practitioner Mertens explored how evaluators can draw on transformative theory “in responding to a call for greater inclusiveness of marginalized groups” (p. 1). Mertens has examined “the ways that transformative theory can both inform the theory that guides our work, as well as enable us to design inclusive evaluations directed toward building a stronger bridge between evaluation findings and the transformation of society” (p. 2). In the present study, I explored how transformative theory and critical education can also inform evaluation capacity building.

Overview of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, a progressive educational approach often associated with authors such as Freire, Giroux, and hooks, is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 7).

Wink (2005) has provided another definition of critical pedagogy, put in terms of a metaphor. She has articulated that critical pedagogy
is a prism that reflects the complexities between teaching and learning. It is a prism which sheds light on the hidden subtleties that might have escaped our view previously. The prism has a tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political, and even economic conditions, and it does all of this under the broad view of history. (Wink, 2005, p. 26)

In critical pedagogy, “the object of thinking critically is not only against demonstrably false beliefs, but also those that are misleading, partisan, or implicated in the preservation of an unjust status quo” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). A goal of the critical approach is to “disclose and challenge the reproductive role schools play in political and cultural life” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p.2).

Critical pedagogy aims to challenge learners to question the status quo and situate their learning within the broader sociopolitical context (hooks, 1994). According to Burbules and Berk (1999), “the critical person [is] adept at recognizing injustice but, for Critical Pedagogy, that person is also moved to change it” (p. 7). In critical pedagogy, there is an “emphasis on change, and on collective action to achieve it” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). Historically, critical pedagogy has been responsive to the most troubling issues of our time, as it not only promotes awareness, but it also inspires action (Giroux, 2004).

Power and relationships in education and evaluation. Niewolny and Wilson (2009) “take the position that adults learn embedded in and constituted by relations of power that comprise the learning experience” (p. 1). Foucault is a French philosopher who has extensively attended to the notion of power and whose work can add deeper nuance to our understanding of the influence of power—specifically “biopower,” which “is the term he uses to describe the new mechanisms and tactics of power focused on life (that is to say, individual bodies and
populations), distinguishing such mechanisms from those that exert their influence within the legal and political sphere of sovereign power” (Genel, 2006, p. 43).

Similar to Foucault’s conceptualization of biopower as ubiquitous and idiosyncratic, critical pedagogy acknowledges that “all members of society play a role in keeping a “dis-equal” system in place, whether [or not] the system works to their … advantage” (Love, 2000, p. 195). Loves has further articulated that “through the socialization process, every member of society learns the attitudes, language, behaviors, and skills to function effectively in the existing society” and that unbeknownst to individuals, this socialization process prepares individuals to play the scripted roles of “dominant” or “subordinate” “in the system of dis-equality based on race” (p. 195). Love (2000) has asserted that this systemic socialization process works to ensure “that each person learns what they need to know to behave in ways that contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of the existing system, independent of their belief in its fairness or efficacy” (Love, 2000, p. 195). Power dynamics are pervasive in our social interactions and can cause greatest harm when left uninterrogated. A major goal of critical pedagogy is to get learners to recognize the role of power in their own experiences and to challenge them to take actions to dismantle oppressive systems.

Giroux (2004) has articulated that “the power of the existing dominant order resides not only in the economic or material relations of power, but also in the realm of ideas and culture” (p. 77). Giroux (2004) has described critical pedagogy as “a moral and political practice” that contributes to a much-needed “discourse of educated hope” (p. 69). According to Giroux (2004), hope is the affective and intellectual precondition for individual and social struggle, the mark of courage on the part of intellectuals in and out of the academy who use the resources of theory to address pressing social problems. But hope is also a referent for
civic courage which translates as a political practice and begins when one’s life can no longer be taken for granted, making concrete the possibility for transforming politics into an ethical space and a public act that confronts the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance and the unending project of democratic social transformation. (p. 76)

In this way, by supporting learners in recognizing oppression and scaffolding their examination of their own experiences and knowledge, critical pedagogy aims to promote epistemic and cognitive justice and to empower learners to reclaim their knowledge and inspire hope for social change.

In the field of evaluation, stakeholders hold various forms and amounts of power. According to Bryson Patton, and Bowman (2011), “power affects stakeholders’ ability to pursue their interests” (p. 6). Just as there are different types of stakeholders at different levels of a program, there are also different types of power at various levels. Oxfam’s work on power analysis has suggested that “power takes different forms” (visible, hidden, and invisible), “power is acted out in different spaces” (closed, invites, and created), and “power occurs at different levels” (household, local, national, and global) (p. 1). Oxfam has also articulated that power can be “power over,” as in “the power of the strong over the weak,” “power to,” as in the power to have agency in decision-making and behavior, “power with,” such as “collective power, and “power within,” as in self-efficacy (p. 1).

Thus, multiple stakeholders have differing forms of power in program evaluation. Evaluators may have the power to select which projects they work on, what methods they use, and what analysis tools to use (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Program administrators have the power to ‘hire and fire,’ and members of the program staff have the power to choose whether to
implement the program as proposed. Volunteers have the power to choose how much of their
time they give, like participants, on whom the program depends. In this way, even if a program
seeks to reach “at-risk” youth who seemingly have no power, they still do—even if their
attendance is forced, they have the power to choose whether to be active, engaged, and truly
present. Participants also have the power to decide whether or not to complete program
measures, and even if mandated, they have the power to choose whether or not to disclose
honestly in their responses. Given the complex network of power dynamics that shape programs
and the inevitable power dynamics that influence evaluators’ work with providers, incorporating
critical pedagogy in their work can be a useful goal for evaluators seeking to advance social
justice.

**Lessons on Andragogy (Adult Education) from Influential Critical Pedagogues**

**Paulo Freire.** Paulo Freire, progressive Brazilian educator and author of *Pedagogy of the
Oppressed*, who was “forced to live in exile for over fifteen years for his writings on education
and the dispossessed members of Brazilian society,” is “considered by many to be the most
influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogical thought and
practice” (Darder, 2003, p. 5). According to Darder (2003), “most importantly, Freire labored
consistently to ground the politics of education within the existing framework of a larger societal
milieu” (p. 6). In Freire’s perspective, “Critical Pedagogy is concerned with the development of
conscienticizao, usually translated as “critical consciousness” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8).

From Freire’s perspective, freedom “begins with the recognition of a system of
oppressive relations, and one’s own place in that system” and “the task of Critical Pedagogy is to
bring members of an oppressed group to a critical consciousness of their situation as a beginning
point of their liberatory *praxis*” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). Burbules and Berk (1999) have
explained that “change in consciousness and concrete action are linked for Freire; the greatest single barrier against the prospect of liberation is an ingrained, fatalistic belief in the inevitability and necessity of an unjust status quo” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). Thus, hope, courage to act, and deliberate disbelief in the inevitability of status quo social injustice are critical elements for effecting social change.

This is in part why Freire viewed the traditional banking model of education, in which teachers deposit knowledge into students’ information receptacles, as “the greatest tool in the hands of the oppressor” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). In this model, educators have the power to propagate fatalistic beliefs about the status quo, whether or not that is their intention. Freire has regarded the conventional banking approach to education, which has informed the public education system, as “a weapon used to prepare the oppressed to adapt to their situation as the oppressed rather than to challenge the situation that oppresses them” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24).

One important way Freire worked to equip learners with the tools to challenge their situations was by teaching them to read. Critical literacy was a significant part of Freire’s work and has important implications for evaluators with a social justice orientation. Parallel to Freire’s emphasis on literacy, evaluators can emphasize evaluative thinking and evaluation capacity building so that partners have the tools they need to recognize and be positioned to challenge their status quo.

**Henry Giroux.** Building on Freire’s work, Giroux has advocated for going beyond “the pulling of the veil,” in which the critical pedagoge reveals to learners that they are oppressed, to also foster in learners a sense of hope. One of Giroux’s major contributions is
his distinction between a “language of critique” and a “language of possibility.” … As he stresses, both are essential to the pursuit of social justice. Giroux points to what he sees as the failure of the radical critics of the new sociology of education because, in his view, they offered a language of critique, but not a language of possibility. They saw schools primarily as instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations and for the legitimation of dominant ideologies, and thus were unable to construct a discourse for “counterhegemonic” practices in schools…. Giroux stresses the importance of developing a language of possibility as part of what makes a person critical. (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8)

According to Giroux, a critical pedagogue’s goal should be “to raise ambitions, desires, and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice” (Giroux, 1988, p. 177). Without inclusion of a language of possibility, critical pedagogues run the risk of paralyzing rather than inspiring action. It might be behoove us then, to stretch our ontological frameworks to interrogate our assumptions about the imagination—the politics of imagination, what constitutes the imagined realm, what is imaginable, who is deemed worthy of imagination, and what conceptions of the imagination can or should be realized.

**bell hooks.** hooks, a renowned writer and liberatory critical pedagogue, has made significant contributions, which can inform how scholar practitioners in the field of evaluation can leverage critical pedagogy to advance social justice in their work. Like Giroux, hooks (1994) has advocated for fostering hope and possibility in learners in addition to helping them realize their individual and collective plight as oppressed subjects. Critical pedagogues are all “critical thinkers [who] are united in their belief that any genuine pedagogical practice demands a commitment to social transformation in solidarity within subordinated and marginalized groups”
(Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 2). However, hooks (1994) has insisted “that students with class privilege must also be educated with critical pedagogical strategies”—a position “which sets her work apart from most discussions of critical pedagogy,” particularly because the Freirian tradition has emphasized the “pedagogy of the oppressed” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). hooks’ unique perspective is significant and implies that critical pedagogy can and should benefit participants across social locations.

Another major contribution hooks has made is her emphasis on the importance of critical pedagogues’ own work towards self-actualization. hooks has taught that to engage in liberatory pedagogy, educators must work to understand their students, as well as to understand themselves. Per Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), “hooks advocates for an ‘engaged pedagogy’ [which] she warns … is more demanding than critical or feminist pedagogies because it requires teachers to be” intentionally and actively committed to engaging in critical reflection to work towards self-actualization and healing (p. 35).

From hooks’ perspective, critical pedagogues cannot support learners in transformation or liberation until they themselves are “committed to their own spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being” and self-actualization (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 35; hooks, 1994). hooks has asserted that most professors are “not the slightest bit interested in enlightenment,” but are rather “enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom” (hooks, 1994, p. 17). According to hooks, educators who do not do the work of self-actualization are not equipped to make “the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute,” which is crucial in critical pedagogy, where “no student remains invisible in the classroom” (hooks, 1994, p. 40).
hooks (1994) has advocated for critical pedagogues to transgress. She has urged us to transgress from our notions of neutral “safe spaces,” a trending controversial issue in across educational settings, particularly institutions of higher education. According to hooks (1994), “critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all ‘safe’ in what appears to be a neutral setting” (p. 38). Rather than attempting to concoct the illusion of a “safe” space, hooks has advocated for us to strive for creating caring spaces, acknowledging that no space is truly “safe,” or free of bias, inequality, and potentially, trauma. hooks (1994) has argued that a foundation of mutual respect can create a caring space that is safer. hooks (1994) has also urged us to transgress from our “condescending devaluation of experience” (p. 88). hooks (1994) has cautioned us to realize that “all too often we [find] a will to include those considered “marginal” without a willingness to accord their work to the same respect and consideration given to other work” (p. 38).

hooks (1994) has also urged us to transgress from our “collective academic denial and acknowledge that … education [cannot be] politically neutral” (p. 30), from our “phallocentric paradigm of liberation” (p. 49), from our dismissal of eros in the classroom (p. 194), and from creating classrooms that are “determined to erase the body and give ourselves over … to the mind” (p. 192). hooks (1994) has challenged us to transgress from the ways we were taught and to recognize that we must do the work to “build community in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor” (p.40). According to hooks (1994), it is only until we confront “our complicity in accepting and perpetuating” disempowerment in learning spaces that we can teach to liberate (p. 44).
Critical Pedagogy as a Transformative Tool in Evaluation

Critical pedagogy offers a fresh lens through which all evaluators, particularly those concerned with advancing social justice, can consider their work. Critical thinking, evaluative thinking, assumption-checking, and critically reflective practice are foundational activities in evaluation praxis. I will now discuss how scholar-practitioners in the field of evaluation can integrate critical pedagogy in three generative spaces of evaluation work—culturally responsive evaluation (CRE), evaluation capacity building (ECB), and the collaborative, participatory, and “empowerment” evaluation family of participatory approaches to promote critical liberatory consciousness-raising.

Critical liberatory consciousness. A critical pedagogue is a liberation worker who uses critical pedagogy to scaffold learners in realizing that we are all “pawns” in a complex set of unjust structures and systems while instilling in learners an action-oriented yearning for personal and collective freedom. Critical pedagogy suggests that “to be effective as a liberation worker—that is, one who is committed to changing systems and institutions characterized by oppression to create greater equity and social justice—a crucial step is the development of a liberatory consciousness” (Love, 2000, p. 470).

According to Love (2000), “a liberatory consciousness enables humans to live their lives in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality, rather than on the basis of the socialization to which they have been subjected” (p. 470). Going beyond Freire’s concept of a critical consciousness to include Giroux’s concept of a language of possibility, Love (2000) has argued that

a liberatory consciousness enables humans to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression characterizing society without giving in to despair and hopelessness about that
condition, to maintain an awareness of the role played by each individual in the maintenance of the system without blaming them for the roles they play, and at the same time practice intentionality about changing the systems of oppression.” (p. 470)

She has further explained that “a liberatory consciousness enables humans to live ‘outside’ the patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process that helps to perpetuate oppressive systems” (p. 470).

The development of a liberatory consciousness is no effortless goal to which to aspire, particularly since we have all been taught that our greatest struggle is survival, not liberation, and in our US context, that our struggle is individual, not collective. While evaluators have not typically identified themselves as liberation workers, they are well-poised to contribute to critical liberatory consciousness. Like, evaluators, family support workers may not be consciously or explicitly concerned with supporting their participants in liberation. However, from a critical perspective, if they are truly concerned with “helping” families, they should be concerned with not only helping families to *survive* the oppressive system, but also to gain *freedom* from it (hooks, 1994; Love, 2000). From a critical perspective, the work of family support workers is not limited to getting families the resources they need to sustain them within the system, which is important in the short-term, but also to help them pursue liberation, which will sustain them in the long-term.

As scholar-practitioners in evaluation strive to embed critical pedagogy in our work, we will have to grapple with questions of how to become aware of and remain subjected to the realities of oppression while still pursuing our imagined freedom. We will have to navigate how to help community-based program providers see that they work within an oppressive system without having them become paralyzed by blame or guilt. We will have to re-examine our deep-
seated beliefs that inform our understandings of help, worthiness, and social justice, which we have been socialized to endorse blindly. Although these questions cannot be answered within a single evaluation activity, they help guide the rationale behind the integration of critical pedagogy in the evaluation community and can fuel a generative movement of evaluators working to transform their work to be liberatory.

**Applying the Transformative Lens**

Examining the intersections between ECB and CRE calls for inclusion of the transformative paradigm, which “directly engages the complexity encountered by researchers and evaluators in culturally diverse communities when their work is focused on increasing social justice” and “provides an umbrella for researchers who view their role as agents to further social justice” (Mertens, 2009, p. 10; Mertens, 2012, p. 811). Shallow, or “functional” capacity building has also been discussed by Tarsilla (2014) in the international literature on evaluation capacity development, a parallel construct to our notion of ECB in the United States. As Tarsilla (2014) has urged, with regard to evaluation capacity development (ECD) in the international context, there needs to be “a shift from functional evaluation capacity development to transformative evaluation capacity development” (p. 8). Tarsilla has proposed that there needs to be transformative ECD, which sets itself apart … as … genuinely geared towards the fulfilment of the organisation’s internal information needs and social aspirations…. Transformative ECD is longer in duration than past ECD efforts as it is aimed at both sustainability and empowerment (at the individual, organisational and systemic levels). Characterised by diffused championing and resulting from the harmonisation of efforts …, transformative evaluation is not a merely technical endeavour …. Transformative ECD is adaptive and
goal oriented …. Whilst some critics might label this emerging approach as being too costly or idealistic, the current effort to provide a global platform for exchanging on ECD might enhance the conversation around it amongst the large public and, therefore, make it more grounded and logistically feasible. (2014, p. 9)

Our need for transformative ECB is just as urgent—particularly as we strive for CRE, inclusiveness, and social justice in our own work as well as in the broader evaluation culture.

As Janzen and colleagues (2017) submit, “a culture of evaluation is maximized when community-based organizations strive to [engage in evaluation that] is community-driven, participatory, and action-oriented, … as much as possible within their particular circumstance” (p. 165). This sets the stage for transformative ECB, which employs strategies of critical pedagogy and collaborative evaluation to respond to community-identified needs, encourage participation in ECB and in turn evaluation, and generate action by promoting utilization.

It is promising that “a growing number of initiatives have emerged in recent years designed to build a culture of evaluation within community-based organizations” (Janzen, 2017, p. 163). However, while we remain hopeful that traditional ECB may yield positive outcomes, Tarsilla (2014) has asserted that “most ECB efforts have not yielded the expected results” (p. 1). Thus, generic ECB may not be enough to sustain a healthy and generative culture of evaluation, let alone promote a culture of CRE. Transformative ECB may present a more fitting and socially beneficial approach to building a sustainable culture of evaluation in community programs. Transformative ECB can foster the critical reflection and motivation needed to create and sustain providers’ commitment to striving for CRE, enhancing their ability and desire to put their newly-developed evaluation skills to use in effecting change in their programs and communities, advancing our pursuit of inclusiveness and social justice in evaluation.
The Value of Mixed Methods in Transformative Inquiry

The value of mixed methods designs have been well-documented by researchers and evaluators like Mertens, who has articulated the benefits of employing mixed methods in transformative evaluation research. According to Mertens (2012), “transformative methodological assumptions suggest that researchers start with qualitative data collection moments to learn about the community and begin to establish trusting relationships” and then work to supplement their qualitative inquiry with quantitative data sources, such as existing public data (p. 809). Thus, according to Mertens (2012), “the most likely scenario would be a mixed methods design with cyclical collection of data that feeds into subsequent decisions about how to use the information to move the research to the next level or to make changes in the community” (p. 809). Mertens and other leaders in the field of evaluation have written extensively about the potential of mixed methods in advancing the transformative agenda (Mertens, 2002; Mertens, 2012), providing a rationale for the use of mixed methods in this community-based evaluation research project.

The traditional, positivist approach to “Science” would likely suggest that this study should include an experiment, perhaps a randomized control trial, in which a group who participates in a TECB intervention is compared to a control group who participates in “ECB as usual.” My positioning as a transformative scholar with a concern for understanding process and meaning-making, however, urges me to leverage mixed methodology to include qualitative methods that can capture participant insights on complex phenomena related to outreach in ways that typical stand-alone quantitative approaches would (and often do) fall short. Qualitative methodologies are worth the substantial efforts they require, as they allow for the inclusion of
perspectives that would likely otherwise be excluded. Further, they may even lead to refined research questions and approaches to inquiry. Thus, the present study employed a mixed method design in which data were collected via active, ongoing, collaborative engagement with program staff.

**Reception Formations**

Evaluators engaging in transformative work have the opportunity to be reflective about the necessarily political nature of their work as well as the reception formations which influence their (in)ability to develop relationships with community program providers. However, due to unbalanced power dynamics, which Foucault has described as ubiquitous, and the “universal status of the researcher as scientist” or expert, evaluator-researchers must be active, rather than passive, in their efforts to engage ethically and effectively with community program providers and participants (McLaren, 1991, p. 158).

According to Denzin and Giardina (2015), “as Foucault (2008) reminds us, subjectivity is not something that is given to or created independently by the individual, but rather is an effect of power, knowledge, and history” (p. 13). Evaluator-researchers striving to promote social justice via TECB are gravely limited in their efforts if they ignore the significance of power and history, even if they attempt to acknowledge the role of knowledge. Power, knowledge, and history work together to create subjectivity which contribute to the reception formations that influence community-engaged projects like TECB.

A critical antecedent to cultivating strong and effective relationships with the community is acknowledge and intentionally working to mitigate the challenges associated with reception formation, that is the “different historically and culturally located subjectivities that will shape how the researcher’s presence in the field is both perceived and received” (McLaren, 1991, p.
According to McLaren (1991), “fieldwork is the creature of cultural limits and theoretical borders and, as such, necessarily is implicated in particular economies of truth, value, and power” (p. 150). Therefore, McLaren (1991) has argued, “a critical astringency must be brought to our understanding of field relations, which can come about only if we are able to situate and analyze our ethnographic practices within larger structures of power and privilege” (p. 150). Although their roles are distinct from ethnographers, evaluator-researchers engaging in TECB must also recognize their complicity in the structures and systems that oppress and marginalize those sharing the social locations of the participants in the community programs with whom they work.

Greenwood and Levin (2007) have advocated for the creation of spaces that facilitate discussion, collaboration, and co-generative research and learning. They have argued that “the encounter between local stakeholders and the professional researcher is the cornerstone on which mutual learning is built,” and that “because we do not begin with a technique defined a priori, and we try to match our approach to the local situation and actors, our [collaborative] processes generally have a slow and intensely conversational opening stage (p. 135). This slow and intentional attention to relationship-building is crucial in transformative community research and evaluation endeavors that strive for knowledge co-generation and collaboration in pursuing social justice. Further, as McLaren (1991) has articulated,

as field researchers, we both actively construct and are constructed by the discourses we embody and the metaphors we enact. … We are, in effect both the subject and the object of our research. It is within this context that we strive as field researchers to create an atmosphere of place and tradition that will act as a lure to the “right” kind of
informants—those who will largely be compliant with our research agenda by conforming to our normative understanding of them. (p. 152)

Therefore, as critically reflexive practitioners, evaluator-researchers must (as they are training community program providers to do) acknowledge this tendency and interrogate their personal and professional assumptions and practices, such as the common but unacceptable “romanticization of the other” and “barbarization of the other” in community-engaged work (p. 159).

Further, according to McLaren (1991), “how a researcher receives his or her informants, and how informants might ‘receive’ a field researcher is contingent upon, and to a certain extent, determined by, their situatedness in a complex network of gender, class, and race relations” (McLaren, 1991, p. 153). McLaren (1991) has posited that participants “will respond variously to the presence of the field researcher according to the discourses that narrate their personal and professional roles”—“field research and relations need to be understood within both” (p. 154). As the Hanisch (1969) and the feminist movement have asserted, the personal is political, and evaluator-researchers concerned with advancing social justice must reckon with how their personal and professional ideologies, allegiances, and practices are influenced by their own backgrounds.

McLaren (1991) has further argued that “critical field relations… necessitate the researcher’s recognizing what conflicting discourses might exist within his or her own subjective formation without sacrificing or hiding the political or ethical center of gravity that guides the overall research project” (p. 156). This is one reason why critical reflexivity and attention to reception formation are essential components of the evaluator-researcher’s work in TECB—TECB mentors concerned with leveraging evaluation to advance social justice must do the work
of identifying the “political or ethical center of gravity” (McLaren, 1991, p. 156). It is only then that evaluator-researchers and program providers alike can “be willing to let go of already formed preconceptions” and work individually and collaboratively to “build a more transformative agenda” (p. 156-157).

**Reception formation tensions.** McLaren (1991) has argued that the “different historically and culturally located subjectivities” between the researcher and community members, known as reception formation, can present challenges, resistances, and barriers to evaluator-researchers being able to reach and effectively engage program providers in TECB (p. 153). The social locators involved in reception formations, such as perceptions of race, class, gender, age, family status, and education shape the relationship that evaluator-researchers will develop with community program providers in TECB.

Authors like Lindeman have recommended that this type of work “be carried out by a genuine insider, the emergent bias of his or her findings being construed as an actual research advantage in disclosing the sub-society's nature” (Giulianotti, 1995, p. 5). Yet, evaluator-researchers can rely neither on insider status nor on outsider status to influence reception formations. For, with good reason, community program providers and the participants whom they serve may be hesitant to trust an evaluator-researcher regardless of their different insider/outsider statues (such as racial and ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, and geographical community of origin).

**Anticipated reception formations with program providers.** Program providers of community-based and government-sponsored programs may be accustomed to attending to income and family status (to determine eligibility), not only via formal processes such as algorithms based on income and household composition, but also based on informal social
“reads” of social location and urgency of need. Paired with our automatic scanning of physical features (such as skin color, hair, and chests), community program providers may attend to the evaluator-researcher’s apparent race (based primarily on skin color and secondarily other personal attributes such as hair texture and voice) and gender (based on, for example, name, voice, clothing attire, and the presence or absence of breasts).

In additional to noting their physical features, community providers may also consciously or subconsciously scan for cues or indicators of the TECB mentor’s family status (such as the presence of absence of a ring on their left ring-finger and the apparent presence or absence of a pregnant belly). Since they are being approached to participate in an educational intervention, and due to the “universal status of the researcher as scientist,” community program providers may also assume that researchers are well-educated in terms of formal schooling. While one may assume higher educational attainment may lead to higher social regard, for some program providers, higher educational attainment may actually lead to greater mistrust from community members. Though higher educational attainment may be indicative of qualification or expertise, it may also communicate to community members that the evaluator-researcher has privilege and may therefore be detached from the real-world struggles that their communities face. This notion may jeopardize the evaluator-researcher’s reception formations in the community, potentially comprising their ability to engage in TECB.

**Intersectionality.** It is important to realize that social locators are *necessarily intersectional* in nature, and therefore should not be regarded as stand-alone features (Few-Demo, 2014). Few-Demo (2014) has conceptualized “intersectionality as a theoretical framework that guides methodological considerations and data interpretation” (p. 170). However, as Few-Demo (2014) has clarified, intersectionality “is not a method in and of itself”
Rather, as she has explained, drawing on the works of Hancock (2007) and McCall (2005), “intersectionality could be conceived of as a budding research or methodological paradigm … that moves us away from thinking of intersectionality as merely providing a description of the unique experiences of a singular master social group or subgroup” (p. 170). Few-Demo (2014) has added that “instead, researchers are encouraged to examine the fluidity, variability, and temporality of interactive processes that occur between and within multiple social groups, institutions, and social practices” (p.170). Few-Demo (2014) has further asserted that in order to advance an intersectionality theoretical framework that is sufficiently inclusive, a researcher must consider how individuals and groups, who are situated by multiple social locations and whose social identities may overlap or conflict in specific contexts, negotiate systems of privilege, oppression, opportunity, conflict, and change across the life course and geography. (p. 170-171)

Since the subjectivities to which McLaren (1991) refers in his conceptualization of reception formations are fluid, variable, temporal, and interactive, they are necessarily intersectional. As such, based on their assessments of the evaluator-researcher’s intersectional social locators, community providers may come to assign an informal label or social locator, such as “ally,” “sell-out,” “climber” or “riser” (as, in, has “climbed up” or “risen” in socioeconomic status), “career-type,” etc. For example, as a young Black woman graduate student named “Natalie” who speaks U.S. English with an “American” accent and tends to not wear a ring on my left ring-finger, community program providers may see me as an African-American young woman who has had educational opportunities, potentially having benefitted from affirmative action, which providers may be either neutral about or have strong positions on (whether affirmatively or
negatively). Thus, my mere status a woman in the academy with brown, relatively wrinkle-free skin, the name “Natalie Cook,” a seemingly “American” accent, a Master’s degree, and a usually bare left ring-finger could potentially evoke strong political ideologies from some individuals and undoubtedly contribute to reception formations.

Since I no longer have a pregnant belly, and I tend to not wear a ring on my left ring-finger, program providers may assume that I either am not a mother or am a single mother. Paired with my apparent priority of high educational attainment, program providers may come to “receive” me as a stereotypical “career-woman,” an overachieving Black woman who will not likely wed, or a “typical” Black woman who has children “out of wedlock.” These socioculturally scripted narratives, which are based on values, ontology, and socially-prescribed discourses around what is acceptable and what is normal, contribute to the reception formations that influence community members’ perceptions and receptions of evaluator-researchers. Furthermore, reception formations can also interact with evaluator-researcher and program providers’ ideologies around social justice to influence their engagement in evaluation, participation, and transformation.

**Mitigating tensions associated with reception formations: positionality, self-reflexivity, transparency, and intentional entrée.** Due to the ubiquitous role of power in society, including the contexts of education and intervention, evaluator-researchers engaging in TECB are challenged with doing the individual work necessary to reflect on their own social locations, paradigms, ideologies, and motivations. Not only should TECB mentors strive for self-reflexivity on an intrapersonal level, but they should also strive for interpersonal transparency with the community program providers with whom they are seeking collaboration. That is, in addition to being self-reflexive about her or his positionality, evaluator-researchers seeking to
engage community program providers in TECB should be intentional about their entrée into the community work. Authors like Hammersley and Atkinson have argued that “gaining continued access to the proposed research subjects, and entrée within their life-worlds, may be the most difficult part” of community-based educational interventions like TECB (Giulianotti, 1995, p. 5).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction
In this chapter, I will describe the methods I used to generate data to answer my research questions. To reiterate, the purposes of this study were to (1) develop and explore the concept of TECB and (2) understand how TECB can influence social justice and outreach-oriented program work. Towards these overarching purposes, I developed, piloted, and evaluated a TECB initiative that is grounded in the pertinent evaluation and critical adult education literature.

There were multiple overlapping phases of this research study with process-focused and meta-reflective inquiry conducted across the phases: the conceptualization phase, the intervention phase, and the inquiry phase.

Figure 2. Study Concept Map

My research began with the conceptualization phase, in which I used literature on evaluation, critical pedagogy, and the transformative paradigm to develop the concept of TECB.
In the implementation phase, I engaged the participants in a TECB pilot program, consisting of a critical praxis institute, a needs assessment, and a series of interactive workshops. The inquiry phase pervaded the study, including concept development, intervention design, implementation, and on-going evaluation of the intervention pilot. Based on findings from the inquiry phase, I returned to the conceptualization phase to further refine the concept of TECB.

**Positionality**

Like with all research, the methodology for this study is rooted in my ontological and epistemological positioning, shaped by academic training as well as my personal experiences. As a scholar with multiple, intersectional identities (such as a Black woman, a first-generation American raised by a single Trinidadian mother, a first-generation college graduate, a person of faith, a mother, a transformative scholar) which interact to shape the way I view, experience, and am received in the world, I have a keen appreciation for the role of my own positionality in influencing my research interests, questions, and approaches.

One way my experiences have shaped the lens through which I have approached this scholarship is my pervasive childhood experience as a program participant. As a first-generation American and first-generation future scholar, I participated in countless programs as a youth—programs for girls, programs for “gifted” children, opportunity programs, science programs, faith-based programs, programs for teens, etc. Varied in their purposes, delivery mechanisms, and contexts, I was an avid program participant, which has contributed to my “belief” in programs. Though hegemonic in nature, I am a believer in the “power” of programs, as I believe I have achieved many of the intended outcomes, whether social support, high educational attainment, high self-efficacy, or a sense of belonging to a community. Though the notion of the “intervention” program is not to be left uninterrogated, I believe that well-planned programs with
intentional theories of change that are culturally relevant have potential to enhance individual lives as well as community conditions—a perspective which has surely had some level of influence on my scholarship and inquiry.

**Rationale for Mixed Methods Research Approach**

In the spirit of collecting deep, meaningful, well-rounded data that work to generate critical answers to the research questions, I employed a mixed methods research design, which combined qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches to yield both qualitative and quantitative data. The data were integrated throughout the research process, allowing for the data in each strand to complement the other.

**Qualitative strand.** Multiple qualitative methodologies comprised the qualitative portion of this study. As an embedded facilitator, I took memo notes throughout the research project. Throughout the intervention, there were multiple opportunities for participants to contribute qualitative data via qualitative participatory technologies like “the whip,” in which participants shared quick verbal reactions or reflections, journal prompts, and focus groups. I also used document analysis to examine literature as well as program documents. Qualitative data generated on surveys, as well as other textual data collected (such as journal responses and focus group transcripts) were coded via content analysis for *a priori* as well as emergent codes (Neuendorf, 2016).

**Quantitative strand.** In this study, quantitative data were collected via surveys, which were administered on paper. Throughout the intervention, I used check-in surveys during and after sessions to gauge participants’ learning and satisfaction as well as to collect their immediate feedback and ideas. Participants also completed a questionnaire, which contained adapted items from published measures, including Taylor-Ritzler and colleagues’ (2013) Evaluation Capacity
Assessment Instrument (ECAI), an adapted version of the Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation Instrument (ROLE) (Preskill & Torres, 1999), and Buckley and colleagues’ (2015) Evaluative Thinking (ET) scale.

Research Questions
As I have previously mentioned, the research questions that shaped this study were:

1. a. How do the principles of the transformative paradigm contribute to shaping a transformative evaluation capacity building (ECB) intervention?

   b. What are the distinguishing characteristics of transformative ECB?

2. How does transformative ECB affect providers’ perceptions about their programs?

3. How does transformative ECB influence providers’ attitudes toward evaluation?

4. How does participation in transformative ECB affect programming and evaluation efforts?

Context, Program Profile, and Sample
Context. This study was conducted in a small town in the New River Valley (NRV), a region in Southwest, Virginia. According to New River Community Action (NRCA) (2017), 16 to 22% of children in the NRV live in poverty, higher than Virginia’s average of 15% of children living in poverty across the state. A 2017 needs assessment conducted by NRCA revealed that “The overall poverty rate in the Valley is 18%, but for the black community, the rate is 37.9% (p. 19-20). Single mothers represent the largest household type in poverty. Single mothers, women of color and senior women living alone have the highest risk of being in poverty” (NRCA, 2017, p. 4). NRCA’s needs assessment also found that with the minimum wage of $7.25 per hour, and the average cost of housing, health insurance, and transportation, “there is little room for
childcare or any unexpected costs,” presenting the need for access to childcare for low-income families, particularly single mothers.

**Program profile.** To pilot this TECB intervention, I partnered with the staff of a federally-funded early childhood education program serving eligible families in the NRV, which I will refer to as the First Steps program. First Steps seeks to support low-income families by providing high quality early childhood education experiences to children from families for whom high-quality early childhood education would be cost-prohibitive. While their children attend First Steps, parents are either working on in school full-time, or working with other programs (GED, certificate, continuing education, job readiness, etc.) to establish their “path” to family self-sufficiency. Like the Head Start program, which “rejected the deficit model and consciously adopted a cultural relativistic approach that respected Head Start families’ racial backgrounds and cultures,” First Steps seeks to provide holistic, culturally-responsive early childhood education as well as respectful support for transitioning families (Zigler & Styfco, 2010, p. 36). Some ways First Steps provides such support for young children and their families include: full or part-time childcare at no cost to families,

**Sample.** Four program stakeholders participated in this TECB study, including the Center Director, the Family Development Coordinator, an infant room teacher, and a toddler room teacher. Three of the four participants provided their demographic information. All three of the participants for whom demographic information is available are female. Two participants identify as White and one identifies as Black. Both teachers completed a certificate program and consider themselves “low-income” while the Center Director completed a Bachelor’s degree and considers herself “medium-income.”
Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies comprised this mixed methods research project. In this project, I employed an integrative mixed methods design to generate well-rounded data, allow room for emergent data, and triangulate meaning based on multiple perspectives. Due to the integrative design, the qualitative and quantitative strands were related throughout the process, from instrument development to data analysis. My goal was to not miss potential connections and to not unnecessarily dichotomize parts of the integrated whole.

Concept development. The first part of this study was development of the concept of TECB. Toward the goal of conceptualizing the unexplored intersection of the transformative paradigm, cultural responsiveness and evaluation capacity building, I reviewed existing literature related to the aforementioned concepts. I reviewed the literature on evaluation capacity building and conducted a content analysis to examine any existing connections made to culturally responsive evaluation and transformative evaluation.

Based on my review of the literature and my content analysis, I developed a list of key elements to include in the conceptualization of TECB. I then developed modifications for existing ECB activities based on the transformative elements. I also created new ECB activities to include in the intervention to infuse the principles of social justice, culturally responsive evaluation, collaborative evaluation, and critical pedagogy to traditional ECB activities. These activities, compiled in a participant workbook, came together to comprise the intervention pilot. Select worksheets have been included in the Appendix.

TECB pilot program. As part of their participation in the pilot program, participants completed a worksheet containing quantitative and qualitative items regarding their evaluation experiences, opinions, and goals. They then participated in a semi-structured group discussion
around those constructs. I recorded notes on this discussion in my mentor notes, which I later open-coded for emergent themes. After every other session, participants in the pilot TECB program completed a paper Participant Check-In, which was later coded for emergent themes and analyzed as process evaluation data.

Participants in the TECB pilot program also completed an end-of-program worksheet as well as an online follow-up surveys. The first post-survey was administered on paper after the final session and the second was an online one-year follow-up survey, administered via Microsoft Forms. The online follow-up questionnaire contained an six-item section containing Likert-scale responses related to their feelings about evaluation, a four-item section with Likert-scale responses related to their individual preparedness to do evaluation, a seven-item section with Likert-scale responses regarding their organizational readiness for evaluation, and three open-ended responses (What do you remember from our sessions?; Have you been able to implement/do any of the ideas we brainstormed? What has helped or hindered you?; What is something you still have questions about or wish we had covered?). The follow-up survey data were analyzed for descriptive statistics; open-ended responses were coded for open themes. These measures yielded summative evaluation data for the TECB pilot program.

**Critical Praxis Institute.** The Critical Praxis Institute, an important session of the TECB educational series, was designed to be a critical non-formal learning experience to challenge and inspire family support workers to question their assumptions about “help,” support, best practices, evidence, and success in their programs. The goals of this institute were to create a space for participating family support workers will have the opportunity to come together to a space, realize the connections in their work (to disrupt perceptions of alienation and foster collaboration and a sense of community), engage in critical reflection personally and
professionally (to begin the work of self-actualization), and begin the conversation about how even good work can be improved to be more culturally relevant and promote social justice (to recognize injustices at the systemic level and begin to develop a liberatory consciousness). This may help family support workers realize ways in which, unbeknownst to them, their work with families may come from a place of pathology, blame, and white supremacy—and further, may inspire family support workers to embrace a critical perspective in their work.

While the design of this critical praxis institute allows for participant input on the learning objectives, five core learning objectives were predetermined to guide the educational experience. The first learning objective, concerned with positionality, is for family support workers to reflect on their personal experiences, why they are engaged in family support work, and how their personal experiences have informed their work with families. The second and central learning objective, focused on the critical perspective, is for family support workers to begin questioning their assumptions and engage with the ontological politics of family support. The third learning objective, concerned with fostering a liberatory consciousness, is for participants to not only interrogate the assumptions embedded within their work, but also to begin thinking about how to shift from operating within the status quo to pursuing liberation with and for the families their programs serve. While participants may not walk away from the learning experience with practical steps towards liberation for their families or themselves, they should walk away with the seeds of a liberatory consciousness which they can develop as they continue their work with families.

The fourth learning objective, concerned with community-building, is for family support workers to begin relationship-building and have the opportunity to recognize connections and possible collaboration in their work. The fifth and final predetermined learning objective,
focused on a fostering a culture of reflexivity, is for family support workers to see this educational experience as the *beginning* of their work towards self-actualization and liberatory consciousness, such that they see reflexivity as an important, continuous part of their personal and professional work.

The session following the Critical Praxis Institute focused on program vision and mapping. In this session, participants first collaboratively created a program map without my guidance. After a brief lesson on stakeholders, the participants then worked together to create a stakeholder map for their program. This stakeholder map consisted of three concentric circles, with the program name written inside the innermost circle. The program director volunteered to be the “scribe” for this collaborative mapping activity. Moving from the inside-out and outside-in, participants offered their ideas of stakeholders, based on the brainstorming exercise on the handout they completed individually. As a participant offered an idea of a potential stakeholder to include, the group would deliberate on whether they agreed that the nominated entity was a program stakeholder, and if so, they negotiated where on the map the stakeholder should be written, such that stakeholders closer to the program name on the map were more involved with or influenced by the program and those further out on the map had stakes in the program but were less involved.

In preparation for the Centering Culture Conversation, participants individually responded to journal prompts about their own cultures and values as well as about their participating families’ cultures. They had the opportunity to share some of their reflections during the Centering Culture Conversation, in which we also discussed the role of culture in their program, how their own and their participating families’ cultures influence the program, and
about how they navigate “clashes” between their own culture, their participating families’ cultures, and what is regarded as best practice or mandatory policy.

The next sessions covered technical topics, including logic modeling, in which participants learned about and collaboratively created a logic model, data collection tools, unobtrusive measures, and reporting. As we addressed each of the aforementioned topics, I listened for whether the transformative topics or critical lens emerged organically in the participants’ conversation. When the issues did emerge spontaneously, I explicitly asked the participants to consider how those issues (such as power, “help,” and culture) might relate to the material.

Validity Concerns

As with any research project, particularly those with qualitative designs or components, a potential source of concern related to the validity of this project is the issue of time. As with many research projects of the collaborative and emergent nature, time constraints may compromise the validity of the study. Since this study involves an educational intervention, issues of time and dosing necessarily play a role in the validity of the results of the study. Time constraints for this study will limit the amount of post-intervention follow-up data that is collected to measure how long any effects of the intervention may last. For example, since I conducted this study for my dissertation research, a two-year post-participation follow-up would go beyond the scope of the present study. Thus, in some cases, data on intentions were collected over the course of the study. Actual longer-term post-intervention follow-up data may be collected as a separate study following the conclusion of this dissertation study.

Finally, a related but separate issue that may challenge the validity, or rather confirmability, of this project is the case study design, since only one program was involved in
the intervention. Due to the small sample size and convenience sample, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other programs. While some findings may be applicable to other programs, there is the potential that certain findings may be attributed to idiosyncrasies of the participating program. The case study design, however, was appropriate for present study in terms of feasibility for development and piloting of a new approach to ECB. Future studies on TECB interventions with other programs can help contribute to a wider understanding of how TECB works and what effects it may have on those who engage in it.

Chapter 4: Results

In this section, I will discuss the results of each phase of the study, which again, included theoretical conceptualization, a pilot implementation, evaluation of the pilot TECB program, and refining of the conceptualization based on empirical findings, as depicted in the concept map previously presented in Figure 2 and reiterated below.

![Figure 2. Study Concept Map](image)

Theoretical Conceptualization of TECB

The first phase of the present study involved conceptualization of the transformative approach to ECB (TECB). Towards that end, I consulted with the literature on transformative evaluation, evaluation capacity building, and culturally responsive evaluation, referring back to
the conceptual diagram presented in Chapter One. According to Cronbach and colleagues (1980), “the methods and techniques of evaluative inquiry are based on a scientific attitude that facts can serve as evidence and that knowledge claims can serve value claims” (p. 85). They caution that “no masterful set of knowledge claims, however, is going to settle value disagreements about social issues” (p. 85-86). According to the authors, the technical aspects of evaluation design, such as observations, sampling, and controls, serve a pragmatic purpose, to observe and improve programs in their natural state.

They urge us to realize that “the worth of evaluation is judged not by the research criterion of the technical accuracy of answers given to narrow questions but by the growth of understanding” and that “the evaluator should expect the results of evaluation efforts to be consumed in the progress of understanding” (p. 85-86). Thus, as Cronbach and colleagues have articulated, “the evaluator is an educator working so the social order learns. This view of "evaluator as educator" is found in Stakes (1972) responsive evaluation and is finding new advocates” (p. 85-86). I am one such advocate of the “evaluator as educator” view—though I readily add the perspective of the evaluator as a continuous learner. In TECB, the mentor (parallel to the facilitator role in traditional ECB) must be self-reflective, humble, and open to both teaching and learning. This is in contract to the traditional ECB facilitator, who likely does see her/himself as an educator, but bearing the evaluation knowledge and skills, may not readily see her/himself as a learner in the ECB context.

Based on its roots in the transformative paradigm of evaluation, TECB was designed not only to educate and train ECB participants to develop evaluation knowledge and skills, but also to scaffold ECB participants in recognizing “that knowledge is not neutral, but is influenced by human interests, and that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within
society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society” (Mertens, 1999, p. 1). In conceiving this study, I sought to explore how transformative ECB can serve as one mechanism by which 21st century evaluators can respond to the challenge of being intentionally inclusive and using evaluation to promote social good.

Using critical pedagogy to model strategies of collaborative and participatory evaluation throughout the ECB process, TECB can enable participants to develop the motivation, knowledge, skills, and social support (via a community of practice) to employ a critical lens to examine the social justice issues that are necessarily relevant to their work. Moreover, beyond skill-building, TECB is designed to scaffold ECB participants in recognizing “that knowledge is not neutral, but is influenced by human interests, and … reflects the power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society” (Mertens, 1999, p. 1). Transformative ECB can engage participants in culturally responsive ECB (CRECB) and fosters participants’ ability and motivation to practice culturally responsive evaluation (ECB4CRE).

Given its potential to influence the broader culture of evaluation, CRECB is as important as culturally responsive evaluation. Conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of culturally responsive ECB is an increasingly urgent task for evaluators as “ECB become a prevalent activity among evaluators” (Suarez-Balcazar & Taylor-Ritzler, 2014, p. 96). There are numerous factors contributing to the urgent need for community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop internal evaluation capacity, including “accountability demands from funding sources and boards; desire to acquire new funding via competitive applications; fears of the insensitivity of externally imposed evaluations; [and] desire for formative feedback (Stevenson, 2002, p. 233). This multifaceted anxiety is often compounded with a (sometimes dire) scarcity of resources
(human and economic) to detrimentally overlook the significance of cultural relevance, not realizing what is at stake—successful recruitment, retention, positive outcomes for participants, reputation, community relations, and ultimately, social justice.

Like CRE, culturally responsive ECB cannot be prescribed and requires reflection and intentionality on the part of the evaluator or ECB mentor. There is no one authoritative guide to ECB and furthermore no formula for culturally responsive ECB. However, Hopson’s five principles for cultural competence in evaluation can serve as an anchor for operationalizing cultural responsiveness in transformative ECB.

According to Janzen and colleagues (2017) “many existing evaluation capacity building strategies tend to rely on an “expert-based” pedagogical approach,” which thwart ECB in three main ways (p. 164). Relying on the banking educational approach to ECB makes it less likely to “1) enable those closest to and most effected by the program to drive the evaluation agenda, 2) engage stakeholders to contribute their experiential and practical knowledge when guiding and implementing evaluation activities, and 3) lead to evaluation utilization and organizational change” (Janzen, 2017, p. 164). Applying the collaborative approach to transformative ECB means that participants collaboratively shape the ECB evaluation efforts as we cooperatively establish community guidelines, learning goals, indicators, data collection approaches, and analysis strategies.

This approach acknowledges that at the “crux of the knowledge generation process is the encounter between local insights and the understanding that the outsider brings to the table and the fusion of these insights into a shared understanding that serves as the basis for solving practical problems” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 102). Further, it is “aimed at guiding collective thinking and ensuring that relevant interventions are developed on the basis of the
perceived needs and problems of beneficiaries and on local capacities and lessons from experience” (Lefevre et. al, 2000, p. 1). It relies on the assumption that “participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities…in order to address embedded social and economic inequities” affecting their communities, resulting in a much-needed shift from the typical top-down, expert-driven approach to a more grassroots approach of collective inquiry (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, p. 172).

Not only can transformative ECB mentors use collaboration to make their ECB more culturally responsive, but they can also advocate for participants to employ collaboration and cultural responsiveness in their subsequent evaluation work. Weiss asserted that “including clients in the evaluative process would also help redress the inequalities in access to influence and the imbalance of power that beset marginalized groups in their social interactions with the larger society” (Weiss, 1998, as cited by Mertens, 1999, p. 2). Collaboration is crucial for engaging participants in a knowledge-generation enterprise that is inclusive and relevant.

Janzen and colleagues (2017) have offered some recommendations for engaging in this type of ECB based on their lessons learned from a community-based ECB initiative in Canada. They have asserted that is crucial for ECB facilitators to make meetings accessible to participants, “avoid prescriptiveness by focusing on the uniqueness of the program context in determining the practical relevance of the evaluation,” “building consensus on why evaluation is important for the particular program and how best to do and use it,” “draw on the insights and experiences of program staff and participants” when planning the evaluation, facilitate direct participation of staff participants in at least one concrete evaluation activity “to ensure experiential learning opportunity,” “seek out coaches as needed to assist in democratic facilitation that stresses personal interest, practicality, and fun,” and to “involve diverse
stakeholder perspectives when collaboratively drafting evaluation recommendations” (Janzen et al., 2017, p. 168).

Towards promoting action and change, Janzen and colleagues recommended that ECB facilitators strive to report evaluation findings to include stakeholders in the development and dissemination of evaluation reports, “celebrate accomplishments, including program improvements based on evaluation evidence that demonstrate the collective success of the evaluation experience,” and “nurture ongoing learning and critical thinking with others in a similar sector through regular knowledge exchange events” within a community of practice (2017, p. 168). By encouraging participation and fostering a culture of evaluation that is collaborative and intentionally culturally responsive, transformative ECB provides a mechanism for advancing in our pursuit of inclusiveness and social justice in evaluation.

Hopson’s third principle of cultural competence is “avoiding ethnocentricism means embracing multiple cultural perspectives” (p. 12). Hopson (2004) has articulated that “the culturally competent evaluator is able to shift between diverse perspectives, recognizes the limits of narrow culturocentric standards and ideas, and values reciprocal cultural understanding (p. 12). Reflexivity plays an important role in an evaluator’s realization of the ethnocentricism, potentially in the form of perpetuating white supremacist ideals, which are unintentionally present in her or his own work, and can help transformative ECB mentors recognize ethnocentricism present in their ideologies and/ or practices. The use of collaboration in transformative ECB also gives participants the opportunity to shape the experience and contribute based on their own cultures, ontologies, and epistemologies.

The fourth tenet of cultural relevance is that “culture is central to the evaluation process” because of “the profound way in which culture (including racial and ethnic identity, social origin,
class background, etc.) shapes worldview, values and norms, and thereby impacts the uses of, reactions to, and legitimacy of, any evaluation” (Hopson, 2004, p. 13). This important principle places culture at the center of evaluation in general—not only certain evaluation projects that explicitly focus on culture or social justice.

Since Hopson (2004) has articulated that culture is important in all evaluation work, culture is central in transformative ECB. Transformative ECB mentors are charged with developing and adapting strategies and practices that are relevant to the ECB participants. They must work to not only be respectful of the participants’ culture but also to be intentional about weaving it into the work, which is really their work together—hence again the importance of the collaborative approach. ECB mentors, as collaborators, must also be reflective about how their own cultures and worldviews affects their work theoretically and practically.

Hopson’s fifth and final principle of cultural competence in evaluation is that “culturally and ethnically diverse communities have contributions to make in redefining the evaluation field” (p. 13). By collaboratively engaging providers in transformative ECB and supporting their development of the knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in culturally responsive evaluation, transformative ECB has the potential to include diverse persons in evaluation work, and generate new knowledge about leveraging evaluation to effect social change.

As Janzen and colleagues (2017) have asserted, “in short, effective evaluation capacity building needs to create vision that inspires and motivates (why evaluate), as much as to build knowledge and skills that are needed to design, implement, and sustain evaluation practice in an ongoing way (how to evaluate)” (p. 164). Through transformative ECB, or ECB that is culturally responsive, centers social justice, and advocates for CRE, evaluators and ECB mentors have the potential to transform participants into critically reflective practitioners who value data, strive for
continuous improvement, and are keenly aware of the influential roles of culture and power in their work and in society at large. This collaborative work “produces not only a vision for future collective action but also builds a sense of community and enables/inspires people to work toward that vision” (Janzen et al., 2017, p. 166). Therefore, whereas traditional ECB can be credited with appealing to the mind, transformative ECB has the potential to also touch the soul, such that participants come to view themselves as change agents and as members of an organizational coalition, fueled by their collective desire to continue, improve, and build on their collective work.

Transformative learning reaches and transcends the conscious mind to engage with elements of the human spirit, such as imagination, emotion, human interrelationships, human-ecological relationships, and sacredness (Mezirow, 2000; English & Irving, 2015; Hart, 1990; O’Connor, 2002). Transformative learning moves beyond cognitive and experiential learning to support learners in “becoming critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). Further, transformative learning, such as the learning that transformative ECB fosters, counters “meaningless, oppressive, and alienating learning, which … constituted the bulk of … formal education” (Foley, 2001, p. 73) and scaffolds learners in “experiencing a deep, structural shift … of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world” (O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii). Unlike more traditional pedagogical approaches, which emphasize the mind or the body, transformative learning speaks to the soul—it engages with the human spirit and the world we inhabit.

Transformative learning transcends the domains of the conscious mind and the physical body to engage with elements of the human spirit, such as imagination, emotion, human
interrelationships, human-ecological relationships, and sacredness (Mezirow, 2000; English & Irving, 2015). Whether a program’s staff is one individual, a small team, or a larger coordinated system, transformative ECB engages participants in critical interrogation of their assumptions about the world and their social locations within it.

**Decolonization, cultural responsiveness, and inclusivity.** According to Marsella (2015), “decolonization recognizes that the distribution of ‘power’ is part of every relationship, and that this distribution can be asymmetrical” (p. viii). Marsella (2015) has asserted that if a program professional “fails to consider her or his role and function as sources of power, she or he can harm a [client] by imposing certain ill-considered methods and content rooted with cultural and historical contexts that sustain the abuses of power” (p. viii). Marsella (2015) has articulated the injustice of focusing on individual pathologization without regard to the systems and structures that breed sociocultural determinants. He has explained that in the present age of reductionism, characterized by hyper-emphasis on individual factors, such as neurological and psychological determinants, “there is a massive failure to grasp the cultural determinants” (2015, p. viii). As Marsella (2015) has observed,

> it is as if each individual is solely responsible for his or her actions, including their problems through choice and preference. But this ignores the complex forces that modulate mind and behavior, especially the sociocultural contexts that too often are rooted in the injustices associated with race, class, and status. (2015, p. viii)

Thus, it is crucial that family professionals and scholar-practitioners alike can work to decolonize “help” and intervention by acknowledging and reflecting on the ways in which they, by function of their roles, are complicit in perpetuating hegemony. Further, as Marsella (2015) has explained, minority populations in the U.S. and other Western nations are rising while White populations
are declining. He warns, though, that “the real issue for all parties is the need to recognize that each is a function of colonization of mind. It is only an issue of who has the power to shape mind and behavior and what are the personal, societal, and national costs of doing so for all” (p. x).

TECB enables scholar-practitioners and family service professionals to orient their work towards decolonization and social justice while engaging in the day-to-day intervention and evaluation activities of their daily work.

**Engaging in critically reflective praxis.** Beginning with the goal of building in a concern for cultural relevance, I revisited Hopson’s work on culturally responsive evaluation. I relied particularly on Hopson’s five principles for cultural competence in evaluation as an anchor for operationalizing cultural responsiveness in transformative ECB. The first of Hopson’s five principles is that “the social location of the evaluator matters,” suggesting that there is significance in how the ECB facilitator’s own background shapes the lens through which s/he works (p. 12). Based on this tenet, I began the conceptualization process by first engaging in active reflection on my personal background and intersectional identities and further, to interrogate the assumptions I have developed about the world based on the various social locations I occupy, which are further complicated as I straddle and traverse invisible socioeconomic boundaries (i.e., as a Black woman, a child of Trinidadian and Jamaican immigrants, a first-generation college graduate, a person of faith, a knowledge constructivist, a progressive, a mother, a WIC participant, etc.). Engaging in this critical reflection felt “healthy” as I embarked on the task of conceptualizing TECB.

Evaluator-researchers engaging in TECB, or TECB mentors, must not only advocate for program providers to be critically reflexive practitioners, but they themselves as TECB mentors must embrace and model critical reflexivity over the course of the educational intervention. As
with other community-engaged approaches to research and intervention, such as Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), the relationship between the evaluator-researcher and the community (program providers and community program participants who may participate in evaluation efforts), though “often a thorny endeavor,” is a crucial component which should be intentionally nurtured via transparency and mutual respect (McLaren, 1991, p. 155).

Hopson’s second principle of cultural relevance in evaluation is that “evaluators play a role in furthering social change and social justice,” as “evaluators ‘are more than technicians’” and have the ability, if not the obligation “to recognize asymmetric power relations to challenge systems and mechanisms of inequity and injustice in hope of dismantling oppression against cultural groups on the fringes of our larger society” (p. 12). This principle beckons for inclusion of the critical lens in evaluation, and therefore, I argue, in evaluation capacity building via TECB. Discussions of power are not unprecedented in ECB, as Volkov and King (2007) refer to contextual “power hierarchies” in their checklist for building organizational capacity. However, the issue of power needs to be more deeply explored in ECB scholarship in general, and in particular, must be acknowledged in TECB.

By integrating the critical perspective their work, evaluators can foster a critical liberatory consciousness, not only within the community-based programs with whom they work, but also in their praxis. Transformative evaluators, or evaluators who identify as change-agents for social justice, can leverage critical pedagogy to reflect on their personal experiences, on why they are engaged in the work they are doing, and on how their personal experiences have informed their work with partners. Not only can they do this as part of their own critical reflection, but they can also engage partners in this type of reflection as part of their CRE, ECB, or other participatory evaluation activities.
Thus in spite of competing demands for their attention, evaluators and partners alike should strive to do the work of interrogating their assumptions and engage with the ontological politics of constructs like “at-risk,” “intervention,” “voice,” and “evidence,” which can strengthen their intentionality in their work and contribute to their development of a critical liberatory consciousness. Moreover, engaging in this work can reaffirm for evaluators and the community partners with whom they work the importance of ongoing reflexivity as part of their personal and professional development.

This work is valuable from the critical perspective because it enables evaluators and partners to center critical reflection, which creates the “space for constructive confrontation and critical interrogation” and “forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases” (hooks, 1994, p. 36-37; p. 44). When evaluators develop a critical concern for liberation, they can improve their work with community partners, who interact directly with the community. When community partners then develop a critical liberatory consciousness, even if they are limited by political or organizational restrictions, a mere shift in their perspective and consciousness can have positive impact on the communities with whom they work. Giroux (2004) has argued that

this is why intellectuals must take sides, speak out, and engage in the hard work of debunking corporate culture’s assault on teaching and learning, orient their teaching for social change, connect learning to public life, link knowledge to the operations of power, and allow issues of human rights and crimes against humanity in their diverse forms to occupy a space of critical and open discussion. (p. 77)
Evaluators, too, ought to “speak out” and leverage our work to effect social change and dismantle oppressive systems. While our methods ought to be systematic and rooted in understanding rather than personal or organizational gratification, our work is not neutral.

Critical pedagogy offers evaluators a powerful mechanism for transforming evaluation work to advance social change, particularly in the contexts of culturally responsive evaluation, evaluation capacity building, and participation-focused evaluation methodologies. By incorporating critical pedagogy in our praxis, evaluators can make further progress in our efforts to be more culturally responsive, more inclusive, and more change-oriented.

**Employing critical pedagogy in TECB.** Critical pedagogy seeks to “disclose and challenge the reproductive role schools play in political and cultural life” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p.2). Although “there is no agreement about who originated critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire is considered the most likely candidate” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). Freire saw the banking model of education, in which teachers deposit knowledge into students’ information receptacles, as “the greatest tool in the hands of the oppressor” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). Freire regarded this approach to education, an approach that has informed traditional public education, “a weapon used to prepare the oppressed to adapt to their situation as the oppressed rather than to challenge the situation that oppresses them” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). Critical pedagogues are “critical thinkers [who] are united in their belief that any genuine pedagogical practice demands a commitment to social transformation in solidarity within subordinated and marginalized groups” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 2). Although critical pedagogy is explicitly concerned with addressing social issues and including marginalized people groups, this approach is not limited to teaching about race, culture, or society.
Quite contrarily, pedagogical perspectives can (and perhaps should) inform the development of the educational design of classes across content areas—including those that one may not assume to be relevant, such as mathematics (Frankenstein, 1983). Actually, there are “contemporary developers of critical pedagogy” who are “educator, scholars, theorists, and revolutionaries not traditionally associated with critical pedagogy (Carter G. Woodson, Lolita Lebrón, Frantz Fanon, Reies Tijerina, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sucommandante Marcos)” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 2).

Just as critical pedagogy is not limited to one educational subject or realm, the relevance of critical pedagogy is also not limited to students from marginalized groups. hooks is actually known in part for her “insistence that students with class privilege must also be educated with critical pedagogical strategies”—a position “which sets her work apart from most discussions of critical pedagogy,” which tend to be based on the Freirian emphasis on the “pedagogy of the oppressed” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 24). Working towards the disclosure and disruption of oppression, racism, and marginalization is not only the work of members of marginalized groups or those who identify as critical pedagogues, though their identity as such is honorable in its own right, as they self-identify as they declare their commitment to promoting social justice through education.

Beyond technical skill-building, a goal of TECB is program staff to, from a critical perspective, engage with the ontological politics of family support and begin the work of developing a liberatory consciousness. In the spirit of the engaged, critical pedagogy that is concerned with transformation and liberatory consciousness for which hooks (1994) advocates, the TECB mentor should urge participants to reflect on their own experiences and acknowledge how those experience influences their work, to share stories about their work with and hope for
families in their communities, and to think about how they may work within their roles to move beyond the notion of family “help” to liberation for the disenfranchised families they serve.

It is not realistic or perhaps appropriate to expect or encourage program staff or family support workers to incite a literal revolution, as they are confined to working within their roles and organizations rules and expectations and also need to maintain their employment. However, it is feasible and worthwhile to inspire them to view their work and their participants differently, such that they are conscious of the oppression to which we are all subjected in different ways. Then, family support workers may make the critical shift from and only helping families survive their current circumstances to also viewing vulnerable individuals, families, and communities as deserving and capable of liberation.

**Examining issues of power and safety in learning spaces.** An important element of critical pedagogy is the issue of power, which can be examined through the lens of Foucault’s poststructural theory of power and knowledge (English & Irving, 2015). According to English and Irving (2015),

Foucault draws attention to the ubiquity of power and its refusal to be located only in recognized and hierarchical structures such as government, the divinity, or the presidency. In particular, he acknowledges the pathways of power that flow capillary-like through all our relationships and through our bodies, as well as the resistances that always seem to accompany that power. He wants us to attend to the particularities of the familiar and how this minutiae is imbricated in each moment and interaction. It is within this minutiae that learning occurs. (p. 128)

As English and Irving (2015) derive from Foucault’s work, power is pervasive in our social world, even in places where we do not think it could or should exist, or be allowed to exist.
One of these places is the classroom—a place educators seem desperate to be able to regard as a neutral “safe space” (hooks, 1994; Henry, 1994). Though grounded in positive intentions, the notion of the classroom as a safe place ignores the ever-presence of power and the tensions that exist between teachers and learners, as well between learners with varying social positions. In her essay on “pedagogy as powerful and dangerous terrain,” Henry (1994) has confessed that she is a teacher educator because she believes “in the power of pedagogy to change people’s understandings about themselves, others and the world” (p. 1). Henry has explained that her classrooms are not “safe spaces,” but rather, are “places of extreme vulnerability and conflict. Tears of pain or anger and ambiguity are not uncommon consequences of deconstructing our lives and belief systems” (p. 1). In her essay, Henry offered “some personal reflections on learning and teaching about ‘difference.’ Such terrain is political, dangerous, and ‘unsafe’” (1994, p. 1). Although Henry has written from the perspective of a teacher educator, evaluators and (T)ECB facilitators can learn from her raw conceptualization of the classroom as a tumultuous place.

Perhaps, if educators are willing to abandon the self-soothing characterization of the classroom as a so-called “safe space,” which unwittingly erases the real pain and fear experienced by so many learners, we may be more poised to create learning spaces that are genuinely sites of caring and healing. I see the difference between a “safe” space and a “healing” place as analogical to the difference between a “colorblind” society and an inclusive society. In both cases, the distinguishing feature is the acknowledgement of that which scares and hurts us. This critical acknowledgement is an important feature of the TECB approach.

Critiques of critical pedagogy. Some scholars would argue that “as valuable as its contribution has been in placing pedagogy in the forefront of discussion, critical pedagogy still
exists more as a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical specification” (Breuning, 2005, p. 110). On one hand, this can be seen as a strength, as it allows educators across disciplines to imagine how critical pedagogy might inform their teaching (which necessarily occurs in a space laden with tensions of oppression and marginalization, whether or not they are conscious of it). Yet, on the other hand, other scholars may critique the critical approach for “informing educators about the principles that should govern their work but saying little about how they might actually do it” (Breuning, 2005, p. 110).

Another critique of critical pedagogy portrays critical theorists “as being more interested in displaying the shortcomings of schooling than providing models toward which schools should aspire” (Breuning, 2005, p. 110). This perspective begs for the shift from “criticism to substantive vision” (Breuning, 2005, p. 110). Although critics may hunger for a practical prescription for critical pedagogy, critical theorists have left room for educators’ own imaginations to adopt critical pedagogy in their work as educators.

**Critical liberatory pedagogy: Pedagogy as a tool for liberation.** In spite of the critiques of critical pedagogy, which provide valuable moments for the type of critical reflection that is central to transformative learning, critical pedagogy remains a powerful tool for teaching towards liberation. In their article reflecting on bell hooks’ notion of liberatory pedagogy, Specia and Osman (2015) have written that “hooks’ ideologies revolve around her philosophy of the classroom based on race, capitalism, gender, oppression, class domination, liberation, collaboration and praxis in teaching in learning” (p. 195). From their perspective, “freedom in education gives teaching a performative element in each classroom. The transformed and transformative classrooms are a testament to hooks’ vision of changing the way we think of pedagogy as liberatory for all involved in education” (p. 195). Like teaching, I would add that
freedom in education gives learning a performative element, such that transformation relies on both teaching and learning, which have a dialogical relationship in transformative, critical, and liberatory pedagogical contexts.

**Intersections between transformation and critical liberatory pedagogy.** One intersection between transformative and critical liberatory pedagogies is the attunement to the sacred gifts around us—though these gifts exist in tandem with the suffering around us, as authors like Henry (1994) and Morrice (2012) illustrate. In the pedagogical teachings and practices of transformative learning and critical liberatory pedagogy, we are called to attend to gifts, gifts of which we so readily lose sight—gifts like “the gift of freedom…[which] for hooks [is] the teacher’s most important goal,” and the “gift of life,” of which we can so easily deprive ourselves through our “endless activities that do not seem to bring an enduring sense of fulfillment” (Specia & Osman, 2015, p. 195; O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p. 2). While these gifts are readily available to us, they do not come without cost. To enjoy these gifts, we must also struggle to critique our own assumptions and understandings of learning, education, work, success, the world, and the role we play in it.

There are some shared goals and values, as well as some distinctions between transformative, critical, and liberatory pedagogy. While transformative learning is most concerned with promoting psychic transformation at the individual level via personal investigation of assumptions and critical reflection, critical and liberatory pedagogies are explicitly concerned with exposing and dismantling the ever-present forces of oppression, racism, sexism, and marginalization that infest our minds, our relationships, our learning and working spaces, our communities, and our society as a whole.
I find the transformative and critical pedagogical approaches to be reconcilable, and in some ways, even complementary. Where critical pedagogy may lack a plethora of practical methods for implementation, transformative education provides strategies, such as critical reflection as a site for transformation. Where transformation lacks a critique and explicit stance against oppression, critical liberatory pedagogy centers social justice and liberation. Together, transformative and critical liberatory pedagogy have the power to challenge students and teacher-students, teachers who embrace the knowledge their students offer, to question their assumptions about themselves, each other, and the world we share, while also being inspired to use education to recognize and combat the oppression and suffering around us. Transformative and critical liberatory pedagogy provide us with a framework through which we can begin to realize and embrace the gifts of knowledge and life—gifts to which we all have a right. Transformative and critical pedagogy, or in the case of program practitioners, andragogy, are synergistically influential on the TECB approach.

**Liberatory consciousness.** For those pursuing these gifts and those aspiring “to be effective as a liberation worker—that is, one who is committed to changing systems and institutions characterized by oppression to create greater equity and social justice—a crucial step is the development of a liberatory consciousness” (Love, 2000, p. 470). The central role of consciousness is another intersection between transformative and critical liberatory pedagogy.

According to Love (2000), “a liberatory consciousness enables humans to live their lives in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality, rather than on the basis of the socialization to which they have be subjected” (p. 470). She has asserted that “a liberatory consciousness enables humans to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression characterizing society without giving in to despair and hopelessness about that condition, to
maintain an awareness of the role played by each individual in the maintenance of the system without blaming them for the roles they play, and at the same time practice intentionality about changing the systems of oppression” (Love, 2000, p. 470). Love (2000) has further explained that “a liberatory consciousness enables humans to live “outside” the patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process that helps to perpetuate oppressive systems” (p. 470).

Clearly, the development of liberatory consciousness is no effortless goal to which to aspire. How is it that we can become aware of and remain subjected to the realities of oppression while still pursuing our imagined freedom? How can we work with our oppressors and those we may oppress without being paralyzed by blame or guilt? How can we abandon the deep-seated beliefs which we have been socialized to endorse blindly when they are so engrained within us and our world?

According to Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), “hooks advocates for an ‘engaged pedagogy’ [which] she warns … is more demanding than critical or feminist pedagogies because it requires teachers to be” intentionally and actively committed to engaging in critical reflection to work towards self-actualization and healing (p. 35). From hooks’ perspective, educators cannot support their students in transformation or liberation until they themselves are “committed to their own spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 35). The development of liberatory consciousness is critical in our work to overcome that which we have been socialized to regard as inevitable and to create the liberation for which we yearn, as program practitioners, evaluators, Extension professionals, and engaged citizens.
**Transformative evaluation capacity development.** In the field of evaluation, “evaluation capacity building is typically understood to involve the building of knowledge, skills and attitudes of organization members to engage in ongoing evaluation work” (Janzen at al., 2017, p. 163). ECB has “become a prevalent activity among evaluators” and community-based organizations responding to needs to data and “evidence.” However, while there is a growing need for ECB and evaluators are working to fulfill that need, according to Tarsilla (2014), this type of functional ECB is not enough. Tarsilla has advocated for transformative evaluation capacity development, which “sets itself apart … as … genuinely geared towards the fulfilment of the organisation’s internal information needs and social aspirations” (2014, p. 9). The current sense of urgency in building evaluation capacity places evaluators in the position to use ECB as a vehicle for promoting social justice and effecting social change.

However, so far, ECB efforts have been relatively generic, including varied traditional teaching methods, such as lessons, workshops, technical training. Although ECB facilitators employ some interactive teaching strategies, they have yet to intentionally depart from the banking method of education, which critical pedagogues like Freire have described as mundane and repressive. Evaluators are well-poised, however, to integrate critical pedagogy in ECB to transform ECB into a consciousness-raising experience that moves participants to view themselves as change agents.

Evaluators can create transformative ECB experiences by integrating critical pedagogy in their work with program staff. By employing critical pedagogy in ECB, evaluators can scaffold ECB participants in “experiencing a deep, structural shift … of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters [their] way of being in the world” (Foley, 2001, p. 73; O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii). Based on the Freirian perspective, “change in consciousness and concrete action are
linked” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). A defining characteristic of ECB is the aim to foster evaluative thinking skills, which, according to Buckley (2015) and colleagues, is “critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence” (p. 378). According to the authors, evaluative thinking (ET) “involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action” (p. 378). A goal of TECB is to not only instill ET, but to pair ET with consciousness-raising to foster in community-based program providers a critical liberatory consciousness.

According to Freire (1970), “critical consciousness is brought about not through intellectual effort alone but through praxis—through the authentic union of action and reflection” (p. 48). Praxis is a central concept in both critical pedagogy and evaluation. Applying critical pedagogical praxis to ECB praxis can enable evaluators to shift their ECB efforts from generic to transformative. In this way, both the evaluator and the group of ECB participants are challenged to not only learn and apply evaluation concepts, but to also develop the critical liberatory consciousness that instigates change.

As evaluators may already do when planning an ECB initiative, integrating critical pedagogy will offer evaluators additional tools for engaging learners in learning and reflection that is meaningful to them. Evaluators can guide partners to think about particular clients with whom they have worked, moments of perceived “success” or “failure” in their programs, instances when their personal constructions of “help” or social justice may not have aligned with their program or organizations’ ideology, dilemmas they may have faced in their programming, as well as moments when they themselves may have experienced (dis)empowerment in their work in communities. Evaluators can also employ critical pedagogical strategies like story
circles to engage partners in sharing imaginative stories about their hopes and dreams for their programs and the families in their programs, as hooks (1994) has advocated for the inclusion of the imagination in critical pedagogy.

The evaluation literature suggests that there is a space for evaluators who acknowledge the ubiquitous role of power in society, and therefore the significance power has in evaluation work. While there are evaluation approaches that focus on including participants in some part of the evaluation process, such as the collaborative, participatory, and “empowerment” approaches, critical pedagogy and strengthen the extent to which all actors are engaging in critical attention to power in evaluation.

As Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) have articulated, “participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities…in order to address embedded social and economic inequities” affecting their communities (p. 172). However, as evaluation scholar-practitioners, we should challenge ourselves to engage more deeply and more intentionally with the role of power throughout our work—our work with community partners, their work with the community, our work with the community (or lack thereof), and within all of the micro-interactions that occur across these contexts.

“Empowerment” evaluation provides a clear example of uninterrogated reference to power. Better labeled “ECB-focused” evaluation, “empowerment” evaluation is an approach that focuses on partners developing evaluation skills as part of the evaluation. This approach has been widely critiqued for its name, which implies that the evaluation involves some type of empowerment, assumingly for the partners participating in the evaluation. Yet, there is no power analysis or meaningful attention to power in “empowerment” evaluation. As Miller and Campbell (2006) have articulated, “a prominent issue in the debates on empowerment evaluation
concerns the extent to which empowerment evaluation can be readily distinguished from other approaches to evaluation that share with it an emphasis on participatory and collaborative processes, capacity development, and evaluation use” (p. 296). Miller and Campbell (2006) bring up a second issue, which “concerns the extent to which empowerment evaluation actually leads to empowered outcomes for those who have participated in the evaluation process and those who are the intended beneficiaries of the social programs that were the objects of evaluation” (p. 296). By applying critical pedagogy to “empowerment” evaluation, evaluators can add the nuanced analysis the approach has so far lacked.

In transformative ECB, where the TECB facilitator, or perhaps more appropriately, mentor, engages participants in culturally responsive ECB to promote a culture of culturally responsive evaluation, the collaborative approach to evaluation can address the multiple “asymmetric power relations” that are always at play in social learning settings (and society at large) (Hopson, 2004, p. 12). The collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation begin to address the necessarily present power dynamics influencing evaluators’ work with partners by including partners in the evaluation process.

Critical pedagogy, however, can help evaluators take this a step further to engage all actors in making meaning of the power dynamics at play. By engaging in critical dialogue and storytelling, evaluators can learn about partners’ experiences with evaluation, any mistrust they may have developed about evaluation or research, and about rich pieces of program history that may have otherwise been regarded as irrelevant or inappropriate. In this way, engaging in critical pedagogy can enhance the relationship between the evaluator and community partners, and in turn, can improve the evaluation experience.
In TECB, the mentor employs critical pedagogical methods to create transformative ECB experiences and more intentionally discuss issues of power throughout the ECB experience. In this study, I engaged the participants in reflecting on issues of power via verbal discussions as well as journal responses. Niewolny and Wilson (2009) “take the position that adults learn embedded in and constituted by relations of power that comprise the learning experience” (p. 1). They have asserted that power dynamics are inevitably influential in sociocultural learning settings like that of an ECB initiative, particularly in initiatives that adopt a community of practice approach, such as TECB.

By employing critical pedagogy in ECB, evaluators scaffold ECB participants in transformative learning, which “involves experiencing a deep, structural shift … of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters [their] way of being in the world” (O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii). Based on the Freirian perspective, “change in consciousness and concrete action are linked” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 8). A defining characteristic of ECB is the aim to foster evaluative thinking skills (Buckley et al., 2015). Towards conceptualization, this suggested that transformative ECB should seek not only to instill evaluative thinking, but to pair evaluative thinking with consciousness-raising to foster in community-based program providers a critical liberatory consciousness.

In TECB, through the ECB mentor’s use of critical pedagogical methods, s/he can challenge and inspire the ECB participants to question their assumptions about “help,” service, best practices, evidence, and success in their programs. Over the course of the ECB experience and for as long as the cultivated community of practice is able to thrive, participants would have the opportunity to come together to a space, sometimes physical and other times virtual, to realize the connections in their work (to disrupt perceptions of alienation and foster collaboration
and a sense of community), to engage in critical reflection personally and professionally, and to engage in dialogue about how even good work can be improved to be more culturally relevant and promote social justice (recognizing injustices at the systemic level).

In the pilot program, I invited (or challenged) the participants to identify and question their assumptions. This work included group discussions and written journal responses and worksheets, in which TECB participants could engage in critical reflection. Critical reflection is a core element of TECB, which can enable participants to realize ways in which, unbeknownst to them, their work with families and communities may come from a place of pathology, blame, and/or white supremacy—and further, may inspire them to embrace a critical perspective in their work and come to view themselves as agents of change.

Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between CRECB (culturally responsive ECB) and ECB4CRE (ECB designed to promote CRE). Culturally responsive ECB serves as an experiential learning process in which participants gain practice using the tools and participating in critical learning activities. These activities can be centering and generative for staff who have become critically reflective practitioners. Providers who participate in TECB gain the experience of critical and culturally responsive ECB, and in turn, develop the ability and motivation to engage in culturally responsive evaluation in their own work.

**Participant Demographic Information**

The first information collected in the implementation phase of this study included demographic information as well as needs assessment information so that I could gauge the program’s evaluation capacity needs. Three of the four TECB participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire, in which they indicated their role (open-ended), race/ethnicity (open-ended), age range (circle one: teen, 20s, 30s, etc. through 100+), education (circle highest level
completed), income level (circle one: low, medium, high), and cultural background (open-ended). The director, “Jane”, identifies as a “White/ Non-Hispanic” woman in her 40s with a Bachelor’s degree, medium-income, and a “melting pot” cultural background. The toddler teacher, “Victoria”, identifies as a low-income “black” woman in her 40s who has completed a certificate program and some college. Regarding her cultural background, she indicates that she “grew up in the country. Very traditional on holidays and family.” The infant teacher, “Molly Sue”, identifies as a low-income White woman in her 20s who has completed a certificate program and some college. She describes her cultural background as “a southern background with a big southern family.” The participant who did not complete a demographic questionnaire is the program’s family development specialist who shall be referred to as “Doreen.”

**Needs Assessment**

A needs assessment at the beginning of my work with the participants, designed to help orient the program towards the needs of the participants, yielded quantitative and qualitative data about their attitudes towards evaluation, familiarity or experience with evaluation, and organizational readiness to engage in evaluation planning. As part of the needs assessment, TECB program participants participated in a focus group and completed a paper questionnaire, which contained 68 five-point Likert scale items and two open-ended items. Section 1 of the questionnaire was about individual thoughts about evaluation, motivation to engage in evaluation, and evaluation knowledge and skills. Mean responses to the items in Section 1 are summarized in Table 1. Sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire was about organizational factors, including the learning climate, resources for evaluation, and use of evaluation findings. Table 2 contains a summary of the mean responses in Section 2 and 3.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think that an evaluation . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Will help me understand my program.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Will inform the decisions I make about my program.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Will justify funding for my program.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will help to convince managers that changes are needed in my program.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will inform changes in our documentation systems.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is absolutely necessary to improve my program.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Should involve program participants in the evaluation process.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Will influence policy relevant to my program.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Will help improve services to people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who also have disabilities.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Is unnecessary because we already know what is best for our participants.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Is too complex for staff to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| I am motivated to . . . | |
| 1. Learn about evaluation. | 4 |
| 2. Start evaluating my program. | 4 |
| 3. Support other staff to evaluate their program. | 3.75 |
| 4. Encourage others to buy into evaluating our program. | 4 |

| I know how to... | |
| 1. Develop an evaluation plan. | 2.75 |
| 2. Clearly state measurable goals and objectives for my program. | 3.25 |
| 3. Identify strategies to collect information from participants. | 3.25 |
| 4. Define outcome indicators of my program. | 3.25 |
| 5. Decide what questions to answer in an evaluation. | 3.75 |
| 6. Decide from whom to collect the information. | 3.63 |
| 7. Collect evaluation information. | 3.25 |
| 8. Analyze evaluation information. | 3.67 |
| 9. Develop recommendations based on evaluation results. | 3.5 |
| 10. Examine the impact of my program on people from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and/or people with disabilities. | 3.75 |
| 11. Write an evaluation report. | 2.5 |
| 12. Conduct an evaluation of my program on my own. | 2.75 |
| 13. Conduct an evaluation of my program with support from others. | 3.25 |
| 14. Present evaluation findings orally. | 2.5 |

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Program managers provide effective leadership.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Staff understands how everyone’s duties fit together as part of the overall mission of the program.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Program managers communicate program goals and objectives clearly.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Program managers have a clear plan for accomplishing program goals.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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5. Program managers have realistic expectations of what staff can accomplish given the resources

The program where I work fosters an environment in which . . .

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<tr>
<td>1. Evaluation information is shared in open forums.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Staff is supported to introduce new approaches in the course of their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. It is easy for staff to meet regularly to discuss issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Staff is provided opportunities to assess how well they are doing, what they can do better, and what is working.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Staff can encourage managers and peers to make use of evaluation findings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Staff respects each other’s perspectives and opinions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Staff errors lead to teachable moments rather than criticisms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Staff participates in making long-term plans for their program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Staff concerns are ignored in most decisions regarding strategic planning and evaluation.</td>
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Resources for Evaluation

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<tr>
<td>1. Resources are allocated to provide accommodations for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and for people with disabilities to collect evaluation information (e.g., interpreters, translated documents).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Staff has time to conduct evaluation activities (e.g., identifying or developing a survey, collecting information from participants).</td>
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<td>3. Staff has access to technology to compile information into computerized records.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Staff has access to adequate technology to produce summary reports of information collected from participants (e.g., computerized database).</td>
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<td>5. Resources are allocated for staff training (e.g., money, time, bringing in consultants).</td>
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<td>6. Technical assistance is available to staff to address questions related to evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Funders provide resources (e.g., training, money, etc.) to conduct evaluation.</td>
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<td>8. Funders provide leadership for conducting evaluation.</td>
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<td>9. Agency leadership engages in ongoing dialogue with funders regarding evaluation.</td>
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Mainstreaming: Evaluation as part of your job

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<td>1. My program gathers information from diverse stakeholders to gauge how well the program is doing.</td>
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<td>2. My program has adequate records of past evaluation efforts and what happened as a result.</td>
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<td>3. I have access to the information I need to make decisions regarding my work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I am able to integrate evaluation activities into my daily work practices.</td>
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<td>5. The evaluation activities I engage in are consistent with funders’ expectations.</td>
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Use of Evaluation Findings

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<tr>
<td>1. To report to a funder.</td>
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<td>2. To improve services or programs.</td>
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<td>3. To get additional funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. To design ongoing monitoring processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. To assess implementation of a program.</td>
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<td>6. To assess quality of a program.</td>
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<td>7. To improve outreach.</td>
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<td>8. To make informed decisions.</td>
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<td>9. To train staff.</td>
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<td>10. To develop best practices.</td>
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<td>11. To eliminate unneeded services or programs.</td>
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**Questionnaire results.** There were also two open-ended responses, one labeled “What I wonder about evaluation” and another telling “A story about an evaluation experience I’ve had.” In response to what they wonder about evaluation, Jane, the director, posed a concern about scope (“Do smaller scope evaluation, produce enough feedback to make plans from. We tend to do annual larger scope evals which I question leads to less detailed response or fewer total responses”). Victoria, the toddler teacher, questioned the validity of doing evaluation (“Is evaluation really effective?”). Molly Sue, the infant teacher, indicated that she hopes that evaluation will “help her grow and strengthen what I already love to do” and Doreen, the family development specialist expressed wanting to learn “how to engage parents to encourage more participation.”

Of the four responses containing stories about an evaluation experience the participants had had, three of them were positive. One teacher shared that the center had received the highest rating in their assessment by the state’s childcare quality rating program. Another shared that she felt “really happy” when her “evaluation observer told me I was more than ready and I was what that class needed.” The family development specialist shared that she has had “positive work performance evaluation.” The director shared that “over the years I have had work evaluation that where (sic) designed such that not obtaining top makes a sign of failure. This left me with the feeling that they were being done more to say that the organization was doing them rather than for any real goal of improvement.”
**Focus group findings.** The focus group revealed that the participants did not have a clear understanding of what evaluation capacity building entailed, but viewed evaluation as an important concept to learn as a program with reporting requirements to multiple funding and licensing agencies. They reported expecting to get “fresh ideas” and “strategies” out of the TECB experience. When asked about their current feelings about evaluation, all of the participants mentioned that evaluation can be “intimidating” and one mentioned that evaluation makes her feel like a “bug under a microscope.” Jane, the center director, explained that they report to four different agencies who observe and assess them based on four different sets of standards, some of which she does not always agree with or agree with how they are prioritized. The two teachers agreed with Jane and further spoke about [a funder’s] “obsession” with documentation, which Laura explained further that hyper-documentation can “interfere with quality.” All of the participants expressed being overwhelmed with multitudes of forms related to documentation and assessment.

Regarding familiarity with or experience doing evaluation, the center director expressed having experience evaluating the teachers. She also reported understanding that evaluation can help with “making accountability constructive.” The teachers shared that they have experience having their teaching assessed. Their comments, such as “striving for outcome of growth,” “goal success,” and “help building,” reveal that while the teachers may not have experience with program evaluation, they did have a sense of the potential value of evaluation.

When asked to discuss how, if at all, their work is related to social justice or social issues, the TECB participants immediately referred to poverty and eligibility criteria for participation in the program. Victoria, the toddler teacher, explained that “TAP guidelines are really strict. You have to be really in poverty, in family crisis.” Laura, the center director added that their
framework, “the role of early childhood education as infrastructure” promotes “high quality 
[early childhood services] to have big impact. In conclusion of the focus group, I asked the 
participants if there was anything else they would like to share now or learn later. One teacher 
mentioned wanting to learn “how to get parents to identify and achieve goals.” The center 
director expressed wanting to learn about “improving response rates without burdening the 
families.” She further shared that “informal—on the fly—has worked better than formal” in past 
efforts to obtain parent input.

Program Maps

The TECB participants collaboratively created three maps over the course of this 
educational intervention: a free-form program map (Figure 3), a stakeholder map (Figure 4), and 
a logic/pathway model (Figure 5).
The free-form program map was the first that participants completed collaboratively in the TECB pilot. As they worked together to brainstorm the multiple components, goals, and relevant stakeholders to their program, the program director served as the “scribe” (she who would write down their ideas) and I offered generic prompts like, “Are there any other goals?” and “Who else would care about this?”. 

*Figure 3. Free-form Program Map*
After creating their free-form program map, I led the group in conducting a stakeholder analysis and creating stakeholder map. Again, the program director served as the scribe while I facilitated the brainstorm session. This time, in addition to offering probes to expand participants’ thinking about who “counts” as a stakeholder group, I also scaffolded discussion around the power differentials embedded on the map, asking them to think about who held the power, who should have the power, and how they could work to more equitably redistribute the
power among and between groups. We later revisited this map to think about which engagement and data collection approaches may be most suitable for various stakeholder groups; I served as the scribe for this portion.

*Figure 5. Logic/Pathway Model*

Another map that TECB participants created with my facilitation and note-taking was the logic/pathway model (pictured in Figure 5). We used sticky notes on a poster board to create and organize the elements of a logic model. We then discussed the connections between these elements and (in pencil), drew connections between the elements to create the pathway model. Given the “spaghetti” appearance of the model, we then starred the sticky notes with the elements that the group decided comprised the key pathway. Not pictured is a reduced map.
which focused only on the key pathway, so that participants would have a clearer map with which to work.

**Critical Considerations**

The TECB participants had written (via journal reflections) and oral (in reflection circles) opportunities to share about critical issues like power, “help,” and culture. Three of the four participants mentioned “resources” in their journal descriptions of “help.” Victoria, the toddler teacher, referred to being able to “go to another staff or administrator if [they] have a concern. Resources are also available.” The infant teacher referred to “helping our families that are struggling the most (which is like 85%); we help set them up with resources and other programs.” The director, Jane, indicated that program participants view help as “getting resources they feel they need to succeed.” Three of the four participants also referred to “growth” in their journal descriptions. The director, Jane, defined help as “contributing to the future growth of others” and Molly Sue, the infant teacher, explained that they “help the children to grow physically, mentally, and emotionally.” Victoria, the toddler teacher, explained that “help can also be positive criticism or advice I may need to help me grow.”

Doreen, the family development specialist, explained,

Help is the main focus of my line of work. To help parents advocate for their children. To help families become economically independent. Personally, I define help as a stepping stone. Some people require more help than others. But it’s all to encourage families to be their best. Not my definition of best, but theirs.

She further described that “how we think about help is the base on how we give it and how other people perceive help. Is it a handout or is it a tool to encourage?” The director, Jane, explained that “the view of what help is impacts our interactions with others. One example is if we try to
help someone when they do not view themselves as needing help; it can cause conflict.” Jane further elaborated on this issue during the focus group.

“Dilemma” was one theme that emerged from the focus group on the topic of “help.” All four participants described there being some dilemma associated with their work to help families. Jane, the program director shared that sometimes our intention is to help someone but if they don’t view themselves as needing that help, or they don’t view it as something—as a priority—that something they want help in, are we really helping them? Or is it sometimes more of condescending? You know, if I feel like I’m good with something, and someone comes along and tries to help me with it when I don’t think I need the help, it can kind of be a little insulting. And so how do we understand that? Because we might find as an outsider, …this person needs support in this area, but they don’t see an issue with what they’re doing or what’s happening.

When I asked the director a probing question (“So how do you deal with that?”) she laughed and responded “Delicately.” She further shared,

So take parenting. This is one that comes up I think frequently in what we do. There’s a lot of different views on parenting. We have sort of a view of best practice, given our background, and a lot of times it doesn’t always align with what the parent is used to and what they believe works and sometimes when there’s that disconnect, it’s like how hard do we push? Um, and it’s hard. A lot of times we just sort of share what we’re doing here at school, and sometimes what the parents are doing at home we can’t do at school, because of [laughs] laws. Cause like we had a parent, and their immediate response when we brought up a behavior that we were wanting to work with, was, ‘When they do that
just slap them on the hands.’ So like, ‘Well we can’t. And it philosophically doesn’t agree with most of us here, just because of who we are, so how do we respond? So the first response is ‘Well we can’t do that, so this is what we are trying to do. Cause we don’t want to step on toes. We don’t want to be shut off—cause saying, ‘Oh you need parenting classes’ is not the right response.”

The other TECB participants laughed, and the toddler teacher added, “Even though sometimes you might think that.” The director concluded that “parenting and behavior management” are examples of a “disconnect” in where families may be able to benefit from help, but that help is not requested, or perhaps welcome. Jane concludes that “there’s a lot of different cultures out there of how you parent.”

Doreen, the family development specialist, explained that “help is meeting the families where they’re at. Like just because I have a certain definition of help, that family may not have that same definition that I have.” Victoria, the toddler teacher shared that there are some parents that you just think that we help maybe a little too much that they start to indulge, or they depend on that help. And we’re asking, ‘Are we really helping you or are we just letting you depend on us? We teach the kids you know, to be self-independent—are we helping the families do that too? Or are we just kind of giving them that crutch to lean on because we think that they need it more than another family? And if that’s the case is that making a big difference to the other families if they find out that we’re giving just them extra help. Does that affect them somehow? So whether they think, ‘Do they like them more than they like us?’ So we have to kind of walk that thin line between are we helping them because they need the help or are we helping them
because they just think that they can just get that help and not have to put anything back in it.

Jane, the program director followed up that she is faced with the dilemma of which client am I most beholden to? Cause sometimes I might feel that way about a parent client, but like right now, is it in the best interest of the child for me to provide that extra help? Which one has the higher priority? In the short term, for the child, or in the long term, for the parent?

Molly Sue, the infant teacher, also referred to dilemmas around “help” during the focus group. She described sometimes feeling torn about helping a family, in the more transactional type of help, which the director refers to as moments of “kindness help.”

Another theme that emerged from the focus group on “help” is parents viewing asking for help as a “weakness.” Molly Sue shared that she thinks that some families view help—asking for help—as a weakness. I know that some families…it’s a pride thing. And sometimes I think it might also be a cultural thing, not wanting to ask for help—not wanting to seem like they can’t take care of their child, or they’re doing something wrong. But it’s not that, it’s not—and sometimes I’m like, do I imply that you need help? Like do you need resources for something? For food? For clothing? What do we need to do to help you get to your goal? And I think some families are more resistant to that.

Victoria, Molly Sue’s toddler counterpart, echoed agreeing that she also believes families view asking for help as a sign of weakness.

An additional theme that emerged is that of “empowerment.” Doreen, the family development specialist shared, “I looked at it like giving the families power, so that they don’t
have to stay in the box, just because they were maybe born into poverty, they don’t have to stay in that lifestyle.” The toddler teacher, Victoria, explained that she views help as “helping them to help themselves.” This theme is not surprising since family empowerment is one of their program’s organizational objectives.

**Adopting a trauma-informed lens.** The aforementioned themes suggest that the First Steps program staff are aware that there is plurality in conceptualizing and operationalizing “help” and that they must negotiate conflicts. Another theme that emerged was provider trauma. Although I have taken what I consider a rich collection of courses related to critical, adult, and feminist pedagogies, which urge educators to acknowledge the potential trauma experienced by learners, I was still caught off guard. As the infant teacher shared why she is engaged in family support work, she became emotional and shared about the abuse she experienced during her own childhood. As she was sharing, I was reminded of bell hooks’ assertion that classrooms, characteristically political and shaped by power dynamics, cannot be *safe* spaces, but at best, *caring* spaces. Thus, trauma informed practice has emerged as another important feature of TECB.

Evaluation practitioner Martha Brown has previously advocated for the adoption of a “trauma-informed lens” (Brown, 2019). Brown offers “Trauma-informed and De-colonizing Evaluation Practices,” an “experiential workshop, [in which] participants will learn how to recognize the effects of trauma and intergenerational trauma, and how to conduct evaluations through a trauma-informed lens” (2019). Brown has described her workshop as teaching skills that “will strengthen evaluators' capacity to conduct culturally responsive evaluations without replicating colonizing and oppressive practices that cause harm or trigger trauma responses” (2019). According to her workshop description, “participants will learn how to keep a Circle in a
variety of evaluation contexts. Attendees will actively participate in Circles, discussions and role-plays and will have the opportunity to practice keeping a Circle” (2019). Brown’s “Circles will focus on building trust, connections, establishing group values and solving problems. Attendees will benefit from improved trauma-informed methods and practices that facilitate listening, empathy, voice, trust, connectedness, and understanding” (2019). It is clear that adding a trauma-informed lens to evaluation and ECB can move our work from being focused on technicalities to carefully creating spaces which can generate reflection, connectedness, and social change.

Although Brown does not call her work TECB, there is some affirming overlap to our approaches, particularly since she describes that her workshop “will strengthen evaluators' capacity to conduct culturally responsive evaluations…[that do not] cause harm or trigger trauma responses” (Brown). The target audience for “Trauma-informed and De-colonizing Evaluation Practices” is “Intermediate” with “basic evaluation knowledge of qualitative methods.” By contrast, TECB is designed to integrate these concepts in foundational evaluation training, when program staff are learning the basics of evaluation, which presents both benefits and challenges.

In Brown’s approach of teaching intermediate-level evaluators how to apply a trauma-informed lens to their work, she may be able to build on participants’ foundational evaluation knowledge, skills, and experiences, giving participants the benefit of having a working understanding of evaluation purposes and methods on which to build. In TECB, by contrast, participants may come in with little to know knowledge of or experience with evaluation. Or, presenting even more of a challenge, TECB participants may come in with negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about evaluation (such as “evaluation means surveys,” or that the
The ultimate goal of evaluation is to criticize or cut programs. Working with established evaluators may create the opportunity to explore deeper concepts related to culture, values, and oppression, without having to instill basic evaluation knowledge and skills. While TECB may not have the benefit of building on participants’ foundational knowledge, a strength of the TECB approach may be that participants are trained, from the beginning, to see the interconnectedness of issues of culture, inclusivity, and equity, rather than regarding these concepts as a specialized “diversity add-on”—an important distinction of the TECB approach.

**Evaluation Planning**

After an educational session on evaluation planning, I facilitated an evaluation planning workshop. In this session, I worked with the TECB participants to develop two evaluation questions. The first evaluation question they developed was “How do others view our program?” They identified a stakeholder survey as a way to collect data to answer that question. Their intended audience for the survey includes their funding agency, an administrator, their program staff, participating families, and the broader community. They hope that they data they collect will help them to understand an important paradox, which is given the known need for childcare in the community, particularly for low-income families, “Why isn’t there a waiting list?”. Some items they drafted to include on the stakeholder survey include: “How familiar are you with our program?”; “How might we change or improve?”; “How did you learn about our program?”; “How would you describe our program purpose?”; and “What role (if any) do you play in our program?”.

The second evaluation question the participants identified was “How do we want our program to be viewed?”. The TECB participants identified the program staff and participating families as the stakeholders of interest for their second evaluation question and decided that
focus groups would be the best method of data collection for them to address that question. Some guiding questions they developed for the parent focus group include: “What has this program meant to you?”; “How much involvement do you want to have in shaping/running the program?”; “What do you view as the role of the child? Family? Staff?”; and “What do you view as your role in this program?” The TECB participants also planned to conduct a focus group with their peers, other staff members, preferably in the context of a staff retreat, where they would also have a “suggestion box” station. They would like to ask the staff the same questions they posed to the participating families to try to develop a holistic understanding of what their program means to the staff and the families their program serves.

**TECB Pilot Evaluation**
In addition to the production of program maps and models throughout the TECB series and beginning an evaluation plan, participants also provided qualitative and quantitative data towards evaluation of the TECB intervention by participating in focus group and completing Participant Check-ins throughout the series.

**Final Participant Check-in quantitative results.** The final Participant Check-in revealed that all of the TECB participants either strongly agreed (2/3) or agreed (1/3) that they have had experience doing program evaluation. They all (3/3) agreed that they understand how program evaluation works, that they have the skills to evaluate their program, and that they feel qualified to evaluate their program.

All of the participants either agreed (2/3) or strongly agreed (1/3) that evaluation could help them improve their program. They also either strongly agreed (2/3) or agreed (1/3) that evaluation would help them provide better programming. They varied, however, in their response as to whether they think they have the time it would take to evaluate their program—the
director disagreed that she would have time, while the infant teacher agreed that she would have
the time and the toddler teacher was neutral. Relatedly, the program staff varied in their
responses as to whether this would be a good time to begin efforts to conduct evaluations—the
center director disagreed, the toddler teacher was neutral, and the infant teacher agreed. The
center director and infant teacher agreed and strongly agreed (respectively) that there would be
support among employees if they tried to do evaluation work while the toddler teacher was not
sure. The toddler teacher was also unsure that it would be worthwhile to incorporate evaluation
activities into their daily work practices while the center director and infant teacher agreed that it
would be worthwhile.

Whereas in the initial needs assessment focus group the participants expressed finding
evaluation “intimidating,” by the end of the intervention, all (3/3) of the participants strongly
disagreed that evaluation is scary. They varied, however, in their responses as to whether they
find evaluation confusing or stressful. The center director was neutral about whether she finds
evaluation confusing but agreed that she finds it stressful. The toddler teacher agreed that she
finds evaluation confusing but disagreed that she finds it stressful. The infant teacher disagreed
with statements about finding evaluation confusing or stressful, though she was neutral about
wanting to learn more about evaluation. Although the center director and toddler teacher reported
finding evaluation either stressful or confusing (respectively), they both responded in agreement
that they are interested in learning more about evaluation.

Final Participant Check-in qualitative feedback. The center director and teachers had
varying responses about what would stick with them from our work together. The center
director’s response was about using evaluation to look at the “big picture.” She expressed having
“a direction to go with being more focused on a bigger question when designing evaluations.”
The infant teacher referred to the value of engaging in critical reflection on her work as well as having critical discussions with her colleagues. She explained that “what I learned about being able to reflect on my job and what I’m doing at [the childcare center] was very impactful. Sometimes just being able to talk with peers can open your mind.” The toddler teacher identified “how to improve communication from family and work on culture from families” as what would stick with her most from our work together. She responded “yes” without elaboration when asked whether any of our activities together helped her to realize something new or see something in a new way. The infant teacher also responded affirmatively and explained that “talking about culture really helped me appreciate mine and to have an open mind about my kids [in the infant room] and what their cultures are. The center director shared that she “appreciated the intentional connection between cultural awareness and evaluation.” Based on her comments in the focus group, interview, and my notes on the program handbook, I anticipate that the close alignment between the organizational philosophy and transformative evaluation will facilitate their actualization of some of our TECB work together.

When asked what new plans they had because of what they learned, both teachers gave family-centered responses, which aligns with both the organizational philosophy and TECB. The toddler teacher mentioned “the culture from our families” and the infant teacher shared that she will be “sending out a newsletter to my families to ask them for family pictures to display for my kids in the classroom.” Both teachers indicate an intention to incorporate family culture into their early childhood education work, though they remain fairly surface-level in their reference to culture.

Reflecting as the TECB mentor, an important finding related to facilitation is that the mentor must dedicate “sufficient” time to culture and must be willing to entertain “awkward
silences” for longer than typically-expected moments of time. Sufficient time is required to elicit critical reflection and emphasize the importance of moving beyond a tourism-style, essentialist version of “cultural awareness”—but what exactly is “sufficient”? I imagine that like me, the TECB mentor, acting as a critical adult educator, will be faced with balancing the tightrope walk between, on one end, scaffolding participants to “lean into discomfort” (a critical pedagogical notion about challenging and supporting learners to engage in difficult dialogue) and on the other end, keenly recognizing and respecting participants’ limits and not hyper-extending them. This is a fine, ambiguous line, however, given that critical pedagogy necessitates pushing, or rather, boosting (scaffolding) participants beyond their comfort zones.

My mentor notes reveal that I struggled with gauging how much probing to do with participants’ responses during the critical conversations out of fear of hyper-extending them. Since these focus groups were semi-structured, I had flexibility in how much probing I did for responses about various constructs. Upon reflection, I realize that I erred on the side of less rather than more probing on the most difficult topics. In the spirit of “meeting participants [or learners] where they are,” I think I did the right amount of probing, not only to avoid hyper-extension, but also to avoid participants shutting down before giving the TECB experience a chance. This finding suggests to me that it may be beneficial to have different levels of TECB (perhaps an introductory level and a capstone level), so that both the facilitator and the group of participants have an idea of how deeply they can expect to go over the course of their work together.

The center director indicated that she plans to “use some of the mapping processes to help find an area of focus for program growth.” All (3/3) of the participants responded affirmatively that they think what they learned will contribute to their professional development.
The center director explained that “being intentional in our growth and reflection process is integral to my professional philosophy” and the infant teacher shared that she “can continue/add or improve from each family I come in contact with.”

While the teachers reported not having any suggestions for making this a better learning experience, the center director suggested “being able to take more time with the different components” because “some parts we were a little rushed.” All (3/3) of the participants responded affirmatively that our work together had been helpful to them. The center director shared that she had “enjoyed [being] challenged to think about the evaluation process in a different way.” The toddler teacher shared that “it has shown me a new way to collect data” and the infant teacher indicated that the TECB series had been “very helpful. It’s been nice to talk about new ideas and discuss problems with the program.” All (3/3) of the participants responded affirmatively that this was a valuable learning experience. The infant teacher responded “yes” without elaboration, but the toddler teacher shared that it was valuable because “I can apply this to my career.” The center director responded “Yes. It has given me more insight into the process but also into the perspective of my staff.” None of the participants had any additional feedback, but one added “Great job!”.

One-year follow-up survey. One year following their participation in the TECB pilot program, participants provided a brief reflection on their perceived preparedness to engage in evaluation of their program. I collected participants’ follow-up perspectives via a secure online Microsoft Forms survey. This follow-up questionnaire contained a six-item section containing Likert-scale responses related to their feelings about evaluation, a four-item section with Likert-scale responses related to their individual preparedness to do evaluation, a seven-item section with Likert-scale responses regarding their organizational readiness for evaluation, and three
questions with open-ended responses (What do you remember from our sessions?; Have you been able to implement/do any of the ideas we brainstormed? What has helped or hindered you?; What is something you still have questions about or wish we had covered?).

Two of the three (2/3) participants responded that they “strongly agree” that they have experience doing program evaluation and one of the three (1/3 was neutral. Each of the three participants reported different levels of agreement (“strongly agree,” “agree,” and “neutral”) with regard to understanding how program evaluation works. Two of the participants (2/3) were neutral about having questions about program evaluation; one (1/3) was in strong agreement that she had questions. While two participants (2/3) responded that they “disagree” that they found evaluation confusing, one (1/3) was neutral. Participants reported varied levels of agreement that evaluation is stressful or scary. With regard to finding evaluation stressful, one participant (1/3) responded “disagree,” one (1/3) responded “neutral” and one (1/3) responded “strongly agree.” While one participant (1/3) still reported that she was in strong agreement that evaluation is scary, one participant (1/3) responded that she disagreed that it is scary and another strongly disagreed.

Two of the three (2/3) participants responded that they “strongly agree” that evaluation could help improve their program and one (1/3) responded in agreement. One participant (1/3) strongly agreed and two agreed that “evaluation would help us provide better programming.” All three (100%) of participants agreed that “it would be worthwhile to incorporate evaluation activities into our daily work practices,” but all three were also neutral with regard to there being “support among employees if we tried to do evaluation work.” Participants had varied levels of agreement regarding program administration. With regard to whether “program administrators would like us to evaluate our efforts,” one participant (1/3) responded “neutral,” one (1/3)
responded “agree,” and one (1/3) responded “strongly agree.” Regarding timing, one participant (1/3) agreed that “this would be a good time to begin efforts to conduct evaluations,” but two (2/3) responded “neutral.” While one participant (1/3) was neutral, two of the three (2/3) agreed that “there are evaluation processes in place that enable employees to review how well changes we make are working.”

In their open-ended responses, participants reported some memory but lack of implementation of the evaluation activities they discussed during the TECB pilot program. Regarding what they remembered from our sessions, one participant confessed that “I don’t really remember a lot of the sessions. But I also haven’t had to use any of it.” This highlights the importance of emphasizing that evaluation work is ongoing and can contribute to program understanding and improvement regardless of the presence or absence of external pressures for an evaluation report. Another shared, “I remember how we could better help the staff and their families. How to feel appreciated and to help grow.” This participant’s mention of appreciation and growth suggest that she grasped the essence of the power of ongoing program evaluation. Another participant explained that

we looked at a couple of types of program evaluation tools and the benefits to each. We also looked at the various stakeholders and how evaluation can be tailored to elicit feedback from stakeholders based on who the stakeholders are and what level of involvement they have in the program as well as the benefit of using multiple types of evaluation tools to reach stakeholders.

This participant demonstrated that she learned multiple evaluation tools and was aware of the benefits of using them for various stakeholder groups, indicating an understanding (or at least awareness) of measurement, mixed methods, and tailoring to stakeholders.
Two of the participants responded to the second open-ended question, “Have you been able to implement (do) any of the ideas we brainstormed? What has helped or hindered you?”. One participant responded “not yet” while another shared

I have used a little of what was learned from the session in the process of looking at revamping our staff evaluation process. It would have been better if other members of our administrative team (at our partner locations) had also received this training so I was not the only member of the process familiar with these various tools.

Only one participant responded to the final question, “What is something you still have questions about or wish we had covered?”. In her response, she revealed that

there is still difficulty in managing the time needed to complete effective program evaluations and being able to delve deeper into these methods with someone more knowledgeable in the tools when we are actually creating and using an evaluation system (coaching) would be very beneficial.

The follow-up results suggest that the TECB pilot program was effective in improving participants’ attitudes toward evaluation, but that without practicing what they had learned and having a knowledgeable coach to support their efforts, they have not (yet) been able to implement the evaluation activities they brainstormed during the pilot program.
Chapter Five: Discussion & Conclusion

To reiterate, the research questions guiding this dissertation study were:

5. a. How do the principles of the transformative paradigm contribute to shaping a transformative evaluation capacity building (TECB) intervention?
   b. What are the distinguishing characteristics of TECB?

6. How does TECB affect providers’ perceptions about their programs?

7. How does TECB influence providers’ attitudes toward evaluation?

8. How does participation in TECB affect programming and evaluation efforts?

In this chapter, I will discuss my synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative data in response to the aforementioned research questions.

I conceived this study in response to my observation that evaluation capacity building, a valuable process for helping program staff to build their evaluation knowledge and skills, presents a ripe, untapped opportunity to infuse transformative principles so that program staff learn to question their assumptions and align their work with a respect for culture as well as a commitment to social justice. It is my assertion that in an increasingly diverse, ever-changing society in which resources are dwindling, evaluators interested in building individual and organizational capacity with program clientele, simply cannot afford to pass up the opportunity to promote social justice and cultural responsiveness in the context of ECB. The data gathered throughout this dissertation study provide evidence that transformative principles can be applied to traditional ECB and that this enhanced, transformative ECB (TECB) can promote program staff to become more aware of issues of culture and social justice.

My first research question was about conceptualization of this new, specialized (as approach to generic) approach to ECB, including what transformative principles could be added
to generic ECB to create TECB as well as what characteristics would distinguish TECB from traditional ECB. The findings from the conceptualization phase of this study indicate that, based on the literature, “essential ingredients” for TECB include critical adult education; principles of culturally responsive evaluation, not only in the content material but also in delivery in the TECB intervention; transformative education; and critical pedagogy/andragogy (adult education).

The second research question addressed the potential effects TECB could have on providers’ perceptions about their programs. The results of the pilot program evaluation suggest that participants did embrace an appreciation for culture, diversity, and inclusivity, but that they did not fully make the connections between these concepts and program evaluation. Rather, they were more readily able to express how issues of culture, diversity, and inclusivity could be incorporated into their program curriculum. The findings did show, however, that after participating in the pilot program, participants believed that program evaluation was worthwhile and could help them improve their programs.

My third research question was about how TECB might influence providers’ attitudes towards program evaluation. Evaluation of the TECB pilot program reveals that participation in the experience can reduce anxiety and other negative attitudes toward evaluation, and that those reductions in evaluation aversion can persist for a year. Participants reported that they thought they had the skills to evaluate their program and felt qualified to conduct program evaluation, but that they lacked the time and resources to actually engage in program evaluation. A qualitative response revealed that at least one participant thought they would have been able to implement their evaluation plans with the support of a knowledgeable coach, such as the TECB mentor. This suggests that TECB mentorship should not be confined to the duration of the intervention,
but should include ongoing support through implementation—similar to how developmental evaluation is generally supported (Patton, 2010)—and likely, through utilization so that they actual utilize their evaluation findings to make informed changes for program improvement.

The fourth research question guiding this dissertation study was about the effectiveness of this TECB pilot intervention with the family-centered childcare program in this case study. Evaluation findings suggest that overall, the pilot TECB program was effective in promoting more positive attitudes and self-efficacy with regard to program evaluation. Although participants confessed not having been able to move forward with implementing their evaluation plan, they still valued evaluation and believed in its potential to help them improve their programs. While they reported feeling like they had the skills to conduct evaluation of their program, they reported a lack of time and “coaching” to support implementation.

**Refining the TECB concept based on findings.** After analyzing and interpreting the results, I revisited my conceptualization of TECB, allowing my research findings to color the lens through which I reexamined the concept. One implication the evaluation findings had on my refining of the TECB concept is around who should participate in the TECB process.

While I was concerned with democratizing knowledge and ensuring that the teachers had access to the evaluation knowledge and skills regardless of their formal educational training, the evaluation findings led me to further reflect on the experience of being underpaid and overworked and the politics around and ethics of labor, particularly unpaid labor. Findings reveal tensions around already being stretched too thin and the personal toll of adding on additional work. In the TECB process, the teachers, none of whom earn a living wage, were being asked to engage in labor. Not only was this work compounded on top of their other responsibilities, ranging from lesson planning, to diaper changing and conflict management, but TECB included
labor that involves the *self*, as opposed to work one could dissociate from in order to push through. For this reason, I would add to the TECB concept an incentive (such as reduced duties in some other area, when feasible) for staff participants, particularly those who are already overworked and underpaid. If incentives are not available, perhaps TECB should *begin* with a program administrator who receives higher pay and has management and assessment responsibilities. Then, as the program administrator, such as the Center Director, builds evaluation knowledge and skills, s/he may be better positioned to establish a system that will work for her staff to contribute to. This approach may reduce the burden of taxing unpaid labor for frontline staff or educators and may lead to greater organizational readiness for evaluation.

Another important implication findings had for my refining of the TECB concept was the need for trauma-informed practice. Given the trauma marginalized groups like African-Americans groups, who are still healing from the historical trauma of slavery and Jim Crow, as well as the present-day trauma of racial profiling and execution by law enforcement, and the regrettable pervasiveness of childhood trauma, TECB must adopt a trauma-informed approach so that the TECB experience can be one that is caring and healing, acknowledging that it may not always be “safe” since reflection can trigger a range of memories and emotions. In the pilot TECB program experience, I was struck by a teacher’s emotional recall of her own childhood trauma, which surfaced as she was reflecting on why she is in a helping profession. My reading on critical and feminist pedagogies have emphasized the importance of acknowledging and being sensitive to potential trauma, and a trauma-informed approach is an important addition to the TECB framework.
Professional Implications

This study’s findings have important implications for the field of evaluation as well as the field of Extension and outreach.

Implications for the field of evaluation. The findings of this study have important implications for the field of evaluation in broad and specific ways. Broadly, this study’s conceptualization, pilot, and evaluation of transformative evaluation capacity building (ECB) calls to our attention the need to investigate an intersection of some key elements of the field, including transformative evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation, and evaluation capacity building. As the field of evaluation continues to develop and professionalize, the concept of TECB presents a ripe opportunity to intentionally shape the future of evaluation, promoting inclusivity and social justice as the key features of evaluation that they truly are, given that evaluation, though systematic and rigorous, unavoidably influenced by context and values.

Implications for Extension professionals. As public and private funding for Extension and outreach activities become increasingly scarce and competitive, the stakes for accountability become more clearly urgent. Extension systems at land-grant institutions across the country are beginning to invest in Evaluation Specialists and efforts to improve their ability to measure program outcomes and impacts. The Extension community is (in some cases, finally) realizing the critical need to document actual outcomes and demonstrate impacts beyond mere outputs (such as number of clients served or fields sprayed). While I do celebrate this emergent embracing of evaluation in Extension (which is actually its own topic or subfield, “Extension evaluation”), I assert that as Extension works to embrace evaluation, such as by hiring an Evaluation Specialist and/or engaging in evaluation capacity building (ECB), Extension should adopt the transformative approach (TECB), such that Extension professionals are transformed
from knowledge-sharers to social change-makers. After all, Extension’s mission is not centered on information delivery for the sake of enlightenment, but rather leveraging knowledge to improve lives and society.

Adopting a transformative approach to Extension evaluation may have important implications for the emerging profession of Extension Evaluation Specialist. While traditional approaches to evaluation may not specify, job listings for Extension Evaluation Specialist positions should acknowledge the pertinence of inclusivity to program development and evaluation. Existing Evaluation Specialists (among others) should also extend their systems-thinking to think more critically about the status quo and about how their programming could help “move the needle.” As Extension professionals, as evaluators, it is our duty. Evaluation specialists, evaluators, and other champions of program evaluation are charged with using our skills and evaluative insight to improve programs and systems, and in turn improve lives, communities, and ultimately society.

The Extension Creed (Ohio State University Extension) reads,

I believe in people and their hopes, their aspirations, and their faith; in their right to make their own plans and arrive at their own decisions; in their ability and power to enlarge their lives and plan for the happiness of those they love.

I believe that education, of which Extension is an essential part, is basic in stimulating individual initiative, self-determination, and leadership; that these are the keys to democracy and that people when given facts they understand, will act not only in their self-interest, but also in the interest of society.
I believe that education is a lifelong process and the greatest university is the home; that my success as a teacher is proportional to those qualities of mind and spirit that give me welcome entrance to the homes of the families I serve.

I believe in intellectual freedom to search for and present the truth without bias and with courteous tolerance toward the views of others.

I believe that Extension is a link between the people and the ever-changing discoveries in the laboratories.

I believe in the public institutions of which I am a part.

I believe in my own work and in the opportunity I have to make my life useful to humanity.

Because I believe these things, I am an Extension professional.

According to the Extension Professionals’ Creed, Extension personnel should be concerned with advancing the democratization of knowledge and should believe in the “opportunity [they] have to make [their lives] useful to humanity.” Jim Langcuster (2011), an Extension Communications Specialist and Mission Extension Weblog Editor has published “A 21st Century Extension Creed,” which reads

I believe that mutual respect, openness, creativity, and innovation—the core values of the 21st century—are the hallmarks of Cooperative Extension work.

I believe that Extension educators are called upon not only to affirm these values but also to ensure that they comprise an integral part of our work.

I believe that Extension educators constitute the most valuable of all infrastructure—human infrastructure—and that this deep reservoir built of trust and collaboration retains an infinite capacity for fostering human achievement.
I believe that we are more than simple purveyors of knowledge—we are knowledge enablers whose charge is to add value to knowledge by demonstrating how practical, meaningful, and lasting use can be derived from it.

I believe that our long-standing experience with and affinity for collaborative learning, reflected in the work of Seaman Knapp and Booker T. Washington, singularly equip us for the immense challenges that await us in the 21st century.

I believe that the collaborative learning embodied in Extension work is enhanced by a generous measure of empathy and compassion.

I believe that in an era of frenetic growth punctuated by rampant scarcity, we are called to be sustainers, securing and enriching the lives and livelihoods of those we serve without eroding the ability of future generations to secure and enrich theirs.

I believe that by acknowledging and celebrating our differences, we enhance opportunities for personal growth and enrichment and secure the personal freedom of and respect for all.

I believe that the prevailing winds of change are summoning us to do what we have always done best: to work, to teach, and to inspire through dialogue and empowerment, demonstrating to our diverse audiences the value of accepting and embracing change as an inevitable facet of life and as an opportunity to formulate new ways of thinking, living, and working.

I believe passionately in these ideals and because they embody the essence of Cooperative Extension work, I proudly proclaim and honor them as my own.

Extension could enhance its efforts to fulfill the land-grant mission by adopting the transformative approach and affirming the ideals of the 21st century Extension creed, including
leveraging human infrastructure, engaging in collaborative learning, being concerned with sustainability, and embracing diversity.

**Kaleidoscopic Thinking**

The findings from this study also suggest that in moving towards building capacity for transformative evaluation, TECB may focus on a cognitive skill distinct from critical thinking (CT), and even from evaluative thinking (ET), a skill which I conceptualize as *kaleidoscopic thinking*. Kaleidoscopic thinking (KT) is thinking that centers social justice and human dignity through intentional consideration (turning of the kaleidoscope) of multiple perspectives and contexts while attending to the intersectional planes of diversity, such as culture, race, gender identity, age, belief system, and socioeconomic status.

Referring back to the literature which provided the theoretical underpinnings for this study, these intersectional planes of diversity are another way of viewing what Barrio refers to as the multiple dimensions of cultural relevance. As previously cited, Barrio (2000) has asserted that “cultural relevance can be productively viewed as a multidimensional and dynamic” (p. 880). KT also builds on Wink’s previously cited metaphor of critical pedagogy as “a prism that reflects the complexities between teaching and learning” (p. 26). Wink has related critical pedagogy to “a prism which sheds light on the hidden subtleties that might have escaped our view previously. The prism has a tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political, and even economic conditions, and it does all of this under the broad view of history” (p. 26). KT also draws on Giroux’s description of critical pedagogy as a “discourse of educated hope,” as well as his notions of language of *critique* and language of *possibility*, both of which play a role in KT (2004, p. 69). KT involves reflexivity, creativity, compassion, and hope on the part of the thinker when examining issues and making decisions.
Like its predecessors, KT involves CT, “rationally deciding what to do or believe” and ET, critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation,” (Norris, 1985, p. 40; Buckley et al., 2015) such that thinkers should consider multiple perspectives and contexts when examining issues and making decisions.

As Norris (1985) has asserted, “critical thinking ability is not widespread” and like CT and ET, fostering KT in learners and program practitioners requires work—work including intentional activities which are designed to exercise and build the capacity to expand one’s thinking (p. 40). What distinguishes KT from CT and ET, however, is that it involves the intentional consideration of intersectional planes of identity and diversity. Like the overlapping colors that dance into new arrangements with each turn of the kaleidoscope, so too are we able to “turn” our thinking, to examine issues from a complex set of intersectional perspectives, rather than as they appear at surface level (which, without interrogation, only perpetuates the status quo).

Although the metaphor of the kaleidoscope has previously appeared on rare occasion in the literature of fields such as such as gender studies, career studies, and human development, the image of the kaleidoscope has only recently surfaced in the field of evaluation. In his October 9, 2019 contribution to EVALTALK, a cybercommunity for evaluators, Michael Quinn Patton, a prominent figure in the field, explains,

I consider evaluation a kaleidoscope. You look at it one way and the pattern reveals a profession, another turn and it is a discipline, then turn again and a transdisciplinary image emerges, and yet another turn and it takes on the pattern of an applied social science, then the pattern shifts with another turn and it becomes imagined as a technology, then an art, and still turning the kaleidoscope again, evaluation is science. In
essence, evaluation is a many-splendored thing and in keeping with intersectional identity framing these days, evaluation has multiple identities and diverse brands. It’s all in how you look at particular patterns in particular light. It isn’t one thing, it is many things.

(Patton, M., 2019)

While his analogy of the kaleidoscope as it pertains to evaluation is more focused on the dynamic nature of the professional field, Patton’s (2019) description of evaluation as a kaleidoscope does share some overlap with my conception of kaleidoscopic thinking (KT), namely with his description of evaluation as “a many-splendored thing” which has “multiple identities and diverse brands.” As Extension and other outreach organizations seek to incorporate evaluation into their work, they should be intentional about the “brand” of evaluation they are promoting. Obviously, economic evaluation will always have a place in Extension, a system which relies on public funding. However, Extension evaluation should also include transformative evaluation, that which has the potential to transform the narrative of Extension as “simple purveyors of knowledge” toward mobilizing Extension workers to be active agents of social change. In this way, Extension workers and other community educators and program professionals can leverage “the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance” to advance “the unending project of democratic social transformation” (p. 76).

Directions for Future Research
This dissertation study consisted of conceptualization of TECB as well as a case study pilot and evaluation with one program. While this approach was appropriate for answering my dissertation research questions, additional studies can help not only to continue refining the
concept of TECB, but also to get a broader sense of how feasible and effective TECB would be for a wide variety of programs.

In this study, I partnered with a family-centered childcare program to test TECB. However, in the future, additional TECB interventions with a diverse sample of programs (with a variety of missions, organizational structures, personnel capacity, etc.) can help contribute to an understanding of how TECB would work with other types of programs, including those who are not explicitly concerned with social justice.

Future implementation studies, then, can help answer the question of whether TECB is most appropriate for programs whose work readily aligns with the transformative (social justice-oriented) paradigm, or whether TECB is also useful with programs who do not (but perhaps, aspire to) be intentional about addressing issues of equity and culture in their work. Perhaps participation in TECB can help program administrators and staff realize existing or potential opportunities to promote social transformation, in ways big and small, in their program work—whether that be a slight shift in their attitudes toward concepts like “the culture of poverty” (concepts that attempt to provide explanation but have the potential to propagate racist or white supremacist ideology under the guise of research, transmitted informally among peers as well as formally through well-intentioned trainings)—or a tangible action, like a change in program policy or an addition of an activity to acknowledge, respond to, or promote diversity.

Future research can reveal whether TECB and KT could be a difference that makes a difference and can help understand whether the difference will persist over time in a variety of organizational contexts, under diverse conditions. Further conceptual and empirical research can facilitate further investigation of whether TECB can interrupt “business as usual” in order to break free from the hegemony of the "helping" program. As evaluation continues to grow and
evolve as a field, small changes like these at the individual, programmatic, organizational, and societal levels can add up to the field of evaluation contributing to the creation of a more democratic and socially just society.

**Conclusion**

Evaluation, systematic inquiry about a program’s process and/or impacts, can help strengthen programs, diverse in their missions, organizational structures, and funding mechanisms. As funding becomes increasingly scarce due to the changes in the economy and shifts in political agendas (from the grassroots to the state and federal levels), programs are charged with doing more (more, higher quality programming serving more participants) with less (funding and capacity).

Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is one such way that programs can strive to effectively achieve program outcomes in spite of (increasingly) inadequate human and material resources. As programs must grapple with how to best “stretch” fewer dollars to fund resources, the capacity to perform ongoing internal evaluation can be invaluable to a program. ECB can help program administration and staff understand and improve their programs, assess their progress achieving outcomes, and demonstrate program impacts to themselves, their participants, and their various stakeholders.

Through ECB program staff can learn about theories of change and how program activities relate to desired outcomes, indicators of success, data collection, measurement, analysis, reporting, and even utilization for program improvement. Yet, program staff engaging in traditional ECB, can develop evaluation knowledge and skills without ever learning how to incorporate cultural relevance or a concern for equity into their work. Whether or not this is acceptable is a question with which the field of evaluation must grapple. However, since
“evaluators aim to generate inclusive, emancipatory knowledge,” attending to culture and social justice is necessarily the work of an evaluator (Hopson, 2004, p. 12). TECB fills this gap—it integrates principles of cultural relevance and social justice into the ECB process so that participants develop a concern for these values as they build evaluation knowledge and skills.

The central goal of TECB is to promote a culture of collaboration and foster in program staff a critical consciousness as they develop evaluative thinking and evaluation skills. Program professionals working through various public and private entities have developed and implemented programs seeking to address various “wicked problems,” or social issues, affecting children, families, adults, and communities. By engaging in TECB, scholars and practitioners can challenge themselves to move beyond relying on ideologies that blame the poor and pathologize the “other” to more intentionally identify and address “wicked” problems in ways that are intentionally collaboratively concerted and culturally responsive.

Evaluators and family service professionals can leverage collaboration to decolonize notions of “help” and confront the harsh reality that “among the most successful are programs that affirm commonly held stereotypes about poor people of various ethnic groups” such as “poverty is caused by bad parenting” and the culture of poverty thesis, which has been detrimentally propagated by “ethnocentric and naïve” works like the renowned Moynihan Report, which inaccurately claimed that “African Americans practiced a different and disabling form of kinship that was intensifying their poverty independent of external opportunities and limits (Greenbaum, 2015, p. 67; p. 48-49). This presents a clear example of why the transformative approach is necessary in effectively and ethically addressing “wicked problems.”

Through my dissertation research, I aimed to develop, test, and evaluate the concept of TECB. In the first phase of this study, I developed the concept of TECB based on literature
covering transformative evaluation, evaluation capacity building, culturally responsive evaluation, critical pedagogy, and adult education. I explored the theoretical and pedagogical intersections between transformative learning and liberatory critical pedagogy, so as to inform intersectional transformative learning and critical pedagogical philosophies and practices. Pedagogy grounded in transformation and liberation has the power to ignite active learning and incite transformation in learners, educators, and the world they inhabit. My synthesis of these topics, which are too rarely discussed in relation to one another, yielded important insights for what TECB would entail and what andragogical principles and strategies I could use to engage program practitioners seeking to develop evaluation knowledge and skills, such as engaged learning, mutual respect for learners, and critical education.

In the second part of this study, a pilot TECB program I implemented with the staff of a family-centered early childhood education program for children from low-income families, I tested the concept of TECB. The TECB pilot program consisted of an on-site interactive workshop series in which I shared with participants the TECB curriculum, which I developed based on my blended analysis of evaluation capacity building, culturally responsive evaluation, critical adult education and the transformative paradigm.

To evaluate the pilot program, I reviewed Participant Check-ins (brief process evaluation instruments) and conducted document analysis on artifacts of the TECB pilot program, including created program maps, completed handouts, and mentor notes on discussion-based activities. I also collected one-year post-program follow-up data via an online survey to measure any potential shifts in participants’ evaluation attitudes, self-reported skills, and evaluation efforts. The TECB pilot evaluation revealed that the TECB approach successfully promotes interest in
and motivation to do evaluation, but that participants lacked sufficient time, structure, and coaching to carry out their evaluation plans.

In the third part of this study, I applied the findings of the TECB pilot evaluation to my original theory-based conceptualization of TECB to refine and improve the approach based on the empirical testing with the family support program staff. Based on my findings from the pilot evaluation, I learned that participation in TECB should be incentivized for frontline staff (or should not compound their un(der)paid labor, that TECB should begin with a program director who can help shape the TECB experience to make the most sense for her/his program, and that TECB needs to include a trauma-informed perspective. In a future study, I will apply these changes to the TECB approach and test the refined conceptualization with a program staff from a variety of programs.

Moving forward, TECB can be a worthwhile endeavor for program practitioners, particularly those who are concerned with social upliftment, such as Extension and outreach professionals as well as early childhood educators and family support workers. Further research is needed to further investigate whether TECB can effect significant change and ultimately be the difference that makes a difference in reframing notions of “help” and supporting program staff to see themselves as social change agents. Future research can also help to further understand and measure the development and implications of kaleidoscopic thinking (KT).

Kaleidoscopic thinking (KT) is thinking that centers social justice and human dignity through intentional consideration (turning of the kaleidoscope) of multiple perspectives and contexts while attending to the intersectional planes of diversity, such as culture, race, gender identity, age, belief system, and socioeconomic status. KT involves reflexivity, creativity, respect
for diversity, hope, belief in possibility, and compassion on the part of the thinker when examining issues and making decisions.

In the field of evaluation, while our methods ought to be systematic and rooted in understanding rather than personal or organizational gratification, our work is not neutral. Through TECB, evaluators can support program professionals and community educators to build and utilize KT to leverage their work to catalyze social change that is productive in “moving the needle” and to disrupt the status quo. Thus, TECB can make a difference in creating a more equitable and just society in which individuals, families, and communities have agency in determining their outcomes and social systems and structures support rather than thwart their achievement of those outcomes.
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Transformative Evaluation Handbook
Capacity Building
Transformative Evaluation Capacity Building (TECB) is an social justice-enhanced approach that works to promote social change by infusing principles of the transformative lens and cultural responsiveness in the evaluation knowledge-building and skill development process.

About this Handbook

Natalie E. Cook developed TECB for her dissertation in completion of her PhD in program development and evaluation at Virginia Tech. This handbook is not meant to be a standalone guide, but rather to scaffold learning in TECB participants by providing explanations, prompts, activities, and templates to accompany TECB training.
About Transformative ECB

Transformative ECB embeds social justice principles in ECB to intentionally promote evaluative thinking, skill development, critically reflective praxis, and an orientation toward social justice.

Elements of Transformative ECB

- Critical Praxis Institute (Orientation)
- (Re)Envisioning the Program
- Program Map-Making
- Crafting Evaluation Data Collection & Analysis Plans
- Communicating and Leveraging Evaluation Findings
- Sustaining Evaluation (Closing)

CRITICAL PRAXIS INSTITUTE

Part 1: Critical Praxis Institute (Orientation)

Purpose: To orient TECB participants to the transformative approach to evaluation and to set a critically reflective tone for the TECB experience

What is critically reflective praxis?

Critical reflection is a meaning-making process.

Praxis is how we apply what we learn to our work, which is our practice.

Critically reflective praxis refers to our reflection on our knowledge and work to learn and strive for improvement.

Questioning Assumptions
Assumptions refer to the ideas we hold as truths. By questioning our assumptions, we can open our minds to seeing things in new ways.

**Reflecting on “Help”**

By taking the time to think carefully about what we mean by “help,” we can improve the way we approach “help” or support, rather than assuming that we always know how to best help our clientele.

**Transformative Evaluation**

The transformative approach to evaluation is especially concerned with promoting social justice.

**Culturally Responsive Evaluation**

Culture is an important part of who we are as humans, family members, citizens of our communities, and members of society. Culturally responsive evaluation is an approach that acknowledges the importance of culture and inclusivity in programming and evaluation.
“This I Believe”

“This I Believe” is an international project that aims to engage people in identifying and sharing their core values and beliefs. We will use adapted prompts to guide our own personal reflection as we begin our own critical reflection.

**Tell a story:**
Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be real. Consider moments when your belief was formed, tested, or changed. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and to the shaping of your beliefs.

**Be brief:**
Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. The shorter length forces you to focus on the belief that is central to your life.

**Name your belief:**
If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief.

**Be positive:**
Say what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

**Be personal:**
Make your essay about you; speak in the first person. Try reading your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

thisibelieve.org
“THIS I BELIEVE”

A Story About What I Believe
Tell a story that relates to your core beliefs and values.

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What I Believe
Write a paragraph describing the core belief(s) that are central in to your life.

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My Belief Statement
Write 1-2 sentences about your core belief(s).

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________
Reflecting on My Role as a _________________

As part of your participation in transformative evaluation capacity building (TECB), you have the opportunity to reflect on who you are as a person and practitioner and to think about how your personal and professional experiences have shaped and been shaped by personal, organizational, and societal influences. In this section, we will explore issues of help, power, stakeholders, and change.

What do the following terms bring to mind for you? Use the concept maps to organize your brainstorm.

- Help
- Stakeholders
- Power
- Change
Thinking about “Help”

Many programs seek to help participants in one or more ways to achieve one or more goals.

How is “help” defined (explicitly or not) in your work?

How do you define “help” personally?

How do program participants think about “help”?

Why is it important to think about how we think about “help”?
Writing your Program Description

What does your program do? Who does your program serve? Write a brief (fewer than 3 sentences) description of your program.

Program Mission Statement

Program Elements

What are the “pieces” that come together to make your program work?

Pieces that are like materials or resources are called inputs.

Pieces that are actual parts of the program (things the participants do) are called activities.
What is a logic model?

Logic models are a type of concept map which provide visual depiction of a program.

What is a pathway model?

Pathway models use arrows to depict theoretical connections across logic models.

Parts of the Logic Model

Inputs are essential program materials and key resources that make the program possible

Activities are parts of the program that engage participants

Outputs are the “by-products” of activities

Outcomes

  Short- involve change in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, etc.

  Medium- involve change in behavior, practice, approach

  Long- involve change in social conditions/the status quo (these may be “wish list” items, like world peace)

Context- the environment, community, and “times” in which the program is happens

Assumptions- what should be a “given” in order for the program to work (this is a second definition; see the first on p. 3)
Session 4: Identifying & Engaging Participants and Other Stakeholders

Purpose: To identify program stakeholders and examine the power dynamics at play; to introduce participant engagement

Stakeholders

What are stakeholders?

Who are stakeholders of your program? What are their stakes (why do they care about the program)? What power do they have? Use the table below to organize your brainstorm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Stake(s)</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Participants’ parents</td>
<td>Child outcomes</td>
<td>Permission, home implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session 5: Crafting Evaluation Data Collection & Analysis Plans

Purpose: To learn how to develop evaluation questions, use mixed methods to collect data, analyze evaluation data, and make sense of evaluation findings

Use the chart below to take notes on each data collection approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Tips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Journal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre/Post-Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Document Review</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photovoice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rubric</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analytics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unsolicited Feedback</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session 6: Communicating and Leveraging Evaluation Findings

Purpose: For participants to learn how to communicate evaluation findings using data visualization and community engagement strategies

Best Practices in Creating Stakeholder Reports

Stakeholder reports should

- be directed to a **specific stakeholder** audience (e.g., legislators, community, funder)
- be focused on the **outcomes** that matter to the stakeholder(s)
- be written using the **stakeholder’s language**
- be free of jargon and empty words (and acronyms)
- be **credible** (claims made based on data)
- summarize evaluation data (present interpreted, not “raw” data)
- be **concise** (no large amounts of prose)
- be **attractive** (including infographics, charts, photos, etc.)
- speak to the “**bigger picture**” – beyond the individual level
- contain a **variety of content**, including prose, charts, images, etc.
- Include **success stories** and **participant quotes**
- be free of grammatical errors, typos, etc.
Here are *some* of the terms that may come up over the course of a TECB training. Many of the terms on this list are not unique to the transformative approach to ECB, but rather, are also relevant to generic ECB. Others are more specific to the transformative approach. Overall, these terms provide some of the foundational language for important evaluation concepts and skills. You may use this page to take descriptive notes on each term.

**Activities**

**Assumptions**

**Context**

**Cultural responsiveness**

**Culture**

**Evaluation capacity building**

**Logic models**

**Mixed methods**

**Outcome**
Output

Pathway models

Participatory evaluation

Program

Power

Qualitative

Quantitative

Research

Social justice

Stakeholders

Stakeholder maps

Theory of change

Transformative