Evaluative capacity building in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professional development programs:
A new conceptual framework.

Jo Lunn Brownlee[1], Jennifer Sumsion[2], Ann Farrell[1], Susan Irvine[1], Gerry Mulhearn[2], Kerryann Walsh[1], Sharon Ryan[3], & Donna Berthelsen[1],

1Queensland University of Technology, 2 Charles Sturt University, 3 Rutgers University

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Australian ECEC policy context

Rudd-Gillard federal Labor Government [2007-2013]

- **National Early Childhood Reform Agenda** (COAG)
- Aim: to improve national productivity through increased access to higher quality ECEC services.

ECEC initiatives

- National Early Childhood Development Strategy
- National Quality Framework
- Universal preschool access
- National Early Years Workforce Strategy

Australian ECEC policy context cont.

Abbott Coalition Government [2013-]

- Aim: to establish… a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market (Productivity Commission, 2013).

ECEC initiatives

- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
- Continuation of universal preschool
- Support for NQF (with some possible amendments)
- Long Day Care Professional Development Fund

Current Policy 'Moment' – the LDCPD

- 2014 - **Long Day Care Professional Development Programme (LDCPD)** introduced.

- $AUD 200 million over 3 years to support the professional development of 76,000 educators in long day care centres.

- Supporting educators to address requirements of the NQF.

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Current Policy 'Moment' cont.

- Leaders expected to build **professional learning communities for quality improvement.**

- All educators expected to engage in **reflective practice.**

- Centre-specific ***Quality Improvement Plans*** (central to external quality assessment and ratings process by ACECQA).

Evaluative capacity building (ECB)

- ECB is about learning how to engage in evaluative decision making (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

- "members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyse and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action"… and "view it as a journey….to become learning organisations" (Preskill & Boyle, 2008 p. 444 & 456).

- We define this as taking an ***evaluative stance …*** a **mindset** (e.g. evaluative thinking and beliefs) and a **skillset** (e.g. critical thinking skills).

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

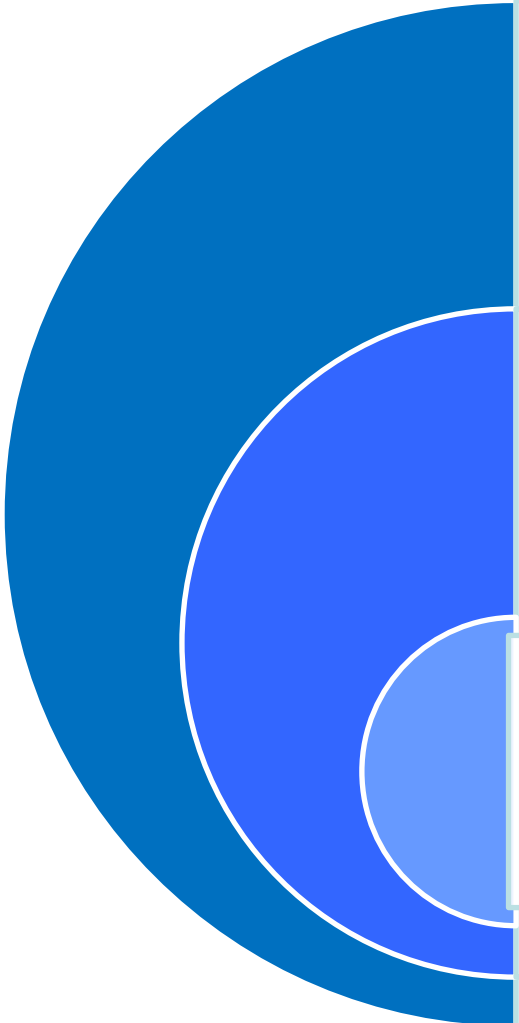# Evaluative capacity building (ECB) models

- range of ECB models exist (see for example Labin, 2014; Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

- most acknowledge that personal and situational factors influence the implementation of ECB in organisations, leading to organisational outcomes such as sustainable evaluation practices and a range of individual, organisation and program outcomes (Labin, 2014; Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

Multidisciplinary model of ECB

1. Motivations, assumptions and expectations determine nature & implementation of ECB strategies

2. Development of sustainable practice - transfer of ECB knowledge and skills (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Integrative ECB model

Needs/reasons (why) – motivations, goals-objectives, attitudes, and organisational capacity

Activities (what and how) - strategies and mediators such as organisational capacity, role of evaluation in organisation

Outcomes - individual,organisation,program
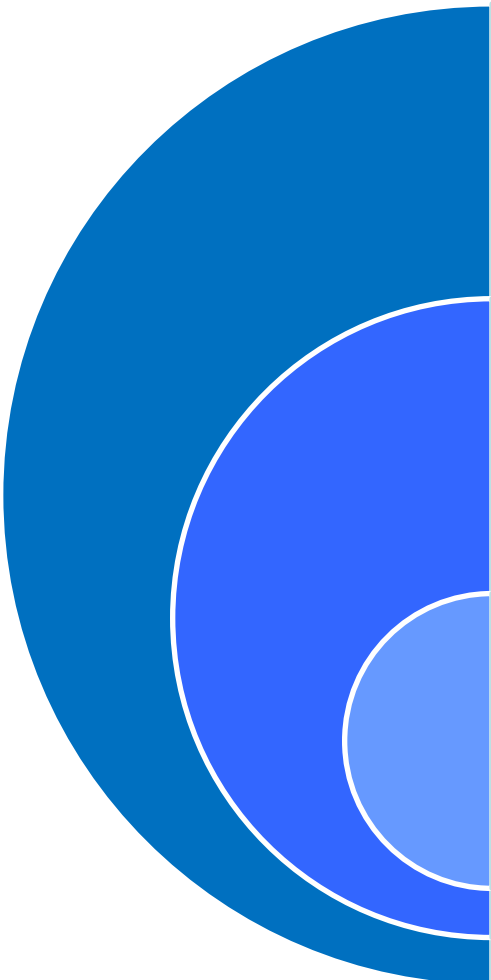
(Labin et al., 2012; Labin, 2014).

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Some common ground…

Personal presage factors- needs (Labin, 2014), attitudes, motivations, and assumptions (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

Situational presage factors - leadership, culture, communication, systems and structures (Preskill & Boyle, 2008) and mediators such as organisational capacity (Labin, 2014).

Leading to **ECB strategies** and organisational outcomes e.g., such as sustainable evaluation practices (Preskill & Boyle, 2008)

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Personal epistemology – a new way to theorise ECB

Personal epistemologies - the beliefs individuals hold about the nature of knowing and knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997).

Considered to filter all knowledge and beliefs (Brownlee et al., 2011).

Innovative way to theorise professional learning in ECB models - focus on personal epistemology as a factor that mediates how ECEC leaders and educators engage in **critical reflection** during decision making processes.

Personal epistemologies

Changes in personal epistemology from

- **absolutist** (black & white view of knowledge)
- **subjectivist** (personal opinions count)
- **evaluativist** (tentative, evidenced-based evaluation of knowledge) (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002) .

Personal epistemologies and learning

- Personal epistemologies activated during learning - influence engagement in critical thinking (Braten & Stromso, 2006; Hofer, 2002).

- Learning associated with effective ECB -evaluate a range of perspectives/inputs and managing complex environments with multiple stakeholders.

- Decision makers who enact evaluativist personal epistemologies more likely to engage in critical thinking and analysis based on evidence for a "best" solution – take an evaluative stance.

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

Conceptualising & measuring evaluative stance

- We define an evaluative stance as **a skillset** (critical thinking skills) and **mindset** (knowledge, personal epistemologies, dispositions towards flexibility and openness).

- This may lead to innovative ways of measuring evaluative decision making by drawing on measures such as:

1. **Skill sets**

   - critical thinking skills (Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), Pintrich, 2003)

2. **Mind sets**

   - open-minded thinking dispositions (Stanovich & West, 1997)
   - epistemic beliefs (Epistemological Beliefs Inventory, Schraw et al., 2002).

Co-production

- Refers to collaboration between service providers and consumers of those services (Giddens 2003).

- Fundamental shift from "doing *to* and doing *for*" to "doing *with*" (Dunston *et al.* 2009, p. 41, original emphases).

The new conceptual framework ….comprises 3 inter-disciplinary bodies

Some final thoughts….

- Much investment has been and continues to be made in professional development with little attention to the deep shifts in epistemologies needed if educators are to change their practices.

- Need to go beyond improving the capacities of individual educators to consider improvement of educational quality within and across ECEC settings.

Charles Sturt University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

MONASH University Education

References

- Braten & Stromso, (2006)
- Brownlee et al., (2011).
- Dunston *et al.* (2009)
- Giddens (2003).
- Hofer, (2002).
- Hofer & Pintrich, (1997).
- Kuhn & Weinstock, (2002)
- Labin et al., (2012)
- Labin, (2014)
- Pintrich, (2003)
- Preskill & Boyle, (2008).
- Schraw et al., (2002).
- Stanovich & West, (1997)

- ***Photos of educators engaging in professional development funded by the Queensland Health and Community Services Workforce Council; Courtesy of the Workforce Council.***