

## **American Journal of Evaluation**

Lori Wingate

Volume 26, number 1 was the first issue of the *American Journal of Evaluation* (Volume 26, Number) with Robin Miller at the helm as Editor. There are 5 articles, plus 1 contribution each in “Forum,” “Methods Notes,” “The Historical Record,” and “Ethical Challenges.”

In the issue’s first article, “An Alternative Route to Policy Influence,” Carol Hirschon Weiss, Erin Murphy-Graham, and Sarah Birkeland identify a type of evaluation influence based on their study of the use of D.A.R.E. evaluations. They posit that this type of influence (or “route to influence”), which they call “imposed use,” is distinct from those commonly discussed in the literature on evaluation use, namely instrumental, conceptual, and political/symbolic. “Imposed use,” they write, “may occur in any field where a higher level of government with funds to disburse demands specific action on lower operation levels, based on evidence” (p. 25). In the case of D.A.R.E., the U.S. Department of Education made instrumental use of evaluation findings by limiting funding to programs that met certain criteria (based on evaluation results). School districts’ response to this mandate (which in most cases was to drop their D.A.R.E. programs) exemplifies imposed use. That is, they were using evaluation findings to make decisions—in fact the authors report the districts had little interest in the evidence. Rather, they were reacting to the federal requirement based on those findings. Weiss, Murphy-Graham, and

Birkeland note “imposed use is not something new . . . it is a concept that has not surfaced before in the evaluation literature” (p. 25).

In “Quality, Context, and Use: Issues in Achieving the Goals of Metaevaluation,” Leslie Cooksy and Valerie Caracelli report on their metaevaluation of 87 evaluation reports prepared by International Agricultural Research Centers. They highlight how common evaluation issues—particularly quality criteria, political and cultural context, and use—have a “different texture” (p. 40) in metaevaluation contexts. It is crucial to clearly identify the purpose of a metaevaluation—whether for evaluating evaluation quality or identifying evaluations for inclusion in an evaluation synthesis—so that appropriate planning and methodological decisions can be made. The authors use examples from their metaevaluation experience to illustrate these issues.

Laurie Stevahn, Jean King, Gail Ghere, and Jane Minnema’s article on “Establishing Essential Competencies for Program Evaluations” present a detailed taxonomy of “essential competencies for program evaluators.” They argue that improved training, enhanced reflective practice, advanced research on evaluation, and professionalization of the field are benefits that are likely to result from acceptance and use of such a taxonomy. They identify 61 competencies across 6 domains: professional practice, systematic inquiry, situational analysis, project management, reflective practice, and interpersonal competence. Furthermore, they crosscheck these competencies against the Joint Committee standards, AEA Guiding Principles, and Canadian Evaluation Society Essential Skills Series. Stevahn and her colleagues conclude by identifying two activities that should be undertaken to validate the taxonomy for widespread use: a comprehensive validation study and the construction of rubrics for each competency that specify proficiency levels.

In this issue's fourth article, Melanie Ehren, Frans Leeuw, and Jaap Scheerens demonstrate the use of a "policy scientific approach" to reconstruct the program theory of the Dutch Educational Supervision Act. The three steps of this approach are to identify assumptions, validate the reconstruction, and critically evaluate the program theory. After presenting the results of their study, they discuss the benefits of limitations of the approach.

In the final article, "Multidimensional Implementation Evaluation of a Residential Treatment Program for Adolescent Substance Abuse," Leyla Faw, Aaron Hogue, and Howard Liddle discuss the importance of evaluating a program's implementation and report on their evaluation of the structure and process of a substance abuse treatment program. They conclude that "understanding the effectiveness of treatment for adolescents hinges on the continued development of methods to measure treatment implementation and analyzing these findings in relation to outcomes" (p. 93).

In the Forum section of this issue, Thomas Schwandt discusses "The Centrality of Practice to Evaluation." He analyzes the popular conception of "evidence-based," which he says values evidence over practice, and discusses what implications this view of "evidence-based" has for understanding practice and evaluation. He recommends that evaluators move from thinking of practice as "an objective that needs to be repaired" to a more genuine conceptualization in which practice is a "material and linguistic event in which human dilemmas emerge and are addressed" (p. 100).

In the Methods Notes Section, J. Jackson Barnette and Anne Baber Wallis seek to "close one of the few gaps left in the Campbell-Stanley-Cook-Shadish legacy of research designs" (p. 106). They examine how what happens to an intervention

between multiple postobservations (e.g., removal, continuation, changes in intensity) in experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs impacts validity, data modeling, and analysis. They argue that designs that take these factors into account will produce better inferences.

Donna Mertens' contribution in the "Historical Record" section provides an account of the "The Inauguration fo the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation" (IOCE). IOCE's mission is "to help legitimate and strengthen evaluation societies, associations or networks so that they can better contribute to good governance, effective decision making, and strengthen the role of civil society" (p. 127). Mertens describes the work done to get the organization off the ground; gives a brief account of the inaugural assembly that took place in Lima, Peru in 2003; and conveys the IOCE's mission, goals, and current priorities. She concludes by dicussing the organization's accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities.

In the "Ethical Challenges" section, Gillian Kerr comments on two analyses of "The Steering Committee" ethical challenge in a previous issue of *AJE*. She did not think these analyses paid sufficient attention to "the role of the steering or advisory committee itself and the extent to which membership of such a committee is associated with genuine power" (p. 132) and explains why in "Reflections of 'The Steering Committee.'" "