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## Integrating Evaluation: A Parting Thought

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As I get older, I find that I dislike arguments more and more, especially when the structure predetermines who gets in the last word. Therefore, I've resisted, I hope, the temptation to "set the record straight," or "get in the last word," and instead focused on the messages being communicated in my paper and those of the discussants. After reading the reactions of the reviewers, and rereading my own manuscript, I have two predominating thoughts: one pertaining to the main reason I wrote the paper in the first place and the other stemming from the specific comments of the discussants.

One of the main reasons for writing my article was to raise the profile of evaluation in counselling. It certainly seems to have done that. Nancy Hutchinson (1997 [this issue]) links the ideas in my paper to a literature base that reflects her own work. She provides excellent examples of how recent practices in the field of education can contribute to the development of a research base to inform evaluation practices in counselling. (I hope that others will join me in addressing the challenge offered at the close of Hutchinson's commentary.) Bob Flynn (1997 [this issue]) provides a very nice summary of the main arguments in my paper. (It is always humbling to see one's work boiled down to a few words, especially when it's done accurately.) He then takes the opportunity to focus on aspects of evaluation that he thinks are important. Richard Young (1997 [this issue]) takes many of the points I tried to make, recasts them using constructivist language, and elaborates the necessity of maintaining fidelity with stakeholder perspectives and expectations. (It seems that Young's comment has more to do with the language I use than the arguments I am trying to make.)

In pointing out the flaws in my paper, I hope that the main tenet will not be lost, namely, that evaluation needs to be seen as occupying a centrally important role in the counselling process. I used the term "co-equal" to describe the role that I think evaluation needs to occupy in counselling endeavours. In a cover note to the Editor, one of the discussants asked "what does co-equal mean that equal does not?" I want to address that question in a way that does not distract from the central message. Certainly, adding "co" to "equal" does not alter the dictionary meaning. However, I use words to communicate, and connotations are my central concern. I'm not wanting to defend my use of the term, only to focus the reader's attention on the point I was trying to communicate.

We've all heard the phrase "A and B are equal, but A is more equal than B." My point in using the term "co-equal" was that evaluation needs to be seen as an essential part of the counselling process, equal in importance to other aspects of counselling, such as rapport building, listening, meaning making, motivating, etc. This goal will have been achieved when counsellors would find it unthinkable to not evaluate the impact of their work on clients, just as they would find it unthinkable to not build rapport with clients. Further evidence that evaluating counselling outcome is "co-equal" with counselling process will be seen when counsellor training programs place as much emphasis on evaluation skills as they do on listening skills. We may disagree about the language, but I think we agree on the message. For me, the goal will have been accomplished when evaluating one's work with clients has the same profile as other interpersonal factors, in the practice of counselling, in the training of counsellors, and I might add in the evaluation of the quality of the work of counsellor educators with their clients, i.e., the learners in their classes and workshops. I believe that one step towards this goal is to open a dialogue, to get people talking and thinking about the proposition, and I'm happy to have been part of the discussion.

Enough of that soap box. Let me turn to the second point. I feel fortunate that the discussants have been able to add their own perspectives and enrich the dialogue on evaluation.

Bob Flynn (1997 [this issue]) and I have had several discussions on the relative merits of informal assessment and standards testing. He points out that evaluation measures need to be trustworthy and provide some confidence that we are getting the sort of information we think we are getting (validity). We also need measures that are consistent. We need to be confident that if a measure shows change, the phenomenon being measured actually has changed, and conversely, if a phenomenon is relatively unchanged the measure also will be relatively unchanged (reliability). He prefers formal assessment procedures because they demonstrate these properties.

Flynn (1997 [this issue]) has a point, but I suspect that when counsellors, counsellor educators, and researchers begin to devote more attention to alternative ways of evaluating counselling, we will begin to develop new approaches and fine-tune existing informal processes to the point where we can have confidence in what they are telling us. Sechrest, McKnight, and McKnight (1996) offer some examples of trustworthy informal measures, such as counting the number of hours a client with panic attacks spends outside his or her house. Peavy (1996) describes how mind-mapping, thought-listing, and other procedures from the constructivist literature can be used to gauge client change. The research agenda outlined by Hutchinson (1997 [this issue]), the examples and links to the educational literature base she provides, and the suggestions

provided by Young (1997 [this issue]) will be useful in helping to develop other trustworthy alternatives to standardized tests. Standardized testing likely will continue to have a place in the evaluation process, however, I plan to direct a large part of my energy towards finding ways for improving the trustworthiness of alternate measures that are more easily infused in the counselling process.

Now in closing I cannot resist a few nit-picky points. Flynn (1997 [this issue]) suggests that “researchers” should be added to the list of stakeholders. I would agree, it was an oversight not to include them in the first place. Flynn also says that he prefers the term “psychological interventions” to “counselling” because it is more general. On this I beg to differ. I used the term “counselling” precisely because it includes interventions that are not psychological. I’m thinking here of the wide range of educational interventions that school counsellors use to enhance self-esteem, promote self-exploration, encourage interpersonal communication, and so on. I’m thinking also of the wide range of interventions pertaining to career development and enhancing basic life-skills. My comments were intended to include these domains and not just interventions that were psychological. As Hutchinson (1997 [this issue]) pointed out, the field of education contains much that can inform counsellor evaluation practices, and I would encourage counsellors to become more familiar with that literature base.

Young (1997 [this issue]) maintains that there is likely more evaluation going on than many people think, especially when counsellors are sensitive to, and take into account, stakeholder constructs. I would agree. This is what I referred to as “informal evaluation,” and I think it needs to be viewed as occupying a more legitimate role in the counselling enterprise. Perhaps one way of increasing the perceived legitimacy of the informal evaluation practices of counsellors and clients is by linking those practices to the qualitative literature base, as Hutchinson (1997 [this issue]) suggests.

Seligman (1996) points out that often by the time we design an experiment, operationalize the independent variables, operationalize the dependent measures, and carefully select the population, we strip the process of much of the reality to which we want to generalize. A central argument in my paper was that we need to start with the reality that counsellors and clients experience in counselling. We need to encourage counsellors to view the evaluation of their work with clients as a higher priority. We need to develop evaluation procedures that are easily incorporated into counselling practice. And, we need to encourage counsellors to identify the ways they currently judge their success with clients and explore ways of documenting evidence in a manner which other stakeholders find acceptable. The main purpose of the

exercise was to open a dialogue on evaluation in counselling. I am happy to have been part of the discussion.

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