CERTIFICATION, CREDENTIALING, LICENSURE, COMPETENCIES, AND THE LIKE: ISSUES CONFRONTING THE FIELD OF EVALUATION

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Abstract: After a brief review of recent history framing the debate about certification, the discussion begins by defining key terms (certification, credentialing, licensure, accreditation, and professional development). It then briefly summarizes the three main articles on the topic in this journal issue, analyzing their content in terms of similarities and differences. Lastly, implications are provided for the future of certifying or credentialing evaluators.

Résumé: Après un bref examen des récentes discussions entourant l'agrément, l'article débute par une définition des termes clés (reconnaissance professionnelle, émission de titres/certificats et permis, agrément, et perfectionnement professionnel) puis présente un bref résumé des trois principaux articles sur le sujet dans ce segment de la Revue, dont le contenu est analysé du point de vue des similarités et différences. En dernier lieu, on discute des retombées pour l'agrément et la reconnaissance professionnelle des évaluateurs à l'avenir.

████████   Gratitude must be expressed to the authors of the related articles in this issue for their willingness to engage in discourse on a vital topic and to the Canadian Evaluation Society for supporting the endeavour. Additional thanks are extended to Brad Cousins and Martha McGuire for inviting my participation as a discussant. My appreciation comes from historical and personal perspectives.

In 1997, Len Bickman, then president of the American Evaluation Association, asked if I would lead a taskforce investigating what would be necessary to create a process for certifying evaluators. His request probably came from the fact that I had previously been in charge (with Molly Engle) of the 1995 study of evaluation training programs in the United States, Canada, and Australia. I was not

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keen on accepting nor did I feel that the idea was worthwhile, but I agreed to the assignment. That work resulted in several papers and a host of presentations. Whether I wanted it or not, I had assumed the mantel of a leading proponent for credentialing (not certifying) evaluators in the US. To put it mildly, there was not a groundswell of enthusiasm for the proposition, and wearing even a part of the mantel seemed like a lonely and heavy burden, especially in my own country.

"Alas, poor Yorick" (re Altschuld), all is not bleak and dreary. To their credit, the Canadians were making substantial progress in dealing with certification (see the earlier work of Love, 1994, and Long & Kishchuk, 1997). As things evolved a group of evaluation researchers at the University of Minnesota (King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001; Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005) developed and continue to expand upon an interesting avenue of investigation about evaluation competencies. It nicely dovetailed with and perhaps even sparked the renewed emphasis on credentialing, certifying, accrediting, and similar functions. Along these lines, Nagao saw the need for a certification system for evaluators in Japan and initiated discussions with a number of knowledgeable evaluators throughout the world about how to proceed (personal communication, September 2002).

Collectively these individuals kept concerns about how to train professional evaluators and what might be an entry mechanism for the field at the forefront of the field. Via writings and actions they pushed these topics to higher levels of consciousness.

With that short bit of history, the intent of this discussion is to highlight and analyze what the other authors have said and to draw implications from their thoughts. The text is organized as follows: the first section covers a brief clarification of terms; then there is an analysis of the main themes contained in the articles by McGuire and Zorzi, Nagao, Kuji-Shikatani, and Love, and Stevahn, King, Ghere, and Minnema; finally, conclusions and possibilities for the future are offered.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

In almost all discussions about certification, terms are muddied and take on subtle shades of meaning and texture. Connotations, while enhancing the beauty of the language, may also cloud issues and understandings, and possibly lead to misunderstandings. Therefore

it is important to establish common definitions for the key terms as used by the article authors and others who have explored conceptual issues regarding certification. In Table 1, selected terms/concepts are explained in a general way to guide our deliberations. The terms (certification, credentialing, licensure, accreditation, and professional development) are included or alluded to in all of the articles and frame much of their content.

The terms overlap. The distinctions among them are not absolute and, for some, more a matter of degree than substance. On the other hand, a couple of points are noteworthy. There is a fairly sharp demarcation between certification and credentialing, especially in regard to legal ramifications. It is for that reason that I was much more supportive in the past of the latter for evaluation, a position to which I still adhere (Altschuld, 1999).

The second point is that while the focus of certification is an individual, accreditation refers to organizations and their capacity to deliver education and/or training. One part of accreditation might be the competencies and proficiencies of those who have been trained,

Table 1
Key Terms/Concepts

Terms/Concepts	Meaning	Comments
Certification (also see Licensure)	A process by which a person masters certain skills and competencies in a field as assessed by an external body (usually a professional society in the area of consideration)	Most often done through a formal test or set of tests (certification exams) as in law, medicine, engineering, etc.

Certifying body may be legally liable for the skills that they designate as being attained by an individual

Certification may have to be periodically renewed most frequently (but not always) via continuing education |
| Credentialing | A set of courses or other experiences a person must go through to receive a credential

May be done by a professional society or sometimes by trainers as in a credential for having been trained | Does not specify the skill set attained by the person credentialed, only that they have gone through delineated experiences and courses

Tests or certification exams may be, but generally are not, used for credentialing instead it is the courses or training experiences that the individual has taken

The legal implications for credentialing are less than for certification
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Table 1 (cont.)

Terms/Concepts	Meaning	Comments
Licensure	Licenses are awarded by states, branches of government, and legal jurisdictions One must have a license to perform services or undergo penalties if they are performed without a license Many times the criteria for licensing are the same as certification and are determined by professional societies/groups	One may be certified but not licensed as in the case of a physician who has passed the necessary medical examinations but is found to have defrauded patients or illegally used drugs Legal jurisdictions set up review panels in cases where there is malfeasance or unsafe practice Control of licensure resides outside of the professional group but is almost always highly influenced by it
Accreditation	A mechanism whereby the educational program of an agency or educational institution are examined, by an external panel against established criteria for programs The program, if it passes review, receives a formal document indicating that it is accredited	Accreditation is for a program whereas certification, credentialing, and licensure relate to an individual Accreditation reviews rely on the courses and experiences that comprise a program, the skills gained by those going through it, their proficiencies as determined by tests and other outcome measures, and the processes through which the program is delivered
Professional Development	Training activities undertaken to improve and enhance the skills and understanding of individuals or the staff of an agency or institution Generally a positive and important activity for workers and those in professional positions	In some cases there may be knowledge or short skill tests embedded in the training Part of the work landscape and culture and recognized by professionals as a require-ment for them to stay current in their fields Such training in some fields may be part of required professional certification, licensing, and/or credentialing maintenance

but it is only one component among many. Others are: competencies of those who deliver training; adequacy of facilities (equipment, resources, etc.); ways in which the educational programs are kept up-to-date and current; level and sustainability of financial support; and assorted additional features.

THEMES DEVELOPED BY THE ARTICLE AUTHORS

Given the charge to them, the authors of the three articles have seen certification through similar yet somewhat unique lenses. Major themes in each article are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Major Themes in the Articles

Article/Authors	Major Features
Competencies and Performance Development/McGuire and Zorzi	Professional development of evaluation staff within organizations is stressed
	List of competencies with forms for evaluation and self evaluation provided
	Ties to staff development and how competencies might be used are made
Preparing School Evaluators/ Nagao, Kuji-Shikatani, and Love	Targeted and intensive professional development training session for a specific evaluation need in Japan
	Training takes into account the nature of the culture and uses that fact to its advantage
	Lessons learned from this first time venture in Japan
Evaluator Competecies in University-Based Evaluation Training Programs/ Stevahn, King, Ghere, and Minnema	Overview of many factors affecting university training programs for evaluators and the complexities of such training
	Presentation of an empirically based set of evaluation competencies
	A modest proposal for a 'cross walk' with existing lists, standards and so forth

McGuire and Zorzi attacked the idea of certification from the viewpoint of a consulting organization that provides evaluation services to a range of clients. What skills and competencies are required on the part of its employees for that organization to perform well and how might those skills be assessed or evaluated? The authors provided a detailed list of the evaluation competencies needed, an appraisal form for an employee to evaluate himself/herself against them, a form for determining the quality of an individual's work, and a discussion of how such measures might be linked together for enhancing skill levels and personal (as well as personnel) development.

They suggested that such procedures be incorporated into a performance development system consisting of a conceptual framework, clear position descriptions, a strategy for self-reflection on the part of an employee, ongoing feedback, formal assessment, and planning for learning. They noted that the competencies might be used for hiring decisions, identifying organizational competencies (after all evaluations are seldom performed by an individual but rather by teams that blend unique skill levels), and forming evaluation teams.

It should be stressed that the skills and processes for their demonstration are comprehensive and applicable to many other work situations, not just the one of the authors. This is obvious in the titles of the skill categories. In the main heading of Knowledge they include: ethics and quality assurance; systems theory; specific types of evaluation; history, theories, and models of evaluation; research design; sampling and measurement; and capacity building. The heading of Skills and Behaviour contains: ethical conduct and competence; groundwork (i.e., scoping out the entity to be evaluated); evaluation planning; data collection; data analysis; critical thinking; reporting; communication and interpersonal; and project management.

In a related vein, Nagao, Kuji-Shikatani, and Love described a professional development approach in Japan to prepare internal evaluators for educational programs. The authors emphasized that certification through professional development has advantages such as: working with individuals from diverse educational backgrounds; blending formal and informal aspects of educational experiences; and being adjustable to basic and advanced levels of training. To capitalize on these advantages, the authors looked for examples of training strategies and ways to certify those who participate in them. Although they found few illustrations of the latter, there were models for training in essential evaluation skills, particularly the Essential Skills Series of the Canadian Evaluation Society.

They adapted this model to fit the needs of Japan for training evaluators "to coordinate the internal evaluation activities in public sector organizations." Rather than being generic as in Canada, the training was cleverly tailored to the unique aspects of the Japanese culture in education (in particular, teachers working together and routinely observing and critiquing their colleagues). The skill level of professional development activity was between advanced beginner on the one hand and proficient and expert on the other.

The training took the form of an intensive four-day workshop to teach relevant evaluation theory and implementation, critical analysis of case studies of school evaluations via discussion, and skills to facilitate school evaluation. Throughout the sessions there were daily evaluation forms, and many of the activities involved participants in hands-on ways. The first use of the workshop was a pilot test that is currently being evaluated. Based upon observational and self report data and a retrospective analysis by the authors, they arrived at a set of preliminary conclusions or "lessons learned." Examples were: the quality of presenters is important in regard to

clarity and putting participants at "ease"; the use of case studies seemed to be especially effective; experiential learning was important for helping participants to focus the evaluation process; establishing an ethical basis for evaluation was valuable; and support from the top or higher levels of a system was helpful. A detailed description of the entire workshop is provided in the article.

Stevahn, King, Ghere, and Minnema build from and expand upon a body of research about evaluator competencies they began in the late 1990s. In initial efforts they developed a set of essential evaluator competencies, and since then they have been refining and revisiting this complex topic. Competencies were established empirically through a consensus rating approach. The intent of their work was and continues to be to promote debate and discussion about what evaluators do, how they go about conducting evaluations, and ultimately what should be included in the training of evaluators. They also acknowledge that much still needs to be done in clarifying terms, getting the field to agree on the competencies, and generating concrete depictions of each competency.

In the current article, they point out the subtle nature of the skills (competencies) problem by noting the roles (internal vs. external, traditional vs. participatory, etc.) evaluators play and the settings (government, health, education, social service, business, etc.) in which they ply their trade. Then using the questions "What should a formal university evaluation training program encompass?" and "What should be its mission, vision, values, and outcomes?" Stevahn et al. delineate the choices and decisions confronting those who develop and implement university-based training programs. They cite content, instructional strategy, breadth versus depth, courses from within an area or discipline and those from across multiple areas, and many other similar considerations.

The main categories in their list of competencies are professional practice, systematic inquiry, situational analysis, project management, reflective practice, and interpersonal competence. In the conclusions, the authors then note that what seems to be missing from evaluation as a profession are procedures for credentialing individuals and accrediting preparation programs. They offered a "modest proposal" that an analysis be undertaken of various documents (Standards for the Conduct of Evaluations, Guiding Principles, various compendiums regarding competencies, and so forth) with the goal of coming to consensus as to standards for training of evaluators.

DISCUSSION

In reviewing the articles it was obvious that there are many shared ideas. The competency lists supplied by McGuire and Zorzi and Stevahn and her colleagues and the detailed workshop specification of Nagao et al. strongly correlate. One example would be the concern with how to focus an evaluation. It is not only common to all three manuscripts but a competency that would be seen as important for virtually all evaluators. This pattern of similar competency lists and specifications is also inherent in many other materials, as noted by Stevahn et al. Indeed, more than 30 years ago Stufflebeam (1968) suggested steps for conducting an evaluation that has a fair amount of overlap with the skills seen as needed today.

Another illustration of the shared perceptions in the three articles resides in the recognition that there are varied levels of evaluation training ranging from novice up to proficient and eventually to expert. One set of authors went so far as to observe that distinctions between the levels will need to be specified but currently are not.

In regard to differences, it was apparent that the locus of training may have an effect on what is taught and how it is taught. Professional development as in the case of Japan is targeted to a specific need and set of applied skills, which is appropriate. At universities, however, the training may be somewhat more generic and theory-based. Beyond that, the purposes of training may not be alike. In two separate studies of university evaluation training programs (Altschuld, Engle, Cullen, Kim, & Macce, 1994; Engle & Altschuld, 2003), respondents to surveys were asked about the goals of their programs. Most, but not all, reported a strong orientation toward practice and application. A smaller number stressed the conduct of research on evaluation and developing individuals who would teach evaluation courses, probably in higher education.

Moreover, from numerous studies of evaluation training in universities since the late 1970s, it appears that there has been a steady decline in the number of programs and support for them. If these findings are accurate, questions arise about what might happen if we don't attend to the distinction between professional development and university-based training and what might be a reasonable blend and balance between the two. Could the research base of the field with its excellent journals be seriously threatened, and would it erode with an even more pronounced emphasis on practice?

In the period of time between the two studies identified above, several major developments have taken place that may account for the smaller number of programs. New ways of training, primarily of a professional development nature, have appeared. Examples are *The Evaluators' Institute*, training from local AEA affiliates such as the Ohio Program Evaluators' Group, and the summer program at the graduate school of Claremont. These efforts serve a valuable function and, even though they overlap with university offerings, they are clearly of the professional development mode. With the passage of time they may and probably will affect enrollments and in turn the finances of university programs. How to balance and work across training in these contexts is an important consideration.

Several other observations from the articles are germane to this discussion. Professional development, as noted by the Japanese illustration, demonstrated the value of practical hands-on materials and the case study approach to training. This concept would apply equally to universities but might differ in one way. In universities, instructors might enhance their courses more with research materials and published investigations.

Lastly, another observation that seems pertinent is that we should be creative in thinking about how to use the lists of competencies. One evaluator may be quite highly skilled, be at the expert level in many areas of competency, and have vast experience. But — and it is a significant but — it is a certainty that no single evaluator will be adept across all the main categories of competencies, let alone the subtleties of their subcategories. Major evaluations, especially those of scale, will be done by teams that have complementary skills and skill levels inherent in individual team members. In such cases the concept of using identified skills across the team makes a good deal of sense for evaluation planning and implementation. It would require that we think more carefully about how we structure evaluations and what it might take to carry them out successfully. It is unrealistic to assume that any one individual is able to carry out the job well, and, moreover, differential skill sets would hopefully result in better and more sophisticated evaluations.

IMPLICATIONS

Related to the last point, the modest proposal contained in the Stevahn et al. article deserves a further look and would be one implication derived from the articles. The authors call for a conference

or a specialized workshop in which people knowledgeable about the issues would "cross-walk" or forge the multiple listings of skills and competencies into a unified entity — a set of standards or, perhaps better yet, a set of guidelines for the training of evaluators. Arriving at a unified perspective that could help in thinking through evaluation training and developing a core for it would be a valuable result from what now is approaching 10 years of thought and effort. Doing so will go right to the heart of what we consider the profession of evaluation to be, and aid in clarifying who we are and what we do.

A second implication deals with the delivery of evaluation training and the related concept of credentialing rather than certification at this time. When the skills and competencies are reviewed, it is apparent that not a single evaluation training program at a university or institute could produce an individual with all the prerequisite skills, competency levels, and experiences necessary for an accomplished evaluator. The programs in universities tend to be quite small and limited (perhaps two or three evaluation-specific content courses staffed by individuals with less than one full-time equivalent commitment to them). The coursework offered is highly diverse and may emphasize somewhat divergent models of evaluation and methods for conducting evaluation, have a specialized field (education, business, social work, health) focus, and, as indicated previously, may even have different ultimate purposes and objectives.

Students who want to specialize in evaluation may take a small sequence of courses in one discipline (education and educational psychology are the main ones) and then methodology courses in psychology, sociology, statistics, and other fields. They probably will have both quantitative and qualitative courses. They may pursue cost-benefit analysis in economics or business and other courses in public policy, communications, and so on. If the above pattern is typical, then aside from what are relatively few courses in one discipline, evaluation training programs cut across disciplines with discipline slants or foci within courses. Due to factors such as these, Scriven (1994) referred to evaluation as a trans-discipline. Mertens (1994) emphasized the need for training in a number of disciplines. Trying to certify via testing in such circumstances would be tenuous at best.

Accreditation would also be problematic. Methodology taught in psychology or sociology is not accredited; rather the total program or the discipline is, not sub-areas within it. How to accredit an evaluation program represents a perplexing a complicated undertaking.

With this in mind let's return to the idea of credentialing rather than certification. If we produce a unified set of competencies, could they not be viewed as a way to establish an evaluation training program across disciplines so that we could say to a prospective student, here is what some typical training programs entail? Here are options for training, assuming a certain minimum number of courses in key areas (methodology, measurement, evaluation theory, etc.). Here are the beginning levels and here is what it might take to reach higher levels of competency. In other words, we could say that to be credentialed as an evaluator you would at least have to have these types of courses in these areas and/or this particular set of experiences.

We could also use the list of competencies to evaluate how well or not courses fit with what we deem to be important for the practice of evaluation. The same kind of logic could be applied to institutes and specialized training opportunities. They would be subject to the same scrutiny as university-based training. So would all of the continuing educational programs necessary to maintain competence and up-to-date understandings.

This is not the same thing as certification but it would be a step in the right direction. The bottom line is that continuing as we have been without any control of entry into our field is not sensible for the long term.

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