A Made-in-Canada Credential: Developing an Evaluation Professional Designation

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Abstract: Following extensive research and consultations, the governing body of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) announced in October 2007 “that there is member support to pursue a system of professional designations for evaluators in Canada.” Some 19 months later it introduced a new voluntary service for its members, a Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation. From an acknowledged bias of one of the CE architects, this article reflects on its development, what it is, and how context and process importantly shaped this unique evaluation professional designation. Discussions of the challenges encountered in the development process and the opportunities going forward aim to contribute to the future of the CE designation in Canada and to the growing international interest in and discourse on professionalizing evaluation.

Keywords: certification, competencies, credential, professional designation, qualifications


Mots clés : certification, compétences, accréditation, titre professionnel, qualifications

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Evaluation in Canada in 2007 offered fertile ground for the development of a professional designation. While not unanimous, there was some convergence of thought and energy within the evaluation community to take steps to professionalize evaluation. Research commissioned by the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES, 2007a) provided not only strong support for the development of professional designations, but also an action plan derived from good practice in other professional associations (Halpern & Long, 2007) and a review of the literature (Huse & McDavid, 2006). In response, CES proposed (CES, 2007d) to move cautiously forward on the path toward professionalization through the development of two levels of designation; member and credentialed evaluator. A comprehensive consultation process (Cousins, Cullen, Malik, & Maicher, 2009) gave CES confidence that there was support from members to move forward with these designations.

This is the story of the development of the CES Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation; a realist response to “What works for whom under what conditions and why?” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The author of this article was intimately involved in the development of the CE designation and brings a declared bias to the thoughts and analysis provided here. The Canadian professional designation is unique, not only as the first of its kind, but also in shape and form. This article explains why and how the CES now provides an opportunity for its members to be credentialed as professional evaluators.

The article begins by defining the scope of the initiative, including some starting definitions. Next, the Canadian Professional Designations Project (PDP) is profiled, and deliverables from the development process are described. Finally, the article reflects on the challenges in developing the CE designation, with benefit of five years’ hindsight.

SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

In October 2007, National Council (the governing body of CES) announced that “CES will proceed with the next steps to establish a professional designation for evaluators in Canada” (CES, 2007b). National Council expressed its belief that there was sufficient member support to pursue a system of professional designations and directed that the approach prescribed in their Response to the Action Plan (CES, 2007d) be pursued. This was a critical starting point for the professional designations project.

The Action Plan (CES, 2007a), discussed earlier in this issue (Halpern, Gauthier, & McDavid, 2015), was clear in recommending that the CES develop three successive levels of designation within the professional association: member, open to all who join the CES and agree to abide by its ethics and standards; credentialed evaluator, to reflect an entry level of education and/or experience in evaluation; and certified professional evaluator, based initially on peer review assessment and, possibly later, examination. National Council opted for a more cautious and incremental process for professional designations, and CES set in
motion the development of member and credentialed evaluator designations. The member-level designation was later removed from the scope of the PDP and considered as a task for the Member Services Committee of National Council. As of this writing, the member designation has not been implemented.

Importantly, National Council did not at that time support the development of the certification level of designation. Nor did they support a system of accreditation, sanctioning of courses, or programs of education or training (as suggested in the Action Plan). CES (2007d) expressed concern with the current state of the education and training infrastructure in Canada and the lack of consensus on a body of knowledge to support either accreditation or the more advanced designation of certification.

Professionalization may come in the form of credentialing, certification, or licensure and these terms are not always used in a consistent manner. For the purposes of the CES initiative on professionalization, Council requested a “study [that] would provide CES with models and processes of credentialing that would facilitate the establishment of such a system and identify the pro's and con's of credentialing versus certification or licensing” (CES, 2006, p. 2). Working definitions for credential and certification drew heavily from Altschuld (2005) and are provided and discussed in some detail by Halpern et al. (2015).

Definitions for credentialing and certification are largely built around the process for earning and awarding the designation. A credential speaks to having completed specified education and/or experience, and certification is generally awarded after an exam and/or portfolio-based independent assessment. As Perrin (2005) points out,

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\text{[C]ertification (literally the issue of a certificate) can range from being required to pass an examination or to otherwise demonstrate one's competencies, to successful participation in an accredited course of study, to certification of attendance at a course (even if someone sleeps throughout the entire course, or perhaps slips out the door after signing the attendance registry). (p. 181)}
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Gussman (2005) also speaks to process differences and adds that legal considerations, “licensing and certification of individuals involve arduous processes and appear to raise the spectre of potential legal challenges. ‘Credentialing’ is a looser form of certification and this approach leads into the identification of core competencies” (p. 2). Here meanings given to credentialing and certification are linked to rigour in how the designation is awarded (and thus its credibility), as well as serving to define what the designation says about its holder.

The terms credentialing and certification took on additional meaning in CES's professional designation project. The authors of the Action Plan (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007a) described their proposed credential designation as entry level, while certification was mastery (as independently assessed). In the Action Plan the three levels of designations were described as a ladder, where Credentialed Evaluators would tend to be more junior personnel and most often work under the supervision of a Certified Professional Evaluator (CPE). In the plan,
the designations have explicit levels of expertise or competence assigned to them, an approach also applied in other professional organizations (Halpern & Long, 2007).

In its response to the Action Plan (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007d), CES did not establish the credential as being entry level. CES indicated that the credential was to include consideration of experience and education and would not preclude future development of a certification process, should this be seen as necessary by the membership at a future date. CES called for a Credentialing Board to be established as a decision-making body for the credential.

These issues—the meaning of a designation, the process to award a designation, and the extent to which a designation speaks to levels of expertise—were important challenges in the design of the Credentialed Evaluator designation.

PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATIONS PROJECT PROFILE

The Professional Designations Project took place from October 2007 to May 2009, when it was approved as an ongoing program and the Credentialed Evaluator designation was established as a voluntary service of CES. A detailed Project Plan (CES, 2007c) was developed at the outset of the initiative and included a discussion of the project scope, approach, roles, responsibilities, and work plan. The project was committed to principles of inclusiveness, transparency, feasibility, utility, and partnering (CES, 2007c). These elements had formed the cornerstones of successful consultations on pursuing a professional designation (Cousins et al., 2009) and were deemed critical both to the development process and, substantively, to the nature of any designation developed. The Project Plan also included a logic model, shown as Figure 1.

Assumptions articulated by National Council (CES, 2007d, p.4) concerning a multitiered system of designations, held strong for the upcoming undertaking:

- that sufficient impetus and justification for system development and installation exists;
- that ample training and professional development exists or will exist;
- that an adequate foundational knowledge base for the profession exists or will exist;
- that set up costs and ongoing maintenance costs would not be prohibitive.

Goal and Objectives

Defining la problématique is an important first step in articulating goals and objectives. What was CES trying to address in pursuing a professional designation? At the outset of the PDP, two distinct but interconnected issues dominated evaluation community discourse: evaluation identity and evaluation quality. Issues of evaluation quality were tied to increased involvement of non-evaluators in evaluation work, a lack of defined entry requirements for the discipline, lack of clarity around the definition of evaluation, diverse and unpatterned career path of
GOAL
To define, recognize, and promote the practice of ethical, high quality, and competent evaluation in Canada through the creation of a system for professional designations in CES

ACTIVITIES
- To build and augment external partnerships to develop and recognize evaluation discipline in Canada
- To recognize degrees of evaluation practice within the Canadian evaluation discipline
- To develop and implement the infrastructure for professional designations in Canada
- To develop and make broadly known the ethics, standards, and core competencies for Canadian evaluation
- To undertake a crosswalk of competencies to devise, consult, and approve core competencies for Canadian evaluation evaluators

IMPACT
- There is clarity and definition for and within the evaluation discipline/practice in Canada
- A viable financial plan, administrative system, criteria, and marketing plan for designations are adopted by National Council
- Increased reciprocal activities and interaction between CES & identified partners & stakeholders
- To create a sustainable infrastructure for a system for professional designations in Canada

OUTCOMES
- Members are satisfied with the system of professional designations
- Core competencies, ethics, & standards are adopted from international best practices, Canadian experience, & member consultations
- External organizations support, promote, and make use of the Canadian designation system in Canada

OBJECTIVES
- To recognize degrees of evaluation practice in Canada
- To develop & make broadly known the ethics, standards, & core competencies for Canadian evaluation
- To develop a crosswalk of competencies to devise, consult, & approve competencies, ethics, & standards for Canadian evaluation evaluators
- To create a sustainable infrastructure for a system for professional designations in Canada

OUTPUTS
- Core competencies, ethics, & standards for Canadian evaluation evaluators
- Approved criteria for CES Member & Credentialed Evaluator
- Defined, market, & established a system of recognized Canadian evaluation practitioner
- Agreements & plans with provincial, territorial, & federal governments, universities, & other professional groups

Figure 1: Professional Designation Project Logic Model
evaluators, and gaps in available evaluation education and professional development (Cousins & Aubrey, 2006; Gussman, 2005).

Rowe (2014) questions whether evaluation quality will be influenced by a system of professional designations, at any level, and is echoed by Perrin (2005): “[A]re shoddy evaluations done predominantly by non-evaluators who might be screened out by certification?” (p. 185). The relationship between professional designations and improved quality has not been established, at least not in the evaluation profession. It is not clear if consumers of evaluation benefit from a professional designation through improved evaluation quality, an issue worthy of further research and study. Although some may argue that improving quality is the only valid reason to pursue professional designations (Perrin, 2005), the PDP’s goal was to begin the process of defining an identity for the community.

The PDP’s goal was “to define, recognize, and promote the practice of ethical, high quality and competent evaluation in Canada through the creation of a system of professional designations in CES,” and its stated desired impact was that there be “clarity and definition for and within the evaluation discipline/practice in Canada.”

The evaluation “identity crisis” involved a lack of clear demarcations and defined parameters for the evaluation function (CES, 2006). Observations ranged from somewhat dire predictions of “evaluation per se in Canada is in need of a distinct identity to ensure its survival” (Gussman, 2005, p. 10) and “if CES does not take control of its own field of expertise, it is possible that other professionals (such as management consultants, management accountants and internal auditors) will ‘fill the vacuum’” (CES, 2007a, p. 5) to a more moderate analysis of “identification with evaluation as a profession is not strong, and quite weak in some sectors and regions” (Borys, Gauthier, Kishchuk, & Roy, 2005, p. 16) and there is support for “development of an identification with a professional community” (Gauthier, Borys, Kishchuk, & Roy, 2006).

The goal and objectives of the PDP were in keeping with the mandate of CES, which is dedicated to the advancement of evaluation theory and practice.

Structure

CES National Council invested a Professional Designations Core Committee (PDCC) with responsibility to move forward on the approach outlined in their Response to the Action Plan (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007d). This committee included three members of National Council and reported to the CES President and National Council. The core committee was responsible for the project design, management, and implementation. The project structure also included three subcommittees, each chaired by a member of the PDCC (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007c):

- Credentialing subcommittee (CSC): to define the professional designations for CES and develop and implement a sustainable system of delivery through a Credentialing Board
Infrastructure subcommittee (ISC): to create a sustainable infrastructure (within CES) for a system of voluntary professional designations for CES members

Partnerships & Outreach subcommittee (POSC): to build and augment external outreach and partnerships to those who may be impacted by and/or support the professional designation project.

The project spanned the tenure of two CES Presidents, both of whom demonstrated strong commitment to and leadership for the PDP. They facilitated open and frank exchanges among the community (on and off National Council) and ensured there was time and space allotted to the 19-month-long conversation within the executive and governing body of the organization. In addition to offering progress reports at regular National Council meetings, the PDCC convened special teleconference sessions to consult with CES National Council at key points in the development process.

Transparency was important and included openness between the PDP and National Council, as well as between PDP/National Council and the CES membership. At the outset, the full Project Plan (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007c) was shared with the CES membership, including the terms of reference for the core committee and three subcommittees. Throughout the project, the PDCC published quarterly updates on the CES website, to keep the membership informed of the project’s progress. A plenary session at the 2008 CES National Conference was devoted to reporting on the project’s progress.

Project personnel produced a flyer explaining the nature of the project and had it distributed at all CES training courses. In addition, the CES President sent a letter to the chapter Presidents, soliciting their assistance in communicating the initiative to key contacts in their respective jurisdictions. A generic letter was provided detailing the CES’s plans for a professional designation. Over 60 letters, issued under the signatures of the CES President and the chapter Presidents, were sent to contacts in provincial and federal governments, including Ministers and Deputy Ministers with responsibility for the evaluation function. Finally, a practice note was written for the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation (CJPE) at the mid point in the project, which unfortunately was not published.

Activities

The management of the project by the PDCC was a significant undertaking. Populating the subcommittees was done through an open call to CES members for volunteers to assist on the project. The initial 21 CES member volunteers changed with exits and new entrants over the 19 months of the project, due to volunteer availability and interest. Ultimately the project involved 34 individuals representing all but three of CES’s 12 regionally based chapters. As project volunteers were not forthcoming from Manitoba, PEI, or Nova Scotia, the National Council representatives for these chapters played a larger role in communicating to the chapters and coordinating consultations. The PDCC members were acutely
aware of the lack of a francophone representative on the core committee. There was a concerted effort to engage with the Quebec chapter of the CES and to reach out for francophone members on the subcommittees.

The core committee and three subcommittees worked primarily through distance technologies (Skype, e-mail, and conference calls). The PDCC usually met bimonthly, although a more intense schedule was required in the latter months. Each of the subcommittees operated within its own terms of reference and work plan. Subcommittee meetings were generally convened on a monthly basis but occurred more frequently as deliverables were being produced. The PDCC called an “all committees” meeting on two occasions during the project, to share the progress with all volunteers and solicit their input on key deliverables.

Inclusiveness was an important principle for the conduct of the project. Although the project’s reach across CES chapters was not complete (9 of 12), it served to bring regional views to the development table. The PDP volunteers included practitioners, academics, representatives from both the private and public sectors, and also came from different academic disciplines. Each individual made a significant commitment and contribution to the project and brought unique expertise and skills that were used to the fullest extent possible.

At any given time in the development period, some 23 individuals across Canada were working to build this designation. Not only did this provide a richness of expertise and experience, but the volunteers on the project proved to be ambassadors in their respective regions. They kept the national conversation—the buzz—going during the development process and were experts and champions when consulting on the CE model.

Project activities, as organized by subcommittees, involved (a) research and development, (b) program infrastructure development, and (c) outreach and consultations. In addition to the reporting or accountability communications mentioned in the previous section, communication and consultation with CES members over these 19 months was intense and included the following:

- a member-wide survey on CES proposed competencies
- opinion leader consultations for validation of competencies and descriptors
- CE model consultations in each of the 12 chapters, with consolidated reporting
- two open, national CE model consultations sessions (electronic)
- CE application and mock credentialing board testing process
- two plenary sessions at CES conferences (2008 and 2009).

PDP volunteers either conducted the consultations or prepared the materials for consultations within chapters. Results of all consultations were analyzed and reported to National Council and now serve as a valuable historical record and resource.

Other project outputs included the development of CE application and member guidance documents, procedures for applications and appeals, Credentialing
Board terms of reference and operating guidelines, and a job description for an Application Administrator. A program proposal for the new Professional Designations Program was developed and included a new CES organizational chart with associated new roles defined, a cost-sensitivity analysis for pricing the CE, a CES policy statement on the PDP and identified bylaw implications, an implementation plan, and a monitoring and evaluation plan. The model for the CE was developed with significant effort and attention on competencies, as discussed in detail below.

Resources
The PDCC investigated options for independent funding support at the outset of the project, in the hope of hiring external resources to lead and/or undertake the project. Two grant applications were unsuccessful, and the project was largely accomplished with volunteered resources. Project budgets were prepared and monitored. The CES spent a total of $18,250 over the 19-month development period; these funds were used primarily for translation (65%) of communications materials and teleconference meetings. In addition the CES received 450 days of volunteer time from its 34 volunteers (as tracked by the PDCC). This is an estimated value of $350,000 for in-kind service! The total cost of developing the CE was $365,000, with 95% of that amount being in kind.

CREATING THE DESIGNATION: THE HOUSE THAT CES BUILT
Roughly the first year of the project was focused on “pouring the foundations” for the professional designation. Substantively the CE was built on three pillars: ethics, standards, and competencies as prescribed in the Action Plan (CES, 2007a) and Response (CES, 2007d). The PDCC and its subcommittees incrementally built these foundations for a professional designation before turning their attention to the actual substance of the designation.

For the purposes of this initiative, the PDP defined ethics as speaking to behavioural norms and standards as the foundation for evaluation work product. This approach reflected how the CES evaluation community tended to define these two important underpinnings to professionalization. The PDP found, as have others (e.g., Picciotto, 2005), significant variation in the use of the terms ethics and standards, as well as approaches to articulating these. Some evaluation associations incorporate ethics into standards and some into guidelines or tools for practice.

Ethics
CES had adopted its Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in 1996, following extensive development and consultation by an ad hoc committee of National Council, the Standards Development Committee. Member consultations had informed a discussion paper (CES, 1992) followed by panel discussions, revisions, and approval. A further review was undertaken in 2006 by the Administration Committee of
National Council, accompanied by presentations at the 2006 CES conference, and no modifications were felt necessary.

The PDP undertook research into ethics in 10 or so other evaluation professional associations to examine various approaches. Only one (in this admittedly limited review)—the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES, 1997)—specified a distinct Code of Ethics. The CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct is somewhat less comprehensive than the AES Code, which includes elements of ethical conduct related to the members’ obligations to their professional association, to evaluation colleagues, and to the public at large. The CES guidelines operate at a lower level, limiting issues of accountability to the project, fiscal, and client management issues.

A Comparison of Evaluation Ethics (CES, 2008) was developed and accompanied the PDCC recommendation to National Council that the current Guidelines for Ethical Conduct be reaffirmed. The PDCC felt that the CES guidelines, in combination with adoption of standards (discussed next), was a sufficient base on which to move forward with the designation. This was passed by National Council in February 2008.

Standards
CES has long been an active member of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE), a joint United States and Canadian organization incorporated exclusively for developing evaluation standards. The program evaluation standards and other standards produced by the Joint Committee are endorsed by the American National Standards Institute through a rigorous process of consultation, validation, and field testing by the Canadian and US evaluation communities. The American National Standards Institute and the Standards Council of Canada are members of the International Standards Organization (ISO), which sets standards across countries for business, government and society.

The PDCC prepared some history on the standards and recommended these be formally adopted by CES. CES National Council voted unanimously in March 2008 to adopt the Program Evaluation Standards of the JCSEE as Canadian guidelines for quality practice. The standards are reviewed and revised every five years by the JCSEE.

Competencies
The development of Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice (CCEP; CES, 2009) was a critically important and stand-alone accomplishment of the project. Maicher and Frank (2015) examine this aspect of the PDP in detail, the substance of the CCEP, and the development of the associated descriptors that serve to define each competency. The CES-approved suite of competencies is largely based on work conducted in the United States evaluation community (Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005) and was informed by ongoing support of key colleagues King and Stevahn during the PDP.
Two issues are important as context for this article. First, the development of competencies was perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the PDP—it was not the substance or content that was problematic, but the rationale for their development and use in the professional designation. The project was operating with somewhat conflicting directions. Although research had pointed to the need for competencies as a basis for certification (CES, 2007a), the PDP was mandated to build a credential, typically based on accredited courses or programs, education, and experience elements. However, CES (2007d, p. 7) identified “as a pivotal first step the undertaking of a cross-walk or cross referencing of existing professional evaluation knowledge frameworks as a basis for deciding criteria that would underlie a system of professional credentialing.” National Council favoured the development of competencies as means of articulating the knowledge base—the skills and knowledge an individual needs to be an evaluator.

Second, there were and continue to be variations in the use of competencies that cause some confusion and debate on the CCEP. In some workplaces, such as the federal government, competencies are specified at levels (such as junior, intermediate, and senior) and are used to support job descriptions, recruitment, and salary classification systems. This was not the approach taken in the PDP, which looked to identify key elements in the evaluation experience and keep the competencies generic so as to include (and not preclude) acceptance by those who specialized in certain evaluation approaches or sectors.

**Credentialed Evaluator Designation**

As the PDP team gained confidence in the three pillars and the positive feedback it was receiving on this work, they moved forward with the credentialed evaluator designation. First, National Council was engaged in further discussions on the designation in their fall 2008 meeting. CES National Council reinforced their vision that the credential qualifications were to incorporate a mix of experience and education and agreed on what the designation was designed to say: *The holder has provided evidence of education and experience required to be a competent evaluator.* This is an important definition, as it is not attesting to the competence of the individual (something that would be more applicable to certification processes), but to the fact that CES has identified what education and experience elements are critical to evaluation practice and that the CE has provided proof of same. The CES was fortunate to have as its president a lawyer and active member of the Barreau du Québec (Quebec Bar) who was able to confirm this CE definition would not infer legal liability on the part of CES.

The designation qualifications are

- **Qualification 1:** evidence of graduate-level degree or certificate. The applicant is asked for evidence of education—a copy of their degree.
- **Qualification 2:** evidence of 2 years (full-time equivalent) evaluation-related work experience within the last 10 years. Statements of work experience are supplemented with letter(s) of reference.
Qualification 3: education and/or experience related to 70% of the competencies in each of the five domains of Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice. Applicants draw selectively from their education and/or experience to describe in a short narrative how the competency has been accomplished. A minimum of 70% of competencies in each of the five domains are required.

An important element of the CE is a requirement for ongoing professional development to maintain the designation. Credentialed Evaluators must undertake and report a minimum of 40 hours of professional development over three years.

Development of the requirements for the CE designation was guided by principles of inclusiveness and feasibility. Requirements were developed by the PDP team with the CES membership in mind, creating a designation that would be relevant to the experience and education of the Canadian evaluation community. The CE was not defined at a level (junior or expert), but was shaped on the characteristics of those members who were successfully practicing evaluation.

Several factors influenced the education qualification in the designation. Canadian evaluators have diverse educational backgrounds, largely in health, education, psychology, and sociology. Approximately 60% held a master’s degree, 20% a bachelor degree, and the balance had a doctorate or postdoctorate-level education (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014). The most obvious choice for an education requirement, a degree in evaluation, was nowhere to be found in Canada. In most cases evaluation was being taught in graduate programs that otherwise specialized in a specific academic discipline, although graduate certificate programs in evaluation were starting to be developed (Cousins & Aubrey, 2006). How then to set an educational qualification for the credential? If not evaluation-specific subject matter, what did the education system contribute to the evaluator’s knowledge and skill set?

The PDP looked to the Canadian education system to see how undergraduate and graduate levels were differentiated, regardless of discipline. Table 1 provides generic competencies that a holder of the specified qualification is expected to master, in varying degrees at different levels (Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2009).

Skills important to evaluation, including research, critical thinking, and capacity to work creatively and autonomously in situations of ambiguity and uncertainty, were best aligned with a master’s level of education. The PDP team set the educational qualification at a graduate level. Either a graduate degree or a certificate, from the Canadian education system or judged to be equivalent to such, would be acceptable.

Acceptable options for graduate-level education were also defined. Applicants without the stated requirement were invited to pursue a process of identifying how their background experiences equated to the required formal education, through
Table 1. Ontario Qualifications Framework (excerpt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Baccalaureate/bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Master’s degree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual &amp; methodological awareness/</td>
<td>An understanding of methods of enquiry or creative activity, or both, in their primary area of</td>
<td>a) A conceptual understanding and methodological competence that (i) enables a</td>
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<tr>
<td>research and scholarship</td>
<td>study that enables the student to</td>
<td>working comprehension of how established techniques of research and inquiry are</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems using well</td>
<td>used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline; (ii) enables a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>established ideas and techniques;</td>
<td>critical evaluation of current research and advanced research and scholarship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Devise and sustain arguments or solve problems.</td>
<td>in the discipline or area of professional competence; and (iii) enables a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application of knowledge</td>
<td>a) The ability to review, present, and interpret quantitative and qualitative information;</td>
<td>treatment of complex issues and judgements based on established principles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) The ability to use a range of established techniques;</td>
<td>and techniques;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) The ability to make critical use of scholarly reviews and primary sources.</td>
<td>b) On the basis of that competence, has shown at least one of the following:</td>
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<td>(i) the development and support of a sustained argument in written form; and</td>
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<td>(ii) originality in the application of knowledge.</td>
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<td>Competence in the research process by applying an existing body of knowledge</td>
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<td>in the critical analysis of a new question or of a specific problem or issue</td>
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<td>in a new setting.</td>
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<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Baccalaureate/bachelor's degree</th>
<th>Master's degree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional capacity/</td>
<td>a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study, employment, community</td>
<td>a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:</td>
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<td>autonomy</td>
<td>involvement, and other activities requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and</td>
<td>(i) the exercise of initiative, and of personal responsibility and accountability;</td>
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<td>decision-making and working effectively with others;</td>
<td>(ii) decision-making in complex situations, such as employment;</td>
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<td>b) The ability to identify and address their own learning needs in changing circumstances</td>
<td>b) The intellectual independence required for continuing professional development;</td>
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<td>and to select an appropriate program of further study;</td>
<td>c) The ethical behaviour consistent with academic integrity and the use of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Behaviour consistent with academic integrity and social responsibility.</td>
<td>appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct of research;</td>
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<td>Awareness</td>
<td>An understanding of the limits to their own knowledge and how this might influence their analyses</td>
<td>d) The ability to appreciate the broader implications of applying knowledge to</td>
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<td>of limits of knowledge</td>
<td>and interpretations.</td>
<td>particular contexts.</td>
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a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). In addition, degrees obtained outside of Canada were acceptable if deemed equivalent to those from Canadian universities. A grandparenting clause was specifically included in the CE designation for the education qualification. In order not to disadvantage those CES members whose evaluation practice began when an undergraduate degree was more commonly the foundation of professional preparation, the education requirement was waived for current members who did not have graduate-level education. Current members were defined as those whose name appeared in the June 1, 2009 CES membership list.

The selection of two years for the experience qualification was somewhat arbitrary. Here again there was extensive discussion among the PDP team and with National Council. Two years of experience was considered to provide sufficient time for an applicant to have been exposed to and undertaken the behaviourally based elements in the competencies. It was not considered either entry-level or expert, but in combination with the other two qualifications two years was seen as a reasonable amount of experience to be competent. This is an important feature of the CE requirements: they are taken as a whole, in combination or as a package, with no individual requirement being sufficient. Setting the required length of experience at two years was strongly supported in the member consultation process, which also lead to the addition of “within the last ten years” in recognition that evaluation is not always the full-time focus of Canadian practitioners (Borys et al., 2005).

The third requirement was developed to allow applicants to demonstrate (to reviewers on the Credentialing Board) how their education and experience aligns and equips them with the approved evaluation competencies. The initial CE model presented to the membership proposed a requirement that applicants show education and experience for 60% of competencies in each domain. The requirement was adjusted to 70%, based on feedback from the consultation process. The PDP team considered this third requirement to be somewhat of a portfolio-based approach, allowing members to self-assess and articulate their experience and education. The qualification recognizes that not all evaluators need to know everything (Perrin, 2005; Zorzi, McGuire, & Perrin, 2002) and was designed to allow for the acknowledged diversity in the community. Diversity applies to both the routes taken to the profession as well as the range of approaches used by evaluators. Perrin (2005) applauds and values this diversity as a source of strength in our community, and cautions against any professional designation constraining or limiting these characteristics. The PDCC was of like mind.

As the expression says, the devil is in the details, and the details of the CE qualifications were not without challenges, especially the requirement to demonstrate alignment of education and experience with competency statements. Of note, a small group of opinion leaders (some of them co-authors of the Action Plan, Canadian Evaluation Society, 2007a) identified issues with the use of competencies in a credential. They first expressed concerns following the 2008 conference and again when the PDCC engaged them as a challenge group to
critique the proposed CE model in early 2009. The discussion centred around three key issues:

1. The use of competencies is a fundamentally flawed application of the credentialing level of professional designation, more appropriate to the level of certification where the designation speaks to the application of skills and knowledge.
2. The proposed model for the CE falls somewhere between a credential and a certification.
3. The credentialing system should be fact-based, not assessment-based.

The “challenge group” remained unconvinced and developed an alternative proposal (April 21, 2009) submitted to the PDCC and National Council and presented during information sessions in the National Capital chapter (the home chapter for the authors of the alternative). Although this alternative did not receive significant support in the consultations on the CE model, the group was quite correct in labelling the PDP’s CE model as “somewhere between a credential and certification.” The PDP was knowingly introducing a novel approach: credify, a term that may be defined as

Credify v.t. a process consisting of 2/3 credentialing and 1/3 certification to award a professional designation.

The three-pronged qualification for the CE was the PDP response for a professional designation with “meaning and substance” that spoke to the Canadian evaluation community and experience. The use of competencies in the application and review process was intended to provide the designation with definition, credibility, and a level of consistency. The project struggled to arrive at the proposed model and looked carefully at alternatives, some of which follow.

Where credentialing typically recognized the education and/or experience of an individual, research had shown many different approaches (Altschuld, 2005; CES, 2007a). In some cases, a credential simply recognized completion of education or training. If the CE designation was to limit itself to an education qualification, it would be awarded to those with a degree in any discipline, saying nothing about the individual’s knowledge of evaluation. The CES offers an introductory training program on evaluation—their Essential Skills Series. Aligning the CE to completion of this training was also not appropriate because it is only a four-day, high-level course and not designed to produce fully rounded practitioners.

A credential solely based on experience provided challenges as well. The CES evaluation community came to evaluation from many diverse experiences, and frequently not as a result of a planned evaluation career path (Borys et al., 2005). Two or five years in a job with the title “evaluator,” as shown in a CV or through references, did not necessarily speak to the evaluation competence of an individual. Using only a combination of experience and education, as is often the case in a credential (CES, 2007a), was also problematic. Without some type of assessment,
what was a CES credential saying if a member held a master’s degree and had 2 (or 20) years of evaluation experience in their CV?

Thus the PDP sought to build a practical designation (what works) for the Canadian evaluation community (for whom) within the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation context of Canada (under what conditions) to begin the process of defining an evaluation identity (and why). The PDP team consciously chose to straddle conventional wisdom around credentialing and certifying in their CE model. The PDP team believed the competencies, ethics, and standards were collectively a strong response to identity questions, and their inclusion in the designation was important in responding to the defined problematique.

The reader may ask why the CES did not move directly to an exam-based certification process. The answer is that the CES was not convinced the Canadian evaluation community was ready for an exam-based approach. In addition to not being mandated to develop a certification process, the PDP team understood there was room to move into designations in a more cautious and perhaps gentler approach. Although the competencies were well received in consultations, they were new and untested. In some respects, they “flew below the radar” (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014), as member consultations focused attention on the CE model and the three qualifications. There was a need to assess the application of these competencies, to see if they resonated with the community as defining features in a designation and as a professional identity.

The PDP was committed to the requirement to build a feasible designation. The costs of developing an examination and the administration behind that process far exceeded what was being considered in the CE model. And, in spite of efforts on the part of the PDP team, it was impossible to confidently estimate the level of demand for a CES professional designation. Best estimates ranged from 10% to 60% of the CES membership (Borys et al., 2005; CES, 2009), too broad a spread to be helpful.

The model for the Credentialed Evaluator therefore incorporated elements of education and experience, and saw the need for an applicant to convincingly align both of these to most competencies. Requisite skills of an evaluator, analysis and dealing with evidence, was felt to be an appropriate backdrop for this third requirement. The PDP team was mindful that their mandate included the establishment of a Credentialing Board as a means of peer assessment for the designation (CES, 2007d). The CE is defines the holder as having the experience and education to be competent—not that CES has certified the holder as competent, as might be the case in a certification (exam) process.

This quasi-portfolio-based approach to the application process was designed to give the applicants wide latitude. Many different experiences and education could contribute to acquiring the required skills and knowledge in the competencies, as was (and is) the situation in the Canadian evaluation community. At the same time, the review and decision-making process through a Credentialing Board was seen to bring a level of consistency, credibility, and quality to the designation.
CONCLUSIONS

The development of the Credentialed Evaluator designation was a significant undertaking and accomplishment for the CES. In many respects, the PDCC believed the process was as important, if not more, than the outcome of the project. “Perhaps the most critically important and energizing part of the work is not in the result (i.e., CE), but rather in the cross-country conversation and debate on evaluator identity” (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014, p. 42). The process described in this article shows the importance of leadership, inclusiveness, and consultation to the success of the professional designations project. These are three critical issues that other organizations embarking on a similar path should note.

The development of the CE highlights another important leadership dimension beyond the strength of individual leadership. The professional association took the lead in the discourse on the evaluation function, as opposed to responding. There is some debate on the extent to which the practitioner-based membership of CES is influenced by or, some may argue, led by the actions of the evaluation function within the federal government. Certainly with a significant proportion of CES members employed in or contracted by the federal government, the influence is strong. With the PDP and adoption of the CE, CES took the lead in describing its professional parameters, in defining what evaluation is and what it takes to do it.

Efforts to make the federal government “system” more intimately engaged with the designation and development process were not particularly successful nor, in hindsight, undertaken as strategically as might have been done. Information was exchanged with key stakeholders in the federal government, and in all cases there was continued interest in the development process. However, the PDP failed to more substantively engage the federal or provincial governments in a manner that would recognize the credential within the human resource systems of government. To do so would not have been an easy task. There are policies, job descriptions, salary classifications, and collective agreements that would be implicated. However, in view of the dominance of government-based work in both the supply and demand side of evaluation, this issue is important and continues to require attention.

Two of the four starting assumptions articulated by CES (2007d) can, thus far, be seen as successfully realized: (a) that sufficient impetus and justification for system development and installation exists and (b) that set-up costs and ongoing maintenance costs would not be prohibitive. With benefit of innovative implementation of the designation program (Kuji-Shikatani, 2015), a critical mass of CEs now exists and the program is financially viable. There are about 250 designated Credentialed Evaluators (as of June 2014) representing about 17% of the CES.
membership. CES annual reports show marginal positive revenue over expenses in the audited statements for 2010, 2011, and 2012. Initial budget forecasts and price-sensitivity analyses seem to have held strong in these early years of the program.

The other two starting assumptions pose continued risk for the professional designations program. First, it was assumed that “ample training and professional development exists or will exist” (CES, 2007d, p. 4). The limited availability of opportunities in evaluation education and training was an important consideration in the design of the CE qualifications and in the level of required ongoing professional development (set somewhat below that of other professional organizations). The PDP worked as co-developer of the first business case establishing the Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education (CUEE, 2008). The CUEE continues to grow and build educational programming to support the evaluation profession (Kuji-Shikatani, McDavid, Cousins, & Buchanan, 2012), and the CES is an important partner and contributor to the CUEE.

On the professional development side, the CES is perhaps on less stable footing. It has a bifurcated approach to professional development, owning and delivering some courses and purchasing or simply advertising independent offerings from private providers. It is not clear that the number or nature of offerings of professional development have increased or been made more accessible. The new professional designations program will require a more strategic and proactive effort to ensure the evaluation community across Canada has access to continuous learning opportunities.

Finally, CES (2007d, p. 4) indicated that a system of designations assumes that “an adequate foundational knowledge base for the profession exists or will exist.” In this regard, the PDP led to some progress through the development and approval of evaluation competencies and their associated descriptors. However, there is a critical need for this knowledge base to be examined, researched, updated, and managed as the living and evolving entity that it is. Perrin (2005) warns of an overreliance on credentials and the “certification of skills for yesterday.”

The CE program is a major accomplishment, and it requires ongoing management, leadership, and direction, notably in relation to the knowledge base and professional development. It is not uncommon in volunteer-based organizations that energy and momentum is successfully corralled for the purposes of innovating, but gains can be lost in day-to-day delivery and management. There is a vital need for CES to develop systemic mechanisms for regular review, validation, and updating of the key pillars of the CE and to actively support new professional development needs.

NOTE

1 The group of CES opinion leaders was led by Benoît Gauthier and included Shelley Borys, Gerald Halpern, Marthe Hurteau, John Mayne, Simon Roy, and Bob Segsworth. Communications (through e-mails) and working notes of the PDCC documented the exchange recounted here.
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