

Diverging Realities, Converging Possibilities: A Scholarly Approach to Bridging the Gap Between Fiscal Constraints and Programme Accountability

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Funding support for Canadian universities has been constrained, or in decline, for several years now and demographic trends and the overall economic outlook suggest that an environment of fiscal constraint can be anticipated into the foreseeable future. Concurrently, roles of counsellors have expanded and there is movement toward accreditation of programmes and regulation of the profession in various provinces of Canada. Graduate programmes that prepare counsellors sit between these two realities, with ever-fewer resources to direct to programme development while regimes of accountability require closer attention to student progress and programme outcomes. As scholars, counsellor-educators have the potential to bring research expertise, a critical perspective and a desire for deep understanding of developing counsellors' experiences to programme development and evaluation. This session explores how programme review and development activities might be constructed through a scholarly lens to meet the practical, pragmatic requirements of monitoring in counsellor-educator programmes in an environment of scarce resources, while simultaneously leveraging the curiosity and capacity of scholars to take up substantial questions around student development. Not the least of the considerations that must inform such research is the role of students, who are participants in these explorations, and the careful consideration of the ways in which they may be beneficiaries of these processes. Promising theories, questions and approaches to research, drawn from literature, will be presented, along with a sample research plan situated in a counsellor-education programme.

Among the ideas that hold promise for providing broad theoretical support for this approach to research around counsellor-education, we offer self-authorship theory and developmentally-effective educational practices (Baxter-Magolda, 2004; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown & Lindsay, 2009), resilience in higher education (Morales, 2008; Walker, Gleaves & Grey, 2006), the concept of liminality (Hurlock et al., 2008; Tempest & Starkey, 2004) and ethics of assessment (Aschieri, 2011) for consideration. Possible research questions range from those related to case-based explorations of the interface between personal, professional and academic development (Spurgeon, Gibbons & Cochran, 2012; Thompson, 2004) to phenomenologically-located inquiries into students' lived experiences of their programmes (Henfield, Owens & Witherspoon, 2001; Hughes & Kleist, 2005) and investigations of connections between teaching methods and students' competency attainments (McAuliffe, 2002; Schumaker, Ortiz & Brenninkmeyer, 2011). The growing community of teacher-researchers involved in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in Higher Education internationally provides ideas for small-scale studies and venues for presentation and publication. Overall, we argue that qualitatively-oriented approaches to research that are synchronised with routine data collection required for external reporting offer the best possibilities for conducting research that is sustainable in the context of constrained resources, takes up substantial questions in counsellor-education, supports programme development and is of direct benefit to students.