

SECOND EDITION

# Evaluating Practice

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**GUIDELINES FOR  
THE ACCOUNTABLE  
PROFESSIONAL**

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MARTIN BLOOM  
JOEL FISCHER  
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SOFTWARE ENCLOSED

# ▼ Evaluating Practice: Guidelines for the Accountable Professional ▲

SECOND EDITION

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## DEDICATION

To the readers of our book,  
we dedicate this dream of scientific practice:  
To be both sensitive and humane, and to be systematic and rigorous,  
at the same time, all of the time.

# ▼ Preface

I appeal to you. . . . Measure, evaluate, estimate, appraise your results, in some form, in any terms that rest on something beyond faith, assertion, and 'illustrative case.'

State your objectives and how far you have reached them . . . . Let time enough elapse so that there may be some reasonable hope of permanence in the results which you state.

The greatest value [of evaluation of practice] will be . . . an evaluation of one method against another, or one's present work with one's past and one's hope for the future. Out of such evaluations will come, I believe, better service to the client. [We will be able to deliver better services to clients] by getting attention focused on at least a fair proportion of attainable goals and by finding better means of knowing when we are off the track that we meant to follow.

There are few human service professionals who would deny the importance of the message contained in the above quotation. But how long will it take for the concept of accountability to visibly influence our thoughts, our attitudes, and our behavior? Take another look at that quotation. These remarks were made more than a half century ago by Dr. Richard Cabot (1931) in a presidential address to a helping profession. It

sometimes takes an incredibly long time before good ideas have much impact.

Today there is an increasing sense of urgency about being accountable as the government, our clients and consumers, and colleagues all point to the need to evaluate our practice and to provide evidence of the effectiveness of our work. Yet even with this increased pressure some of us in the helping professions have not yet been successful in building systematic evaluation into our practice. We believe that part of the reason for this is that the tools for such evaluations have not been widely available to professionals.

This book addresses that need. The purpose of *Evaluating Practice: Guidelines for the Accountable Professional* is to make available to students and practitioners in all of the helping professions—including social work, psychology, psychiatry, education, medicine and health, and counseling—the knowledge, skills, and specific procedures to evaluate their own practices. The primary tools for achieving this are called *single-system designs*, which are systematic ways of going about analyzing, measuring, and evaluating practice. Single-system designs involve approaches and procedures that show how evaluation

and practice can be integrated, thus offering an excellent opportunity for practitioners to demonstrate their accountability. Moreover, as we shall discuss in detail later, single-system designs provide a number of specific advantages for practice—ways that we believe will actually help you enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of your services.

We have tried to make this book as practical as possible. You can connect to the evaluation procedures in this book whatever theories or approaches to practice you ordinarily use. Each step of the evaluation process is thoroughly discussed with many examples presented from a wide variety of professions and fields of practice. We've also provided a number of references so that you can explore topics of interest in greater depth. We have tried to imagine what you need in order to use evaluation in the problems and tasks you face in everyday practice. Thus, we have included guidelines for selecting the best measures, designs, and analytic procedures. We even suggest ways by which you can introduce evaluation procedures to your clients.

We provide both the research and practice backgrounds for all of the steps in the evaluation process—measurement, design, and analysis—but the accent is on helping you to translate these ideas into concrete actions to help make your practice more effective. Indeed, the heart of this book involves three main components: *conceptualizing and measuring client and client/system targets and goals*, including those of individuals, families, groups, communities, and institutions; *designing an evaluation* that is appropriate to the task but sensitive to the needs of the client or client/system; and *analyzing the ongoing data so as to supply corrective feedback to practice* in order to more effectively achieve client and client/system goals.

While there are ways to deal with accountability other than by evaluation, and while there are ways to evaluate other than by single-system designs, we strongly suggest that monitoring and evaluating our practice using single-system designs is an important step on the way to demonstrating our accountability. Moreover, single-system de-

signs offer an extremely helpful set of methods for beginning to translate our commitment to evaluation into visible actions.

It has been just over a decade since the publication of the first edition of this book. During the interim, the field of single-system designs has exploded with new knowledge. We have tried to capture that new knowledge in this edition of the book and have done our best to try to translate it into something approximating English because the field is becoming increasingly technical, even about what is intended to be a rapid and approximate evaluation method. But we still hope this will be *useful* knowledge, not just new knowledge for the sake of new knowledge.

Most of the book has been rewritten or extensively edited. We have presented new developments in measurement and reconceptualized some old ones. We have presented some new designs and have provided a range of new case illustrations that give good examples of actual implementation of—and some problems with—single-system designs in practice.

We also have attempted to provide an integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluation. We believe that both perspectives have a place in evaluation and reject the idea that only one or the other should dominate.

This edition of the book also has made numerous additions in the area of analysis of data for single-system designs. Some of these are a little more complicated than the procedures we described in the first edition—although we also have retained most of those procedures—but we have tried to describe them in ways that will be both comprehensible and useful. In some instances, however, where the material is a little more technical, we've placed it in an Appendix at the end of the chapter, especially in Part IV. This is not to say that the material is less important, but rather that it may be useful only in particular circumstances.

Finally, one of the major additions to this book is the inclusion of two microcomputer programs, plus step-by-step guidelines for

their use throughout the book. Knowledge and use of computers is increasingly a priority in the helping professions, and we hope the inclusion of this material will be a boon to readers. One of the programs is called Business MYSTAT, and it will make calculation of some of the analytic methods less dreary and time consuming. Computer Assisted Social Services (CASS), the other program, will help you manage caseloads, administer measures, and even graph your results. These programs can help simplify the occasionally tedious part of single-system designs and enhance your efficiency overall. We believe it will be well worth your while to learn how to use these new tools for evaluation, not just for this book but for the whole of your professional career in the twenty-first century.

Some things don't change. We have pretty much kept the same format and organization of the first edition, including outlines at the start of each chapter and summaries and suggested activities at the end of each chapter, based on feedback from users that the first edition's format was "user-friendly." We have tried to keep our writing style personal and not too jargony. We hope we've succeeded in that effort. And, as in the first edition, we have maintained a focus on evaluation at all levels of service delivery—from clinical work with individuals, couples, and families, to broader-scale evaluation of programs and community intervention.

This edition is partly a result of feedback we received from a number of users of the book, based on a survey we took of those users. We have tried to make the improvements that were suggested to us and to keep the strengths that were highlighted for us by the people kind enough to provide feedback.

When all is said and done, more than anything else, we hope this book will provide some stimulating ideas for you, will challenge you to do your best in your practice efforts with clients and consumers, and will help you to meet the challenges of accountable practice in the 1990s and beyond.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No book, even one such as this that has clocked a million miles of circulating drafts courtesy of the U.S. postal service, is ever a product of the authors alone. Over the years we have been aided by many colleagues and students who contributed to this book through critical discussions with some of us, or in providing case illustrations: Thank you Gail Phillips, Deborah Siegel, Fredric Reamer, Bill Nugent, Wallace Gingerich, David Gillespie, Walter Hudson, Siri Jayaratne, William Reid, Waldo Klein, Ingrid Beremus, Helen Reinhart, J. Leydon, Richie Greene, and the Icelandic Workshop group—25 social work instructors who came together to study single-system designs with Martin Bloom in Scandinavia in 1989. Our deans provided long and continuing support: Paul Glasser (Rutgers), Nancy Humphreys (University of Connecticut), Patricia Ewalt (University of Hawaii), and Eunice Shatz (University of Tennessee). Hisae Tachi and Daphne Asato provided fantastic secretarial support as always.

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Martin Bloom  
Joel Fischer  
John G. Orme

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# ▼ I What Are You Getting Into? ▲

You've chosen to enter one of the helping professions in order to help people, not to do research. So what are you doing in a class or in an agency in which you are expected to evaluate your own practice? The brief answer is that learning how to evaluate your practice will help you to practice both more sensitively and more effectively. The long answer requires further study—the purpose of this book.

In Chapter 1, we will begin by showing the close parallels between the problem-solving steps in good practice and the basic steps in evaluation. (For example, both good practice and good evaluation begin with a clear definition of the problems and goals. We can't start helping or evaluating our clients until we know their problems and their objectives.) We will outline the ways in which monitoring client behavior can tell us when we are on—or off—target, so that we can take corrective action. We will describe briefly how to analyze overall outcome of the service program—were there significant changes in the client's problems or not? We will conclude Chapter 1 with a flow chart showing the evaluation process—measurement, design, analysis, and decision making—as parallel to similar phases in problem-solving practice.

Most of all, we are hoping that you will come to recognize that the evaluation of practice is feasible and potentially very helpful. The basic principles of evaluation and practice are remarkably simple; the applications can be adapted to almost any situation in which you might be called upon to practice—and to evaluate. By the conclusion of this book, we hope that you will be able to evaluate your own practice, provide social accountability for your profession, and enjoy the process of being a more effective and humane practitioner.



# ▼ 1 Integrating Evaluation and Practice: Introduction to Single-System Designs ▲

▼ **Purpose:** This chapter presents an introduction to single-system designs (SSDs), a method used by helping professionals to evaluate practice. In this chapter, we present the basic characteristics of single-system designs; we compare this evaluation method with the classical research methods; and we summarize the entire evaluation process with a flow chart showing which chapters will discuss which portions of the whole process. Our main purpose in this chapter is to encourage you to recognize the feasibility and the desirability of evaluating your own professional services—in whatever community setting you may work and using whatever theory guides your practice. This is a goal that we will identify as scientific practice, the combination of a sensitive and caring practitioner with the logical and empirical strengths of the applied social scientist. ▲

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS

### WHAT ARE SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS?

#### Basic Characteristics of Single-System Designs

- Specifying the Target (Problem or Objective)
- Measuring the Target by Forming Its Operational Definition
- Baseline and Intervention Phases
- Repeated Measures
- Practice Designs
- Evaluation Designs
- Analysis of the Data
- Decision Making on the Basis of Findings

### THE PARALLELS OF PRACTICE AND EVALUATION: A DOUBLE CASE ILLUSTRATION

#### Practice as Evaluation, Evaluation as Practice

### SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS AND CLASSICAL RESEARCH

### ADVANTAGES OF USING SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS IN PRACTICE



## PRACTICE ISSUES REGARDING SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS

- Single-System Designs Take Too Much Time
- Use of Single-System Designs Interferes with Practice
- Single-System Designs Are Appropriate Only for Behavior Modification
- Single-System Designs Are Too Rigid to Be Adaptable to Practice
- Single-System Designs Don't Add Anything
- Evaluation and Practice Really Can't Be Integrated by One Person

## A WALK THROUGH THE EVALUATION PROCESS

## SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF SINGLE-SYSTEM DESIGNS

If you had three wishes regarding a required research class, what would they be? Our own dream list would include the following: That whatever we learned would be immediately useful to our practice; that it be taught in everyday language rather than in incomprehensible statistical jargon, and wouldn't take forever to learn and to apply; and that it would be fun.

It was with this type of dream list in mind that this book was conceived and written, because these are the dreams with which all research students go into their research classes. But some types of research (for example, classical group designs that employ experimental and control groups or surveys, or the like) are rarely immediately useful to one's practice. Their strengths include the use of a variety of elaborate designs and complex statistical procedures that contribute to basic knowledge building in the helping professions and the social and behavioral sciences. However, classical research rarely provides practitioners with immediate feedback that can have an impact on client's problems or situations. And, alas, classical research usually isn't much fun, especially for students who want to see immediate practical applications of their courses. We do want to emphasize, however, that learning to become a critical consumer of classical research is an important skill for practitioners. It is the re-

sults of classical research that help us decide which are the most effective interventions to use.

However, the evaluation approaches that use the single-system designs discussed in this book are immediately applicable, they deal with specific client concerns, and are easily understood. They might even be considered fun. We don't guarantee the latter—you only get three wishes—but we think we can deliver on the others.

Single-system designs essentially involve continuing observations of one client-system before, during, and after some intervention. By "client-system" we mean one or more persons being assisted by a helping professional to accomplish some goal. Such goals may involve working with an individual, group, family, neighborhood, organization, or community. These goals may involve preventive, promotive, ameliorative, or rehabilitative practices. These services may be delivered by social workers; psychologists; people in nursing, medicine, or the allied health fields; or professionals in education or other helping professions. For simplicity of discussion, let it be understood that whenever we talk about some specific client-system—individual, group, or other collectivity—we will use the less clumsy term, client.

Using single-system designs, you can learn what the client's problems and potentials were before the intervention. You can identify the client's objectives and goals. From this understanding of problems and goals, you