Running head: SCHOOL COUNSLING PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation in Support of School Counseling in Italian Schools

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Abstract

School counseling is has become increasingly prominent in Italian schools because it has the potential to address several critical problems in contemporary Italian education. Evaluation of school counseling programs and services is important in order to improve them and demonstrate their impact to educational decision-makers, funders and school stakeholders. In this article, we present a six step framework for the evaluation of school counseling in Italian schools: (1) theory of action, (2) evaluation questions, (3) evaluation design and method, (4) data analysis and findings, and (5) evaluation reporting and use. The application of this framework is illustrated with examples of formative and summative school counseling evaluation scenarios.

Over the last 15 years, Italian education has been in a process of transformation in order to respond to the changing expectations of a changing society and the changing needs of a changing student population. Italy is currently experiencing ongoing, dramatic transformations in its economy and its social structures that are manifested in its schools. Carey and Bertolani (2008) have summarized critical issues in contemporary Italian education: 1) many students regard their schooling as meaningless and useless; 2) many students show a lack of engagement and motivation because they cannot exercise choice in their course of study; 3) many students who would be well served by vocational education see it as low quality and leading to menial jobs; 4) a high level of disengagement from school is evident in poor attendance, repeating grades and quitting school; 5) many student have trouble negotiating transitions between schools and between school and university; 6) schools have difficulty including all students especially international students into the academic and social life of the school; 7) widespread bullying and violence that involves both students and teachers is evident; 8) many teachers feel dispirited and emotionally worn out because they are experiencing increasing challenges and expectations without adequate help and support; and, 9) communication problems between teachers and parents rooted in a lack of trust, disrespect of teachers, low parenting skills hamper the development of alliances between teachers and parents in support of students’ education.

Traditionally, Italian school staffing has not included professionals who were trained to attend to students’ personal, social and vocational development. Problems evident in the Italian educational system, however, have led to suggestions that professional counselors be deployed in schools (Carey and Bertolani, 2008). Centers of Information and Counseling (CICs) within schools were developed and promoted by the Ministry of Education as a response to these problems (DPR 91-X-90, n 309). CICs are intended to serve as a listening center for students who are experiencing problems manifested in drug abuse, school disengagement and interpersonal maladjustment that are affecting their school success and well-being. CICs provide counseling, information, youth social events, and referral specialists in cases of severe psychological disorders. While CICs are clearly a step forward in providing needed counseling services in schools, they have been criticized as not including the full range of preventative and remedial services that are actually needed and the lack of assurance that the services are being provided by competent qualified counselors (Bertolani and Carey, 2009).

Bertolani (2014) has recently proposed an approach to school counseling in Italian schools that has many of the features of school counseling in the United States including both prevention and remediation activities and a comprehensive focus on students’ academic development; personal and social development; and, career and vocational development. Relatedly, due to the rapid development of the counseling profession in Italy as reflected in the activities of its professional associations and the increased visibility and respect for counseling as a distinct profession, a group of highly qualified professional counselors exist who are capable of providing a comprehensive array of high quality services in schools. While it is unlikely that it will become common for schools to hire counselors as full time employees as in case in the US, It has become quite common for schools to contract with counselors in private practice or with community agencies to provide counseling services in schools.

As counselors become increasingly involved in school-based work, there is an increased need for them to be engaged in the evaluation of their own work in schools. As government funded institutions, schools need evidence of effectiveness to justify the time and public money spent on school counseling services. Often, school-based counseling is funded by philanthropic organizations that also want evidence of effectiveness. Even in the absence of external demands for accountability and effectiveness, it is a good idea for counselors to engage in evaluation in order to determine how to deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

In the US program evaluation is considered an essential activity for school counselors. Forty-three out of the 50 states have licensure requirements for school counselors that are related to competency in program evaluation. The Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs requires that university-based training programs for school counselors include training in program evaluation. (Trevisan, Martin and Carey, 2017).

The rationale for evaluation in US school counseling is twofold. One, by routinely evaluating their programs and services, school counselors can obtain information that indicates how to improve their programs. Two, by evaluating their programs, school counselors demonstrate to stakeholders that their work has an important impact on students and therefore has value (Gysbers and Henderson, 1994).

The US and Italian school counseling contexts differ in many important ways. In the US, school counselors are fulltime school employees and are implementing programs in schools that consist of a range of preventative and remedial services covering a wide range of developmental domains. In Italy, school counselors are most often service providers who are contracted by schools to deliver specific services. In both the US and Italy, evaluation leads to improvement of service delivery. In the US evaluation is politically necessary to justify the full spectrum of activities that school counselors want to include in their comprehensive developmental programs and for proper student/counselor ratios that are conducive to good work. In Italy, evaluation would be helpful to document the value of expanding the services that counselors deliver in schools by establishing that these services contribute to the education and wellbeing of students, parents and teachers. Unfortunately, most school counselors in Italy have not had any formal training in evaluation methods and techniques. This article therefore provides an orientation to program evaluation to help school counselors undertake the evaluation of their work.

The Power and Potential of Evaluation

Evaluation in the US as it is known today started in the 1960s with the evaluation of large-scale curriculum projects funded by the National Science Foundation. Evaluation gained further impetus and momentum with the inception and implementation of the War on Poverty programs. These large government expenditures generated calls for accountability and evidence that taxpayer dollars were having an impact. Fast forward to today, and evaluation as a discipline and profession has grown exponentially. In 1990 there were five international evaluation organizations and by 2010 there were more than 50, (Lavelle and Donaldson, 2010). Coupled with several networks that connect many countries together through evaluation, including Italy, a very rough estimate of individuals who identify with evaluation globally is in the tens of thousands. As an academic discipline, evaluation has numerous journals dedicated specifically to the development of the field. As a profession, evaluation is clearly a growth industry, with numerous professional possibilities in regional and national governments, think tanks, universities, foundations, and private organizations. In short, evaluation has found its way into most aspects of programs, projects, and organizations, particularly those funded by government.

While growth and demand for evaluation continues to increase at a rapid rate, a widely accepted definition and approach remains allusive. Evaluation has developed a wide variety of models, methods, and theories, and tools for the practicing evaluator. On one hand, the lack of wide agreement on many aspects of evaluation is to be expected of a profession that is relatively young. On the other, it also signals that much of evaluation is dependent on context (Patton, 2014; Rog, 2015). And contexts differ with respect to the nature of the program, the stakeholders involved, how established the program is, and a host of other variables that come into play when conducting evaluation. Thus, many definitions of evaluation exist today.

For school counselors in the US, the way evaluation is thought of is connected to the idea of school counseling as a program, with a curriculum and set of services that are deployed within schools. The Comprehensive Development Guidance and Counseling program (e.g., Gysbers, 1981) that was developed and promoted in the 1970s and 1980s, and its modern version, the American School Counseling Association National Model (ASCA, 2012), both speak to the need for the school counselor to evaluate services for improvement and to show program impact. These school counseling models signal and compel evaluation practically as a tool that supports school counseling programs and conceptually, as an approach that will promote school counseling programs as a policy strategy that stakeholders and key decision makers can buy into. We think the definitional aspects of evaluation subsequently put forth, will work well in the Italian context, particularly as counseling in schools continues to take shape.

A key aspect of evaluation in the school counseling context is that evaluation is conducted by the school counselor, rather than a professional evaluator. While nothing is rigidly certain in evaluation, the idea of school counselors evaluating their individual programs strongly suggests that school counselors must have knowledge and skills in evaluation to carry out these tasks and responsibilities. Education and training in evaluation is therefore, a crucial element in the professional development of school counselors. There is an important benefit to the idea of school counselors evaluating their own programs. It deals with the construct of evaluation use. Using the evaluation results, findings, and recommendations in some way is the sin quo non of evaluation. If the evaluation isn’t used it’s clearly a waste of resources. Weiss (1988, 1998) made one of the most compelling arguments about evaluation use. Namely, program evaluation will more likely be used if those who provide programs services are intimately involved in the evaluation conceptualization, development, implementation, and data analysis. In short, program personnel must have major responsibility and ownership in the evaluation for use to occur. For school counselors, evaluation tasks and responsibilities that concern evaluation of the programs they provide services in is a key aspect of the professional expectations for school counselors in the US and we think, in Italy as well.

Evaluation Defined

For purposes of this article we are using the terms evaluation and program evaluation interchangeably. And to be clear, evaluation could refer to the evaluation of programs, policies, projects, products, and personnel. The goal of any evaluation is social betterment (Henry, & Mark, 2003). That is, the goal of an evaluation is to contribute to the change process for the improvement of social conditions or simply, to make things better, improve matters, however defined in a given context.

There are standards of educational evaluation that have direct bearing on how evaluation of school counseling programs should be approached. The *Standards* (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011) have evolved over 30 plus years so they are fairly refined. The *Standards* have been developed by a joint committee of representatives from a variety of educational disciplines and fields, including representatives from the American Counseling Association (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Thus, the educational evaluation standards address the kinds of things that will make high-quality evaluation in the context of school counseling. The definition for evaluation articulated in the *Standards* reads as follows:

The systematic investigation of the quality of programs, projects, subprograms, subprojects, and/or any of their components or elements, together or singly for purposes of decision-making, judgments, conclusions, findings, new knowledge, organizational development, and capacity building in response to the needs of identified stakeholders leading to improvement and/or accountability in the users’ programs and systems ultimately contributing to organizational or social value (Yarbrough, et al., 2011, p. xxv).

Though detailed, the definition speaks to the possible purposes of educational evaluation, that evaluation should meet the information needs of a variety of users, and that in the end, educational evaluation should contribute to making things better.

While there are a several types of evaluations that could be used in educational contexts, , there are two main types that have stood the test of time; namely formative and summative evaluation (Scriven, 1967). The purpose for each is signaled in its name. The purpose of formative evaluation is to determine whether the program has been implemented as planned, whether planned recipients of the program are being reached, what is working well, and what needs improvement. The purpose of summative evaluation is to determine impact or the effectiveness of the program. It also includes whether unintended consequences occurred, both positive and negative. Summative evaluation is also thought of being done for purposes of accountability. Robert Stake, an influential evaluation scholar provided an analogy for thinking about formative and summative evaluation and the connection between the two as he refers to the cooking of a soup at a restaurant. When the chef tastes the soup that’s formative evaluation. When a restaurant client tastes the soup, that’s summative evaluation (Scriven, 1991).

Framework for Conducting Evaluation

Given the unique components associated with school counseling programs and the expectation for evaluation of program services by school counselors, we offer a fairly straightforward framework for organizing and driving the evaluation. This framework could be used for both formative and summative evaluation. The framework includes five elements: (1) theory of action, (2) evaluation questions, (3) evaluation design and method, (4) data analysis and findings, and (5) evaluation reporting and use. Each is discussed.

*Theory of Action.* The first step in designing an evaluation is the creation of a logic model. A logic model is a graphic representation of the theory of action of the program to be evaluated. The theory of action for a program is a concise statement of the benefits expected from the program, the relationships between program activities and the expected benefits and the relationships between program resources and activities. The theory of action postulates that if resources are used to implement program activities, specific benefits will result for program participants. Programs are often designed without an explicit statement of the program’s theory of action. It is unclear how resources relate to activities and activities relate to benefits. By creating am explicit theory of action, the postulates of the program are made explicit and can be “tested” in an evaluation.

The creation of a logic model for a program is an effective approach to the identification of the program’s theory of action. There are many designs for logic models (Frechtling, 2007; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004) that vary from very simple to very complex. We have found that the following approach is a simple, yet powerful approach to logic modeling. logic models following this approach are found in Figures 1 and 2.

First, it is helpful to identify the resources that are being used to support the program. These are the inputs of the program. Inputs come in the form of: people, materials, space, staff time and training and support for program implementers.

Second it is essential to identify each of the activities of the program. Activities include all the different ways that services are provided that are expected to result in some benefits to program participants. With a counseling program, these might include services such as individual counseling, group counseling family therapy, parent consultation and prevention training. Arrows are drawn between inputs and activities. These arrows reflect the program’s “hypotheses” about what resources (program inputs) are needed to adequately deliver which services (Program Activities).

Third, it is essential to specify the expected outcomes related to each activity. Outcomes reflect the benefits for participants that are expected to result from participation in program Activities. Often there are short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes are the immediate beneficial effects of activities. These might include participants’ knowledge gains, skill development and/or changes in attitudes. Long-term outcomes reflect the ultimate benefits of program participation. They include benefits such as enhanced wellbeing, successful completion of school, and higher levels of school achievement. Usually, these long-term outcomes are the reasons that programs are funded and developed. As above, arrows are drawn between activities and short term outcomes. These arrows reflect the program’s “hypotheses” about the relationships between services and immediate benefits. Next, arrows are drawn between short term outcomes and long tern outcomes. These arrows reflect the program’s “hypotheses” about the relationships between the immediate changes in participants’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the long-term benefits expected from program participation.

The completed logic model represents a map that describes the theory of action of the program—how the investment of resources is transformed to produce desired long-term benefits for participants. As illustrated below in the two evaluation scenarios, the program’s Logic Model can be used to plan its evaluation. A formative evaluation reflects the “testing” of the hypothesized relationships between resources and activities. It asks, given the allocated resources, are the programs activities well implemented? A Summative evaluation reflects the “testing” of the hypothesized relationships between activities and outcomes. It asks, do the program’s activities result in expected short term and long-term outcomes (participant benefits).

*Evaluation Questions.* Evaluation questions (similar to research questions) focus the evaluation and suggest the kinds of data that need to be collected. The following are typical questions asked through formative evaluation.

* Was the program implemented as planned?
* Are intended program recipients receiving services as planned?
* What is working well? (as a counselor, how can I prove what works well? My opinions? In Italy many school counselors say that their interventions worked because they FELT a better classroom climate, better relationships etc. Usually the verb ‘FEEL’ is used as a proof of what works)
* What needs improvement?

To address these questions, key stakeholders such as the school principal, teachers, and parents could be asked for feedback through questionnaires or interviews. In other words, asking individuals who have a stake in services and could be in a position to know specifics about the program are the kinds of people who could be sought for feedback. Evaluation questions also address stakeholder concerns about the programs and services.

For summative evaluation, the following are standard evaluation questions.

* What is the impact of the program?
* Were near term outcomes achieved?
* What is needed to document long-term outcomes?
* Were there unintended consequences of the program, either negative or positive?

*Evaluation Design and Method.* The kinds of data collection activities associated with summative evaluation are often more technically complicated than those with formative evaluation. The most straightforward reason is that showing impact is most often done statistically. As a consequence, summative evaluation typically requires measures of the kinds of things that the program seeks to change (e.g., increased social skills among seventh grade students; increased positive attitude toward school among 10th grade students). It also requires a research design that will show before and after comparisons in some way or a comparison between groups of that did not receive services with those that did. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these designs. They include experimental and quasi-experimental designs as well as the statistical techniques required to illustrate possible changes in students or others (e.g., parents, teachers) who are recipients of specific program services for intentional reasons.

Similar to research, data analysis in evaluation focused on the kinds of strategies used to make sense of data that is collected. Qualitative data such as collected through interviews, requires analysis of trends, themes, patterns, and outliers. As mentioned statistics are used to analyze quantitative data that is collected.

*Data Analysis and Findings*. Also similar to research, the actual evaluation findings can be thought of as answers to the evaluation questions. Findings provide the basis for program change recommendations and are done so, in a transparent way. The findings are usually best organized by the evaluation question or questions specified at the beginning of this evaluation framework. Findings should be presented clearly, in a concise manner, and specifically focused on addressing the particular evaluation question.

*Evaluation Reporting and Use.* Evaluation reporting and use entail how the evaluation results and recommendations are communicated and whether and how the evaluation is acted on. Reporting the evaluation is typically conducted by developing an evaluation report. The report is submitted to the principal, school oversight board, teachers, parents, and or some other stakeholder group. The report is typically organized by the framework articulated here. It is thought of as comprehensive in that it includes all aspects of the evaluation. It usually ends with a set of recommendations for changes to the program.

The report is the one document that contains everything about the evaluation and that can referred to should questions or concerns be voiced. In this sense, a good evaluation report is essential in navigating the political complexity of doing work in schools. Attaching an executive summary that includes the highlights of the evaluation is a reasonable strategy to try and get busy professionals to read about the evaluation. In addition, consider other ways to communicate the rationale, method, and results of the evaluation, such as presentations to teachers, parents, and community members.

In the end, we recommend that professionals providing counseling services in schools think about evaluation reporting and use as ways to inform and influence key stakeholders about programs and services. Evaluation reporting and use can be thought of as a set of strategic activities to in part control the perception of programs and services among stakeholders by having collected appropriate data that addresses key stakeholder concerns about the program. And in the end, you’ll want to make sure that counseling professionals have considered the findings and recommendations and work to make changes where possible, or explain why changes were not made.

As mentioned, the framework presented here provides a straightforward means for the school counselor to organize the evaluation. It can also be thought of as a rhetorical device to frame the discussion and perception of the programs and services by stakeholders. If asked about aspects of the evaluation, the school counseling professional has a ready means to address the various aspects through the framework of the evaluation. If asked about the program itself, particular if there is some type of concern, a comprehensive, balanced evaluation can address nearly any concern voiced that is under the control of the counseling professionals providing the services. The evaluation framework signals in an organized manner, accountability and transparency in providing program services. Further support for program services could be an outcome.

Two Evaluation Scenarios

The following two scenarios reflect a Formative Evaluation and a Summative Evaluations of school-based counseling programs.

The first scenario reflects a formative evaluation. In this scenario, a counselor in private practice is hired by a school to provide counseling and consultation services to students, teachers and parents. This is the first time that these services have been delivered in the school. In this situation formative evaluation is clearly called for. The primary purposes of this evaluation would be to document that the requested services were indeed delivered, to identify problems interfering with service delivery, and to determine if the services were having desired short-term outcomes. This information would be used to improve service delivery.

*Theory of Action*. Since this situation represents a “one person program”, the counselor developed a Logic Model by him/herself. The counselor identified the desired long-term outcomes (i.e. improved student wellbeing and academic achievement) for the school counseling program and developed activities that, if implemented properly, should lead to these outcomes. The logic model for this evaluation is depicted in Figure 1.

*Evaluation Questions*. In this formative evaluation, the primary issue being investigated is whether or not the Activities of the program are being implemented properly. Specific evaluation questions would include: How many hours of consultation with parents, counseling with students and consultation with teachers were actually delivered. What problems were encountered in delivering these services? What topics/issues were covered in these sessions? Did parents, student and teachers find the sessions to be helpful? Do the parents, students and teachers have suggestions for improving services?

*Evaluation Design and Methods*. Measurement of critical aspects of service delivery should be simple and, whenever possible, integrated into the delivery of the program activities to ensure that the data is actually collected. In this Formation Evaluation Scenario, the counselor maintained a log of client contacts for each of three major activities. The log documented the length of the session, the topics addressed in the session, and notes on any logistical problem encountered scheduling or delivering the session. Parents, students and teachers needed to be asked if they found the services to be helpful, what aspects of the services were most helpful, and how services could be improved. The counselor considered several simple methods that could be used including: asking clients to complete a short questionnaire after each session, asking clients to complete a questionnaire after the activity is finished, interviewing selected clients after the activity is finished, and interviewing selected (focus) groups of clients after the activity is finished. The counselor chose to interview focus groups of parents, teachers and students who had completed sessions. The counselor developed focus group interview guides keyed to the abovementioned evaluation questions, selected 5 people from each group who were thought to be thoughtful sources of information, and conducted 3 interviews (one for each group), and summarized the answers to the evaluation questions.

*Data Analysis and Findings*. The counselor used a qualitative approach to data analysis and identified themes in the focus group discussions. The counselor determined that although there were more than 100 hours of service delivered there were many more consultation sessions with parents and teachers than counseling sessions with students. Both the parent and teacher focus groups indicated that they believed that the consultation sessions were helpful in improving their ability to work with students. There were a few helpful suggestions for improving the session. The student focus group indicted that students were reluctant to come to the counseling sessions because they feared that what they discussed would be shared with their teachers and parents. They were aware that the same counselor who was counseling students was also conducting consultations sessions with parents and teachers.

*Evaluation Reporting and Use.* The counselor reported the results of the formative evaluation to the school administration and to the people who had participated in the focus groups. The formative evaluation results were used to improve service delivery in the program. The minor suggestions of the parents and teachers were incorporated to improve consultation sessions. In addition, the counselor developed a confidentiality statement for students and enlisted the help of a colleague to conduct the student counseling sessions so that confidentiality could be assured. The school administration supported the changes in service delivery. A dramatic change in student-initiated counseling sessions was noted.

The second scenario reflects a summative evaluation. In this scenario, a counseling agency contracts with a school to provide preventative programs, teacher training and counseling and consultation services to students, teachers and parents. The contract is paid for by a donor organization that expects to know how students, teachers and parents benefitted from the services that are provided.

In this situation summative evaluation is clearly called for. However it should be noted that at an early stage of project implementation, formative evaluation should have been conducted to ensure that the program was operating optimally. Summative evaluation makes little sense unless it is already known that the program is operating well. With summative evaluation the evaluation is more complicated than with formative evaluation. Consequently, it is often helpful to work with an external evaluator. In this scenario, a donor organization funded the projected and required evidence for effectiveness. Typically, 10% of an externally funded project’s budget is devoted to evaluation activities. The counseling agency contracted with an external evaluator to help with the design and execution of the evaluation.

*Theory of Action*. The evaluator facilitated the development of the program’s logic model taking care to include both the donor’s required long term outcomes and the agency’s ideas about the activities that were necessary and sufficient to produce these outcomes. The resulting logic model for this evaluation is depicted in Figure 2. The evaluator reviewed the donor’s written description of the grant and interviewed representatives of the donor to identify the desired long term outcomes (i.e. improved student wellbeing, academic achievement and school social climate). The evaluator also led a group of agency counselors through the process of developing the rest of the logic model including the activities, the resources required for these activities, and the short term outcomes of the activities that were likely to be related to the desired long term outcomes.

*Evaluation Questions*. Summative evaluation assesses the extent to which the long and short-term outcomes were obtained. Evaluation questions would include: “What is the evidence that parents learned parenting skills; students increased in engagement in school; students showed increased empathy and social skills; and, teachers improved in their abilities to manage problematic student behavior in the classroom? What is the evidence that student improved in their wellbeing and academic achievement?

*Evaluation Design and Methods*. The external evaluator considered several possible ways to measure client change including the use of institutional records, individual interviews, group interviews, and questionnaires and rating scales. They chose to use institutional records and rating scales that had been demonstrated to be reliable and valid in previous research.

The kinds of comparisons used in this case are before and after comparisons. A measure is taken before services were provided and a measure taken after services provided. These comparisons provide a measure of change or impact that can be attributed to the program. In this case, teachers were asked to complete a self-rating scale to rate their problem-solving abilities before and after their consultation sessions. Students were asked to rate their level of engagement in school before and after their sessions. Parents were asked to rate their skill in parenting before and after their sessions. Similarly, teachers were asked to rate the students’ levels of engagement before and after sessions. Teachers also rated students’ social skills before and after sessions.

All students in the school were asked to rate their level of wellbeing and the climate of their classroom at the beginning and end of the year. The beginning and end-of-year ratings of student who participated in the program were compared to see if students who participated increased in their wellbeing and if school social climate improved.

Subsequently, each student who participated was matched with a student who did not participate based on their beginning-of-the-year self-rating of wellbeing. The two equivalent groups were then compared to each other to determine if students who participated in the program had larger changes in wellbeing than students who did not.

Similarly, the evaluation looked at the grades that students received in key courses (Italian and Math) at the beginning and end of the school year to determine if the students who participated improved and if they improved more than their classmates from the matched group that did not participate.

*Data Analysis and Findings*. The Evaluator computed the difference between individual before and after scores, sometimes referred to as gain scores, for all measures and within group (i.e. students, parents). Gain scores are found by subtracting the pre-intervention scores from the post intervention scores. The evaluator used statistical tests to determine if it was likely that observed gains were real as opposed to being attributable to random fluctuations. Teachers showed significant gains in problem solving. Parents showed significant gains in parenting skill. Teacher, parent and student self-ratings of student engagement were found to increase. Teachers’ ratings of students’ social skills showed significant gains. Students’ ratings of school social climate showed significant gains.

Students who received services should exhibit larger gains their ratings of wellbeing than the equivalent comparison group of students who did not receive services. Participating students showed gains in both Italian and Math grades that were larger than the nonparticipating students, however the gain scores of the participating students and student in the comparison group were not statistically different. The evaluation concluded that there was evidence that the program was successful in increasing student engagement, teacher problem solving, parent skills, student social skills and student wellbeing, and school social climate. However, there was no evidence that the program led to improved academic achievement as measured by grades.

*Evaluation Reporting and Use*. The evaluation results were used to account to the funding organization. The Report prepared by the evaluator indicated that there was evidence that the program was successful in producing all four desired short-term outcomes and three out of the four desired long term outcomes. It suggested that given the trend in academic achievement results, the lack of a significant finding was probably related to a lack of sensitivity of the measure (grades) and recommended using a different measure of achievement in subsequent evaluations. All components of the program seemed to be successful. The funding organization decided to provide additional funds for continuation of the program in the original school and additional funding to implement and evaluate the program in neighboring schools.

Summary and Discussion

As the practice of school-based counseling grows in Italian schools it will be increasingly important for counselors to have skills in program evaluation. Since school-based counseling is a relatively new phenomena, it will be necessary to evaluate programs in order to demonstrate its effectiveness and its contributions to the educational enterprise. It will be necessary to share evaluation results with stakeholders (school administrators, teachers, parents and students) to establish the credibility as a school-based set of services and to establish and maintain support for the work. Government and nongovernment funders of school-based counseling programs will require evaluations to demonstrate effectiveness and to document the return on their investments. Finally, the counselors themselves will need evaluations to be done in order to help them improve and fine-tune their programs to achieve maximal effectiveness.

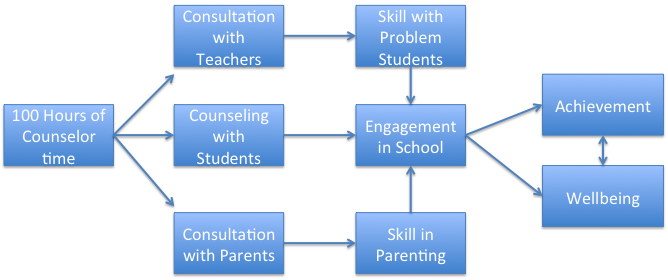
Since training in evaluation is not presently an important component in the education of counselors in Italy, counselors who wish to become proficient in program evaluation will need to do so through self-study. We intend that this article will be a good starting point for learning program evaluation. We recommend that the various Italian professional associations include program evaluation in their conferences and training workshops to provide practicing counselors with opportunities to become more proficient in program evaluation.

Understanding the differences between formative evaluation and summative evaluation and being able to develop a logic model, identify evaluation questions, develop a strong evaluation design, collect and analyze evaluation data, and develop evaluation reports and use evaluations results are essential skills whether the counselor intends to conduct evaluation himself or herself or collaborate with an external evaluator.

It is also important to recognize that evaluation is a not purely a technical matter. Adeptness in research techniques alone does not guarantee an effective evaluation. It important to recognize that evaluation is always done in a political context and under resource constraints. Conducting an evaluation also requires skills in problem solving, communication, and a political sense of how best to situate the evaluation within the political context. When thinking about these nontechnical aspects of an evaluation, it is important to ask:

* How were program stakeholders involved in the evaluation?
* Did the evaluation meet the information needs of the stakeholders?
* Was there balance and proportion in the way the evaluation was conducted?
* Was possible bias appropriately dealt with?
* If vulnerable participants (e.g., children) were included in the evaluation, how were they protected?

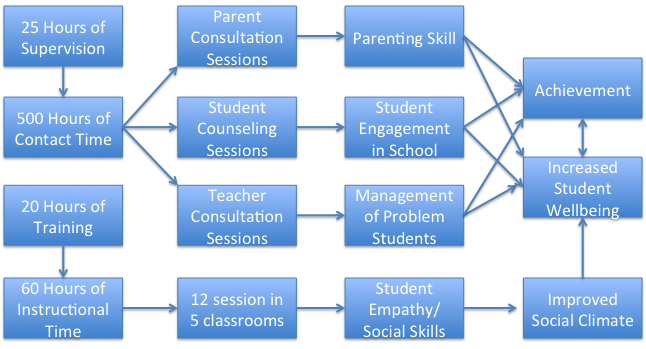
We think counselors are in a unique position to conduct quality evaluation work. The nontechnical skills required for evaluation, such as good listening and communication skills, sensitivity to the needs and concerns of program stakeholder groups, and being able to work productively with a variety of school professionals, are skills that many counselors have and that can be used strategically and effectively to carryout evaluation tasks and activities. Like most professional activities, the more one conducts evaluation the better sense they will develop about how best to navigate an evaluation politically, within the confines of resource constraints, and in a way that makes things better. We offer this paper as a means to begin to think about, develop, and carry out evaluation in a meaningful way. As argued in this paper, we think evaluation has much to offer counselors in Italy, as they continue the important work of school-based counseling in Italian schools.



INPUTS ACTIVITIES SHORT TERM LONG TERM

OUTCOMES OUTCOMES

Figure 1. Logic Model for Formative Evaluation Scenario



INPUTS ACTIVITIES SHORT TERM LONG TERM

OUTCOMES OUTCOMES

Figure 2: Logic Model for Summative Evaluation. Scenario

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