

VII *PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD*

ii. Research and Publication

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Introduction

Specialist pastoral/spiritual care practitioners and educators, whether in seminary, healthcare, counselling centre, forensic, or other settings do not do enough research and theory development. Empirical research and theory development are essential to the growth and development of any profession. Indeed, it is one of the characteristics of a legitimate profession that the profession is producing research and developing a body of knowledge that supports practice. Moreover, that research and theory development needs to be subject to peer review in order to have credibility. Finally, it is not finished until it is published in such a way that it becomes available to the profession and to those who wish to verify the credibility of the profession.

One of the problems is that there are very few pastoral/spiritual care positions which include in the position description a mandate to do research. When empirical research or theoretical development is being done by pastoral/spiritual care practitioners and educators, it is being done “around the edges” of their “real” work. More often than not, however, pastoral/spiritual care practitioners and educators leave it to persons in theological colleges or other academic settings to do research and theory development.

Although there have been some subtle shifts in recent decades, involvement in teaching and doing empirical research has not been emphasized in basic preparation for ministry/spiritual care and/or other forms of professional faith group leadership in seminaries, theological colleges, or religious/spiritual formation educational programs. In recent decades, there has been some emphasis on the value of empirical research and empirically grounded theory in advanced professional and academic degree programs.

While we credit Anton Boisen with being one of the initiators of specialized pastoral care and supervised pastoral education, we often forget that his primary interest was in what one can learn about religion and spirituality from those who are mentally ill – and he used his background as a forester to structure his exploration of his own mental illness experience and that of the patients in the hospitals where he served as chaplain.¹ He was primarily a “pastoral researcher.”

An even more serious problem is that many pastoral/spiritual care practitioners do not know how to read and assess reports of empirical research and theoretical explorations – and frequently complain when the pastoral journals have too much “academic or research content.” When pastoral journals have too much “academic or research content” they find it difficult to maintain the interest of pastoral/spiritual care practitioners and educators.² One might speculate about why this is so. However, what is needed is research on the issue!

I suggest, then, that pastoral/spiritual care educators need to teach their students, even at the basic level of pastoral/spiritual care education, basic skills in doing and assessing empirical research and in developing theory about pastoral/spiritual care practices. Moreover, since research and theory development is not finished until it is published, students (and teachers) need to know how to go about getting their work published.

Developing Theory

Developing theory is not about determining what is the “correct” theological, psychological, educational, or psychosystemic theory of the practice of pastoral/spiritual care and education. Rather, it is about exploring how theory (including theological or religious theory and spiritual/worldview frameworks) can be helpful in understanding pastoral/spiritual care, counselling, and education.

¹ This assertion is based on the author’s conversations with Carroll A. Wise, who was part of Boisen’s second group of seminary students, and on Glenn Asquith’s *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader* (Decatur: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, Inc., 1992)

² These observations are based on several years of involvement with *The Journal of Pastoral of Pastoral Care & Counseling* during which time I have had many conversations about this topic with the Managing Editor and in the Board of Managers.

Doing Research

Doing research is not about determining what is “correct practice,” although it might be about trying to determine what “good practice” is or even what “best practice” is – at least in certain circumstances. Doing research is also not just about “proving” that pastoral/spiritual care “works” – although it is important to carry out that kind of outcome research as a way of validating the work done by pastoral/spiritual care providers with persons and systems that fund healthcare and community agencies. More importantly, research in pastoral/spiritual care, counselling, and education is about exploring those functions and the human spiritual experience in order to illuminate our work.

Getting Published

The Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice & Education / Association Canadienne pour la Pratique et l'Éducation Pastorales (CAPPE/ACPEP) is one of several pastoral associations that sponsor The Journal of Pastoral Care Publications Inc. – a not-for-profit corporation registered in the state of Georgia, USA. JPCP Inc. publishes *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* and books and monographs on pastoral/spiritual care, education, and research and serves as the distributor for *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* (formerly *The Journal of Supervision & Training in Ministry*) and *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*.

These journals are “peer reviewed” – as are the books published by JPCP Inc. That is, before an article or a book manuscript is accepted for publication (or, in the case of books, sometimes for re-publication) a panel of experts reviews the article, manuscript, or book and assesses whether it makes a significant contribution to our field. Sometimes the item can be published in the format in which it has been submitted. Often, minor (sometimes major) editing is required. When the item is deemed to offer a significant contribution, the intent of the reviewers and of the editor is to ensure that it is done well.

This peer review process is followed by several other pastoral journals – primarily journals originating in North America and Europe.

Increasingly, these kinds of materials will be published online on the internet and in a format that will allow for conversation between the author and practitioners and educators from all over the world.³

Getting Started with Your Project

1. Discuss your project with peers and students.
2. Obtain feedback from others about the issue you want to research and about your methodology.
3. Formulate a clearly articulated question, with sub-questions also clearly articulated.
4. Read widely what others have written about the topic and specific question(s) you are interested in. It is highly unlikely that you are the first person to stumble across the question(s) in which you are interested, so take advantage of what others have discovered before you. Make use of Google (www.google.com) and Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com) or and other indexing services and search engines, with both broad and narrow search parameters (words, topics, ideas, maybe even your whole question), to discover what has already been written about your question(s).
5. Determine whether your question(s) require quantitative data (numbers and statistics), qualitative data (interview information from co-researchers), or historical data (from books and other forms of recorded information). Swinton and Mowat⁴ and Cresswell⁵ are particularly helpful for doing this discernment. Three sub-modules (Power Point presentations in PDF format) have been provided to get you started on your discernment. Click on the sub-module title to access it. Use your “Back Button” to return to this page.

QuantQualComparison.pdf – a comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies

QuantitativePastoralResearchMethodology.pdf – an overview of the various forms of Qualitative Research Methodology

³ For example, *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* is now published online at <http://journals.sfu.ca/jpcp> and *Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling* is online at http://www.ekir.de/sipcc/index_english.htm.

⁴ Swinton, John and Harriet Mowat. (2006) *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London, UK: SCM Press.

⁵ Cresswell, John W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd edition). Los Angeles/Delhi: Sage Publications.

QualitativePastoralResearchMethodology.pdf – an overview of the basics of
Qualitative Research

6. Determine the particular methodology that will help you to find an answer to your question(s) – e.g. a correlational study, a narrative inquiry, exploration of the archives of a person who has made a contribution to our field – to name just a few possibilities.
7. Make yourself an “expert” in that methodology by broad and deep reading of the methodology texts (see the Bibliography provided herewith) – i.e. make certain that you understand the general principles of inquiry and research methodology and also the specific methodology which you plan to use. When your project report (article/book) gives evidence that you are well versed in the methods of Inquiry, Evaluation, and the Search for Knowledge, it will be regarded as credible by the discerning reader.
8. Write out what you plan to do in as thorough a manner as possible. A sample Proposal format has been provided.
9. Submit your plan to the appropriate ethics review panel. Any research that has the potential to impact on the lives of people involved in the study should be reviewed by an independent and objective review panel. These are usually already in place in a university/college or a hospital setting. In other settings, they can be set up on an ad hoc or standing basis.
10. Once your plan is ready to implement, DO IT.
11. Don’t be in a big hurry about getting from data gathering to writing the report. Assemble your data. Think about it. Worry about it. Love it. Hate it. Organize it. Talk with others about it. Begin to write about it – and also to expand and refine your literature review – because now you will know what is relevant and what is not.
12. When you have a first draft ready, let your most enthusiastic supporter and your harshest critic read it.
13. Re-read and revise. Consult with your critics. Five to ten revisions may be necessary to make your report or book publishable. And when you submit it, the peer reviewers or the editor might ask for further revisions. In this process, commit

yourself fiercely to what you are discovering, but also be open to feedback and to the input of others.

Getting the Report about Your Project Published

1. Think about which journal or publishing house might want to publish your work, and make certain that you know how to write your piece in a way that will be acceptable to that publisher. (Most journals and publishers provide a “style sheet” which you can use for guidance.)
2. Once you are satisfied that your work is in a publishable state, submit it following the directions of the publisher you have selected. **DO NOT SUBMIT A PROJECT TO MORE THAN ONE POTENTIAL PUBLISHER AT A TIME.** Submission to several publishers at one time is unethical.
3. When you receive revision requests from the editor, take them seriously and be willing to let them inform your own thinking about your question(s) and the data you have gathered. Sometimes that is difficult because of your investment in what you have written – but try to let go of that.
4. Re-submit.
5. Sometimes the editor will suggest that you submit to another journal or publishing house. Receive that advice with appreciation. The editor is giving you the benefit of their experience – and it could very well lead to your work getting published in the most appropriate place. And remember that editors and peer reviewers do what they do because they believe that generating knowledge and deepening understanding is a community function.
6. Submit your work to the new journal or publishing house.

Postscript: Sometimes authors decide that it is quickest, easiest, and least painful way to get their work into print is to self-publish or to publish in a popular journal rather than a peer-reviewed journal. Certainly, there are many ways to self-publish and many popular journals. **Resist this temptation.** Taking this route deprives your work of the critical eye (and affirmation) of your peers. Your work will be a much better contribution if it goes through the process of review by a skilled editor and scholarly peers. Further,

your work may not receive the attention of the field because it is not peer-reviewed or published by a reputable publisher. The final ignominy is that your peers may not be able to find it anywhere!

SAMPLE RESEARCH PROPOSAL OUTLINE ⁶

1. *The Issue to be Researched and its Context*

- a) State concisely the issue which you wish to research a single-sentence question.
- b) List the subsidiary questions that are embedded in your research question. These additional questions should open up the primary research question by elaborating specific avenues of inquiry.
- c) Identify the experiences, images, ideas, theories, etc. that are sensitizing you to the question.
- d) Outline the scope and limitations of your proposed study.
- e) Define the key terms/concepts in your research question.
- f) List the assumptions you are making in order to carry out this research – e.g. the accessibility of co-researchers and/or data and how you will access co-researchers and/or data, etc.
- g) Describe how this study relates to ministry/spiritual care, generally, and to your own practice. Indicate how the research question arises in ministry/spiritual care practice and how anticipated outcomes might impact the practice of ministry/spiritual care.

2. *Theological/Spiritual Care Themes*

Identify and describe briefly the theological/spiritual care issues which you believe your Project will explore. Identify any particular themes that are central to the field of ministry/spiritual care in which your Project is located and/or central to your denominational/faith group perspectives. **Specify the relationship of this Project to your theology of ministry/spiritual caregiving.**

3. *The Researcher's Readiness*

- a) Indicate what has prepared you for conducting this study.
- b) Give a preliminary, precise summary of scholarly opinion in regard to the research question (initial critical literature review) in which you demonstrate sufficient familiarity with relevant literature to warrant your statement of the issue in section 1 above.
- d) State any ethical issues that relate to the carrying out of your study. Address at least the following concerns in respect of any participants of your study.
 - (i) Their participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw without prejudice.
 - (ii) Benefits to the participants outweigh the costs to them.
 - (iii) Confidentiality is their right, should they wish to exercise it.

Universities and healthcare facilities have Research Ethics Policies. See the following examples. <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/historyandclassics/ResearchEthics.cfm> and http://www.ualberta.ca/ST.STEPHENS/resources/documents/ethics_review.html

4. *Methodology*

Describe the research methodology options that best fit your research and indicate why that is so. Describe your specific research plan. The plan must clearly address the issues of data gathering and analysis.

5. *Validation*

- a) Describe how you will build trustworthiness into your study at each stage of the research.
- b) Describe how you will take into account your own biases.
- c) Describe how you will position yourself as researcher in the study.

6. *Proposed Schedule for Completion*

8. *Bibliography and Other Resources*

⁶ Adapted from the D.Min. Program Manual of St. Stephen's College, Edmonton.

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- Rodrigues, Bartholomew, Deanna Rodrigues, and D. Lynn Casey. (2000) ***Spiritual Needs & Chaplaincy Services: A National Empirical Study on Chaplaincy Encounters in Health Care Services***. Providence Health.
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number of samples of previously published research reports which inform hospital chaplains, congregational pastors, hospital personnel, and theological students about ways in which knowledge gained from carefully designed research can enhance their project of care. The quantitative research reports in this volume explore topics such as the role of spirituality in terminally ill hospitalized patients, the demonstrated helpfulness of prayer in health crises, the impact of hope among women with breast cancer, the role and impact of chaplaincy services in general hospitals, and several other topics in which the relationships between spirituality and health care is explored.]

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Cresswell, John W. (2009) ***Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*** (3rd edition). Los Angeles/Delhi: Sage Publications. [An excellent overview text, with lots of detailed how-to-think-about-it and how-to-do-it resources]

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