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# Obituary

## Remembering Laura N. Rice

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It was only many months after her death that we learned from Irene Elkin that Laura Rice passed away on July 18th 2004 at the Mayflower Place Nursing Center, West Yarmouth, Massachusetts, USA.

Laura Rice received her PhD in psychology from the University of Chicago in 1955. After teaching and directing the Counseling Center there for several years, she came to York University in 1970, where she founded the Counselling Psychology Doctoral programme. She was greatly respected and liked by her students and colleagues. She retired in 1986 but continued to work at York on developing an experiential approach to therapy until she left around 1993. Laura started with Carl Rogers' group in Chicago and as well as being a wonderful teacher of the client-centered approach to therapy was first and foremost a psychotherapy process researcher. She was a true investigator and a remarkably innovative contributor to the field of psychotherapy research. She believed deeply in the importance of observation of what actually occurs in therapy and of categorizing behavior on the basis of its observable characteristics, rather than grouping behavior assumed to be similar conceptually. In an era when the hypothetico-deductive method dominated psychology, she championed the development of coding categories based on observation and methods to locate meaningful clusters of process into meaningful categories, in order to generate hypotheses based on those observations

By example she imbued in her students the value of the close observation of process. Her most highly original contribution was the development of a process-rating measure that

rated Client Vocal Quality. While not denying the importance of meaning, she believed that the style and manner of client processing was more important than the content of what they said. This work was done before she came to York, but led to her specifying a common in-session problem, in which clients were puzzled about their reaction to a particular situation, which she called a problematic reaction. She postulated that the affective reaction stemmed from the activation of cognitive/affective schemes relevant to recurring classes of situations in which clients find themselves functioning in unsatisfying ways. This prefigured the advent of cognitive therapy.

In this work she developed a description of the in-session marker of problematic reactions and an effective means of intervention involving evocative responding. This expanded the view of empathy from understanding alone to include the major additional functions of evocation and exploration. This set the template for the development of a new method to both psychotherapy research and to treatment — an events-based approach. This events-based approach blossomed into a task analytic study of the information processing involved in the resolution of affective tasks in therapy and ultimately into the Process Experiential approach to therapy. Her research efforts truly led to improvements in therapy and ultimately to a marker-guided and process-guiding approach to treatment.

Laura's work has had a major impact on the directions of psychotherapy process research, establishing that studying what clients and therapists actually do in therapy is of major significance.

Perhaps Laura's greatest contribution was her mentoring and stimulation of a generation of psychotherapy process researchers. This led to a change in the intellectual climate of the field of psychotherapy research, culminating in the recognition of the importance of process research.

Following Carl Rogers' example, she engaged in intensive listening to clients and tapes of psychotherapy, leading her to identify important ingredients in successful psychotherapy. This journey led to the construction of well-grounded and detailed *micro-theories* of different routes to therapeutic change much more differentiated than Rogers' general process description of change. In the 1980s Rogers recognized her as the major contributor to research on Client-Centered Therapy.

At a more personal level, I found Laura to be a private person who came alive when she was doing therapy. She was an incredible listener and highly respectful of others. She embodied the client-centered conditions as both a therapist and as an academic and research supervisor. Her intellectual acuity, creativity and real curiosity were inspiring. Most of all, by conveying unconditional confidence in my potential and abilities as a therapist and as a research investigator, and by encouraging and giving me the freedom to explore my own research ideas and theoretical questions, she allowed me to develop faith in my own understanding and ideas. This was her invaluable gift to me. She similarly empowered and inspired many of her students, who remain forever grateful.