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An Analytical Overview: Child and Youth Care Competencies

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Jason Dennison is currently at Sheridan College.

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Abstract

In the Child and Youth Care (CYC) field, it is important to be aware, understanding, and involved with the domains outlined by the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice; that being, Professionalism, Cultural and Human Diversity, Relationship and Communication, Developmental Practice Methods, and Applied Human Development (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 9). By being aware, understanding, and involved in each domain of competencies, practitioners begin to understand themselves and others. Competencies help to develop the practitioner's knowledge, contexts of practice, context of self, relationships, the milieu, organizational system, and culture (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, pp. 26-29). Ultimately, this helps to create a curriculum that facilitates learning, for both the practitioner and the young person(s) inside and outside the workplace (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 29). Furthermore, as the 298 competencies are re-evaluated and developed over time, through the on-going process of being active in the CYC field, the practitioner will become more successful in their milieu. This paper aims to create an awareness of the importance of engaging in competencies outlined by the Association of Child and Youth Practice. It is important to note this paper is subjective in nature and follows research that could be argued as outdated or of westernized culture. Moreover, due to the lack of diversity in research, that being, quality over quantity, it could be argued that not all aspects of practitioner's competencies are outlined. To further understand this paper, families refer to caregivers, not necessarily being blood-related, of young persons that are within the primary environment. Young persons in this paper refers to children and youth, and is used in place of "client", due to client indicating there is power over them.

Keywords: young person(s), competencies, practitioner(s), child and youth care

Child and Youth Care Competencies Analysis

Professionalism

The professionalism domain involves flexibility, self-directedness, and a high degree of initiative (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 10). Practitioners need to be reliable, as well as function effectively in both individual and group settings (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 10). Practitioners who are professional understand the ethics in the CYC field and how they function. They use this to guide their practice and effectively advocate for both youth and their families, as well as the profession itself. Professional practitioners engage in constant personal development and care for themselves when needed; examples include, going to therapy or debriefing with team members (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 10).

Proficiency in the Professionalism domain will develop over time as you gain more experience in the field. However, it is important to start developing this competency early on in your career, as it will help with the awareness of the profession and laws/regulations, develop healthy behavior and attitudes, develop self-care, and understand ethics and advocacy. In turn, this will benefit both the milieu and individuals (practitioner and young person). Furthermore, professionalism in the milieu will help improve behaviors of the practitioner, young person, and the environment (people around the young persons) by changing the dynamic between how they work together, specifically focusing on a strength-based approach. Professionalism can be seen through the therapeutic milieu by developing plans of action, interventions, using developmental theories, and maintaining relationships with both children, their families, and colleagues. One of the biggest things that helps practitioners be professional in the therapeutic milieu is

understanding ethics. Ethics affect the way practitioners operate and can make them successful in their field, if they have a positive understanding of ethics.

Cultural and Human Diversity

Cultural and Human diversity as a domain involves actively promoting respect to both the culture and diversity of the young person(s) (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 12). As the practitioner engages in self-understanding and evaluates information regarding the competencies, they can develop practice methods that form respectful and effective relationships with young person(s) (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010, p. 12). Practitioner's need to be aware of their own beliefs, values, and ignorance to take a step back, when needed, to better understand the young person(s). This will help them to be proactive and advocate for the young person when injustices occur. Being aware of the Cultural and Human Diversity competencies includes the foundational knowledge and understanding of the 8 major groups; these groups include age, class, race, ethnicity, levels of ability, language, spiritual belief systems, educational achievement, and gender differences.

Cultural and ideological factors are included in the therapeutic milieu. These factors are required to be positive and non-oppressive in order to create a safe and encouraging environment for children, youth and their families, which promotes change. Values and beliefs also play a role in the Cultural and Human Diversity domain, as they affect the way you see things and how you operate or handle individual situations. For example, a practitioner that has different values and beliefs and openly shows and/or imposes them on the child who comes to see them, would be breaking both the Professionalism and Cultural and Human Diversity domains of competencies; the child may feel judged or like they don't belong. It should be noted that no two children can be worked with in the same way. By understanding that each child is an individual and unique in

their own way, specifically their strengths and challenges, the practitioner will be more successful in their milieu.

Relationship and Communication

Relationship and Communication skills are an essential competency for child and youth care workers to possess. Communication helps form empathetic relationships with a positive regard for the young person(s) (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 17). It is this trustful relationship that is formed between the practitioner and young persons that promotes therapeutic change. Without communication skills, it would be impossible to form a meaningful relationship with children, youth, and their families. Effective relationship and communication skills are also important when working in a team environment. This includes, but not limited to, group programs, colleagues, and communities (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 17).

It is important for practitioners to have proficiency in both written and oral skills. While it is important to be objective, clear, and respectful when writing reports and cases notes, practitioners also need a variety of verbal and nonverbal skills. Specifically, the ones outlined in Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen (2020), which include use of silence, active listening, empathy, awareness, avoidance, questioning skills, paraphrasing, and summarization (p. 17). Child and Youth Care workers spend most of their time caring for the children and youth they work with. They are present for all the experiences the child goes through. Therefore, they need the Relationship and Communication competencies in order to de-escalate crisis or for when a child experiences real life events, whether they grow or regress from them (VanderVen, 2020, para. 2). By building on the child's strengths and abilities through a developed model of social competence, both the child and practitioner will be successful (Anglin, 2001, para. 5). This model of social competence can be developed only when the practitioner understands the

knowledge, skills, and elements of themselves (Anglin, 2001, para. 7). Care is the most important aspect of building a relationship with children, youth, and their families (Krueger, 2000, para. 12). By showing that you care for the children, youth, and families you are working with, they are more inclined to be successful in the implemented individualized program (Krueger, 2000, para. 12). In Weisman (2010), children were asked to identify qualities that make a successful child and youth care worker; these qualities were categorized into 5 characteristics: personality, attitude, behavior, use of self, and ownership (para. 16). For the purposes of this paper, only some characteristics will be listed. That being, one from each category (in the order above), including genuineness, interest, trust, listening, and accountability (Weisman, 2010, para. 16). Trust is the main theme in these articles, which shows that relationship reluctant children need a strong role model they can trust. Another common theme is genuineness. By possessing both trust and genuineness, the practitioner will be able to form successful relationships.

Developmental Practice Methods

By understanding the Developmental Practice Methods competencies, and developmental milestones, the practitioner will be able to meet the child where they are developmentally, and help them reach their appropriate needs to be successful. It is through the environment that the CYC builds and re-evaluates over time, specifically, how the environment influences a young person's development (in an appropriate manner), that therapeutic relationships occur. Environment includes all aspects affecting the children, youth and families lives, such as "Genuine Relationships, Health and Safety, Intervention Planning, Environmental Design and Maintenance, Program Planning and Activity Programming, Activities of Daily Living, Group

Work, Counseling, Behavioral Guidance, Family (Caregiver) Engagement, Community Engagement” (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 20).

Proficient practitioners understand that it is not through programs that young person’s change, but through the relationship between the young person’s and practitioner. By separating the young person from their behavior, the practitioner will be more proficient in helping the young person(s). However, they will not necessarily be accepting the behavior, but trying to understand the complex issue, while being non-judgmental. Practitioners need to set clear boundaries and ethical regulations while forming relationships. To achieve proficiency in this domain, practitioners need to understand the reasons youth commit crimes, be able to apply meaningful consequences, and help to promote rehabilitation and reintegration into the community (Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick [PLEIS-NB], 2005, p.5). In addition, practitioners must be aware of laws and regulations affecting young persons, such as the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), and be able to advocate for them.

Applied Human Development

Practitioners need an understanding of the Applied Human Development domain in order to promote appropriate development, based on their mental age, using a developmental-ecological perspective (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 15). They need to understand that children, youth, and their families are teachable, and meet them where they are. Practitioners will learn this competency over time using their foundational knowledge, experiences, and self-awareness together, to achieve effective programs and services for children, youth, and families (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 15). Foundational knowledge for this competency includes, life span, cognitive, social-emotional, physiological, psycho-sexual, family, and

spiritual development, as well as, systems and dynamics, and exceptionality in development (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2020, p. 15).

By understanding the competencies in the Applied Human Development domain, practitioners will be able to create individualized plans that promote positive growth in children, youth, and their families. One of the best theories for child development care is the Maslow hierarchy of needs, which encompasses many aspects of what a person needs in order to be successful (Gannon, 1999, para. 3). For example, once the physical and emotional needs are met, there is no need to focus on those aspects as much as the next stage. One of the more notable examples from the readings is that institutionalized care that often focuses on safety needs, such as cleanliness, with little regard for other needs, often leads to low self-esteem (Gannon, 1999, para. 3). It is important to understand that in the CYC field, majority of the children and youth lack a strong role model (Gannon, 1999, para. 6). By understanding the competencies in the Applied Human Development domain, practitioners will be able to pick up elements of building relationships, empathetic approaches, physical and privacy needs of a young person(s), differences in temperament, developmental rhythms, predict and manage a young person's emotional response, and be a dependable adult in the young person's lives (Krueger, 2000, para. 12).

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