

## ASSESSMENT OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKER TRAINER COMPETENCIES

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**ABSTRACT:** An overview of the Trainer Assessment and Development of Competence Model and Inventory is presented. The model involves assessment of competence in the areas of child and youth care and training. The model and inventory can be used as a tool in the development of competent child and youth care worker trainers.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been dramatic growth and transformation in the area of training for child and youth care workers. Several examples of these changes include:

1. The area of training (e.g. agency sponsored) has grown more than education (e.g. academic programs).
2. An increase in the scope of clientele for caregiving personnel (e.g. a greater emphasis on the family and a life span perspective).
3. An increase in distance models and alternative delivery systems to increase availability.
4. An increase in the variety of sponsors of training (e.g. the advent of the private training consultant).
5. A growing infusion and exchange in international training and education activities (VanderVen, 1990).

One crucial area which has been given little attention is the development of trainers. Although the importance of assessment of child and youth care worker competence and professional development has been emphasized, models for trainer competence and development have not evolved (Bayduss & Toscano, 1979; Harrington and Honda, 1986; Maier, 1979; Peters & Madle, 1991; Pettygrove, 1981; Schinke & Schilling, 1980; VanderVen, 1979). In order to promote competent child and youth care practice through training, the development of competent trainers must also be cultivated.

The intent of this article is to introduce a model of child and youth care trainer assessment and development. A basic assumption of the model is that the most effective child and youth care worker trainers have a high level

of competence in two sets of knowledge, attitude, and skill: (1) general/core child and youth care competencies and (2) general/core trainer competencies. Assessment of competence in these two areas can promote the development of existing and potential trainers in the field of child and youth care work.

A review of basic elements of a competency-based approach to assessment will be followed by a description of the Trainer Assessment and Development model. Strategies for worker development are discussed throughout the article. Specific trainer competencies and a rating criteria are also provided for potential utilization for trainer assessment. Finally, applications and limitations of the Trainer Assessment and Development Model are addressed.

### **Assessment of Competence**

A competency-based approach to assessment emphasizes the categorization of competence along two dimensions: (1) the types or areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively perform the job, and (2) the level of competence, which is usually conveyed in some format from high to low or none.

### **Types/Areas of Competence**

Wide ranging child and youth care worker job responsibilities and activities necessitate a variety of child and youth care worker competencies. Various sources have identified many of these essential knowledges, skills and attitudes, (Busch-Rossnagel and Worman, 1985; Child Care Workers' Association of Alberta, et. al., 1990; Harrington and Honda, 1986; Maier, 1979; Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1978; Rycus & Hughes, 1994). Perhaps the most comprehensive effort and product is conveyed in the Principles and Guidelines for Child Care Personnel Preparation (1982) (currently being revised).

How broad or specific the competency should be stated is perhaps an issue of debate and may depend upon the function of its utilization. Rycus and Hughes (1994) in their discussion of the concept of accredited and discredited competencies, state that the development of competencies will always be a compromise between the need for a comprehensive and detailed delineation of job-related knowledge and skills and the need to limit the listing to a practical, usable size.

### **Levels of Competence**

The level of competence is another dimension to consider in the trainer needs assessment process. For example, the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program Individual Training Needs Assessment (ITNA) for caseworkers uses a Likert type interval scale ranging from "Exceptional" to "Cannot

Do.” The Trainer Assessment and Development of Competence model, which incorporates elements from William Howell’s model, contains five sequential levels of competence (Pike, 1989). Intervention suggestions are indicated at each level (Figure 1). The levels include:

- Level one – Unconscious Incompetence.
- Level two – Conscious Incompetence.
- Level three – Conscious Competence.
- Level four – Unconscious Competence.
- Level five – Conscious Unconscious Competence.

Figure 1. Levels of Competence

Unconscious Incompetence	Conscious Incompetence	Conscious Competence	Unconscious Competence	Conscious Unconscious Competence
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase awareness and motivation.</li> <li>2. Provide information on necessary competencies.</li> <li>3. Observe Competent workers.</li> <li>4. Monitor</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teach knowledge and skills</li> <li>2. Provide training and support.</li> <li>3. Direct to those who can help.</li> <li>4. Develop a learning contract</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide opportunities to practice</li> <li>2. Provide feedback, coaching, and support to overcome "Results Dip."</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reinforce effective work</li> <li>2. Use as role models for others to shadow.</li> <li>3. re-set career goals (More Challenges).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Place in educational leadership role.</li> <li>2. Involve as a training instructor</li> <li>3. Involve as a training instructor.</li> <li>4. Promote to supervisor</li> <li>5. Have worker write ideas (Publish professionally).</li> <li>6. Stay connected to practice.</li> </ol>

**Level one (Unconscious Incompetence)**

This level refers to workers who “don’t know what they don’t know.” An example is a new worker who has much to learn but is still unaware of the scope of the job. These workers need to be monitored closely so that they do not inadvertently interfere with program or client progress. A goal is to move them to the next level of Conscious Incompetence by increasing

awareness and perhaps motivation to learn. Having them observe and shadow competent workers can help them to become aware of their limitations and the need to develop competence in specific, previously unaware areas. Providing information on essential competencies may also increase awareness of the complexity of child and youth care work or training.

### **Level two (Conscious Incompetence)**

Workers in this level would still not be identified as competent, but they are aware of the importance of increasing competence in the identified areas. The motivation to learn from on-the-job instruction, educational supervision, and formal training is present. These workers are appropriately identified as in need of training (or some other form of instruction). Intervention involves teaching knowledge and skill in order to move toward a competent level. Developing a learning contract between the worker and supervisor is appropriate at this stage. The learning contract may contain a variety of strategies for learning. The supervisor or trainer should not assume all of the responsibility for the knowledge and skill instruction. There are often many sources of information within the work setting. A supervisor or trainer may refer a worker to other experts or sources of information such as books and videos.

### **Level three (Conscious Competence)**

At this level, workers may for the most part be able to perform competently with the assistance of another competent worker. Or, they may be able to utilize the knowledge and perform the skill but not at a level where it occurs "automatically." They may still have to think about it (maintaining certain key information in short-term memory) and may rely on cues from another or other cues such as notes from training or supervision. Performance may be described as not being fluid or not automatic.

Since our short-term memory can only contain a limited amount of information (seven, plus or minus two chunks is usually considered the limit), it is extremely helpful to learn certain skills to the level of automaticity (Ormrod, 1990). When skills are learned to automaticity, conscious thinking can be directed to other aspects of the job. This is one reason why experienced workers often perceive the same situation differently from new workers. The experienced workers can attend to different information. The subtleties of interaction can be more easily recognized when attention is not diverted to beginning levels of information necessary to perform a skill.

It is important to provide opportunities to practice newly learned skills. Support is also needed to overcome a results dip, which sometimes occurs when learning a new skill. Coaching has been found to be a helpful strategy for dealing with this problem (Rackham, 1979).

### **Level four (Unconscious Competence)**

In this stage, a competency is learned to the level where it can be performed automatically. Just as we can drive a car with little or no conscious effort, many competencies can be learned to this level. For example, many child and youth care workers use reflective listening so comfortably that they are not aware that they are using the skill. However, just as when a car brakes suddenly before us on the highway, there are times when we must focus our conscious attention on what was previously automatically learned. We must be able to determine when a situation deserves our awareness, and attention, as well as a possibly different way of performing.

Child and youth care work is filled with too much uncertainty for any worker to master all situations at the level of automaticity. For example, a worker's casual use of reflective listening may need to lead to more direct questioning when a youngster begins to talk about suicide. The worker still needs to "reflect-in-action" when a situation differs in a way that the worker may not have predicted, or when previously learned successful strategies fail to work (Schon, 1983). Otherwise, the client may be blamed for lack of progress when "tried and true" strategies fail to work.

At this level, effective work must still be reinforced. Reflection-on-action should also be encouraged in supervision, training and other learning opportunities. The worker may want to try out new roles and responsibilities such as a model for other workers to observe and shadow. This may help to move the worker toward the next level where not only can the worker perform the job competently, the worker can also conceptualize and articulate what (s)he does so well (reflection-on-action). However, workers in level four are often prematurely promoted into supervision or training. Promotion in this stage may not be indicated until one is able to conceptualize and communicate competent performance to others. This may be why so many supervisors under-emphasize their educational function. Their approach to supervision may emphasize more of a "telling them what to do" or doing it themselves rather than teaching a worker how to do it and why. Movement toward the next level may be necessary before successful performance as a trainer or as an educational supervisor is possible.

### **Level five (Conscious Unconscious Competence)**

This level describes workers who can not only perform at a proficient level, but are also able to conceptualize and articulate what it is that they can do so well. These workers may be described as "reflective practitioners" who can also communicate effective practice principles, strategies, and techniques to others.

Workers at this level should be encouraged to convey their understanding of child and youth care practice in a variety of ways including: coaching, training, supervision of other workers, agency newsletters, and profes-

sional publication. These workers are ready to take on an educational leadership role. A worker's movement to this level is the nexus to continued trainer or educational supervisory development. The last section of this article will discuss additional strategies to promote attainment of this competency level.

**Trainer Assessment and Development of Competence Matrix**

As stated previously, an effective child and youth care worker trainer should be competent in both child and youth care and training. Figure 2 is a matrix of the two bases of competence, using the levels of competence model. Identification of where a trainer or potential trainer is located on the matrix can suggest developmental intervention strategies for those desiring to become or improve performance as a child and youth care worker trainer.

Figure 2.

		<b>TRAINER SKILLS/COMPETENCE</b>				
		1. Unconscious Incompetence	2. Conscious Incompetence	3. Conscious Competence	4. Unconscious Competence	5. Conscious Unconscious Competence
<b>CHILD AND YOUTH CARE SKILLS</b>	5. Conscious Unconscious Competence	(5,1) (A C&YC subject matter expert (SME). Make aware of training approaches and how workers learn	(5,2) Teach trainer skills	(5,3) Provide opportunities to train with support.	(5,3) Continue to reinforce effective work/training .	(5,5) Get trainer involved in training other trainers. Writing on training.
	4. Unconscious Competence	(4,1) Use as a role model. Help trainer to conceptualize and communicate what they do.	(4,2) Help to conceptualize and communicate what they do.	(4,3) Trainer can use structured training program to train others	(4,4) Trainer probably still needs help to conceptualize the work s/he does so well.	(4,5) Still needs help conceptualizing C&YC skills May want to hook up with (5,1).
	3. Conscious Incompetence	(3,1) Provide opportunities to practice.	(3,2) Provide opportunities to practice C&YC skills. **Not ready to train.	(3,3) Provide opportunities to practice selected C&YC areas. Team up with SME's and competent trainers.	(3,4) May train in selected areas of C&YC. Cotrain with SME's Use as a role model for the practical skills of training.	(3,4) May train selected areas of C&YC skills. May want to hook up with.
	2. Conscious Incompetence	(2,1) Provide training and experience in child and youth care work. **Should not do training.	(2,2) Provide C&YC training and experiences and supervision. ** Not ready to train.	(2,3) Provide C&YC training and experiences and supervision. Provide opportunities to present on learned skills to team.	(2,4) Provide C&YC training and experiences and supervision. May provide opportunities to train topics that don't require knowledge of C&YC.	(2,5) May train selected areas of C&YC. Co-train with (SME's). Can help SME's develop.
	1. Unconscious Incompetence	(1,1) Make aware of need to upgrade child and youth care competence. **Should not train.	(1,2) Make ware of need to upgrade child and youth care competence. ** should not train.	(1,3) Increase both C&YC and trainer knowledge. ** Not ready to train C&YC workers.	(1,4) Can model training skills. Make aware of C&YC limitations. **Not ready to tain C&YC.	(1,5) Can coordinate and teach SME's training skills. Promote awareness of C&YC skill limitations

An assumption of this model is that effective child and youth care worker trainers must at some point be at the conscious unconscious competence level of child and youth care competence. They must be able to conceptualize and articulate, as well as demonstrate, effective child and youth care practice. The most effective trainers are also at the unconscious competence (cell 5,4) or conscious unconscious competence level (cell 5,5) in trainer competence.

Sometimes trainers are hired who have a high level of training skills but limited child and youth care worker skill (cells 1,4 or 1,5). A trainer who is not aware of one's child and youth care limitations may impede worker or program progress through training. It is important for these trainers to become aware of their limitations. Although they are not ready to train child and youth care workers, they may be able to teach or model training skills for child and youth care worker subject matter experts (SMEs) who are in cells (5,1), (5,2), (5,3), (4,1) (4,2) and (4,3). Teaming up with these SMEs may also help the trainer to recognize that there is much child and youth care knowledge and skill to learn. Although the model suggests that trainers should be at the conscious unconscious competence level of child and youth care competence to be most effective, there may still be a role for others with a high level of trainer competence. A trainer in cell (3,4) or (3,5) may train selected areas of child and youth care work or may co-train with a SME. This may also assist both the trainer and the SME to increase their skills.

Exposure to child and youth care practice and/or trainer experience in some form or another is the key to movement toward cells (5,4) or (5,5) where the most effective child and youth care trainers would be identified. In order to facilitate the assessment of trainer identification on the matrix, an assessment of individual competencies of both child and youth care work and training may be attempted. An inventory for this purpose has been developed for the Education and Training Committee of the National Organization of Child Care Worker Associations, Inc.

Below is a listing of trainer competencies and a rating criteria which corresponds to the levels of competence model in a user-friendly manner. The reader is referred to the sources previously cited for information on child and youth care worker competencies.

### **Trainer Competencies**

Trainer competencies were developed from the American Society for Training and Development Competency Study (1982), the Summit County Children Services Trainer Monitoring Instrument, the Ohio Committee for Child Care Worker Training Trainer Monitoring Instrument, and input from a variety of experienced training professionals including:

- Steering Committee, Ohio Committee for Child Care Worker Training.
- Training Directors, Ohio Child Welfare Training Program and Pennsylvania Child Welfare Competency-Based Training and Certification Program.

- Trainers attending the annual International Competency-Based Child Welfare Training Conference, 1994 & 1995.
- Trainers attending the Educator and Trainer Day, International Child and Youth Care Conference, Milwaukee, 1994.
- Education and Training Committee, National Organization of Child Care Worker Associations, Inc.

### **Learner Needs and Characteristics**

1. Trainer knows adult and career development and adult learning theory.
2. Trainer knows the wide-ranging demands involved in child and youth care work.
3. Trainer can assess worker competence level and professional development.
4. Trainer can assess the level of workers' motivation and burnout.
5. Trainer can identify participant expectations as well as "learners," "vacationers," and "prisoners" in the workshop.
6. Trainer can assess workers' learning styles or preferences.
7. Trainer can differentiate between a performance problem due to a lack of knowledge and skill and a problem of execution (training problems from non-training problems).

### **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

#### **Training objectives.**

8. Trainer can set learning and application objectives to respond to individual and organizational need.
9. Trainer knows how instructional techniques are used to achieve desired training objectives.
10. Trainer can communicate workshop objectives as well as clarify unrealistic expectations.

#### **Interactive/experiential.**

11. Trainer can develop and implement role plays and guided rehearsal.
12. Trainer can develop and use structured exercises (other than role play).
13. Trainer can utilize questions effectively.

#### **Didactic.**

14. Trainer can demonstrate effective lecture presentation skills.
15. Trainer can effectively utilize stories, analogies, quotes, real life experiences, etc.

#### **Trainer tools.**

16. Trainer can effectively utilize Audio Visual equipment including Video-cassette recorder, overhead projector, and flip chart.



**Retention and transfer.**

17. Trainer can develop and utilize learning retention strategies such as the mnemonic devices, advanced organizers, logical ordering of presentation, and connecting new information to previously learned information.
18. Trainer knows key factors affecting the transfer of learning process.
19. Trainer can bring closure to the session while obtaining participant commitment to continue learning by using new ideas on the job.
20. Trainer can engage participants in an action planning process to promote transfer of learning.
21. Trainer can assess and intervene in the learning and transfer process before, during and after formal training.

**Group knowledge and skill.**

22. Trainer knows how groups function including how they form, develop, and end.
23. Trainer can enable group participant leadership, conflict management, and problem solving.
24. Trainer can prevent and manage behavior problems in the workshop setting.
25. Trainer can utilize reflective listening, summarizing, and other feedback skills.

**Professional integrity factors.**

26. Trainer knows and can train according to ethical standards for trainers (e.g. guidelines developed by the Coalition of Adult Education Organizations, 1993).
27. Trainer knows and can integrate core values and ethical standards from the child and youth care profession into the content of training (e.g. promoting culturally responsive practice and maintaining family ties).

**Organization/environment.**

28. Trainer knows how environmental factors can promote or prohibit transfer of learning (e.g. support from supervisor and co-workers, opportunity to use new learning).
29. Trainer can utilize the workshop environment to promote learning and application of learning.
30. Trainer knows specific transfer tools/application aides and other transfer of learning strategies that can be used on the job before and after training.
31. Trainer can identify an organization's goals, roles, rules, and interpersonal expectations which impact learning or the transfer of learning process.
32. Trainer can convey to key individuals within the organization the importance of intervening in the before, during, and after stages of formal training to promote change.

33. Trainer can develop plans with key organization individuals to intervene before, during, and after the training.

### **RATING CRITERIA**

A user-friendly rating criteria scale corresponding to the five levels of competence can be used to assess each competency. The trainer assessor can count the number of 1's, 2's, 3's, 4's, and 5's for both the child and youth care and trainer competencies to help locate the cell that best describes a trainer. No "magical" single score should be computed. The assessment of competencies should be used only as a guide.

- 5 = **Expert** (Able to conceptualize and teach others as well as perform at a high level of mastery)
- 4+ = **Proficient** (High level of mastery, able to model for or coach others)
- 4 = **Competent** (Sufficient mastery, able to utilize whenever appropriate)
- 3 = **Emerging Competence** (Able to utilize but not automatic)
- 2 = **Limited Competence** but aware of importance
- 1 = **Absence of knowledge or skill and/or unaware of importance**

### **Applications and Limitations of the Trainer Assessment and Development Matrix and Inventory**

As stated previously, the Trainer Assessment and Development Matrix can be utilized to promote the development of existing and potential child and youth care worker trainers. The model suggests trainer development interventions by increasing competence in the areas of training or child and youth care.

The inventory can help to identify specific areas of strength and limitation. The list of competencies on the inventory can be adapted to reflect a specialization within child and youth care, such as work with gang-involved youth, substance abusers, or sexual offenders. Questions and role plays may be derived from the list of competencies to help in the selection of child and youth care workers and trainers. A worker's ongoing training and educational supervision can be driven by their assessment of competence.

Passing along the knowledge base of child and youth care can be promoted by encouraging workers to attain the fifth level of competence (Conscious Unconscious Competence). A major challenge for the profession is to bring direct care workers to this level. Therefore, efforts to promote this progression must be emphasized. Utilizing trainers who are also at level five in both child and youth care and trainer areas of competence is one effective strategy. Other strategies to facilitate this goal may include:

1. *Providing educational supervision by supervisors functioning at level five.* Supervisors operating at this level are better able to conceptualize and articulate underlying principles of child and youth care practice.
2. *Coaching child and youth care skills to automatization.* Providing opportunities to practice newly learned skills and receiving performance feedback is essential for movement from level three to four. Once skills are learned to level four, a worker's conscious thinking can be directed to the acquisition of additional knowledge and skill or the monitoring of one's own learning.
3. *Providing opportunities for level four workers to be placed in the position of coach or role model for others to shadow.* Being "shadowed" by another worker can sometimes help to "nudge" oneself toward a better conceptualization of self-practice. This may also lead to opportunities to coach other workers. Coaching involves additional knowledge and skill in areas such as diagnosis, observation, and communication of effective and ineffective child and youth care activities.
4. *Encouraging the use of metacognitive strategies.* Enhancing worker self awareness has long been advocated. An effort to help workers "think about their thinking" should be encouraged from the start. Workers should be encouraged to both "reflect in" and "reflect on" practice. Reflecting on practice can routinely be done through regular educational supervision and team meetings. The use of personal learning logs can also be helpful. Additionally, training on personal learning style can help one understand its impact on learning/working. The purposeful application of learning from training or supervision (transfer of learning) should also regularly be encouraged. Reflection while interacting with clients requires that some skills be learned to the level of automaticity (level four) so that conscious thought can be directed toward self-reflection. It may also require some anxiety management skills to reduce interference of retrieval of information from long-term memory due to anxiety evoked in stressful situations.
5. *Agency-wide application of the concept of "learning organization."* There seem to be powerful forces which often separate the "learning" from the "doing" settings and situations. Viewing the learning and doing as part of the same process can be promoted system-wide (Beckhard, R. & Pritchard, W., 1992; Senge, 1990). Perhaps organizations, as entities, also go through the levels of competence development previously described. Organizational norms which expect individuals to strive for level five may help an organizational entity to function at that highest level.

A similar model for supervisors, based on competence in (1) child and youth care and (2) supervision and management is in the beginning stage of development. These two models can help to provide a career development focus for child and youth care workers who may be interested in supervision and management or training within the field of child and youth care.

The Trainer Assessment and Development of Competence Matrix and Inventory is still in the early stages of application. Continued application and research is necessary to validate its effectiveness as a trainer development tool.

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