

PROFESSIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH WORK PRACTICE— FIVE DOMAINS OF COMPETENCE: A FEW LESSONS LEARNED WHILE HIGHLIGHTING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

In 1992, with leadership from Mark Krueger at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, North American child and youth work (CYW) leaders established the International Leadership Coalition for Professional Child and Youth Care (ILCPYC) and created an initial action plan for professional development of the field. The development of universal credentialing standards was identified as one of six strategies to further promote the development of the profession. The development of a Code of Ethics for North American practitioners and a certification process were two objectives emphasized (ILCPYC, 1992). A second meeting of the ILCPYC with additional leaders from the field of youth development in 1999 and a third meeting in 2003 resulted in the development of a plan to build upon the completed Code of Ethics and identify and delineate CYW competencies that underlie the varied fields of practice in North America. This provided a foundation for the development of a certification program and served as a guide for other professional development activities (e.g., personnel recruitment and selection, and curriculum development). This initiative was known as the North American Certification Project (NACP).

A major undertaking of the NACP was a meta-analysis of existing competencies. Under the leadership of Martha Mattingly at the University of Pittsburgh, 87 sets of competencies from various practice sites across North America were reviewed. In 2001, the identified competencies were organized into five broad domains: (1) professionalism, (2) cultural and human diversity, (3) applied human development, (4) relationship and communication, and (5) developmental practice methods (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2002; revised 2010). An abridged version of the competency document is included in this journal issue.

In 2008, the NACP, sponsored by the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP), created the framework for a national certification process for professional CYW practitioners and established the Child and Youth Care Certification Board (CYCCB). Frank Eckles was elected as the initial president of the CYCCB. Establishment of the CYCCB was the culmination of more than 15 years of work by more than 100 dedicated CYW professionals in the U.S. and Canada and a continuing effort to unite the varied fields of CYW practice based on a common underlying knowledge base that transcends work setting. For more complete description of the certification development process see Eckles et al., (2009). For an overview and description of the major certification components and information pertaining to the validation study of the certification exam see Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish (2010) and Curry et al., (2009). This special journal issue intends to build upon these accomplishments and identify key pieces of CYW literature across practice settings that are central to each of the five competency domains. This article will attempt to further

conceptualize the CYW fields of practice as one united profession and highlight a few learning points acquired while coordinating the development of this issue.

UNDERLYING COMPETENCIES OF CHILD AND YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

Discussions with leaders across the varied fields of CYW practice have led to the recognition that a common core of knowledge, skill, and value exists across practice settings. Most established professions have developed from a common body of knowledge, skills, and values rather than the setting in which work is conducted, the age group of who receives services, or characteristics of the type of population served (e.g., mental health or child maltreatment) (Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish, 2010).

Recognizing the similarities of CYW practice across the varied fields while also valuing the diversity provides the opportunity to develop and sustain the CYW profession in unprecedented ways. With the addition of indirect practice (e.g., administration, supervision, training, research, and evaluation), the five domains provide a comprehensive taxonomy for organizing the knowledge base. When defining the profession by this common knowledge base, CYW becomes the largest human service profession (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Curry et al., 2010). This provides a greater opportunity to affect policy on a local and national (and perhaps international) level. As the broader field and emerging profession develops opportunities to promote multiple pathways into the profession and to support career development opportunities will emerge. As a united profession, we can determine the needs of the CYW workforce (common competencies and credentialing) and influence the development of higher education programs to better address these needs. In the current economic climate, higher education is significantly influenced by classes and programs that have numbers (the higher the number of students, the more tuition or revenue for the university). Similarly, a united advocacy effort can influence legislation and policies to support child and youth development. United as one profession we can influence higher education and policy development. As separate fields of practice, we will most likely continue to have limited influence.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD AND YOUTH WORK PROFESSION—A NEW LOOK AS A UNIFIED PROFESSION ACROSS VARIED PRACTICE SETTINGS

If the varied fields of CYW practice united as one profession, where would we stand relative to professional status? The etymological roots of the word profession mean to proclaim publicly—a commitment to an ideal (Pelligrino, 2002). Although there is no uniformly agreed-upon formula for status as a profession, several elements have been consistently identified, including (1) commitment to higher calling or service, (2) altruistic purpose, (3) public profession, (4) rigorous and extensive training, primarily intellectual in nature, (5) systematic body of knowledge, (6) ethical code, (7) professional culture or association, and (8) professional autonomy and

self-regulation over work recognized by society (Dunkerly, 1975; Greenwood, 1966; Lieberman, 1956). From the medical profession, Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess (2004, p. 75) propose a definition that incorporates most of these elements as follows:

Profession: An occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills. It is a vocation in which knowledge of some department of science or learning or the practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others. Its members are governed by codes of ethics and profess a commitment to competence, integrity, and morality, altruism, and the promotion of public good within their domain. These commitments form the basis of a social contract between a profession and society, which in return grants the profession a monopoly over the use of its knowledge base, the right to considerable autonomy in practice, and the privilege of self-regulation. Professions and their members are accountable to those served and to society.

So, how would a unified field of CYW practice stand in relation to this definition and the eight elements that define a profession?

Commitment to Service and Altruistic Purpose

Individual workers and organizations throughout the varied CYW practice settings attempt to promote the development of the children and youth they serve. Many intend to prevent or remediate individual and societal problems. A united CYW field would seem to clearly meet this requirement. However, well published concerns about the state of the workforce across the varied fields of practice highlight the need to improve the overall quality of the workforce to achieve these altruistic purposes. Many leaders have referred to these concerns as a workforce crisis (Alwon & Reitz, 2000; Krueger, 2007a, 2007b; Mattingly & Thomas, 2006). The quality of care varies widely from setting to setting. Some advocates for children and youth point to concerns about the increasing number of children being cared for by nonfamily members. Doek (2008, p.V) states that “there is a convincing body of research data showing that children in residential care and/or treatment—and that can be the case for various reasons—are subject to violence, including torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.”

Overall, we meet the commitment to service and altruism criteria. But we all have encountered workers who are not or are no longer committed to this purpose and we are familiar with program and system elements that unintentionally cause harm. What responsibilities do we have to promote professionalism and perhaps police the profession? Are we familiar with the existing standards of professional practice within the varied fields of CYW? What system issues do we need advocacy efforts to focus upon? How can we best mobilize the potential influence that the largest human service profession might provide to promote positive outcomes for all children and youth?

Public Profession

Professional identity confusion has presented many challenges to publicly professing who we are and what we do. Numerous job titles exist. Dennehy, Gannett, & Robbins (2006) cite a survey conducted by the Academy for Educational Development Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, that resulted in 207 different job titles reported from 350 survey out-of-school time workforce respondents when questioned about their job title.

We have sometimes attempted to define who we are by who we are not (similar to how some adolescents begin their journey towards healthy adult identity formation). By defining ourselves as not teachers (out-of-school time) or not traditional therapists (emphasizing "*The Other 23 Hours*"), but instead doing nonformal education and using daily life events to teach life skills, we have moved closer to a clearer definition of who we are.

Continuing efforts to define the essence of CYW based upon its knowledge base and methods rather than what it is not will help us to better publicly profess who it is that we are and what we do. Perhaps Garfat & Fulcher (2011, p. 16) help us to understand this best: Our work with children and youth "... represents a way of being and working in the world. It is, therefore, about how one does what they do, not a question of what one is called or where they are located." We can publicly profess our way of working with children, youth, families, schools, communities, and other life spaces and contexts in which relationships are built and development occurs.

Common Knowledge Base and Other Profession-Building Accomplishments

This special issue is one important effort to further articulate the growing CYW knowledge base. The issue is organized according to the five domain taxonomy identified by the North American Certification Project (Mattingly, Stuart, & Vandervan, 2002). This taxonomy helps to categorize both the content and the methods of the CYW knowledge base. The taxonomy also provides a common language that can transcend the CYW fields of practice.

Additional progress in defining the "how" or methodology of CYW has recently been articulated by Garfat & Fulcher (2011). They consolidated much of the CYW literature including the work of Krueger, Garfat, and others and describe 25 characteristics of a CYW approach. This article is part of a special issue of the *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* journal focusing on delineating a CYW approach in various areas (e.g., professional development and training, activity programming, intervention—addressing bullying). Developmentally, it is interesting to note that both this journal (volume 24) and volume 24 of the *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* journal (special issue 1-2) make milestone contributions to defining the "what" and "how" of professional child and youth work.

Highlighting key contributions to the knowledge base with this special issue has reaffirmed the significant knowledge building that has accumulated in the

CYW fields. This initiative has, however, brought to light the fact that many of us are unfamiliar with much of the knowledge and profession-building activities that exist across the fields. The varied fields of practice serving children and youth (e.g., early childhood, afterschool, residential treatment, and juvenile detention services) have made significant progress pertaining to implementation of successful professional development conferences (promoting a professional culture), development of codes of ethics, dissemination of knowledge through journals and other practice and scholarly publications, and development of education and training programs. Still lacking, however, are effective mechanisms of integrating these significant developments into a unified profession (the largest human service profession) that can optimize these combined resources to more effectively promote child and youth development. We currently have an invisible or ghost profession. Most practicing child and youth workers are not members of these professional associations or are even aware that these professional associations and their resources exist. There is a need to better engage workers in professional development activities that extend beyond their immediate practice areas and help connect them to the profession at large.

Education, Training, and Certification

As indicated by Eckles, Mattingly, and Stuart in this issue, substantial accomplishments have occurred in North America pertaining to education, training, and professional certification, including the accreditation of CYW higher education programs in Canada. For more information regarding the accreditation initiative see Stuart et al., (2012) in this issue. For a summary of certification efforts in the afterschool and youth development areas see Gannett, Mello, & Starr (2009). The development of the competencies for professional child and youth care practice provides a foundation for which education and training programs can build upon. Curry, Richardson, and Pallock (in press) describe how Kent State University modified its Child and Youth Development Concentration (Human Development and Family Studies major) to better align with the competencies.

Also, based upon these underlying cross-field competencies, the Child and Youth Care Certification Board developed a comprehensive professional-level certification program targeted for CYW practitioners from the varied fields of practice who provide services to children and youth in both community-based and out-of-home settings. Initial research indicates that certification is associated with higher performance on the job across practice settings. Significantly better funded assessment initiatives in other professions (e.g., social work) have yet to demonstrate the effectiveness of their certification and licensing programs (Albright & Thyer, 2010). The CYCCB certification program has the potential to promote a common professional identification with the broader field of practice. See the Eckles, et al., article within this special issue.

Even with these accomplishments in education, training, and certification, significant developments must occur before we can say that we have a systematic ap-

proach to introducing practitioners to the profession and providing ongoing professional development. We have limited information about the most basic demographic information describing the CYW workforce. It is estimated that within the U.S., the CYW workforce could be as large as 5.5 million (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Although research across the fields of CYW practice indicates that the quality of workforce is one of the most important factors determining the quality of care for children and youth, the workforce quality varies considerably from setting to setting (Burchinal, Howes, & Kuntos, 2002; Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Gable & Halliburton, 2003; Knoche, Peterson, Pope Edwards, & Jeon, 2006).

In Canada, higher education programs range from diploma-level to the doctoral-level. However, within the U.S., few programs exist that specifically prepare students for CYW. Still, many high quality CYW-related programs are widely available. These programs could be modified and built upon to provide a continuum of educational experiences to better prepare students for the field of CYW practice. Kent State University (mentioned above) provides one example of how to do this with a Human Development and Family Studies major. The competencies for professional child and youth care practice model and the CYCCB certification initiative provide a common framework for university programs and comprehensive CYW organization training programs to guide their education, training, and professional development activities. Unifying as one profession, can provide what Dana Fusco (2011, p.118) refers to as “quantitative heft” to influence higher education to help better prepare students for CYW.

Professional Autonomy and Self-Regulation

There are limitations to professional autonomy in a profession that mostly practices within organizations. However, to progress toward professional autonomy, self-regulation, and recognition by society, we must first find a way to awaken the invisible sleeping giant profession of CYW work that currently exists and more visibly advocate for best practice standards of care for children and youth.

CLOSING THOUGHTS TO OPEN THE SPECIAL ISSUE

There is no one organization that speaks for the broader field of CYW. Within CYW separate but congruent codes of ethics, competencies, and professional associations have developed. Within the U.S., the counseling profession emerged from a somewhat similar route. In 1952, four counseling-related organizations merged and eventually became the American Counseling Association. While leaders within the counseling profession recognize that progress as a profession is still needed, the counseling profession has made significant strides since uniting almost 60 years ago (e.g., licensing recognized in all 50 states in the U.S. and establishing the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs).

Recent developments such as the competency taxonomy and certification program of the CYCCB can help create a mechanism to bring together the fields of

CYW and provide a national (and perhaps North American) voice to advocate for high quality workforce standards and high quality care for children and youth.

It is our hope that this special issue on the five domains of professional child and youth work competence will make more transparent the depth of the child and youth work knowledge base and illustrate many of the commonalities that exist within the fields of CYW. Perhaps this issue will jump-start a cross-field dialogue about and movement toward a unified profession.

Invited domain editor teams were asked to select articles that best capture the spirit of each of the five competence domains: professionalism, cultural and human diversity, applied human diversity, relationship and communication, and developmental practice methods. Each team was instructed to choose these articles from three categories:

1. **Classic**—an article that has or the editors predict will be able to stand the test of time. An article that is a must read for every professional CYW practitioner.
2. **Research**—an article that contributes to the development of new knowledge to the field pertaining to the competency domain.
3. **Conceptual or practice-oriented**—an article that provides a conceptual framework for professional practice in the domain (e.g., use of an ethical assessment and decision-making process; theory of change).

Needless to say, this task made for lively discussion and debate within each domain team as well as across the domains. The final articles came from a variety of sources. The editors chose to maintain the original integrity of these articles so the reader may notice some style and formatting differences. The original publication citation is included in each of the articles.

It has been an honor to be involved with the esteemed cross-field cadre of CYW scholars who accepted the challenge to construct this very special issue which highlights key contributions to the CYW knowledge base. Let us all take advantage of their contributions to advance the far-reaching CYW field and emerging profession.

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