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A Unifying Thread for Education, Practice and Public Protection

Jackies Stokes

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COMPETENCIES
A unifying thread for education, practice and public protection

Jackie Stokes

*I*APPRECIATE THIS opportunity to participate in the ongoing discourse about professional competencies, social work regulation, and social work education. In 2012, the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR) developed an Entry-Level Competency Profile for the social work profession in response to the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), which ensured inter-provincial mobility for registered social workers. While the Entry-Level Competency profile was the culmination of a series of debates, panels, and roundtables the establishment of the competency profile by no means concluded the debate or dispelled the fears associated with a competency framework; particularly for social work educators. In this paper, I aim to continue to develop the conversation by forwarding a perspective that views entry-level competencies in social work practice as a natural extension of existing educational practices.

Regulation and Competency

In November 2012, the British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW) accepted the CCSWR Canadian Competency profile and signalled to social work educators and the social work community three initiatives: the implementation of a mandatory continuing professional development program, the removal of health authority exemptions from the act, and the implementation of an entry to practice licensure exam. All of these strategies were predicated on a continuous learning, professional, and accountable paradigm. BC was not alone in its initiative

Jackie Stokes has been a registered social worker in British Columbia (BC), and a member of the BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW) for the majority of years since graduation with a BSW in 1986. She is currently serving a second term as an elected Board member on the BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) and is teaching in the Human Services diploma program at Thompson Rivers University.

to incorporate the concept of competency into professional, regulated practice. For example, in Alberta, the Standards of Practice now articulate that "a social worker is responsible to provide competent professional services to all clients" (Alberta College of Social Workers, 2013, B.2(c)).

Professional accountability occurs through legislation in virtually all health, and indeed, in many non-health professions. Regulatory legislation ensures the general public that service providers are members of the profession they purport to be, and further serves as a primary mechanism for service users to have a reasonable expectation of competency. However, in BC, social workers in exempt agencies, such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development and School Districts, may not be educated or registered as social workers. This means that while consumers can be assured nurses are nurses, teachers are teachers, and physiotherapists are physiotherapists, the same is not true in social work. For the consumer, there is no automatic complaint process or regulatory protection from unethical, incompetent, or sub-standard social work services.

Effective September 1, 2015, the BCCSW implemented a mandatory entry to practice exam. This initiative required extensive dialogue between the College and the universities, and for some academics has re-ignited the competency framework debate. In general, the arguments against the development of social work competency frameworks are that they are reductionist, mechanistic, and erode complex judgements; furthermore, they negate the social justice aspect of social work in which government policy is examined and critiqued (Aronson & Hemingway, 2011; Campbell, 2011; Rossiter & Heron, 2011). Rebuttal arguments in favour of competency frameworks are that competency models can provide transparent blueprints for what students can expect to learn and what practitioners have a responsibility to master (Bogo, Mishna, & Regehr, 2011) and ensure the delivery of high quality social work services to the public (Birnbaum & Silver, 2011).

Universities and Social Work Curriculum

Social work programs at universities in Canada are accredited through the Canadian Association for Social Work Education / Association canadienne pour la formation en travail social (CASWE-ACFTS). This process is mostly uncontested, and is an accepted and even revered aspect of providing social work education. In Canada, CASWE-ACFTS provides accreditation on educational policies, standards and procedures, and reviews standards in four domains: Program Mission and Goals; Program Governance, Structure and Resources; Program Content: Curriculum and Field Education; and Program Evaluation/Assessment. This approach is consistent with a quality management system paradigm, which suggests that through the adherence of specific policies and requirements,

the likelihood that a good product being generated is increased. This model differs from accreditation models in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK).

In the US, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) shifted, in 2008, from program objectives to a competency performance approach that demonstrates the integration and application of competencies in practice (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). In this model, the education program is an outcome model responsible for graduating students who are competent to enter practice.

In England, social work programs are accredited through the Health and Care Professional Council. While still ensuring required program management and resources, standards move beyond a competencies framework to a capability one. Educational accreditation looks at standards of proficiency, which stipulate what students should know, understand, and be able to do at the completion of their training (Health & Care Professions Council, 2012). The standards of proficiency are mapped to the professional capabilities framework which comprise the requirements for registration. In Scotland, universities and employers have been working in partnership to embed Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection into degree programs since 2007 (Scottish Social Services Council, 2009). In this model the Standards in Social Work Education are aligned with the practice Key Capabilities (Scottish Executive, 2006). In both of these models, educational proficiency is explicitly linked to practice capability, or competency, and regulation. Neither the US nor Canadian models connect the educational and regulatory practice requirements.

Educational Objectives and Outcomes – Building to Competency

Back in Canada, the CASWE-ACFTS (2014) accreditation standard 3.1 states: "social work programs use learning objectives for students in designing and delivering their curricula and field education" (p. 9). The standards for accreditation do not use either of the terms "outcome" or "competency." This begs the question: What is the difference between a learning objective, a learning outcome, and a competency?

A simplified differentiation is that learning objectives are usually described in measurable and behavioural statements, which describe "what the learner *should* be able to achieve at the end of a learning period" (School of Public Health, n.d., p.1). In contrast, learning outcomes can be defined as "statements that describe significant and essential learning that learners *have* achieved, and can reliably demonstrate at the end of a course of program" (University of Connecticut, n.d., p. 1). Objectives are the intended results whereas outcomes are the achieved results or consequences of what was learned (University of Connecticut, n.d.). Competencies, on the other hand, are defined as "applied skills

and knowledge that enable people to successfully perform their work" (University of Connecticut, n.d., p. 1). In short, objectives say what we want the learners to know, outcomes are what learners do know and can demonstrate in the educational setting, and competencies are integrated and applied practices.

Figure 1: Learning to Competency

Learning Objective	Learning Outcome	Competency
Intended Results	Achieved Results	Applied Results
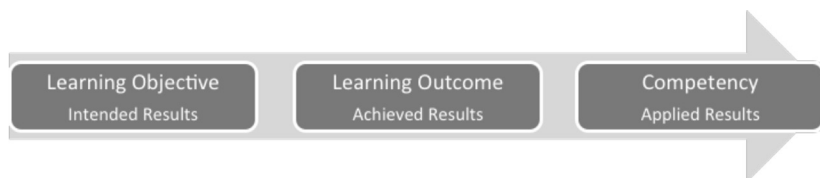
Preparing Social Work Students for Practice

The transformation of learning into practice has traditionally occurred in practicum. "Field education is a highly valued component of social work education" (Bogo, 2010, p. ix), is considered by many students and graduates as the most crucial component in practice preparation (Bogo, 2010), and is sometimes referred to as the "signature pedagogy" of social work education (Shulman, 2005; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). While Larrison & Korr (2013) dispute the characterization that field education is the signature pedagogy, and rather argue that the signature pedagogy of social work emerges in the classroom and is then further applied in field education, it is indisputable that field education is the site of applied practice learning, and the beginning of competency preparation and professional accountability. The integration of the shift from learning objectives/outcomes to competency is evidenced through the language of competency rubrics used by many universities to evaluate field education performance. The use of competency frameworks has shown utility in both micro and macro field education practice settings. Competencies include the acquisition of procedural skills and higher order meta or overarching qualities and values including characteristics such as self-awareness; compassion; motivation; and commitment to social justice (Bogo et al., 2011; Regehr, Bogo, Donovan, Anstice, & Lim, 2012). The concept of competency has evolved beyond a static set of attributes to mean an array of multi-dimensional, dynamic abilities that enhance creativity and transformation, are developmental and contextual in nature, related to the outcome, and connected to the demands of the workplace (Campbell, Silver, Sherbino, Ten Cate, & Holmboe, 2010; Frank et al., 2010; Kovacs, Hutchison, Collins, & Linde, 2013).

Conclusion

In the professional practice of social work, learning objectives and learning outcomes are the stepping stones to competency for entry-level practice. While schools of social work have autonomy in curriculum and program development, there is an additional responsibility to prepare learners for status as registered social workers with mobility across provincial jurisdictions and accountability to the public.

Social workers entering practice will be required to be transparent and accountable through current managerial processes. As trust in public institutions continues to erode, competencies are one way to provide credibility of the profession and accountability to the public. While discussion may still be required to ensure competencies include "modernist ideas of standardization and post-modern ideas of complexity and diversity" (Kovacs et al., 2013, p. 237); hopefully, the debate on the need for practice competency is complete.

Ultimately, the question underlying the debate on regulation and minimum competencies from the general public's perspective is: "Can I be assured that a social worker that I am seeing is competent?". The answer depends on how the profession views transparency and accountability and how it is envisioned that social workers become competent. Competence is a continuous and evolving process that is informed by practice context; and obviously, competency alone does not prevent poor practice from occurring. However, building public trust in social work services is important and I believe it is the role of social work education to prepare students for entry-level competency. It continues to be perplexing that schools of social work have embraced learning objectives through the accreditation process, and learning outcomes through the universities' requirements but have trepidation about ensuring competency for entry-level practice.

I tend to support Larrison & Korr's (2013) argument that students must think and perform like social workers throughout their professional development, and not just in the field education component of their education. Competency for practice shouldn't be separated from learning outcomes, but rather it should be seen as the result of applying complex learning. Ultimately, this bifurcation of theory and practice, of learning outcomes, and applied competencies is an artificial dichotomy. Focusing on this tension between educators and regulators obfuscates the academic environment in which adult learners transition from their educational pathways into transparent and accountable social work practice as required by legislation.

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INDIGENIZING HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CALLS TO ACTION
Awakening to personal, political, and academic responsibilities

Shelly Johnson (Mukwa Musayett)

*U*NDERLYING ALL OTHER TRUTHS spoken during the Year of Reconciliation is the truth that the modern city of Vancouver was founded on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and that these territories were never ceded through treaty, war or surrender (Meiszner, 2014).

Human Rights Injustices and the Musqueam People

One human rights injustice in Canada was acknowledged by Vancouver City Council in 2014, some 128 years after the city was founded on three unceded First Nations territories. What the Vancouver City Council statement does not say is that European settlement was accomplished using the principles of the Doctrine of Discovery, racist political and religious bigotry, which effectively denied the humanity of First Nations peoples, and a drastic Indigenous population decline due to diseases such as small pox and measles. These colonial acts caused the Musqueam population to decline from an estimated 30,000 at European contact to 100 people post contact, to current estimates of over 1,200 (Musqueam, 2011, pp. 39-49). During the same time period, the colonial government removed the Musqueam people from prime west coast real estate totalling 144,888 hectares, and relegated them to three tiny reserve parcels totalling 388 hectares, or 0.2% of their traditional lands (Musqueam, 2011, p. 51). Yet despite deliberate colonial actions to accomplish Musqueam erasure from the planet, the Musqueam people continue to live on their traditional lands where the mouth of the Fraser River meets the Pacific Ocean, as

Shelly Johnson (Mukwa Musayett) is assistant professor in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia

they have for the past 3,500 years. Today their recovery from the brink of obliteration is a contemporary survival story that is still not well known in Vancouver, nor at the University of British Columbia – Vancouver (UBC-V), which for the past 100 years has been located on unceded Musqueam territory. One cannot help but wonder what drives this continued lack of knowledge, and if, or how the inequitable institutional occupation of Musqueam lands contributes to the silence.

The UBC-V campus is located just seven kilometers from the Musqueam community, yet, it is far enough away to protect UBC-V from a second injustice affecting the Musqueam people: the overpowering stench of Vancouver's sewage disposal, which is located at the Musqueam community site. A SUV could drive through Vancouver's huge sewer pipe, which runs directly underneath the Musqueam community, and empties into the Fraser River. The sewer pipe was put there years ago, with no consultation to the Musqueam, no compensation, and with no thought to its impact on the well-being of Musqueam people. Numerous community members have said that it was "just done." During one visit to the community, as I ran from a building to my car to avoid the foul odour, I contemplated other things that were "just done" and are still being done to the Musqueam, and other Indigenous communities in Canada. I wondered about the June 26, 2014 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that unanimously recognized land title claimed by the Tsilhqot'in peoples of British Columbia (BC) (Moore, 2014), and the potential implications for other unceded First Nations lands in BC, including the 144,888 hectares of prime Vancouver real estate claimed by the Musqueam. I envisaged "Indigenizing efforts" by various higher education institutions across Canada, and how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action (2015) are being enacted by universities located on unceded territories. It encouraged thinking about what university governors, administrators, faculty, and students could do to address the foul odour arising from centuries of inequitable colonial relationships, and to meaningfully improve Indigenous community well-being.

UBC-V School of Social Work

One recent example of reconciliation action was taken by the Indigenous Student Caucus and Equity Committee in the School of Social Work at UBC-V. They collaboratively developed a project to breathe life into the TRC Calls to Action (2015) prior to Social Work Week in March 2016. The social work students approached their colleagues and faculty members to ask two questions: "What does reconciliation mean to you?" and "What have you done to further reconciliation?" Participants were asked to write their responses on a white board. Then a picture of the person, and their response, was mounted on poster boards, and displayed at the school. This project was the first student-led initiative to encourage social work

students and faculty to describe the ways in which they have, or have not, furthered the work of the TRC, or responded to the 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015). Multiple emails to approximately 200 students and faculty members, and personal invitations to participate, resulted in the participation of four faculty members and 25 students. The vast majority of faculty and students did not participate in the project. Some students explained they had too many final papers and exams to complete, while most faculty members declined in silence. The UBC-V was the first social work program in Canada to implement mandatory First Nations social work courses. This result signals that more needs to be done to translate education into action, for UBC-V and other institutions. To ask unsettling questions, such as, "What have I, or what has my educational institution done, or not done, to further the work of the TRC?"Alternately they may ask, "How have I, or how has my institution responded, or not responded to the Calls to Action?"

Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2006) and the TRC process led to the establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) at the University of Manitoba. The NCTR mandate is to preserve the Indian Residential School history and legacy in Canada, and to be a permanent home for all the materials gathered by the TRC. In the years to come, the NCTR aims to educate Canadians about Indian Residential School history, and Canada's deliberate attack on Indigenous families under the guise of "education." The hope is that access to its archives will assist in fostering reconciliation and healing of the Indian Residential School legacy in Canada (NCTR, 2015). Affiliated with the NCTR is UBC-V's proposed Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre. The proposed Centre aims to "support community access, public programming, curriculum development, advanced research, and intensive and regular discussion on issues of common concern" (UBC, 2014a). It is not due to open for another year. However, perhaps it could lead UBC-V to address work of the TRC's (TRC, 2015) Calls to Action. One of these calls asks the federal government to "provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education" (p. 2), and is an action that many post-secondary institutions can address in a timely way.

Indigenous Post-Secondary Backlog

The post-secondary backlog is a significant contributor to the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada. In 1996, the federal Liberal government mandated a 2% funding cap on First Nations community budgets for all programs and services, including

education. The despised cap, kept in policy by the Harper government, meant that inflation and a fast-growing Indigenous population were negatively affected by educational budgets that could not keep pace with the numbers of First Nations students who wanted to enter post-secondary programs. It will not be easy in the short term to fully address the education gap, despite the Trudeau government promise to lift the 2% funding cap. However there are many options available to post-secondary institutions to begin the work.

For the Musqueam Indian Band (MIB), collaborative work with UBC-V could mean many new opportunities for their current membership. In 2014, according to information provided by the Musqueam Social Development Department, there were 1,167 registered Musqueam; with 650 people living on reserve and 517 living off reserve. Of the total membership, 117 or 10% are Elders aged 60+ years; 630 or 54% account for adults aged 20-59; and 420 or 36% are children and youth aged 0 to 19 years. Of the children and youth, 362 or 31% are school aged. In terms of employment and education, and based on 2014 MIB social assistance rates, there are 150 employable members living on the reserve; a 24% unemployment rate on reserve and an estimated 30% unemployment rate off reserve. As of 2014, there were 43 MIB members receiving full time support for post-secondary education, while 245 Musqueam people remain on the 2015 education waitlist. The revenue generated by the MIB and the federal government funding for MIB post-secondary education serves approximately three or four MIB members each year. At this current rate, it will take 60 years to support the educational plans of all MIB members on the current education waitlist. Comparatively, the 2015 UBC fiscal financial statements identify a budgetary surplus of $49 million (UBC, 2016) which demonstrates capacity to significantly address the current (and future) MIB education waitlists.

Upon my return to the UBC-V campus from Musqueam, I theorized about an institutional response if a Musqueam delegation were to arrive at the UBC-V President's office with an invoice for 100 years of "back rent?" What might be the rental cost on 993 acres of Canada's most valuable real estate? What might be the cost of addressing the gross inequity that exists? At that time, might institutions begin to understand that more is required to right this inequitable relationship than merely acknowledging traditional territories in opening speeches? What options could UBC-V consider, before that day of reckoning arrives? From my perspective as an Indigenous woman working within a Western academic institution, arguably no other entity has contributed as much to the economic and academic well-being of 100 years of UBC administrators, faculty, staff, and graduates, as have the Musqueam people. Part of being good neighbours is behaving in honourable ways that are based in respect, integrity, truth, and meaningful reciprocity. In these times of fiscal restraint, it also means creatively looking at existing resources, and considering how they may be

reconfigured to benefit the maximum number of people.

Tuition Waivers

There are over 15,000 faculty on both the UBC-V and UBC Kelowna campus locations (UBC, 2015b). Under the Collective Agreement, all UBC-V faculty and staff and their children under the age of 25 years, are eligible to claim a four-year tuition benefit. If the staff or faculty member has no child, the tuition benefit cannot be transferred to another family member, such as a niece or nephew. At a gathering with the UBC-V President in 2015, a female colleague asked if and how the UBC-V Collective Agreement tuition benefit might be amended to support Musqueam students eligible for entry into an academic UBC program. Could unused faculty or staff tuition credits be transferred to a Musqueam student? If it could be transferred, it may have a significant and immediate effect on the Musqueam student waitlist. A male colleague suggested that a targeted tuition benefit to Musqueam people was not enough. He said that the faculty person directing their UBC-V tuition credit to a Musqueam student must uphold a responsibility to meet with the student to determine their career interest. If it is in an area such as Fisheries, then the faculty member has a responsibility to link the student with a Fisheries faculty member, who would act as an educational mentor to the student for their entire four-year program. Other colleagues spoke about the fact that UBC-V, and other educational institutions currently have a tuition waiver in place for youth that were formerly in the care of the provincial government child welfare services (UBC, 2015c), so a tuition waiver precedent already exists. Another colleague spoke of the need for the development of a UBC-Musqueam Employment Strategy; whereby employable Musqueam people could be beneficiaries of employment opportunities on campus.

Conclusion

On May 11, 2016 Canada removed its objector status from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (CBC, 2016), and provided a framework for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. In collaboration with the TRC Calls to Action (2015), and the Tsilhqot'in Supreme Court decision, this new development lays the foundation for every post-secondary institution in Canada to consider what they have, or have not, done to further Indigenizing and reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Peoples. "Indigenizing higher education" means that Indigenous Peoples will evaluate and determine the success of institutional efforts to do so. In the case of UBC-V and the Musqueam people, some ways to begin are the development of meaningful Musqueam employment strategies,