



Special Issue of GJCPP on Practice Competencies in Community Psychology and Their Applications

From the editors of this special issue:

Tom Wolff with co-editors Vince Francisco, Greg Meissen

We are delighted to present to you this special issue of the *GJCPP* focused on the Community Psychology Practice Competencies and their applications. The competencies were developed to give increased definition and legitimacy to Community Psychology Practice. The competencies were not developed as a rigid set of standards for accreditation but rather as guidelines for ongoing discussion, reflection, articulation and challenge. The thoughtful quality of the papers you will read here and the remarkable examples of application in academia and practice affirm that the competencies are achieving these goals. These competencies have already made a difference.

The Practice Group (now the Community Psychology Practice Council) initiated the competency process at its first Practice Summit at the Pasadena Biennial in 2007. In holding a first ever summit on Community Psychology Practice we wished to address the core issues for CP Practice that seemed crucial to the field to survive and thrive including: creating spaces for publications (which helped lead to the *GJCPP*), defining the field (which led to the competencies), supporting practice opportunities (which led to the CP Practice Value Proposition) and visibility (which led to the CP Practice Interest Group becoming the CP Practice Council on a par with the Council for Educational Programs, now the Council on Education).

In 2012, Dalton and Wolfe published in *The Community Psychologist* the eighteen competencies for community psychology

practice that had been developed jointly by the SCRA Council for Educational Programs and the Community Psychology Practice Council with input from the membership at large and the SCRA Executive Committee. The goal of developing and issuing the list of competencies was to stimulate thinking and actions surrounding how these competencies are critical to the practice and teaching of community psychology.

In 2013 Wolfe, Chien Scott, and Jimenez published a special issue of the *GJCPP* (vol 4, Issue 4 2013) highlighting global perspectives on the competencies particularly in relation to the conceptualization and enactment of education programs in Western Australia, Italy, Egypt, and the United States. This was followed in 2015 by Scott and Wolfe's volume entitled *Community Psychology: Foundations for Practice*.

Now, almost three years after the first special issue, we see frequent references to the competencies by many in the field. We also hear of the use of the competencies by students seeking employment, by universities in examining and mapping their curricula, by university internships in defining what they learn, by employers, and others. Despite this wide use, however, the controversies surrounding the competencies have not disappeared. International partners raise questions about the appropriateness of these competencies around the globe (even though they were developed solely for a US audience), the issue of whether competencies lead to accreditation has not gone away, and the need for academic community psychology competencies is now being explored.

As we heard ongoing references to the CP Practice Competencies at Biennials, in publications, and in our ongoing contact with colleagues, it became clear that many were engaging with the competencies, and this volume will explore how the competencies are being received and used in the field by practitioners, academics, and students.

Given the levels of engagement we were seeing, we determined that it was clearly time to visit this topic again in the *GJCPP*. This was confirmed by the outpouring of proposals (almost 30) that we received after issuing our call for papers. We were hoping to do one special issue of the *GJCPP* on the competencies but the high quality of the submission led us to convince the editors to do two volumes. Thus you will find ten papers in this issue and ten more in another special issue to be published next year. They represent contributions from the US and abroad, from both academics and practitioners, and from authors representing a variety of perspectives.

This issue includes a thoughtful introduction from Jim Dalton, who in his role as the Chair of the Council for Educational Programs managed to engage and focus a large number

of academic and practice contributors to write the first drafts of the CP Practice Competencies. There were many drafts and much consultation with others that led to the original competency document. We were delighted that Jim was willing not only to write an introduction but also to write brief commentaries on each article. He also created a chart indicating which of competencies were covered in each of the articles.

We loved reading and reviewing these papers because they represent the wonderful world of community psychology where our colleagues and our students take creative approaches to similar issues. Some of our observations:

The Competencies have been truly a useful resource for both those teaching CP and those practicing. Indeed, there are contributions from nine academic programs on their use of the competencies across the two volumes. You will read many creative uses in both.

The submissions are full of student perspectives, contributions, and their actual words. This is so heartening to some of us as practitioners who have been in the field for a long time and can recall a time when CP graduate students with an interest in practice approached us cautiously at Biennials, confiding to us how unsupported they felt in their programs by some faculty because of their decision to pursue a practice career. When we see students as co-authors for all these papers on CP Practice, we can feel the shifting winds. Now we are walking our walk.

Critical thinking and willingness to challenge the norm often characterize community psychologists, and these characteristics shine through in all the critical thinking in the papers about the competencies themselves. There are many wonderful proposals for rethinking this list of competencies. Which leaves us with the question as to how SCRA and Practice Council moves forward to modify the competencies.

The articles also give us a window into the great variety of community psychology graduate programs that exists in the US and the equally varied way that they have integrated the competencies.

Here are some of the highlights of what I appreciated most from each article as a way to tempt you to read them all:

Infusing Community Psychology Practice Competencies into Doctoral Training.

Gabriel P. Kuperminc, Wing Yi Chan, Scot Seitz, Christyl Wilson *Georgia State University*

Gabe Kuperminc and colleagues from Georgia State describe a stunningly simple yet profound use of competencies based on the following: "The refinements to our curriculum were motivated by . . . a recognition that we needed to attend to the diverse interests of our students, preparing them for careers both within and outside of the academy." They did this by "aligning the training we provide to the wide range of career paths that our students pursue after graduation." They also surveyed their alumni to see where they were working. This simple statement and survey were crucial first steps in recognition of those graduates pursuing a practice career. Unfortunately, this has often been missing in graduate training. They then developed a very clear flow chart to explain a practicum process for site work that all graduate programs should take a look at. They also offer materials that will be very useful to other graduate programs

Thinking through our processes: How the UCSC Community Psychology Research & Action Team strives to embody ethical, critically reflexive anti-racist feminist praxis.

Regina Day Langhout & Erin R. Ellison, and Danielle Kohfeldt, Angela Nguyen, Jesica Siham Fernandez, Janelle M. Silva, David L. Gordon, Jr. & Stephanie Tam Rosas, *University of California, Santa Cruz*

Regina Langhout is one of the clarion voices of the community psychology of the future, and this is well illustrated in this piece written with her students. The fact that this wonderful paper is written collaboratively by a team of eight and actually reads as a whole coherent article is remarkable. It closely looks at the "Ethics" competency, and expands, improves, and illustrates its use in action. "A critically reflexive anti-racist feminist praxis, however, may provide a more generative framework. It demands that we interrogate entanglements, contradictions, complications, and our web of relations among research team members, community-based collaborators, and in ourselves. The rationale for this interrogation is so that we can hold fast to the idea that we all have intersectional positionalities, desires, and histories, which we must consider if we are to create socially just change." This is all put into practice as they describe the processes of their Community Psychology Research and Action Team.

Addressing the Community Psychology Competency Dialectic through

Participatory Pedagogy Kelly Collins, Christopher Keys, Martina Mihelicova, Kris Ma, Nicole Colon Quintana, Jordan Reed, Madison Sunnquist, Carolyn Turek, & Christopher Whipple *DePaul University*

Chris Keys and his students provide an engaging and thoughtful article about how to teach the competencies to community psychologists with examples within a core community psychology course. The examples are rich with detail especially with the materials in the appendix. The article puts it this way: "Rather, the set is intended to outline what CP can look like, recognizing that CP practice is inherently situated within complex, ever changing ecological realities. Thus, CP education and training programs are challenged with exposing students to a variety of central competencies at a

conceptual level, while also providing opportunities for students to use their developing competencies in dynamic contexts and to reflect critically on their use. Thus, Hazel (2007) explains the need to develop alternative teaching and learning strategies that provide an education that ‘focuses not just on content, but also on process, the process of practice as well as the process of learning’ (p.85).” Three applications of participatory pedagogy within the classroom are described

What does it mean to use competencies in "praxis" with undergraduate students at Historically Black institutions? Dawn X. Henderson, PhD, Jameika Matlock, DayQuan Garrett, Christopher Clark *Winston-Salem State University*

Dawn Henderson and her students from a Historically Black Institution tells a compelling story regarding the creation of community engagement and development in a local low income community very close to their campus. The article raises the key question as to how these competencies, developed by professionals, are relevant to first generation African American students and others as they work in settings so similar to the students’ own backgrounds. Henderson and her students’ voices bring a deep richness to this account. There is a wonderful student-made video that accompanies this article – don’t miss it. Also helpful teaching tools are included.

Leveraging Community Psychology Competencies to Advance Medical Education and Improve Obesity Healthcare Victoria Scott *University of North Carolina Charlotte*

Scott’s work suggests that the competencies of community psychology (participatory action research, sociocultural and cross-cultural competence, and ecological perspective) are highly useful in medical

settings especially for designing alternative Continuing Medical Education (CME) approaches and facilitating organizational level changes in primary care practices. The focus was in increasing understanding of obesity and obesity healthcare by health care providers especially through a cultural lens. This is one of the first articles that examines how community psychology competencies can be practically useful for advancing medical education. Scott sets an example of the application of the competencies to CP practice.

Community Psychology Practice Competencies: Perspectives from the UK Jacqui Akhurst, Carolyn Kagan, Rebecca Lawthorn, and Michael Richards. *Rhodes University, South Africa*

Akhurst and her international colleagues raise intriguing critiques on the role of the community psychology competencies in higher education. The authors propose “alternative frameworks that emphasize the need for these to incorporate flexibility and diversity, and to be more holistic (rather than atomistic, as lists of competencies often are); with emphases on community-based rather than individualized principles and values.” They see an imperative to prioritize social justice and to enable reflexive thinking and action to lead to interactive and inclusive processes. It is always refreshing to see our U.S.-based efforts through the critical eye of our international community psychology colleagues.

Competencies for Community Psychology Practice in Spain: Standards, Quality and Challenges in Social Intervention Isidro Maya Jariego, *Universidad de Sevilla*

Isidro Maya Jariego brings a Spanish perspective to understanding the community psychology competencies. In this excellent addition to this Special Issue he provides a description of the evolving Spanish

definitions of competencies within the context of European accreditation. His comparison to the US competencies is very clear and helpful. Jariego describes the process of having to carve out a clear role for community psychology competencies. This may be especially helpful for those working with the CP competencies in the context of Clinical-Community programs.

Intersections of Community Psychology Practice and Higher Education Community Engagement: An Essay of Core

Competencies Tabitha Underwood *Missouri Campus Compact, Missouri State University*

Underwood explores the role of community psychology practitioners in academic institutions in a wide variety of civic engagement related positions on campuses such as those within the realms of community service, service-learning, and community-based research. She then examines how these roles connect to the SCRA Community Psychology Practice Competencies, concluding that “community psychology can be a guiding light to guide civic engagement where it needs to go and better meet the demands of our communities.” In light of how many community psychologists occupy these roles in academic institutions and how little light has been shed on those roles, this is an especially valuable contribution to the literature.

Challenges and Strategies in Promoting Empowering Academic Settings for Learning Community Psychology Practice

Competencies Gregor Sarkisian and Sylvie Taylor, *Antioch University Los Angeles*

Sarkisian and Taylor and the program at Antioch have been some of the earliest serious adopters of the Community Psychology Practice competencies. Their earlier work on curriculum mapping was their first contribution, now in this piece they delve more deeply into the pedagogy of working with adult learners who have a great deal of community savvy but less academic preparation. As this is a critical population for the future of community psychology their insights are especially helpful. They take their student challenges to learning seriously and create ways to work with them by embracing diverse learning styles and expanding student potential.

Reflections on the Assessment of Practice Competencies Nuria Ciofalo, Susan James, and Mary Watkins *Pacifica Graduate Institute*

The Pacifica faculty provide a fascinating comprehensive, and serious self- evaluation of their curriculum around the competencies. This is especially of interest since the Pacifica Graduate program focuses on three areas: Community Psychology, Liberation Psychology, and Ecopsychology. The paper provides a wonderful model for other schools on how to monitor your program and its relationship to the competencies. The greatest strength of this article is that assessing the 18 competencies and those competencies specific to the Pacifica curriculum generates a great deal of dialogue among faculty, advisors, and students, and more importantly, guides enhancement of the education of the community psychologists going through the Pacifica program. The inclusion of the e-portfolio and video with encouragement to readers to comment is a wonderful innovation.

We would like to open up a discussion with our readers on the issues raised in this volume regarding the Community Psychology Practice Competencies. Please let us know your

thoughts on these three questions (comment here or in the section titled “Join the Discussion”):

- 1) In light of the questions, additions and challenges raised in these articles about the original 18 competencies what changes should be made to them?
How should SCRA go about making these changes?
- 2) What other potential uses can you imagine for these competencies?
- 3) How else are you presently employing these competencies?