



Intentional CYC Supervision A Developmental Approach

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ISBN 978-1-928212-29-4

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An imprint of Pretext Publishing

PO Box 23199, Claremont 7735, Cape Town, South Africa

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Introduction

This book has grown out of my attempts to work with Child and Youth Care (CYC) supervisors in training sessions and other consultations, as well as my own experience as a CYC supervisor many years ago. Most of the thoughts expressed in the book have been discussed with practicing supervisors in training groups or private conversations and I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the CYC professionals who so willingly have shared their thoughts, advice and strategies with me. I have had the privilege of knowing many excellent supervisors as well as supervisors who wished there were more resources available to help them build competence and knowledge. This book is my attempt to add some ideas that may be helpful. I sincerely believe that the way I have framed development and the journey to professional expertise will support many supervisors in their careers.

The task of building a profession and creating respect both within and without for relational and developmental CYC approaches falls heavily on the CYC supervisor, and I expect this book may be a useful resource. My career has been bolstered by powerful mentors as well as hindered by poor supervisors, which I expect is not unusual. Ineffective supervision is a major cause of staff turnover in our field, and the people who are most acutely aware of this lack are potentially the most competent practitioners.

I use the shorthand “CYC” to mean Child and Youth Care throughout the book, and I randomly switch genders as I describe different scenarios, to reflect the fact that men and women are both represented. I also believe that the dynamics inherent in becoming an effective CYC supervisor are also present for supervisors in most professions, so much of this book may also be useful for other supervisors.

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Professional Development Stages: A Theory For Practice

Professional Development of CYC Supervisors

Supervisor competence is not created overnight, or through a magical or naturally occurring process. It is a deliberate and developmentally predictable journey which can be supported by providing emerging supervisors with a learning plan and a description of the experiential moments which they will confront as they grow and develop expertise. This book describes a theory of development which will promote self-awareness and normalize the difficult journey to truly professional practice and supervisory excellence. It is a model which is comprised of three distinct levels of professional ability, with three stages of growth inside each level. It also describes the developmental journey of the CYC practitioner, and the interactions that both hinder and enhance supervisory relationships at each combination of supervisor and practitioner connection.

The journey to competence is not simple or easy to achieve, as is true for any professional endeavor, and will typically occur over a five year time period. There are several transition points in this complex journey which may become obstacles to growth, and it is hoped that this theory will support supervisors to see the goal inside each transition which will prevent stagnation and premature developmental closure. There is a parallel process of development for

both practitioners and supervisors which can greatly enhance the interactions in the supervisory relationship, but can also impede this relationship if not understood and taken into account.

There is a five year journey to become fully competent, typically expected in most professional endeavors, requiring 10,000 hours of rigorous work, as described in the book *Outliers* (Gladwell, 2008), and this is a useful benchmark for CYC professional development. People who begin a career in CYC practice can be expected to take this long to achieve the status of being a mature professional. Supervisors beginning their management careers can also expect to undergo a competence journey of the same length. This book breaks the 5 year period into 3 specific levels for both practitioners and supervisors. A basic description of these levels is detailed below.

The three levels of practitioner development described in the theory below typically entail five years of practice experience, coupled with competent supervision. New supervisors also engage in a similarly long journey of 10,000 hours of practice to grow and develop into fully capable professional supervisors. Experience alone does not create this development. As we will see, it is a very deliberate and carefully orchestrated combination of learning, thinking ability and self-awareness, supported by a developmentally more knowledgeable mentor.

It is crucial to understand the need for competent supervision that is necessary to support the CYC practitioner's journey to professional status. Workers who are left to their own devices to improve and develop often stagnate at a predictable point. Common sense and practical experience only get the new CYC practitioner to a basic level of expertise. There is a ceiling that is often ignored which keeps even skilled CYC staff from becoming no more than technicians using formulaic approaches and surface responses to complex needs. Newly hired CYC graduates are badly served by treatment programs where they are left to develop on their own through some belief that good practice grows out of common sense and pure intentions. As in any profession, CYC theory and thoughtful application of life space supports need to be integrated into practice through deliberate professional supervision and training. The CYC literature describes this as *praxis* which is a basic requirement for the emerging CYC professional.

The CYC supervisor is the lynchpin in the professional delivery of services in every program and fully competent professional CYC practice is controlled both positively and negatively by the supervisory ability available.

The focus of supervision is the continual improvement and ongoing development of CYC practice within the program of the agency. Each member of the CYC team is on a specific developmental journey which must be understood and dynamically matched by the supervisor in a deliberate learning process. The ongoing improvement of each CYC practitioner's expertise is key to the eventual success of every treatment program.

The theoretical map which guides the learning journey of CYC practitioners is based on a combination of experience, knowledge and developmental shifts which occur at predictable points in a CYC career. At this juncture we need to examine the developmental theory which describes the three levels of the journey which both supervisors and practitioners travel in developing competence.

CYC Supervisor Developmental Stages

The theory is that CYC supervisors develop professional competence in predictable stages that can be anticipated and transitioned through smoothly. The model creates a learning plan that both administrators and supervisors can use to support the efficient and comprehensive development of competence and professional growth in supervisors at every level of expertise. Awareness of the stages of development as described in this model will support both experienced and new supervisors in their journeys. The hope is that experienced supervisors will see the extent of growth and development necessary to reach a professionally mature standard of excellence and new supervisors will experience a normalizing of the often rocky and unsettling bumps in the early years of their careers.

Evidence in the field during actual training of supervisors has so far shown that newer supervisors express relief and some chagrin at the frustrations and fears they have had which no one had explained to them in a useful way. Some new supervisors had returned to front line practice because the predictable dynamics of the first year of supervision had been so perplexing. Seeing their own experience as a developmental journey has been very helpful. As well, in several

training programs more experienced supervisors, often with many years of practice, have realized that they have stopped learning because they did not prepare themselves for the next step of professional growth.

I anticipate that the use of this theory as a learning map and touchstone for development of expertise will greatly reduce the premature exit of developing supervisors and the atrophy of curiosity and learning in experienced, but stagnating supervisors.

The Developmental Model

This book uses a developmental model to explore the role of supervisor as well as the development of practitioners, supervisors and administrators within a treatment program focus. This model is accurate for many types of supervision, especially in human services, but also in other professional relationships.

Basically, the first year in a new role is dominated by concerns of personal safety and professional competence that result in the use of external control approaches and fear about confrontation that limit relational work. This developmental stage is followed by a treatment planning focus that sees an increase in relational energy and theoretical thinking. After about two years, a more complex integration of life space practice and relational connection emerges. The process continues and these ideas become more refined over a subsequent period of two years. The model assumes that this three level developmental theory occurs during an optimal five year period of competent supervision and professional growth. The suggestion that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve excellence (*Outliers*, Gladwell, 2008) is incorporated into the model in order for a person to fully develop through the levels.

Organizational Implications

There are other issues to be considered as we explore this developmental model. Organizations have individuals at every level of authority who are engaged in relationships with both superiors and subordinates who are affected by the developmental dynamics of both their own growth as well as the developmental dynamics of others. When there is a mismatch between the developmental stage of a skilled subordinate and the developmental stage of a superior

who is still struggling with a new identity, there is great potential for destructive conflict. Often, an awareness of the developmental needs of each person will alleviate the communication problems that naturally arise.

Developmental stages and professional expertise are separate but intertwined dynamics that can enhance or hinder the supervisory process. It is important to consider both individual background and developmental issues when supervisory dynamics are examined. Program focus and agency mandates are intimately connected to the developmental dynamics of the staff at every level of authority. We will examine the various potential combinations and interactional possibilities of supervisory relationships as they impact both program effectiveness and stagnation. Chapter 5 will explore these issues in detail, while Chapter 4 describes the limitations of adult thinking development that may hinder effective use of therapeutic approaches which can be remedied by strategic supervisory interventions.

Let us now describe the developmental theory/model which explores practitioner experiences and supervisory growth in detail, along with the parallel processes impacting supervisory effectiveness.

The Framework For CYC Practitioner Development

There are three developmental levels and three stages (early, mid, and integrated) within each level. The three levels typically are anticipated to occur over 10,000 hours of experience, but need to be coupled with theoretical knowledge and competent supervision. The practitioner generally can be expected to develop through the following schedule:

- Level 1 – The Competent Care Giver develops over a period of 12-15 months, early stage 3-6 months, mid stage 3-6 months, integrated stage 3-6 months.
- Level 2 – The Treatment Planner and Change Agent develops over a period of 2-3 years, early stage 9-12 months, mid stage 9-12 months, integrated stage 9-12 months.

- Level 3 – The Creative, Free Thinking Professional begins to emerge after 4 years of practice, early stage 9-12 months, mid stage 9-12 months, integrated stage, an ongoing process.

It is proposed that this framework can be used as a map by supervisors to plot the professional development plan for individual staff and to anticipate the type of supervision that will be most effective at different points in the journey. A more detailed description of the dynamics of each level continues below.

Level 1 – The Capable Care-Giver

The first year of practice is typically quite turbulent for CYC practitioners. There is an intense orientation which is usually too brief and inadequate to prepare the new staff member for the reality of engaging in life space work with uncooperative and impulsive people. Becoming a skilled capable care giver involves mastering three basic dynamics. Primary is the focus on personal safety, which includes both fear of injury and fear of being seen as incompetent. The second focus is on establishing an adult persona to create a confident helper image that is more than being a friendly face or a slightly more knowledgeable person, but is really a competent resource for the other person to rely on. The third issue is to acquire skills in external control and behavior management so that a safe environment can be established and maintained. These three dynamics are the overall agenda for the first year of supervision.

The basic dynamic that drives this stage is the issue of *safety* and the need of the new worker to manage her own anxiety. This is a fundamental step in professional development that lasts for 12-15 months for the new worker. CYC practitioners who work in the life space are very quickly exposed to a seemingly overwhelming onslaught of stimuli, most of which seems out of their control. Residential program practitioners feel great anxiety for the initial three months of practice, trying to control for all the ingredients in the life space of admittedly impulsive and hard to manage young people, while family workers struggle with trying to get comfortable in visiting chaotic family homes which are often in disarray because of a recent or persistent crisis. School-based CYC practitioners are charged with creating cooperation and compliance in young people

whom the system is obviously failing and community youth workers are expected to work in desperate neighborhoods where they are clearly not welcome. The first level of anxiety is fear of physical harm, but this is quickly followed by fear of being exposed as incompetent. There is also anxiety about doing or not doing something that may be harmful to the youths or families. This anxiety creates a focus on self that makes it very difficult for the new worker to be tuned in to the needs of the person he is trying to help, in spite of his avowed intentions. New CYC practitioners describe every interaction and experience very personally, (i.e. how they are affected), not how the other person is experiencing things. This safety concern is a major agenda for the supervisor of Level 1 staff and will be discussed in detail.

The next major task for the competent care giver is to establish an adult persona, so that she is seen by the youth or family as a competent adult, who has resources and skills that are helpful. Many new staff are relatively young and just entering adulthood, so this may be a developmental challenge for them. Generally, older new hires have less trouble with this, but it is always an issue for a while. Becoming friendly quickly and not appearing too authoritative seems to be a useful strategy to new staff who are anxious about confrontations, but this approach backfires fairly soon. Basically, the people we are trying to help do not need the worker to be their friend, they need someone who can create trust in her ability to be helpful. Supervisors need to encourage younger staff to appear older, not more like a contemporary, and to trust in the program and the team of staff to support them to be a useful resource.

Finally, behavior management is an important early skill to be mastered by new staff because, until a safe environment is established, no change will occur. Family support workers must manage the chaotic dynamics in some households, school-based practitioners need to create a safe presence in the parking lot and playground, community youth workers have to handle navigating within dangerous neighborhoods before they can do anything useful. This behavioral focus is a strong emphasis for Level 1 practitioners, because no trust will exist when people are not confident that you can handle them and the often messy situations that arise. Supervisors need to be aware that there is a seductive appeal to behavioral

approaches, and that relational CYC practice, the task at Level 2, does not rely on behavioral principles. So, even as they are supporting a behavioral practice, supervisors need to be ready to shift gears and demand a more complex viewpoint after Level 1 skills are established.

In sum, the skilled Level 1 practitioner is confident in her ability to manage behavior and maintain a predictable, safe environment. She is less reactive and more responsive in confrontations and disagreements, and has minimized her tendency to focus on herself. She is able to look at situations from the viewpoint of the other person and doesn't resort to blame when people disagree with her recommendations. External control is easily maintained and the daily program or family interaction runs smoothly most of the time. She is clearly established as a helper and challenges to her legitimacy are rare. Recreational activities and learning opportunities are created daily and her presence is welcomed. Her role as a competent care giver has established a nurturing energy that can easily grow into relational approaches.

The tasks for the Level 1 worker include:

- creating a safe environment for oneself;
- establishing external control where and when needed;
- using procedures and routines to develop predictability;
- establishing oneself as a competent and trustworthy caregiver;
- handling aggressive threats and interactions with youth;
- handling aggression between youth or family members;
- creating strategies to establish one's authority as an adult;
- avoiding the use of threats or coercion to control behavior;
- creating recreational events that support strengths and interests;
- establishing a nurturing presence for youth and families.

The internal process for the new worker includes:

- feeling unsafe, overwhelmed, outside of his personal comfort zone;
- thinking that there is a simple right answer to life space situations;
- looking outside oneself for techniques and models to imitate;

- having frequent fight or flight reactions to situations;
- looking for safe youth or family members to connect with;
- having a “me” focus based on personal anxiety.

So the developmental journey for the Level 1 practitioner entails mastering ones anxiety about personal safety and professional competence, establishing an adult presence, and developing skills in creating external control to promote a safe environment. There are three stages in the journey through this level of growth.

Level 1 – The Competent Care Giver

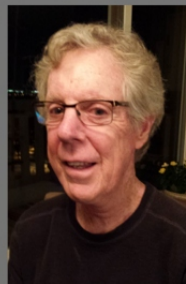


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Jack Phelan spent the first 15 years of his career working in a variety of Child and Youth Care positions before arriving at Grant MacEwan University and teaching, thinking and writing about effective Child and Youth Care practice for the past 30 years. Travelling to many diverse places and meeting articulate Child and Youth Care people around the world has been a wonderful way to enrich his perspective as well as build some wonderful friendships.



This book challenges CYC supervisors and administrators to build treatment programs that go beyond merely managing behavior and establishing safe environments that don't really create the help that our youth and families require. Management is a primary skill for all supervisors, but building effective professional practice through supporting relational and developmentally focused practitioners is the real goal of supervision. The growth of professional expertise for each CYC practitioner is the responsibility of both supervisors and administrators, and this book describes a methodology to create treatment programs that support growth and change for supervisors, practitioners, and the youth and families we propose to help.

Poor supervision is a constantly cited reason for CYC staff turnover. This book attempts to explain this issue and proposes a comprehensive solution that will build effective CYC programs that will engage people at every level of the organization.

ISBN 978-1-928212-18-8



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