

November 28, 2022

Awards Committee
Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education (FAHE)

Re: Nomination for the Ann E. Nolte Writing Award

Dear Awards Committee:

This letter represents a nomination for the Ann E. Nolte Writing Award for the publication:

James, T. G., Sullivan, M. K., Henderson, H., & Varnes, J. R. (2022). Competency focuses versus philosophically grounded health promotion practice: Impacts on innovation and addressing health inequities. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*, 8(4). doi: 10.1177/23733799221094617.

This peer-reviewed article was published, in English, in electronic format in 2022 by the Society for Public Health Education's journal *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. It was authored by Dr. Tyler G. James, Ms. Meagan K. Sullivan, Dr. Heather Henderson, and Dr. Julia R. Varnes. This publication is focuses on two-of-the-three priority areas from this award: (1) the future of health education/promotion, and (2) major philosophical issues in the field.

Significance of the Publication: The professionalization of the fields of health education and health promotion, and pre-professional curriculum, has largely been influenced by the completion of job task analyses by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, the American Association of Health Education, and the Society for Public Health Education. Through this professionalization, the fields of health education and health promotion have focused on credentialing and ensuring that practitioners possess specific competencies related to the work of health educators. We call this focus on identifying the job tasks used in practice and teaching those tasks, instead of understanding *how* or *why* practice is done in a specific way, Competency Focused Practice. In this paper, we "open the metaphorical black box" of Competency Focused Practice and how teaching the competencies (i.e., skills) without teaching philosophy or ethics, may hinder process in the field.

In this article, we describe that Competency Focused Practice – and the job task analyses informing this paradigm of practice – "provides a thorough introduction to the skills *necessary* (but perhaps not sufficient) for a [health education/promotion] practitioner," and that this paradigm discourages philosophical thinking regarding the methods and materials used in practice. We go on to compare Competency Focuses Practice and Philosophically Grounded Practice in three key areas, outlined in the table below.

	Competency Focused Practice	Philosophically Grounded Practice
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages uncompromising ethical decision making, as competencies focuses on ethical thinking and behavior as a skill, informed by regulation. • Focuses solely on risk-benefits of evaluation and research on individual participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages students and practitioners to understand the scope of regulations and apply ethical decision-making across their practice. • Seeks to understand larger risk-benefits of evaluation and research in communities.
Conceptualizing Wicked Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligns social determinants of health with government-based recommendations (e.g., Healthy People 2030), and classifies racism as a social determinant of health. • Focuses on behavioral and learning theory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages practitioners to interrogate our conceptualizations and recognize that racism is an antecedent – or fundamental cause – to other social determinants of health. • Focuses on social theory, in addition to behavioral and learning theory.
Justifying Specific Methods and Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes science is neutral under “evidence-based practice,” and that practices are not tied to a philosophical orientation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires practitioners to justify and defend their use of specific methods, the philosophical assumptions of those methods, and if those assumptions align with the needs of communities.

As described, Competency Focused Practice distills major, unresolved, foci of health education and health promotion, such as ethics and philosophically aligned practice, into skills that can be taught instead of critically appraised. We, therefore, argue that Philosophically Grounded Practice should be at the forefront, allowing students and professionals to appraise methods, materials, and approaches to better innovate in this field, and address the major health issues to come.

This piece, which has been described by some leaders as “provocative,” encourages us to disrupt the notice that competency-based skills will get us to a place where we can solve these health and social inequities. We must encourage, and enable, students and professionals to think philosophically and ethically in order to achieve social justice and health equity. Therefore, I believe that this paper demonstrates the spirit of the Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education, and the intent of the Ann E. Nolte Writing Award.

Sincerely,



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