

UNDERSTANDING LEARNING ACTIVITIES
OF CASEWORKERS FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

Janice M. Iseminger

Dr. Joe Donaldson, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the learning activities that contributed to the professional competences of mental health caseworkers. Nowlen's (1988) Update, Competence, and Performance Models of Competence, concepts of personal/professional knowledge, and situated/social learning theories constituted the theoretical foundations that informed this study. The study was a qualitative study that relied primarily on interview data collected from caseworkers, their supervisors, and their co-workers. Trustworthiness, consistency, and transferability were maintained via the use of multiple sources of interview data; member checks; a peer debriefer/coder; an audit trail; a rich and thick description of the study's context and the participants' perspectives. Four competences emerged from the data: personal, work, tools, and learning competences. Two major learning categories emerged: learning from formal opportunities and learning from and in experiences and situational contexts. Four major relationships between learning activities and the development of professional competences were identified: integrated learning was found to be related to the development of the competence of learning, establishing external relationships to the tools competence, problem solving to work competence, and developing the "self" to personal competence. Implications for practice and research focus on enhancing opportunities for informal learning to occur as part of professional practice.