Ecosystem of Workplace Education and Training: Where Do Learners Fit?

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Ecosystem of Workplace Education and Training: Where Do Learners Fit?

Kathy Harris, Jen Vanek, Jill Castek, & Gloria Jacobs
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Agenda

- Background on study design and theoretical approaches
- What’s a learning ecosystem?
- Who are the learners?
- Insights gleaned from critical analysis of learner interview data & discussion with key stakeholders (employers, WFD practitioners, educators)
- What’s next in our research
Who are frontline service workers?

40% work on retail, healthcare, food service and hospitality

The majority make less than $30,000 per year

30% are under the age of 35

60-70% have job-limiting foundational skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy, problem-solving)

Our Research

What are the experiences of working learners in employer supported learning?

What motivates frontline service workers to participate in employer supported learning opportunities, many of which are offered online?

What factors support working learners’ continued participation and their success?
What makes up an employer-supported learning ecosystem?
Ecosystem Activity

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 2497 0647

Name three components of employer-supported learning ecosystems.

https://www.menti.com/9zyoikbczf
Focus on the learner in the ecosystem

Working Learner

- Teachers
- Classes/courses
- Workforce System
- Friends & Family
- Digital Tools
- Programs/initiatives
- Unions
- Employers/Supervisors
Who are the learners? Creating personae.

- Created to understand users
- Helps to better serve needs and goals of users
- Is a representation of characteristics
- Invites the reader into shared understanding

https://edtech.worlded.org/persona-development-as-a-research-tool
Persona Blogs

- Neberu: Working To Feel Comfortable Interacting With English Speakers
- Alimayu: College-educated Retail Worker Learning English
- Elise: Juggling Work, Required Training, And Long-term Goals
- Regina: Healthcare Worker Seeking To Establish A Career
- Dani: Front-line Supervisor Paid Hourly Seeking Certification For Advancement
- Naomi: Learning for Future Possibilities
We are still learning the discourse of critical race theory. We acknowledge that our whiteness has advantaged us in large and small ways; we’ve benefitted from lifelong white privilege.

As white women we can only see so much because of our whiteness. We can’t understand racism fully or in the same ways as people of color.

We are working to recognize and make visible white supremacy and systemic racism and identify how it plays out in our attempt to change it. We do this work with humility, trying to be allies.
Sociocultural Lens (CHAT)

CRT Analysis
- Endemic Racism
- Capital is differently available

Systems Level Change
What made the difference for the two who succeeded?

- Language discrimination?
- Gender discrimination?
- Access to social capital?
What were the support providers doing?

- Not identifying an issue - just can’t see it
- Identifying an issue but not problematizing
- Identifying an issue and taking action

“Anyone can find two hours a day to do some learning. Ask yourself, what else are you doing?”

Ralph – Teacher

“My job is to help them connect to resources, … how to be someone the companies want to hire …”

Carmen Workforce Counselor

“I’ve had students come to class with their small children. Some teachers just won’t allow that … I didn't let it bother me.”

Matthew - Teacher
Social Justice Mindset/Orientation to Work

[an] agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination (Matsuda, 1996). In higher education, these theoretical frameworks are conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 275)
Discussion

What does it mean to you to show up at work with a social justice mindset? What would that look like?
The need to include many voices

Nothing about me without me

- Establish relevance
- Identify things that we missed, or didn’t get right
- Understand usefulness
Including stakeholder voices

The stakeholders

- Working learners
- Workforce development staff
- Educators
- Employers
- Researchers
A series of 3 convenings

- 1st convening - Understanding Learners Through Persona
- 2nd convening - Using Critical Race Theory as an Analytical Lens
- 3rd convening - The Ecosystem and Worker Voice
Setting the Stage: Learning Ecosystem and Worker Voice

Train of Logic -- What’s assumed versus what we’ve seen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>What we’ve seen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning leads to advancement</td>
<td>Outcomes of learning are multiple; can be applied beyond contexts where learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, to be relevant, needs to have some relationship to here and now. Some learning opportunities may not lead to outcomes such as a promotion or a better job, but can support attitude toward, learning relationship building, which lead to other kinds of learning.
Setting the Stage: Learning Ecosystem and Worker Voice

Promise Fulfilled
Supportive supervisor that did some just-in-time coaching, providing in-context learning/training opportunities; builds worker confidence, visibility in the workplace are someone who “can do the work”; set the stage for advancement

Promise Unfulfilled
Working learner engaged in a learning opportunity related to the job, but it didn’t lead directly to any end point or wasn’t even noticed by the employer or supervisor (promise but no payoff)
The ‘special sauce’

Our data lead us to understand that provision of a formal learning opportunity does not necessarily lead to advancement or learner success -- that there is something above and beyond that is required.
The ‘special sauce’

We’ve noticed that providing supports like nudging and mentoring gets working learners to relevant learning opportunities and then advancement opportunities, or provides opportunities for incidental and/or just in time learning.
Discussion

What steps can you take in your own work to help learners realize the promise of employer supported learning?
Consider equitable access to training, educational, and advance opportunities

This leads us to a series of questions:

1. Who gets the special sauce? Who doesn’t?
2. Who is a good “fit” for the next career step? Who isn’t?
3. Who is “ready” for the next career step? Who isn’t?
4. Who initiates?
5. Who decides?
Welcome to our interactive blog for the 21st Century Learning Ecosystem Opportunities project. Here you can take part in discussions and keep up to date on this three-year research project. The project responds to the need for employers, educators, and policy makers to better understand the characteristics of learning opportunities available to frontline service workers.
Read our Paper

Thank you for attending!

Feel free to contact us

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