

Core Competencies, Lifelong Learning, and Multiple Learner Identities

**Carol E. Kasworm
North Carolina State University
Carol_kasworm@ncsu.edu**



FOCUS OF STUDY

Exploration of Core Competencies

- ❖ **Communities of Practice**

- In relation to multiple HE organizational contexts (learning systems)

- In relation to Learner Role Identities

- ❖ **Studies of US adult undergraduate Workers in different HE (higher education) contexts**

Communities of Practice Framework

- A social-cultural learning system – learning in a community “in practice”
- Based in Lave and Wenger (Situated learning, 1991) and Wenger’s work (Communities of Practice, 1998)
- Novice and Expert Participation continuum
 - Novice – apprenticeships in learning (knowledge and skills application moving from periphery towards the core)
 - Experts –close to the core of the learning system

One set of Communities of Practice – US Higher Education

- Higher Education are multiple learning systems, communities of practice (COP).
- Research differentiates cultures of HE contexts:
 - Community colleges – 2 – year institutions
 - 4 year private, adult-degree programs
 - 4-year public doctoral –degree granting institutions
- Each learning system, as a COP, has differing goals, as well as structural, operational, and relational components

Second set of Communities of Practice–Adult Life Role Identities

- **Past research on adult learning –**
 - Adults have many role identities – based in many communities of practice –i.e. work, family, community
 - Additional roles of adult lifelong learners – undergraduate student
 - Adult learning is based in participation and application of new knowledge and skill within these role identities in COP's

Adult Learner-COP perspective

- Negotiation of meaning of the adult learner in relation to both their communities of practice and their role identities
 - Mutual engagement and negotiation between learner and COP
 - Shared repertoire of core competencies in relation to role identities
- **Do specific role identities and COP's (learning systems) impact competency outcomes for adult learners?**

Study of Adult Undergraduates who were Workers

- Qualitative investigation of 61 adult workers (30 years of age or older)
 - Type of workers -85% enrolled in majors related to current work roles and 15% enrolled in majors for career change.
 - Based in – 3 different learning systems: (community college, 4-year doctoral institutions, and 4-year private – adult degree programs)

Social constructivist learning of core competencies

- Knowledge is :
 - temporary, developmental, non-objective,
 - internally constructed, and
 - socially and culturally mediated
- “a **self-regulatory process** of struggling with the conflict between personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture.”

Study – Situated roles and learning systems

Undergraduate adult students had differing socially constructed learning beliefs of competence learning:

- **2-year Community college** – Learning to become a successful student (80%) and worker role (20%)
- **4-year doctoral institution** – Identity in joint student & work roles (80%), worker role (15%), and non-learner (5% - seeking a credential)
- **4-year – adult degree program** – Identity in worker role (84%), joint student & work roles (12%); and non learner (4% - seeking a degree)

Nexus of Role Identity Learning

- **Viewed Competencies based in either practical (real world, problem-solving) or academic knowledge (conceptual theoretical, world-view)**

Learning for practical orientation in work role

**Learning for conceptual world-view application –
new course insights or new ways of
understanding their world**

- **Subset viewed competency learning
across both domains with creation of new
understandings and knowledge**

Competencies and Role identities & Learning Systems

- **Core competencies are contextualized by adults and learned for deep, long-term learning based on their dominant role identities (workers and students) and expectations within a learning system (three different HE systems)**
- **Core competencies are also contextualized by learning systems in relation to their orientation toward efficacy and utility outcomes**

Challenge for Lifelong Learning Systems and Core Competencies

- Recognition of the contextual orientation of each institution and program**
- Recognition of the multi-role nature of adult lifelong learners and their contextualized learning based in roles and COP's**
- Evolving demands – suggest new challenges for learners and HE a dynamic knowledge society & lifelong learning**