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
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