



Competency-Based Recognition of Learning (CBRL) Collaborative Guiding Principles

February 5, 2019

The Competency-Based Recognition of Learning Collaborative (CBRL) is a group of experts and feedback loop participants brought together to develop tools, resources, and materials to enable competency-based recognition of learning in a manner that addresses equity in validation and recognition of learning for adult learners, African American, Hispanic, and Native American learners. These efforts are timely, because while postsecondary education has examined the shift of non-traditional student populations based on the numbers of students entering institutions, we have yet to fully explore “non-traditional” in terms of who our institutions have been designed to serve.

Guiding Principles

Historically, education in the United States has adapted to the changing needs of student populations whether during times of massification of educational access or changing national priorities. It is time for a review of the systems we created in order to modify them for the learners we currently serve and for those to which they have not historically been designed to support and enable. Without such a review we will be unable to address equity gaps in educational attainment that have been institutionalized within our educational systems—determining the fate of learners based not on what they know and can do, but on their ability to conform to the existing system. Thus, the work of the CBRL Collaborative rests upon three guiding principles that inform the collective development of tools, resources, and materials to help meet current educational needs and address systemic issues of equity.

1. Learning occurs, is reinforced, and developed in a variety of spaces and places including life experiences, work, military, and structured and unstructured educational opportunities. The learning that unfolds throughout the life of a learner *has value*, and *should count* toward credentials, further education, or employment. Non-institutional learning *can* be documented and validated such that learners are able to have their knowledge and skills count in ways that advance their life goals. This is counter to our current system which validates particular types of learning over others, creating inequitable structures, and hindering educational advancement and opportunity of student populations, particularly historically underserved populations and adult learners. We do not view the challenge as a transactional one alone, but a problem of a learning system that currently defines what knowledge is legitimized. To this end, the CBRL supports equity of learning in addition to equitable outcomes for our learners.

2. To enable competency-based recognition of learning from a variety of spaces, competencies—along with intentional educational design aligned to various outcomes—should be transparent to learners and widely discoverable. Such clarity ensures that pathways of attainment are clear and accessible for the learners they strive to serve. Further, it requires a deep understanding of who our learners are such that we can best support their success. It also requires a focus on enabling learner agency and control of their learning to put forward documentation of what they know and can do, regardless of where they may have acquired such knowledge and skills, in ways that are portable, translatable, and widely accepted as valid.
3. We are aware that to foster such an environment requires system-wide and structural changes and redefinitions of stakeholder roles. In essence, a reimagining and revisioning of partnerships within institutions of postsecondary education as well as between education providers, employers, certification bodies, technology providers, and military to name a few. The creation of the system of the future that recognizes learning from a variety of spaces cannot be developed or supported in isolation—it must be done in partnership with other stakeholders and organizations working together to ensure responsiveness for our learners by meeting them where they are.

To help us in our work, we further distinguish between competency-based learning (CBL) and competency-based education (CBE) in alignment with the efforts of American Institutes for Research, which they define as:

Competency-based learning (CBL) includes structured and unstructured opportunities for learning and/or the assessment of learning, both self-created and those designed by employers, educational institutions, and training providers. Examples include modules offered by institutions of higher education; prior learning assessment; military credit; other work-based learning, apprenticeships, and returnships; industry certifications; and government licensures. Competency-based education (CBE) provides structured learning opportunities designed by postsecondary institutions that lead to recognized educational credentials, created by backward design from a disciplinary perspective on what a credential holder should know and be able to do and assessed authentically. Examples include Direct Assessment programs and non-Direct Assessment CBE programs. Taken together, CBL approaches and CBE have the potential to provide access to postsecondary credentials, which can broaden economic opportunities and contribute to a more educated citizenry.