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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER PATHWAYS, WORKFORCE EXPECTATIONS, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

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CULTURAL CAPITAL

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jane Jensen, Associate Professor of
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Lexington, Kentucky

2018

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER
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CULTURAL CAPITAL

Understanding the practical implications of work-based learning opportunities (WBLOs) is complex. Although WBLOs are not new learning environments, understanding and clearly defining them is increasingly necessary. In Kentucky, WBLOs are part of the political discourse in post-secondary education. The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and local/regional economic and workforce development agencies have incorporated strengthening and growing WBLOs into their strategic plans.

By interviewing students who have completed WBLOs at three colleges in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), this study intended to explore student perspectives of WBLOs by asking the following research questions: 1) What role do WBLOs play in transmitting dominant workplace cultural capital and how has that transmission impacted student career pathway decisions? 2) What impact do WBLOs have in developing workplace expectations post-graduation?

The dissertation is produced in three manuscripts, including a companion piece written in collaboration with Lauren McCrary, examining faculty perspectives of WBLOs in Kentucky. The second manuscript is an essay addressing the concept of workforce mis-alignment between the skills possessed by post-secondary graduates and the needs of industry. The third manuscript is a review of the research, which was conducted to explore student perspectives of WBLOs in relation to the research questions.

KEYWORDS: Work-based Learning Opportunities, Cultural Capital, Career Exploration

Robert Boone
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January 30, 2019
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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER
PATHWAYS, WORKFORCE EXPECTATIONS, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF
CULTURAL CAPITAL

By

Robert Boone

Dr. Jane Jensen
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Director of Dissertation

Dr. Jane Jensen
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DATE: January 30, 2019
_____

To

My Family

Acknowledgements

I was recently the graduation speaker celebrating the accomplishments of over twenty GED graduates. During my speech, I stressed that it is through the encouragement, support, and inspiration of others that we often achieve our greatest goals. We very seldom, if ever, achieve anything great on our own. Such is the case for me as I complete this pursuit for doctoral education. I would not have been able to achieve any of this without the encouragement, support, and inspiration of my wife, Gwendolyn. I have been working full-time in challenging roles while completing my graduate education (MPA and now EdD) for seven consecutive years. Moreover, the first two years of my doctoral coursework were spent working full-time and serving as an elected official. During that seven-year span, we have had the joy of welcoming three children into our lives, being recruited for and accepting a new position, buying a house, selling a house, and moving to opposite ends of the state. We have also had the intense sadness of losing my father, the anxiety of developing new friendships and adjusting to a new city, and the strain that an intensely busy life puts on one's family. During this time, my life and my educational pursuits have blended together, which certainly influences my research interests. Also of interest in my research, is one's familial background and its influence on educational and career pursuits. Family, as you will find out in the coming pages, is foundational to my research questions. I could not have balanced my life over the past seven years without the support, encouragement, and dedication of my family.

Great leaders help place opportunities in the paths of those who seek to grow and to serve. There are three leaders who have put me on this path toward completion of my

doctoral education. The first is the late Dr. Richard Marsh who is also mentioned in my Chapter Five reflection piece. Dr. Marsh believed that I could add value to his research in the arena of cognitive psychology as an undergraduate when I was far from believing in myself for much of anything. Dr. Marsh changed my life with a work-based learning opportunity, which ended up spanning three years and still serves as the first line on my CV.

Dr. Juston Pate, when serving as provost of Maysville Community and Technical College, encouraged me to pursue my doctoral education. In fact, it was one brief email from Dr. Pate that changed my life. It simply read something like, "Robert, I know we've talked about you earning your doctorate before. The deadline for the UK program is getting close, and I wanted to send you the info. and encourage you to apply." The truth is, I had wanted to pursue my doctorate, but I never really believed it to be a possibility for me. That short email encouraged me to gather my application materials in a matter of days and apply for this program. Dr. Pate, thank you for that encouragement, thank you for believing in me, and thank you for now serving on my dissertation committee.

Barbara Campbell, my former direct supervisor at Maysville Community and Technical College put more opportunities in my path than I can count. Barb encouraged me to serve on numerous community boards, run for local political office, earn my masters, reorganize career service delivery at MCTC, earn my doctorate, and to become a leader. The six years I spent under Barb's leadership allowed me to grow more than I ever have in my professional life. I hope to model her leadership with the people I now have the privilege of leading.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

I have been a practitioner and administrator in the field of workforce development for about a decade. When considering my dissertation topic, I wanted to focus on an area that could positively impact my field and the individuals served by my organization and others like it. From my experience in engaging with hundreds of employers, employees, and job-seekers over the years, I have been able to gain a thorough understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the arena of workforce development. Pulling from this experience, I wanted my dissertation research to explore the role of work-based learning opportunities (WBLOs) in the career development of students.

Based on my professional experience, it seemed that many of the major workforce challenges in the modern market were foundational issues related to career development. For instance, one of the most prevalent contemporary workforce challenges involves the concept "soft skills," often referred to as "essential skills." Workforce issues involving soft skills are not issues of technical expertise or fluency. If they were, the post-secondary technical curriculum already in place would alleviate most of the concern. Rather, from my perspective as a workforce development practitioner, soft skill issues must be explored and addressed from the standpoint of culture—from a sociological perspective.

Throughout my coursework, it became clear that one of my colleagues, Lauren McCrary, was interested in the topic of WBLOs from the faculty perspective. More specifically, Lauren was interested in focusing on how faculty in community and technical colleges influence the development and implementation of WBLOs. Lauren

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and I decided to collaborate on a dissertation in anticipation that our work would provide insight into the role of WBLOs in impacting student career exploration and the field of workforce development. Moreover, viewing WBLOs from both the student and faculty perspectives could lead to robust recommendations and concepts for future exploration. What follows is a description of a three-manuscript dissertation.

Chapter Two, our co-authored technical report titled, "Work-Based Learning Opportunities: Associated Faculty Practices, Student Impact, and Recommendations," serves as an introduction to the problem and a review of current knowledge. We examine work-based learning situated in the context of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). We define the new and emerging problem of practice reflected in the implementation of WBLOs in Kentucky from the faculty and student perspectives and describe how each perspective overlaps. We also address joint findings and ethical concerns related to performing this kind of research.

Chapter Three, titled, "Work-Based Learning Opportunities and the Development of Bourdieuan Cultural Capital: First-Generation Career Seekers and the Sociological Cost of Workforce Misalignment," is an essay detailing how first-generation college students often lack the necessary cultural capital to successfully navigate the workforce and post-secondary environments. In addition to exploring the role of cultural capital among first-generation college students, this chapter introduces the term, "first-generation career seeker." The term first-generation career seekers was developed from this research, because there was not a satisfactory term in existence to illustrate the perspectives of individuals who are removed from the kinds of career development activities needed to obtain the cultural capital to navigate the implicit world of work. The

essay also makes a case that WBLOs are an important component in aligning the delivery of community and technical college training to the needs of employers. Such an alignment is important given the evolving mission of community and technical colleges to become institutions of workforce development.

Chapter Four focuses on my qualitative research related to student perspectives of WBLO experiences in Kentucky. This study highlights how WBLOs can transmit dominant workplace cultural capital to students, enabling them to more fluently navigate the often-implicit rules of the workplace environment. In addition, this chapter focuses on the ability of WBLOs to "fast-track" career readiness, especially for students who have had limited exposure to career development opportunities. This chapter includes recommendations based on research findings, including: The development of a post-secondary curricular plan to incorporate or infuse WBLO experiences throughout the entirety of programs of study; a strategic emphasis on developing, promoting, and evaluating WBLO experiences, particularly among community colleges where a majority of students are first-generation college students; and, the need for employers in all industry sectors to be engaged in WBLO program development, implementation, and advocacy.

Chapter Five is a reflection on the key findings in the research as well as a personal reflection illustrating why I selected WBLOs as my dissertation topic. The chapter ends with a discussion of the significance of the study and a presentation of the utility of the research among post-secondary administrators, faculty, and employers to: 1) Increase the emphasis on WBLO programming, especially among populations of students who could be characterized as first-generation career seekers, 2) Design and

evaluate WBLO experiences that seek to maximize career development through curricular integration over the entire span of a program of study, and 3) Emphasize the important role of employers in the WBLO design and delivery process, including the role of employers in increasing the number of impactful WBLO sites within the employer community.

Chapter 2
Work-Based Learning Opportunities: Associated Faculty Practices, Student
Impact, and Recommendations
Lauren McCrary and Robert Boone

The Research Problem

Dr. Jay Box, in his first year as President of KCTCS, met with nearly two thousand individuals on a listening tour around the state in 2015. The ideas gathered through these conversations with business, industry, and community leaders, as well as students, faculty, and staff, were combined with over 3,200 online survey responses and distilled into five themes—areas of need in the Commonwealth where KCTCS could contribute to the solutions:

- educational attainment at all levels

- economic development and job growth

- a world-class, 21st century workforce

- global competitiveness of business and industry

- prosperity of Kentucky citizens (KCTCS, 2016, p. ii)

These themes served as the foundation of the current KCTCS Strategic Plan for 2016-22 and are reflected in Dr. Box's vision for "a future where all of our students' dreams translate into communities with a college-educated workforce, ready and able to fill the needs of local business and industry" (Box, 2016).

This need for an educated and prepared workforce is not new. The legislative act that established KCTCS states that the colleges of the system shall "be responsive to the needs of students and employers in all regions of the Commonwealth with accessible education and training to support the lifelong learning needs of Kentucky citizens."

(Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997). It would have been easy to dismiss the listening tour as only serving to confirm that the necessity for KCTCS remains nearly twenty years after its creation. The themes identified in Dr. Box's listening sessions, however, provided additional nuance and clarified what stakeholders expected at the time. The Postsecondary Education Improvement Act speaks of enhancing the relationships between K-12 and KCTCS, facilitating transfer between KCTCS and four-year universities, and improving the "flexibility and adaptability" of currently employed workers in an "ever-changing and global economy" (Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997). The collection of comments from Dr. Box's tour resembled, in today's lingo, the same elements found in the law: educational alignment, skill alignment, career-readiness, innovation, a global perspective, and global competitiveness.

National efforts to tighten the connection between workforce preparation and labor markets reflect this refinement in tone as well. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the first reform of the public workforce system legislation since 1998, became effective in July 2015. A bipartisan effort, it was "designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). The WIOA emphasizes obtaining a "recognized postsecondary credential"—a term that broadened the possibilities for training and support—because credentials have become a prerequisite for entering the middle class (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014, p. 2). The matching of skills provided by postsecondary credentials to employer needs—the

alignment—was and is critical to this process. Unfortunately, this matching has been identified as one of the shortcomings of the U.S. economy since the recovery, so much so that it is now known as the "skills gap."

The problem of a prepared workforce is a perennial one and at the time of this study, the expectation of a rapid response had become the norm. Both legislation and policy documents included language which heralded the great potential for work-based learning opportunities (WBLOs, which we pronounce **wee-**blohs) to address this need in Kentucky. Through WBLO partnerships with companies and organizations, KCTCS was directed to align the curriculum to workforce needs in near real-time and help employers develop a pipeline for skilled talent. Clearly KCTCS was given a role to play in workforce development; yet, research on post-secondary outcomes indicates the benefits for students may even be greater (Hayward & Horvath, 2000; Weible, 2009). Students can increase their understanding of workplace demands and norms. They can develop their soft skills in context and become better able to make sense of the world of work. They may gain confidence and demonstrate their value to a potential employer. Business and government leaders—including the governor of Kentucky—are promoting these myriad benefits of WBLOs. The timing for the expansion of WBLOs is ideal, hence its inclusion (described as "experiential learning") in the ten goals of the KCTCS 2016-22 Strategic Plan.

The promise of WBLOs in Kentucky, however, will not be realized without an intentional response by KCTCS. KCTCS must build upon the apparent successes of WBLOs such as Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME)—which boasted a 98% job placement rate in 2016—and move to understand

other established WBLO programs already in place around the state (KY FAME, 2016). There are, however, unique challenges specific to the students that KCTCS serves. Many are first-generation college students. Many come from communities with low post-secondary achievement. Not only do these students come from households with a limited understanding of college, because of low levels of academic achievement at the college-level especially in rural areas of the state, they have fewer role models who appreciate education or consider work to gain anything other than a paycheck. These factors may likely contribute to the dearth of soft skills that Kentucky employers are decrying as well.

WBLOs may provide the recipe that addresses these multiple needs. WLBOs are commonly considered to be a context for students to practice their learned technical skills. The skills needed, however, are two-fold—both hard (technical) and soft. WBLOs allow students to acquire and practice soft skills that are vital for two-year, open-access college graduates in today's economy and possibly even more so for first-generation students who are also the first in their family to pursue a career path. This report describes WBLO development and the obstacles encountered in Kentucky from a faculty perspective (McCrary) as well as the WBLO experiences of a sample of first-generation college students (Boone). Through this study, we hope that a more holistic and intentional approach towards WBLOs can occur within KCTCS in attempt to afford students the best opportunity to grow and succeed professionally.

This study was designed and carried out with the intention of informing and guiding the response of KCTCS as it expands WBLOs. This contribution to the understanding of faculty influences on WBLOs and the student experiences will serve to increase Kentucky's competitiveness in a rapidly evolving economy.

Work-based Learning Opportunities in Context: A Review of Current Knowledge

Experience gained through guided practice at a workplace, where customer and management expectations determine success, affords students the opportunity to demonstrate and acquire soft skills in the "real world." An inclusive definition of soft skills was created for this study based on current research in the field (adapted from Rotherham & Willingham, 2010; Cabo, 2013; Burstein, 2014). Soft skills are workplace and life skills that cut across disciplines, sectors, developmental stages, and functions. They are often difficult to observe, or measure and they must be learned through understanding, practice, and feedback. These skills are often referred to as work essential skills, career ready skills, or work ready skills (the terminology used in Kentucky by KCTCS). This dissertation will utilize the term "soft skills," amid the other terms, due to its precedence in the literature and its inherent contrast to technical skills.

KCTCS has defined work ready skills based on the results of a survey of hundreds of employers by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System in 2016 as skills essential for the workplace as defined in the state of Kentucky. These skills included:

- Professionalism: Work Ethic, Professionalism and Integrity, and Flexibility/Adaptability

- Communication: Teamwork, Communication Skills, and Interpersonal Abilities

- Critical & Integrative Thinking: Analytical/Research Skills, Problem-Solving/Reasoning, and Technology as a Tool

- Organizational Skills: Planning/Organizing and Leadership/Management Skills

The National Association of Colleges and Employers surveyed over 200 employers to explore what they were looking for in their new hires. Survey results indicated positions remained open because employers could not find applicants who were motivated with strong interpersonal skills and that the punctuality and flexibility of their applicants were subpar (White, 2013). Alarmingly, employers reported, "the entry-level candidates who are on tap to join the ranks of full-time work are clueless about the fundamentals of office life" (White, 2013, para 2-3). The needs for students with better soft skills is clear.

Developing and honing these skills is often incorporated into college curriculum as faculty, often technical instructors with personal experience in their fields of instruction, develop WBLOs for their students. WBLOs are "a structured, supervised professional experience at an approved site" that aligns with the student's career goals and affords the opportunity to earn academic credit (Gilroy, 2013, p. 31). The three main stakeholders are the student, the hosting organization with a corresponding workplace supervisor, and the institution with a corresponding academic advisor. All three must be engaged for an increased likelihood of stakeholder satisfaction.

Globally, nationally, and now at the state level, hands-on learning is taking center stage in political discourse. In 2011, several central and northern European countries were found to have half of their secondary students spend their last two or three years in programs that combine classroom and WBLOs (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011).

Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson (2011) stated that these programs "also advance a

broader pedagogical approach: that from late adolescence onward, most young people

learn best in structured programs that combine work and learning and where learning is

contextual and applied" (p. 38). The United States has started to take heed.

> It is no longer defensible for the U.S. to behave as if it has nothing to learn from
>
> other countries. We believe that if the U.S. is serious about increasing the
>
> proportion of young people who arrive in their mid-twenties with a postsecondary
>
> credential with currency in the labor market, it is imperative that we closely
>
> examine the experience of several other OECD [Organization for Economic
>
> Cooperation and Development] countries, especially those with the best
>
> developed vocational education systems. (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011,
>
> p. 18)

The proponents of applied and work-based learning in the US can learn from other

countries and effectively apply their practices as appropriate. The effects of a positive

WBLO are far-reaching.

Work-based Learning as a Pressing Issue in Kentucky

In addition to the performance-based funding indicators impacting Kentucky

public educational institutions, in the 2016-2021 Strategic Agenda for Postsecondary and

Adult Education, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) released an

agenda titled *Stronger by Degrees*. *A Plan to Create a More Educated and Prosperous*

Kentucky (2016). The strategic agenda outlined 11 objectives and linked those objectives

to the primary three "urgent priorities" based on feedback from stakeholders in education, business, and public and private sector.

1. OPPORTUNITY. How can Kentucky encourage more people to take advantage of postsecondary opportunities?

2. SUCCESS. How can Kentucky increase degree and certificate completion, fill workforce shortages, and guide more graduates to a career path?

3. IMPACT. How can Kentucky's postsecondary system create economic growth and developments and make our state more prosperous? (CPE, 2016, p.5)

WBLOs have become a key role in the second and third priorities and institutions have been encouraged to incorporate these opportunities into the community college curriculum. This future incorporation was confirmed in the details, as an objective under the urgent priority, IMPACT, was, and is still current, Objective 9-*Improve the career readiness and employability of postsecondary graduates*. Subsection 9.3 states "Work with the employer community, foundations, and state agencies to provide 'work and learn' opportunities, including experiential or project-based learning, co-ops, internships, externships, and clinical placements" (CPE, 2016, p. 17). Within the CPE strategic plan, Goal 5 of House Bill 1 (1997) is referenced as a legislative mandate directing the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to "develop a workforce with the skills to meet the needs of new and existing industries" and "improve the employability of citizens" (p. 19). CPE emphasized their collaboration efforts with the Workforce Development Cabinet, the Cabinet for Economic Development, and a partnership with Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics. This partnership was forged to

assist in tracking employment outcomes and "ensure our academic programs are producing the kinds of employees needed to fill workforce shortages" (CPE, 2016, p. 16). WBLOs, specifically internships and co-ops, will continue to support the CPE objectives and partnership goals discussed.

Often mentioned in the literature and in public discourse are the external benefits associated with WBLOs. For example, the student has a higher likelihood of being hired by the organization if they are perceived as competent, have experience that appeals to future employers, and demonstrate abilities to network and establish relationships within their desired field. How do WBLOs provide these attributes? Hayward and Horvath (2000) found co-op students to have a greater appreciation of work, improved social skills, increased understanding of work related to society and increased confidence in their career decisions (similar to topics discussed in Dr. Box's listening tour) (p. 7). Consequently, these values led to better employees overall through decreased absenteeism, better performance, willingness to accept greater responsibility, and less "social loafing" (p. 7). The authors also suggested that from the ages of 18-25, the age range of most KCTCS students, students are more receptive to vocational exploration and proposed this as a prime time for a co-op experience to potentially instill long-term values sought by employers (p. 8). They also found WBLOs to increase job experimentation among students (the willingness to examine and seek new career options), improve self-worth (acquiring and improving skills), enhance perseverance despite uncertainty (willingness to work even if unclear about expectations), and promote responsible risk-taking (willingness to face failure) (Hayward & Horvath, 2000, pp. 9-11).

In another study, Drewery, Nevison, and Pretti (2016) assessed students' vocational self-concept (VSC) and the role reflection plays in WBLOs. The authors posit that beyond skill development, WBLOs help to develop the student.

> Research has shown that [VSC] is associated with a number of positive outcomes, including a faster time to employment (Weisz, 2001), increased ability to learn new occupationally relevant information (Saunders et al., 2000), and decreased occupational indecision (Tokar et al., 2003).

As employers are looking more and more to previous education and credentials as indicators of motivation and success, WBLOs provide leverage to students seeking employment. Also, transition from school to work is easier for students with previous WBLOs in a related field.

In conclusion, the three main parties involved in any WBLO are the student, the organization or employer (with a site supervisor as a point of contact), and the educational institution (with an academic supervisor as the point of contact). An inclusive list of benefits associated with WBLOs for each party compiled by Weible (2009) describes student benefits as higher starting salaries and job satisfaction, more (and earlier) job offers, higher extrinsic success, development of communication skills, and better interviewing and networking skills (pp. 59-60). The compilation of employer benefits included an increased likelihood of filling a position with their top applicant, generation of new ideas, building partnerships with colleges, community involvement and service, and part-time help (Weible, 2009, p. 60). Lastly, examples of the main

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benefits cited for the college were improved reputation, community partnerships, external curriculum assessment, and professional input.

Effective Implementation of WBLOs in Post-Secondary Education

The main stakeholders in a WBLO partnership are the institution, the student, and the employment organization. To create a positive and impactful WBLO, Albashiry et al. (2015) recommended a five-step curriculum development phase of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The authors also emphasize the need for "…extensive collaboration and deliberations between the curriculum developers and stakeholders throughout the development process in order to reach consensus about the main features of the educational programme, such as its outcomes, content, pedagogy, and assessment" (p. 3). Beyond curriculum maintenance, the authors stressed that it was, and remains, important to continually strive for improvement. Upholding relevancy to stakeholders happens through continuous applicable updates, new and timely goals, and initiating change through relationships with senior management, experts, and potential employers of the graduates.

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) president, Doug Meyer, encouraged business and industry to be involved in development of programs and lend insight about what is happening in their field through mentoring, internship opportunities and instructor training (Meyer, 2016). Researchers deemed gaining and maintaining employer engagement as a necessary step.

In healthcare, for instance, it could lead to a higher-quality, more motivated entry-level workforce, while providing a pipeline of people prepared to move up the

healthcare ladder field. . . But because a well-designed program would likely

increase the postsecondary completion rate, the long-term benefits would almost

surely outweigh the near-term costs (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011, p.

33).

The ability to maintain a relevant program must incorporate current stakeholder input.

By doing this, the long-term benefits are more than just the actual WBLO. The student

can grow professionally, the institutions can improve success markers like retention and

completion, and the organization can help shape a potential future employee.

WBLOs as a high-impact educational practice are not a new concept. O'Neill

(2010), the director of Integrative Programs at the Association of American Colleges and

Universities (AAC&U), completed an analysis of internships as high-impact practices

and examined their quality. O'Neill discussed different practices to ensure a high-impact

internship. Among those practices were making sure the students had a task that required

long-term effort while providing an opportunity to establish "substantive" relationships

with key stakeholders, work with a diverse group of people, receive meaningful

feedback, and reflect on their experience. O'Neill referenced a standard from the Council

for Advancement of Standards (CAS) differentiating internships from volunteer

opportunities because of the measured learning that is balanced by the student, institution

and site. She cautioned that all three parties involved must collaborate to "ensure that the

balance is appropriate, and that learning is of sufficiently high quality to warrant the

effort, which might include academic credit" (O'Neill, 2010, p. 6). O'Neill elucidated

that while CAS used the term "deliberate" and AAC&U used "intentional," both agreed

that when incorporating WBLOs into curriculum, it must be a thoughtful, data-driven, reflective process to ensure relevancy and benefit to the student (p. 6).

The employer stakeholder should be first invited by the college coordinator to co-lead the WBLO development. Much of the joint effort between post-secondary and employer partners should focus on the curricular integration of WBLO experiences throughout a student's program of study. Some argue that students should be made aware of WBLOs early in their college career. On campuses where WBLOs were a top priority, students meet with career counselors before they entered a classroom or during their first semester (Supiano, 2015). By giving students an early understanding of how a WBLO will support their classroom learning and long-term career goals, students were more open to seeing potential opportunities as they pursued their degree as opposed to finding one in a time sensitive situation.

Sharma, Mannell and Rowe (1995) cautioned that WBLOs must be relevant to the student's career aspirations to affect their professional development. Van Gyn, Branton, Cutt, Loken and Ricks (1996) expanded by adding that students with relevant work experience were more adept at understanding how their classes and skill acquirement directly related to their long-term career goals. The authors further stated that making this connection between classes and career could be used as a motivational source early in the program to support students in reaching their academic goals. Students were also able to more clearly define their career goals after participating in relevant work experience.

In addition, WBLOs are foundational in providing students with, what are many times, first experiences in the work environment. As a result, WBLOs offered in the last year or last semester of a program of study are little better than the student not having access to a WBLO experience at all. Those of us who have been in the fields of post-secondary education or workforce development have all heard of the nursing student who was nearing graduation only to realize that the sight of common medical occurrences was enough to make the student change career plans. Unfortunately, in this case, an entire academic career was spent in a program of study that will not lead to employment in the field in which it was intended. As academic programs become increasingly specialized, such a change in academic program is akin to a career change, potentially leaving the student starting over in large part. This kind of realization could have occurred much earlier, before great time and financial resources were spent, if only the WBLO experience had been incorporated near the beginning and infused throughout the program of study.

In a 2013 study, it was found that because Clemson University made WBLOs a priority by actively encouraging students to incorporate internships into the span of curriculum and by providing support services for placement, 67% of their graduating seniors participated in an internship or co-op as opposed to an average 36.9% in the 330 other colleges and universities surveyed (Gilroy, 2013, p. 31). Lending further support to the concept of early opportunities is Rosario, Flemister, Gampert, and Grindley (2013), who decided after a high-impact practice, cross-campus collaboration to offer an internship opportunity to first-year students at Hostos Community College as opposed to during their final semester. This practice was deemed a success by the college due to

increased student employment and development. Faculty buy-in, student preparation, and outreach to the local employer community supported the growth of the internships from fifty students to three hundred students annually (Rosario et al., 2013, p. 26).

For a student to develop professionally from a WBLO, previous research indicates the site supervisor must be engaged in ensuring the well-being of the student. Sustained internships "provide a structure to support the transition from adolescence to adulthood lacking for the majority of young people in the U.S. . . . Adult relationships are built on support and accountability, mentoring and supervision" (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011, p. 20). The most effective WBLO site supervisors, from the student's perspective in the NACE Foundation survey results, took the time to offer constructive feedback and teach, treated them professionally and respectfully, were open to consultation, and explained how the designated work was positioned in the long-term goals of the organization (Bottner, 2010; Fifolt and Searby, 2010). The value of an engaged site supervisor cannot be overstated.

Criticisms and Obstacles of Work-based Learning

WBLOs are not always positive. Even when WBLOs are available, students do not always have the availability, time, or commitment to participate in one. In a survey that with almost 10,000 student responses, results indicated that, of the students that had not participated in an internship, the top reasons were a lack of time, the lack of pay for some internships (creating a financial hardship for some), a lack of flexibility in an internship opportunity, and lastly, a lack of confidence in their skills being "attractive to an employer" (Bottner, 2015, p. 27). Bottner also found criticism from the survey indicating that less than half of the internship sites provided some type of mentor or

"buddy program" to help navigate the initial entry into the organization (p. 27). These are all reasons that surfaced as obstacles in our study as well.

A common complaint surrounding WBLOs is that if either the site supervisor or student is not engaged, the student may be charged with completing menial tasks for no other reason than to earn academic credit. This was a common complaint in this study among faculty members. Page, Geck, and Wiseman (1999) cautioned site supervisors to resist the urge to use interns as free labor and exploit their willingness to please. One intern countered the criticisms, saying that "problems experienced by community college interns are countered by the interns' faith in the future resources, which they believe will be available" (Broadhurst & Bartlett, 2014, p. 569). Interns are more willing to endure menial tasks with the hope of long-term networking benefits. For example, an intern may be more willing to file papers for two hours if they know it will maintain their good standing with the site supervisor. A good standing offers them potential positive connections in the field as well as a reference letter for future job searches.

It is a challenge to track and assess WBLO experiences. In KCTCS, the direction of the WBLOs are set by the program coordinator at each college. When practices are kept decentralized (unintentionally), there is no opportunity to gather and share rich data related to successful practices. (Nasr, Pennington, & Andres, 2004). We found that little information related to WBLOs was available interdepartmentally unless specifically sought by a coordinator. For example, one WBLO supervisor may have fewer requirements related to contact hours or a unique reflection component in their class and another program coordinator may have a best practice or an effective supervisor evaluation that offers constructive feedback to the student. However, there is commonly

no centralized office to house coordination of WBLOs and related information (e.g., forms, assessments and evaluations, and narratives about a specific site) is not readily accessible, which negatively impacts collaboration and WBLO performance.

Finally, WBLO programs may not be fully supported in academic settings. The idea of WBLOs has frequently been portrayed as a threat to "traditional education" because it is viewed as "skills-based" or vocational training; not the more traditional idea of classroom education. O'Neill (2010) described this as anti-vocationalism and explained "the idea that addressing career development in the context of the major would 'water down' the curriculum is a powerful one, with deep roots. It reveals a common reaction in academia against anything that smacks of vocationalism or apprenticeship" (p. 7). Making WBLOs palatable for varying degrees of academic traditionalists will continue to be an uphill battle.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Increasingly seen as desirable in multiple industry sectors, WBLOs have been promoted by business and government leaders across Kentucky. The benefits are many. WBLOs provide a better understanding of career expectations for students. Employers develop a pipeline of skilled talent. Colleges and universities strengthen community partnerships and ensure that the curriculum is aligned with workplace needs. In addition, with performance-based funding for higher education a reality in Kentucky, the promising retention and graduation rates for WBLO programs are garnering attention. As a result, increasing the percentage of students participating in "experiential learning" is one of the ten goals included in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) 2016-22 Strategic Plan.

The promise of WBLOs in KCTCS, however, will not be realized without an intentional response based on the fundamentals of successful WBLO programs. The purpose of this study was to explore two questions that could provide the framework for expanding WBLOs in KCTCS:

1. How have faculty and program coordinators experienced the development and implementation of WBLOs in KCTCS?

2. How do students make sense of WBLOs relative to their personal backgrounds and dispositions toward work and learning?

The intent of this study is to use the findings to support and inform the decision-making of faculty, staff, and administrators as they determine the strategic direction of WBLO expansion within KCTCS as a response to workforce, government, and educator demands to improve work readiness among students. A better understanding of how WBLOs within KCTCS are developed and administered and how students from differing backgrounds make sense of WBLOs should inform state-wide policy and practice in Kentucky as experiential learning continues to take a central role within KCTCS and the country.

To better understand the impact of WBLOs, our dissertation team created a two-pronged approach to gather a more holistic understanding of the potential influence of these opportunities. Lauren McCrary approached the research by exploring the educational process of coordinating WBLOs from a faculty perspective. Robert Boone studied the impact of WBLOs from the student perspective and the influence WBLOs have on student ability to navigate the workplace environment. In this collaborative

dissertation, different perspectives, explored qualitatively, are utilized to assess the current landscape of WBLOs in Kentucky and offer recommendations for more impactful WBLO experiences.

Research Design

The research centered on exploring both the faculty and student perspectives of WBLOs at KCTCS colleges. The exploration of each perspective necessitated a specific research design.

For the faculty-focused research design, only programs with elective WBLOs were included. Elective WBLO programs offer the greatest opportunity for expansion and are less influenced by accreditation and licensing regulations. The purpose was to explore faculty experiences coordinating programs where students are given the choice of whether to participate in a WBLO. As a result, this study includes minimal data from medical programs, which often have mandatory WBLOs. Data included anything faculty deemed important to the development or implementation (and associated obstacles) of their WBLO program. The faculty who participated were directly responsible for overseeing the WBLO experience of the student. Participants were technical faculty members who brought experience and expertise in a technical area to their teaching position, but not necessarily advanced academic credentials. For example, some faculty participants worked in the manufacturing industry prior to coordinating a manufacturing program and others worked as an auto mechanic; a medical assistant or office assistant and now coordinate a related technical program. Also, aside from the senior administrator and two staff members who participated, all participants were responsible for assigning the grade associated with the WBLO. To ensure multiple viewpoints,

programs with varying enrollments, in varying programs (logistics, IT/business, manufacturing, healthcare, etc.) and different geographic locations (urban, suburban, and rural) were included in the study. The final 17 participants consisted of 14 faculty, one senior administrator, and two staff members associated with WBLOs. The interview protocol was designed to explore practices and influences on the development and implementation of the WBLOs. These questions also raised discussion of obstacles to success.

For the student-centered perspective of the study, we recruited 20 KCTCS students who had completed a WBLO experience no longer than one year prior to the time of the study from WBLO programs at Southcentral Community and Technical College (SKYCTC), Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC), or Maysville Community and Technical College (MCTC). WBLO programs at these colleges were selected based on their accessibility to the researchers as well as their developed infrastructure for WBLO participation. The students were not hand selected by faculty nor were students intentionally selected as first-generation college students, however all of the 20 students self-identified as being a "first-generation college student." Participating students were asked questions related to their family background concerning work experience, motivations for going to college, and specific questions about their WBLO experience. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix II. The interviews were recorded, and reflective notes were taken throughout the interviews. The transcripts and notes were reviewed and studied to determine initial codes followed by a thematic analysis, similar to the process for the faculty-focused study.

The research team for this study was comprised of two former KCTCS employees: a former *Associate Professor* turned Assistant to the President at Brescia University (Lauren McCrary), and a former workforce development administrator turned CEO of the South Central Workforce Development Board and its non-profit entity (Robert Boone). McCrary led the research effort on exploring influences on the development of elective WBLOs offered by KCTCS. Boone studied how KCTCS students make sense of WBLOs related to family work experiences and other resources for career development. Each team member has been involved, in some cases directly, in the implementation of WBLOs at the post-secondary level. As former coordinator of the Administrative Office Technology and Medical Information Technology programs at Owensboro Community and Technical College, McCrary lead required and elective WBLOs in these academic programs. Boone is responsible for overseeing the public workforce development system in the 10 counties of south central Kentucky, which develops and administers WBLOs as one program in its portfolio of services. Prior to this role, Boone developed the Center for Career Development and Experiential Learning, which continues to serve 19 counties in northeastern Kentucky with experiential learning programming. Due to these responsibilities, each team member possessed skills and experiences that enabled them to serve in unique capacity as researchers.

Joint Findings

Faculty coordinators are key to a successful program. Faculty background was determined to be influential when developing and implementing WBLOs as well as an obstacle in rural and suburban areas when faculty were not from the area. Faculty background included their previous employment, how long they had been in their

technical field, and whether they were born and raised in the location in which they taught. Where faculty grew up and how long they lived in the area was important in rural and suburban areas. Faculty expressed being able to "pick up the phone" and find placements for their students. In urban areas, developing relationships was more tedious; however, opportunities for placement were more prevalent. Also influential was how much experience faculty had in their related field. Largely, the faculty interviewed brought expertise from a technical field to the program. Having relationships in their field in the same area proved beneficial to developing WBLOs. One faculty member who was teaching in the area in which he grew up said of a meeting with potential employers:

> I would say I probably knew half of them in the room. There's probably maybe 15 companies in the room. I probably knew representatives from 7 of them because I had either worked with them, came across them, or worked with them in some capacity. Whether I worked with them directly or maybe they were a supplier or a vendor for us somewhere along the line. They were familiar with me; they knew what was going on. And familiarity helps. Because they know, "oh well, [redacted] might be okay, he might be a great guy." The quality of work I did when I was around those folks, unless I totally just dropped off the other end of the spectrum, they know that I'm going to try to instill that same quality in my students

Another faculty member echoed the sentiment:

> The companies let's say I'm out just wherever, I worked in manufacturing before I ever came to be a teacher, I know people here, there, across this place because it's real funny, we all kind of cut our teeth together.

By being able to speak the technical language and having ties to the town, faculty were at a greater advantage when actively developing WBLOs.

Beyond understanding the benefits to the key stakeholders, faculty had to be able to articulate and appeal to business partners. The first part of this articulation was the developing of relationships with community partners in order to discuss WBLO benefits

with them. Faculty who were able to develop relationships with site personnel and explain benefits clearly, were more likely to gain access for their students. By expressing that a student intern is a good way to "test drive" a student for fit within the company, community partners began to see the benefits to them. Also conveyed were the ways in which WBLOs can help develop a pipeline to produce future employees as well as develop currently employed top talent.

Faculty engagement with the students was also important to a successful WBLO program. As one faculty member explained, "…sometimes all it takes is for somebody to speak positive toward them, toward something. And they'll gravitate to it. Way I see it, if they're in a [redacted] store they probably have a desire to work on stuff. They just may not have the skill." Engagement was also related to the time faculty have to spend to coordinate the many moving parts of a WBLO. There are so many variables to coordinate that it can be time-consuming and requires a lot of maintenance. One faculty went above and beyond to stay engaged with students and former students:

> And a lot of time I'll just go out in the community like on a day there's no school or on a Friday where I'm just 2 hours in here. And I'll stop by [redacted] and say, "hey, how's everybody doing?" I actually do that intentionally to take and check in on my former students that are there employed. Oh yeah [they are all working in the field]. It's like I'm a celebrity when I walk in. It's like everybody's, "Mr. [redacted]". And like for 10 minutes I'm a movie star.

This demonstrates engagement and maintaining relationships with business and industry partners, both deemed influential in this study.

Faculty engagement with both student and industry stakeholders was directly related to their motivation for offering and/or expanding WBLOs. They may be motivated by external factors like compensation, reduced course load, or using the

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WBLO as an internal service initiative; however, faculty are also driven by internal motivations like the desire to see their students benefit from these opportunities or their belief it is the "best thing" for the students.

Advisory Boards

An unanticipated theme to emerge from our interviews was the role of the advisory board. The advisory board is group of community members, former and current students, and employers. The advisory board members are stakeholders in the academic program, and they have an interest in the overall success and relevancy of the program. Some faculty claimed their advisory board played a big role in finding placements for students as well as general encouragement of using these opportunities to teach students. A faculty member in a manufacturing program claimed his advisory board was supportive:

> I can call them and ask them for anything. They're always willing to help. They do. They hire students. They'll let students come in and shadow. They'll give me whatever I need. It's a good group. A very professional group. Like I said, it's been more of a rubber stamp in the past. . .

Inactive advisory boards did not provide obstacles for programs, but they did not actively support WBLOs and definitely did not help faculty members develop relationships with potential WBLO sites. One faculty member said, "They are active in that they participate in those two meetings a year." As is the case in most organizations, there were those who actively participated and those who were not as engaged. Community support refers to the overall sentiment the faculty felt from their community. They made general statements like, "we are valued for our role and what we bring to the community." One faculty member added, "I think the community here does a really good

job of working with our students and their schedules." This support both on the advisory board (composed of community employers) and in the community opened doors for new WBLOs sites.

What makes an impactful WBLO education is purposeful focus on student development. These high-impact practices included goal-setting for the student, constructive and consistent feedback, and incorporating a reflection component into the WBLO. Goal-setting works with the stakeholder preparation but also important is feedback. If a student does not receive any feedback until the end of semester supervisor evaluation, there is nothing they can do to implement change or try to develop professionally at the site. By setting a schedule either weekly or every other week to have a conversation with the site supervisor, the student can learn and implement change as they progress through the WBLO. The interaction does not have to extensive and formal, it can be an informal conversation regarding the student's performance but with clear development opportunities and strengths.

The last area explored in the faculty-focused study were the obstacles associated with the development and implementation of WBLOs. One of the main obstacles to emerge was faculty did not feel supported to offer WBLOs. Faculty did not feel that senior administrators prioritized WBLOs and, consequently, because of many other campus initiatives, faculty did not prioritize them either. When one faculty member was asked why he did not utilize WBLOs, they replied, "Why would I create more work?" and had no qualms about their stance. If it became a priority for senior administration, they explained, they may reconsider but not of their own volition. Also, faculty did not always feel that administration appreciated the amount of work and coordination

involved with WBLOs, one faculty claimed, "it's not as smooth of a transition [to start

offering WBLOs] when you've got a vice president or a president or assistant dean that

truly doesn't understand the needs of your program and it can become very frustrating."

Faculty who did not offer the WBLO did seem to need administrative encouragement

either through prioritizing WBLOs or acknowledgement of the amount of work involved.

Having support staff (or not) was a recurring discussion in the faculty interviews.

Support staff to help with WBLOs was not common among those interviewed and when

there was support staff available, it was in a very minimal capacity. Support staff also

never had WBLOs as their only focus. It was mostly "in addition to" other

responsibilities and therefore, the focus was lacking through no fault of the staff member.

This was summarized by a faculty member:

> Many years ago, we had a staff member who worked with relationships with
> businesses, industry, do you have opportunities for our students? And would try to
> make those opportunities known. The amount of time that could give to that
> slowly whittled down and whittled down and whittled down.

Support staff utilization was usually as a point of contact for community members or as a

person in an area to house agreements between the institution and the WBLO site.

A highly anticipated obstacle to successful WBLO programs was faculty

compensation. Lack of compensation was an obstacle but we found that a lack of

transparency and inconsistencies in compensation were also common complaints. One

faculty member did not know from semester to semester if the WBLO was included in

part of their course load, if they were paid per student, or if they would be paid at all.

This was not uncommon. A couple of faculty on the same campus both had different

understandings of compensation related to WBLOs. An additional hesitancy, or obstacle,

on the part of faculty was the transparency WBLOs draw to effectives in teaching. If faculty members were teaching outdated techniques or their programs were no longer relevant in the marketplace, sending a student out to potential employers for a WBLO highlighted this deficiency.

The most tedious and nuanced obstacles to successful WBLOs were related to logistics. This included if there were sites available for a WBLO, whether the program had the available credit hours in the program of study so as not to exceed the maximum, hesitations by employers to take on students because of liability issues, low prioritization of WBLOs by faculty because of other demands placed on their time, and low prioritization of WBLOs by students because of personal obligations. One frustrated faculty member said, "And then there was that one semester when I had six interns in six different counties. I was going about every other week [out for site visits]. I rapidly quit that. It was dumbass work." Another faculty member was more articulate:

> So, in January, probably the end of January I'll start calling the clinical sites around here. It gets a little tedious. A lot of times if I start calling them in January, or even in December they want me to call closer to the time. It's usually about February, mid-February when I really start calling. It gets a little crunch time.

The time crunch and having available, recurring placements sites were common logistical headaches expressed by faculty. By better understanding the practices and influences on the development and implementation of WBLOs and being cognizant of obstacles, KCTCS is in a proactive position to strengthen WBLOs throughout the state.

What makes a meaningful WBLO experience?

The development of workplace cultural capital begins with meaningful workplace exposure provided by WBLOs. In analyzing student interviews, four consistent markers

of meaningful WBLO experiences were identified. First, students matched with a work environment related to their field of study. One participant noted, "I would not have been able to get experience like this in the medical field [without the WBLO experience]. This opportunity has been huge for me to know what I would like to do in the future." It is worthy of mention that all 20 of the interview participants indicated that they would not have had the opportunity to be involved in the WBLO field if not for the WBLO. Related to the concept of career pathways, another participant noted, "I thought I was open to any job in the area of manufacturing. My internship caused me to realize that I really wanted to lead a team of people in the maintenance department." This clarity was a result of a WBLO.

The second marker of a meaningful experience is: Student engagement in work that is substantive, yet realistic given the individuals student's skills. The level of work engagement is an important element of the WBLO experiences. One participant stated, "I went to my internship and they didn't really have anything for me to do. Finally, after about a half an hour they put me in a room to put labels on files. I was then supposed to transfer all old file material to new files, because the old files were falling apart." This participant noted that she was able to inform her internship coordinator that this WBLO site "was not a good fit," due to the trivialness of the work given the participant's desire to utilize the WBLO experience in a way to perform meaningful career exploration. The internship coordinator was able to locate a WBLO site that utilized the participant's skills more fully and more meaningfully toward the participant's goals. The participant noted that the new WBLO site was "instrumental in narrowing my focus for careers, because it enabled me to learn from others and do challenging work."

The third marker is: The student should be involved in structured reflection throughout the WBLO experience. It is important to note that WBLOs are learning experiences. As such, there should be an element of structured reflection in order to maximize the WBLOs impact. One participant indicated his career exploration from his WBLO experience was meaningful, in large part, because the WBLO coordinator:

> …asked all of us to write short reflections each day in a journal from our SKY FAME experience. Having to write about our day really caused me to think about all that I had learned. It also caused me to be better at goal setting, so if there was something that I wished I would have done differently or asked, then I had the opportunity to follow-up on those things the next day….If I wasn't journaling, I'm not sure I would have asked all of the questions I should've or paid as much attention as I did…"

Reflection supports the student's professional development because it encourages them to closely examine what they have learned and how their responsibilities are situated into the overall landscape of the organization.

The last marker from this study to indicate a meaningful experience was student development of professional relationships with employees on-site at the WBLO. The concept of mentorship relationships that are tailored to the timeframe and duration of WBLO experiences is a concept that appeared repeatedly in the research analysis. One participant indicated, "I never met someone so knowledgeable about their job before I started my internship. It really causes me to want to be more like them…eventually I was able to work closely with that person and learn a lot from them." Another participant stated:

> Shortly after starting [the WBLO], I was introduced to someone who was just going to show me how to do one job. That was a real blessing, because I was able to work with that person…I'll call her Sharon…and she really showed me how to be a good employee in my field of interest, which is to become an LPN at a nursing home. Sharon really helped me understand the technical parts of

the job, but also the politics of the job…both were very important, and I feel that I'm much farther ahead than if I wouldn't had this experience.

The WBLO supported the student's sense of professional development resulting in a sense of accomplishment and the feeling of "getting ahead" in their professional environment. Participants stressed that their mentor helped them assimilate in the workplace culture through encouraging social interactions. Additionally, three participants indicated that their mentor helped them network outside of the WBLO to help with employment post-graduation.

WBLOs and the Attainment of Workplace Cultural Capital.

The findings of this study supported that participants were equipped to navigate the cultural environment of the workplace after completion of a WBLO. Student interviews demonstrated that a definite fluency with the cultural environment in the workplace resulted from meaningful WBLO participation. Such fluency was utilized during the course of the WBLO and afterwards to navigate the workforce environment, develop professional networks, establish a career pathway, and transfer the cultural capital obtained at the WBLO site to other environments that are focused on workforce outcomes (i.e. job interviews, other WBLO experiences, and employment).

The role of the WBLO seemed to be life changing for the students in the interview. One participant stated, "I didn't know I could succeed in college or at a job until I started working [at the WBLO site]. This experience really changed the way I feel about my ability to find a job that is going to support my family." Students stressed the impact the WBLO had on their ability to understand the work environment, transfer that knowledge to other work-related environments, develop confidence to navigate future

and anticipated work environments with fluency, and become better students due to the transferability of some workplace skills to the educational environment. Students overall indicated a sense of being "fast-tracked" to career readiness by their WBLO experience.

An overwhelming majority of the students interviewed indicated that involvement in a WBLO allowed them to be more confident in their ability to locate employment in their desired field upon credential completion. These students used words and phrases like: "My internship caused me to think about the future of my career more…without this experience I probably would be at square one when it came time to find a job." "I feel that I could compete with a lot of other people with more experience because of the skills I gained in this [WBLO] experience."

All interview participants in the student-centered study indicated that WBLO participation was foundational in their career exploration. In addition, all participants indicated that they would not have been able to have meaningful work experience like those presented in the WBLO if not for the opportunity for WBLO participation. For 16 students, the WBLO opportunity was the first time they were personally exposed to work (outside of the public social service, educational, and healthcare systems) that did not consist of a combination of seasonal and part-time positions leveraged to constitute income. For these 16 students, this was the first time they were exposed personally to employment that maintained benefits such as paid time off, health insurance, and retirement savings plans. Such exposure is instrumental in the development of a refined context for which to view the world of work.

WBLO experiences are important in developing a context for the work environment. Context includes a refined view of what the world of work, to borrow a

descriptor from an interview participant, is "really like" (i.e. the world of work is not usually how it is depicted or described on TV or in media). That is, what the world of work *is not*. Context is also important in developing a notion of what the world of work *is*. The role of context is important for participants to understand the work environment. From context, workplace cultural capital is developed. Workplace cultural capital can be defined as the implicit skills needed to successfully navigate the workforce either for entry into the workforce or advancement within the workforce environment. The development of workplace cultural capital enables employees to navigate the intricacies of what is required to retain employment, advance in employment, and earn a raise, among other important markers of success in the workplace. The student interviews echoed assertions made in the experiential learning literature regarding the importance of purposeful work-based learning to increased confidence, soft skills, and the ability to navigate the culture of the workplace with more fluency.

Recommendations

The findings from this study can be used to help guide the future of WBLOs in KCTCS. KCTCS administration, local college senior administrators and faculty can implement practices and policies to support WBLO development and implementation as well as be better prepared to overcome obstacles and support student development.

KCTCS-System Level Recommendations

Based on the research findings that suggest lacking infrastructure to carry out strategic delivery of WBLO programming, it is recommended that KCTCS first conduct an asset map and gap analysis to take inventory on what practices are currently

employed. Our research indicated that a disparity of WBLO practices are implemented at each KCTCS college in our study. Such a disparity points to practices that are inconsistent in terms of policy, implementation, and effectiveness. An inventory of these disparate systems is first needed to determine which stakeholders at each college are engaged in WBLOs and at to what degree, what are the regional "best practices" in the design and implementation of WBLOs, and what are the starting points for WBLO transformation.   From there, KCTCS, as a supporting partner to the 16 colleges in its system, is called to initiate guidance and support for WBLO creation. This series of recommendations can be broken down in the following steps:

1. The KCTCS System Office should establish and convene a work group among each of the 16 community and technical colleges in Kentucky. The purpose of the work group should be to compile and access the diversity of WBLO delivery models at each of the colleges.

2. The KCTCS System Office should provide guidelines for the design and implementation of evidence-based and impactful WBLO experiences. Guidelines for WBLO experiences should focus on the sociological perspectives of WBLOs, including their ability to transmit dominant workplace cultural capital and positively impact soft skill development. A focus on the sociological perspective of WBLO experiences is foundational in "fast tracking" student career development, particularly for first-generation career seekers who are the most "at risk" for being shut out of the pipeline of upward career mobility. Additionally, guidelines should follow the high-impact WBLO practices from O'Neill's (2010) research, including: students should have the opportunity to be involved in tasks

that require long-term effort while providing an opportunity to establish

"substantive" relationships with key stakeholders, work with diverse groups of

people, receive meaningful feedback, and reflect on their WBLO experiences.

Additionally, Albashiry, et al. (2015) recommends a demonstrated five-step

curriculum development plan for WBLO experiences: analyze, design, develop,

implement, and evaluate.

3. The KCTCS System Office should develop a three-year plan to infuse WBLOs

into each semester's curriculum. Our research found that students are not likely

to possess structured work experiences without the opportunities provided by

WBLO experiences. Structured work experiences within the educational

curriculum are important in providing the career context needed for successful

navigation of the workplace environment. Additionally, WBLO experiences,

especially when integrated throughout an entire program of study, play an

invaluable career development role by encouraging students to more fully

understand career expectations post-graduation, find mentors, and to practice

skills learned in the classroom. Research from Van Gyn, Branton, Cutt, Loken

and Ricks (1996) found that students with relevant work experience obtained via a

WBLO experience were more fluent in their understanding of how classes and

skills attainment directly related to career goals.

College-Level Recommendations

Based on the research findings and national best practices (Rosario et al., 2013;

Ferguson, 2011) a centralized system to house related WBLO information and carry out

cross-disciplinary administrative practices in each college is necessary. The infusion of

WBLO programming throughout a student's entire program of study is beneficial and recommendations at the college-level can be made to positively impact student experiences in WBLOs, leading to career readiness and fluency in navigating the workforce.

1. Each college should maintain a centralized department for housing related WBLO information and for universal administrative procedures (maintaining current agreements with sites, obtaining student and site regulations, background checks, additional liability insurances, etc.) (Garis, 2014). Due to the employer-facing nature of Career Services departments, it is recommended that the WBLO department (Center for Experiential Learning) co-locate with Career Services. Stakeholders, including employers, in the community should be able to easily contact a designated point person on campus if they are interested in hosting an intern (Rosario et al., 2013). Centralization is key because it allows for a concentrated and strategic effort to streamline WBLO access and delivery. Xanthis (2015) emphasized the need for a center with the work-based learning focus. As the coordinator at Orange-Ulster (OU) BOCES Career and Technical Education Center in Goshen, New York, pointed out:

> I'm passionate about the Work-based Learning program; it is my priority 24-7. Wherever I go, every day, I'm looking for locations and opportunities for student placement. I keep business cards handy, and whenever I visit a business, doctor's office, hair salon, etc., I introduce myself and give them my information. I also peruse ads in the newspaper and listen to the radio for additional placement opportunities (p. 30).

To ensure accountability, designating one person, or persons, to be responsible for the development and implementation of WBLOs is important. This practice also

lessens obstacles for the general public who wish to take advantage of these opportunities with students.

2. Senior administrators should promulgate a transparent compensation policy. Such a policy does not have to be prescribed by the system-level administration, but it does need to be accessible at the local level. It also does not need to be overly restrictive or detailed; a general policy will ensure faculty understanding and manage expectations. A report in Higher Education (2001) stated that "Several authors encourage higher education faculty to adopt a broader definition of scholarship and to broaden the activities for which a faculty member can receive compensation" (see Boyer, 1990 Rice, 1991). It is important to recognize that an issue of lack of transparency first has to be acknowledged before any changes to a compensation policy can occur. The same report offers steps to ensure all institutional goals are enveloped in the faculty compensation system. The initial steps offered are:

> to develop a faculty compensation system that supports the institutional mission first requires the governing board, president, chief academic officer, or faculty governing body to recognize that the institution should address this issue. The next step is the formation of a committee with a cross section of faculty, administrators, and perhaps students in its membership to examine the issue (2001, Vol. 28 Issue 2, p55. 12p).

Because of differences in college and departmental contexts, transparency in compensation policies and expectations of faculty is recommended as opposed to prescribing a particular compensation approach across the college.

3. A culture of WBLOs should be instilled at every college (Gilroy, 2013). One cost-effective and expedient way to build a culture of work-based learning is

simply to increase the frequency that WBLOs are discussed and visibility surrounding WBLOs. This means to emphasize WBLOs at college assemblies, faculty assemblies, in department meetings, senior administration meetings, at advisory meetings, and among the student body as a mechanism to provide meaningful career development experiences (Sharma, Mannell and Rowe, 1995; O'Neill, 2010). By increasing the frequency that WBLOs are discussed both on campus and in the community, administrators can signal to potential WBLO stakeholders that they are valued and prioritized at the college.

4. For senior administrators, it is vital to promote and enable flexibility for faculty when they are developing WBLOs for students. If faculty must be creative to work with companies or around student's schedules, administrators should promote and support this within reason. For example, if a student needs to earn their WBLO contact hours at nights or weekends, then faculty should feel empowered to allow it. Senior administrators hold power in their voice, support, and in their authority. By implementing these recommendations, campuses are positioned to support WBLO development and implementation that is geared toward student-centered outcomes (Sharma, Mannell and Rowe, 1995).

5. Embedded into the idea of flexibility is the idea that advisory board should be innovative and flexible. Advisory board members were a recurring topic among faculty members in the research. Engaged faculty wanted engaged advisory board members. If they had advisory board members who were not engaged, they expressed concern. Faculty members who were not utilizing WBLOs or were less engaged, did not express concern about their advisory board's level of

involvement. A way to address this area would be to offer professional development to advisory board members prior to their joining to outline responsibilities and associated tasks that the administration and faculty deemed necessary to support a program. Suggestions could include professional development or offering their organization as a host site once an academic year for students to experience a WBLO. It would be up to each campus to determine the level of necessary involvement from the advisory board and what types of training were most applicable to their needs. Karen Elzey, director of Skills for America's Future (SAF), said:

> Community colleges are all different, decentralized, locally funded and targeted at local priorities, which can be difficult for employers to deal with, she says. Business and industry may want to engage with local educational institutions to foster curricula that lead to a pool of new prospects to hire, to improve the skills of their existing workforce or for such altruistic reasons as raising standards of the community in general (2012).

She succinctly summarized the goal of a partnership tween an educational institution and a business organization. The advisory boards for each program are the frontline to accomplishing these goals.

6. Colleges should encourage faculty to incorporate a three-year phase in of required WBLO programming by engaging employer partners in the region. Such engagement can be achieved through the facilitation of industry collaboration where employers can learn about the workforce benefits of WBLO experiences and model designs of impactful WBLO programs. The purpose of this level of engagement is to recruit employers to participate in offering meaningful WBLO experiences to students.   A collaborative approach between post-secondary

education and the employer community to increase quantity and quality of WBLOs, as previously noted, has been a goal of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, which calls public post-secondary institutions in the state to "Work with the employer community, foundations, and state agencies to provide 'work and learn' opportunities, including experiential or project-based learning, co-ops, internships, externships, and clinical placements (CPE, 2016, p.17) For students who are not "WBLO-ready" the colleges should have experiential learning opportunities available on-campus or through a combination of on-campus experiences and workforce development software. If WBLO opportunities are limited based on availability of WBLO sites, then students can also engage in WBLOs on campus and/or through impactful exposure to work environments utilizing software, industry tours, and workforce roundtables facilitated by the colleges (O'Neill, 2010).

7. Colleges should develop an evaluation and tracking system measuring the effectiveness of WBLO engagement every semester (Albashiry, et al., 2015). The evaluation system should incorporate feedback from students and employers. Our research found that WBLO experiences within KCTCS have little evaluation in terms of consistency of practices and effectiveness. Moreover, our qualitative research highlights the importance of interviewing students and faculty to determine WBLO impact from perspectives that are not easily quantifiable. For example, Toker, et al. (2003) in conducting student interviews found that WBLO participation decrease career indecision. Johnson, et al. (2002) found that WBLO participation decreases student anxiety about the prospect of future work.

Faculty-Level Recommendations

Based on the research findings, faculty are key in the implementation of impactful WBLO programming. The recommendation to build a centralized system for WBLO information and maintenance is not a substitute for faculty engagement with the promotion, implementation, and evaluation of WBLO programs. Rather, the goal of a centralized system is to provide faculty with a greater opportunity to facilitate WBLO programing at the curricular-level. Building on a center related to implementing WBLOs, there are other key practices faculty can utilize to strengthen WBLOs.

1. First, by introducing the students to the concept of WBLOs early in their college career, students can begin to see potential opportunities prior to the semester in which the WBLO occurs. This pro-active approach will support a more impactful WBLO experience for the student as well as share the responsibility of finding placements with the student. This approach also helps incorporate the WBLO into the student's academic plan ensuring that the electives hours are available to the student. Supiano's (2015) research found that students who met with a career counselor before they entered the classroom or during the first semester of study were much better able to articulate career ambitions and career plans than students who did not have early involvement with a career counselor.

2. A second important recommendation is for faculty to educate and provide an orientation about WBLOs for all stakeholders whether they are students, community partners, senior administrators, or interested colleagues. By discussing the benefits and working with students and community partners to establish expectations and develop orientations, a positive experience is more likely. Also,

the student has a clearer idea of expectations and is better able to prepare their schedule both academically and professionally. The site support can also prepare and plan for what best suits a student's professional development. A faculty member cannot assume that the WBLO site or student knows how to engage in meaningful WBLOs without providing support. Even if everyone is engaged and has the student's best interest in mind, that does not equate to knowing most effective practices. Preparation and orientation support student growth. Meyer (2016) found that employer engagement in the WBLO process is a major determinant of positive WBLO impact on the career experiences and plans of students.

3. One of the most important and impactful recommendations faculty can utilize is proactive advising. By proactively advising students that WBLOs are available to them and how they can impact their future career, faculty are creating a culture that fosters WBLOs for the purpose of developing the student (Drewery, Nevison, and Pretti, 2016).

4. The last recommendation for faculty is to use flexibility and innovation in the development and implementation process. It is a suggested recommendation for senior administrators to enable and support flexibility and innovation, and it is a recommendation for faculty to exercise that right to benefit the student and community partners both with their students and in their community partnerships. By understanding students' personal obligations and community partners' needs, faculty are demonstrating a willingness to develop a collaborate experience that is mutually beneficial to all involved.

Conclusion

Each campus will need to exercise discernment when considering the recommendations and in determining what is the best fit for their institution and their campus culture. By understanding the amount of coordination that goes into WBLOs, administrators can be empathetic and guide change in an effective way. As it stands now, coordination takes place at the program level. Faculty first need to understand the perspective of the student and how these opportunities can benefit students. When there is buy-in surrounding WBLOs in general, faculty will be more inclined to explore WBLO development and implementation. Consideration of WBLOs is valuable from a sociological perspective, which highlights the ways in which work-based learning can help students acquire the "sense of the game" necessary to navigate workplace cultures. In unison with faculty development and implementation, senior administration's support and influence is important to the overall process.

Chapter 3 Workplace Cultural Capital: A Fast-Track to Addressing Workforce Mis-Alignment

Introduction

Much of the conversation in the workforce development practitioner circles focuses on a misalignment between employer needs and post-secondary education offerings and output. In Kentucky, much of this conversation was codified in a brief 2015 Kentucky Chamber of Commerce report titled, "Kentucky's Workforce Challenges: The Employer's Perspective," which among other claims, stated that the state's community and technical college system was not producing graduates who meet the technical and/or soft skills expectations of employers and that, as a result, every year many graduates of community college are in need of re-training at a great cost to employers in both time and financial resources. Fundamentally, this criticism focuses on a lack of skills. Noticeably absent from the literature is the notion that the kind of dispositions and cultural attitudes appropriate to the 21st century labor market—what sociologists call cultural capital—needed to successfully navigate the workforce may be what is lacking in our nation's community college curricula. At the outset, I am curious as to whether such "workplace cultural capital" may be a potential gateway into the workforce and if this concept might be a hidden piece of what are typically defined as "soft skills." Is the misalignment between community colleges and employers partially caused by a misalignment of *academic* and the concept of *workplace* cultural capital? Does this misalignment exacerbate social inequalities by making the successful transition through community college to the workplace more difficult for students without the appropriate cultural capital?

Over the past four decades community colleges have shifted from being community junior colleges and into engines for regional workforce and economic development. Such a transformation has placed community colleges on the center stage for evaluation from everything to number of graduates being placed in high-demand and high-wage fields *to* employer expansions and job creation. For better or worse, the role of community colleges has changed and with this change comes a host of new expectations. In most regards, our nation's community colleges are expected to be the panacea for each state's workforce development ailments, or at least the conduit through which transformational workforce development is to occur. To this end, the past few years have seen the introduction of new buzz words for an old idea traditionally associated with apprenticeship or internship—experiential learning or work-based learning opportunities (WBLOs). Despite the growing popularity of such terms within higher education, there has been little research accomplished on its effective usage in post-secondary education and its potential impact on workforce development from the sociological perspective concerning the development of cultural capital.

Experiential learning in one form or another has been a part of the community college curriculum for quite some time. In the state of Kentucky, the merger of the state's community colleges with the state's technical institutions in 1998 greatly increased the focus on work-based learning at the two-year post-secondary level, building on a history of students completing co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, and applied-research labs. Again, the current language used to describe these experiences as "work-based learning opportunities" is a new label for an old idea. Also rather new is the concept that WBLOs, in many post-secondary programs are to be completed in the last or

penultimate semester of study. However, at that point, the student has earned all or most of the theoretical foundation that is deemed necessary for the workforce or for further study at a baccalaureate granting institution. At this point in the curriculum, students have completed most of their post-secondary education, but are they ready to navigate the work environment? The current model of WBLOs, based as it is on old models of student placement and assumptions of post-secondary training, may not be adequate for preparing students for navigating the often-implicit world of work.

Despite the long history of experiential learning in community colleges, especially in technical degree programs, the misalignment between community colleges and employers continues to be an issue. For students, WBLOs contextualize the learning that occurs in the classroom. In that regard, WBLOs allow students a "real world" scenario in which to integrate theoretical or technical knowledge gained from the classroom or lab settings. Part of contextualized learning is the exposure of the student to experiences that are implicit and can only occur in a workplace setting. These experiences include adapting to the organizational culture of a workplace, along with understanding unique workplace terminology, norms, and customs. These types of sociological activities facilitated through the engagement in impactful WBLOs should not be absent from experiential learning conversation.

Often research on contextualized learning is approached from the field of educational psychology, examining the motivations or psycho-social development of the student as measures of success or failure, but not the socialization of the student in transition from school to work or the social structures which may advance or impede individual students. The thesis of this essay focuses on student navigation of the often

implicit workplace constructs using the concept of Bourdieuan cultural capital. Foundational to this concept of workplace navigation is the reality that many students in our nation's community colleges are the first in their families to attend or graduate college. For these students, workplace experiences are often imperative to gain the necessary cultural capital to relate to others in the field, to land a job in the field, to advance in the field, or even to complete their program of study in college. Many of these students are not only first-generation college students, but are the first in their family to pursue careers requiring post-secondary credentials and career pathway planning. I call these students "first-generation career seekers."

Cappelli (2015) frames the workforce development and post-secondary education problem in three areas of focus. The first area is known as the "skills gap," in which he argues that the educational system has failed to provide students with the basic skills to succeed in the workplace. These skills are often defined as technical and soft or life skills. The second area focuses on the skills shortage, where it is often argued that the United States is lacking in certain highly skilled professions that are labeled to be in current and projected "high-demand." In recent years, these occupations generally consist of the engineering, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare fields, among others. The final area is a concept of the "skills mismatch" whereby the supply of skills is out of sync with workplace needs, creating a dichotomous over-skilled and under-skilled problem (Cappelli, 2015, p. 252). Education is at the center of all three areas.

Labaree (2008) stresses that the American system of education is viewed as responsible for remediating a variety of social problems. According to Labaree (2008), education has both the goal of social efficiency and social mobility. Social efficiency is

the effort to produce productive workers in the economy. In achieving social efficiency, it is necessary for education to become involved in developing solutions to social concerns that are viewed to negatively impact worker productivity and wellbeing, such as: technical and soft skills deficiencies, poor health, and lack of employability skills. Secondly, social mobility is defined as access to social opportunity. As such, the education system is charged with providing individuals with the skills needed to progress into higher levels of education and work.

Brown (2001) further discusses the ways that educational credentials "signal" certain skills and dispositions for employers, tying degrees or certifications to employment in ways that reinforce social stratification. At the lowest level of the post-secondary educational hierarchy described by Brown, which is the focus of this paper, community colleges provide educational credentials which are most closely tied to the actual work to be done. Lower level credentials (certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees) are seen as indicators of basic and technical skills needed for completers to successfully enter and advance in the world of work. Yet, even at this level, there is a hidden curriculum of language, dispositions, and normative knowledge that is assumed of those who carry the appropriate cultural capital. Again, education is the crux of the perceived gap between potential employees' skills and their future employment. Interestingly, educational credentials only tell part of the story. It is true that educational credentials signal the types of social fluency needed to enter or advance in employment. However, it is possible for one to obtain educational credentials and still be shut out of the pipeline for employment or advancement in employment. Credentials can be disconnected from the formulation of the kind of cultural capital the credentials attempt

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to "certify." This disconnect brings us back to the misalignment discussion between employer need and post-secondary offerings and output. Simply, post-secondary education, particularly at the community college level, is not engaging students in large scale manner to be successful in navigating the often-implicit intricacies of the workforce. This is true especially for those students who lack an awareness of what it takes to be successful in the world of work.

WBLOs in community colleges have been touted as an action that could help solve the skills gap, and by default, educational problems related to impactful social change. Cappelli (2015) points toward the school-to-work movement in the United States that sought to bring schools and companies together to aid in a smooth transition from the classroom environment to the world of work. Much like the school-to-work movement, community colleges have increasingly taken on a role of transitioning students into the workforce, as opposed to transitioning students into at least two additional years of post-secondary education leading to a baccalaureate degree. Credentials are not enough for community colleges to be successful in the transition from post-secondary education to the workforce. WBLOs have the potential to expose students to employment in a meaningful way; to provide students with the opportunity to learn workplace culture in a structured learning environment, but one that is also "in the field;" to develop mentorship relationships with employees who can help "learn the ropes" of the workforce environment and to develop imperative work networks; and to establish a clearer understanding of what is needed to enter and advance in employment, develop a career pathway, and a strategy for following that pathway. Before any of this is possible, community colleges will need to transform their understanding of how

WBLOs can help students navigate the work environment. Such a transformation is, by definition, never simplistic or easy. One thing is clear before starting on the path toward a transformation in WBLOs: We must begin with a better understanding of students.

First-Generation College Students and First-Generation Career Seekers

Venezia and Kirst (2005) discuss the changing global marketplace that, in many cases, necessitates the attainment of educational credentials for the exchange of any hope of entering the middle class. Entry into the middle class was once realized by the completion of a high school diploma. Now entry into the middle class is characterized by completion of a college credential. As a result, an unprecedented number of high school graduates are entering college. According to Schneider and Stevenson (1999), more than 90% of high school seniors indicate that they plan to attend college. Moreover, many first-generation students come from educational backgrounds that are at least ten years removed from their high school graduation. Such an increase in the college-going population has seen a concurrent rise in students who are the first in their immediate families to have attended college.

First-generation college students are often less prepared academically and socially than non-first-generation students (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Socially, research conducted in focus groups at a small baccalaureate-granting college by Terenzini, et al. (1994), indicated that first-generation college students often feel they have to make an "all or nothing" decision regarding whether to maintain their parents' way of life or reject familial culture in pursuit of their academic goals. Olive (2010) describes the pressure for friends and family of Latino first generation college students as intense for reasons that may translate to rural students in Kentucky with deep ties to family and community.

Brooks-Terry (1988), explained that first-generation students, upon entering college, experience conflicts with values and have a more difficult time reconciling those conflicts than do non-first-generation students. London (1989) indicated that first-generation college students experience a form of culture shock when they begin their post-secondary studies. McGregor, Mayleben and Buzzanga (1991) explained that first-generation students felt generally less socially-accepted in the college environment. Terenzini, et al. (1994), stated that first-generation students do not have as much support from family as do their non-first-generation peers. The first-generation college student literature illustrates the sociological disconnect first-generation students have from the dominant college cultural capital. Such disconnect is noticeable outside of college, as well, in the workforce, where first-generation career seekers are at a sociological disadvantage when expected to navigate the often-implicit rules of the workforce.

First-generation career seekers are individuals whose foundational career development is mostly independent from familial involvement or other social networks. First-generation career seekers often come from backgrounds where immediate familial incomes are made-up of two or more jobs, occasionally multiple part-time jobs, which offer low sustainability and stability. As a result, first-generation career seekers may lack both the academic capital to navigate college as described above and the cultural and social capital to navigate career seeking (as opposed to job hunting) in their transition to the 21st century workplace.

One challenge of the first-generation career seeker is the ability to remain in school despite a host of financial, familial, and sociological struggles. To make matters more challenging, it is difficult for first-generation career seekers to, as Cappelli (2015)

points out, pursue specific educational goals in hopes of obtaining employment for jobs

that may not be open to them. For first-generation career seekers, pursuing post-

secondary education is often a gamble where great financial, time, and cultural resources

are expended for the hope of jobs that may not be open to them post-graduation. Often a

lack of upward mobility is not due to deficiencies in technical training or knowledge.

Rather, immobility is due to an unrecognized host of social requirements that are needed

in order to advance in the hidden world of work, even with college credential in hand.

WBLO programs create a mechanism for cultural capital to be obtained,

particularly for first-generation career seekers that can lead to fluency in employability

and the workplace.   WBLOs can lead to the very real hope for students to be hired by a

sponsoring company in the case of an apprenticeship-style program, or of getting one's

"foot in the door" toward employment, as in the case of an internship program. For many

first-generation career seeking students, WBLO opportunities can provide some of the

security needed to ease mobility into the workforce and into the middle class.

Cultural Capital and Navigating the Workplace

WBLO experiences may help develop a context for learning the workforce

environment and subsequently, workplace culture. Interestingly, the assessment

company, ACT, has begun to release pilot studies of its new essential skill assessment

testing for employers and workforce development organizations. The testing software,

called *Tessera*, is a part of ACT's "emotional and social learning" line of products and

seeks to measure the following 6 essential workplace skills: 1) work ethic, 2)

collaboration, 3) resilience, 4) creativity, 5) leadership, and 6) integrity. Each of these 6

essential skills has been arrived at through years of global research with employers.

ACT's research is important because it is the most recent attempt to have essential workplace skills solidified into an assessment product. And, as a result, there now exists an increasingly defined common language to discuss what is meant by essential skills and how those skills are to be categorized. Noticeably absent from the assessment conversation, however, are the ways in which essential skills are developed from a sociological perspective and how essential skills may reflect the language, dispositions, and cultural habits necessary to better navigate workplace culture. Despite the development of new products (such as ACT's *Tessera*) to define and better understand essential skills, foundational understandings of culture and its impact on employment are missing.

Workplace cultural capital is the requisite knowledge and related actions to navigate the often implicit rules of the dominant workplace culture. Middle class cultural capital is virtually universally desired in the workforce. Yet not called by the name "cultural capital," it is often described in the workforce development and higher education literature as "soft skills" or "essential skills." Such skills have increasingly taken center stage in policy discussions within secondary- and post-secondary institutions, state and federal agencies, and in legislation. Other forms of cultural capital may be far less universal and may only be relevant in particular work environments. Universal or specific, cultural capital is needed in order to make sense of and to navigate workplace culture.

The concept of cultural capital is widely ascribed to the French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Although the definition of cultural capital was not consistent across all of Bourdieu's works, leading to confusion surrounding the concept, what is clear is

Bourdieu's differentiation between the three types of cultural capital: 1) embodied, 2) objectified, and 3) institutionalized (Dumais, 2010, p. 246). Swartz (1997), described embodied cultural capital as "the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individuals through socialization and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding." Objectified cultural capital refers to the attitudes toward material objects, such as works of art, which one must possess cultural capital in order to appreciate. Institutionalized cultural capital concerns academic qualifications, which is reflected by the symbolic value of credentials offered by educational systems. According to Dumais (2010), students are able to attain institutional capital when high levels of embodied cultural capital exist, because these kinds of behaviors (language, manners, etc.) are held in high regard by the educational system.

I would suggest that embodied and objectified cultural capital are also necessary in the workplace. Many students lack the knowledge and practice of the "rules of the game" of post-secondary education and the workplace. As a result, many lack the necessary context to really thrive in an alien environment. The likely outcome of this inability to thrive is the shutting out from the pipeline of upward mobility at the gate of the institution, whether college or work or both. Cultural capital is not an automatic occurrence based on the family that one is born into. Cultural capital is developed based on access to diverse environments and interpretations of that environment. Entry experiences can either be conducive to successful navigation of the intricacies of the workplace or not.

Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is not transmitted through birth. Rather, the development of cultural capital is a conditioned process that is acquired over time

(Bourdieu, 1973). Cultural capital can also be difficult to identify at first glance, since it is often not as recognized as economic capital may be (Dumais, 2010, p. 247). Mohr and DiMaggio (1995) define cultural capital as "…prestigious tastes, objects, or styles validated by centers of cultural authority, which maintain and disseminate societal standards of value and serve collectively to clarify and periodically revise the cultural currency." According to Bourdieu (1973) the acquisition of cultural capital occurs primarily from parental investment with the right kinds of cultural training. Related to education, building cultural capital may include parental investment in the areas of making sure children attend the best schools, are involved in honors and advanced placement classes, are involved in extracurricular activities such as sports and orchestra, and are guided toward the college selection process by both the parents, school counselors, or a privately hired college consultant. Related to the workforce, building cultural capital may include the role of parents or mentors in providing direction, advice, and context for the workplace. Although Bourdieu's research focused on entry into the middle or upper class, his concepts can be applied to entry into technical environments considered "working class" as well. "Hands on" experience in the form of internships and other WBLO experiences, often the bellwether of familial social connections and status, are indicative of the transmission of the most valuable form of cultural capital— the kind that is exchanged for income and promotability in the workforce.

One outcome of cultural capital in society, and certainly in institutions of learning, is the phenomenon in which the power structure will select and reward those who possess the knowledge of the dominant culture (Dumais, 2010, p. 246). Differences in cultural capital are reinforced by the educational system, leading to a further stratified

social system in which members of the lower classes have little chance of upward mobility (Dumais, 2002, p. 45). This lack of social mobility is contrary to the popular belief that a college education is the great equalizer of socio-economic class status. DiMaggio (1982) explains that, for teachers, cultural capital can act as a "signal" for the students with whom they can relate better and are thus more likely to promote. Differences in cultural capital can also be reinforced by the workplace environment. In the 21st century workplace, "lower classes" might be reinterpreted as those living pay-check to pay-check. It is clear that some employees lack mobility in the workforce not due to a lack of skills or ambition, but rather due to a lack of awareness or resistance to the "rules of the game" concerning new and unfamiliar kinds of workplaces.

Cultural capital is acquired by way of habitus. According to Dumais (2010) habitus is best summarized as one's "feel for the game." That is, the way one uses the nuances, language, rules, and customs assumed of a given social setting. Dumais (2002) explained that cultural capital consists of one's resources, while habitus consists of one's orientation toward those resources. The implicit nature of cultural capital often makes it difficult to emulate the cultural capital of the dominant class by those attempting to achieve social mobility. Rather, cultural capital appears to be passed down from one generation to the next, and much like a game, it is learned through practice and careful study of the rules, and social norms associated with it—it just seems natural. Even if less privileged individuals possess cultural capital, they are often not rewarded in the same ways as those from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds, because their cultural capital acquisition seems to be less seamless, natural, and more studied than those from privileged backgrounds (Dumais, 2010, p. 247).

Dumais (2010) indicated that children who possess dominant cultural capital are more likely to receive attention from teachers, better grades, and more encouragement to pursue higher education than students from non-middle class (read non-first-generation) households. According to Swartz (1997), in accordance with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, many first-generation students will self-select from the pursuit of higher education, because they will feel that such an education is "not for them." A lack of dominant cultural capital can prevent the prospective first-generation college student from pursuing post-secondary education at all or only as a means to acquire tangible skills (but not necessarily graduate) because degree completion is likely to be viewed as unsuccessful due to one's habitus. First-generation students will not feel a sense of entitlement to pursue post-secondary education for symbolic capital.

For many non-first-generation students, the pursuit of college education has been viewed as part of the natural progression post high school. McDonough (1997) found that differences in social class influenced how students selected and prepared for college. Families with greater financial resources and corresponding cultural capital who felt a sense of entitlement to attend college, were able to better access information about colleges, and receive assistance applying and selecting colleges than students who were going to become first-generation college students. The more affluent families possessed a habitus that was geared toward pursuing a college education, while the first-generation college student families were not able to offer the same level of assistance with navigating the college process.

The College Student Role

The role of student is closely aligned to the role of employee. Related to my research, students, particularly first-generation college students, often struggle to navigate the implicit expectations of post-secondary education. Through structured WBLO programming, students can learn and acquire skills in the work environment that can benefit them in the environment of post-secondary education. Prior research builds on this foundation, Rotherham & Willingham, 2010; Cabo, 2013; Burstein, 2014, point to the essential workplace skills of: Professionalism, Communication, Critical and Integrative Thinking, and Organizational Skills. These skills are transferrable to the educational environment. Why, then, can students not simply transfer essential skills learned in the educational environment to the workplace environment without WBLO experiences? The answer to that question hinges on the importance of environment. The educational environment and workplace environment require similar, yet different, sets of skills. WBLOs can serve as the bridge between both environments, allowing for students to gain a rich experience in both the world of education and the world of work (Rosario et al., 2013). Collier and Morgan (2007) argue that students must master the "college student role" in order to understand instructor expectations and to navigate the new and nuanced environment of college. Applying a Symbolic Interactionist version of role theory to higher education, students who begin college with a greater mastery of the student role, possess a more refined concept of what instructors expect of them in terms of class attendance and quality of college work (Collier & Morgan, 2007, p. 427). Role playing and role making are important to differentiate when considering students in a higher education setting. Role playing occurs when an individual is confronted with a new situation and seeks to conform to the conventional role. For example, when a first-

generation college student seeks to use a conceptualization of what it means to be a college student and conform to those standards in order to act successfully in this new environment. Role making occurs when the individual develops a version of a role that is often more advanced and comfortable in the environment, for example, when a student negotiates with an instructor to develop an independent study course based on a shared academic interest (Collier & Morgan, 2007, p. 427). Both role playing and role mastery are often used together to perform successful *roles* in higher education and the workplace.

From this perspective, the use of roles is related to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Habitus, through the lens of roles, is one's disposition toward cultural values and norms, which impacts how one acts in order to navigate fields. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), social fields are the environments where the dominant and subordinate groups try to control resources. Cultural capital, or capital in general, cannot exist without social fields. According to France, Bottrell, and Haddon (2013), each field has its own governance and each field requires individuals to possess their own type of legitimate capital in order to navigate the field. Education is a social field. The dominant group in education is more likely to possess the appropriate habitus, which will allow them to become "role experts" and more successfully navigate and participate in the educational institution. These students will simply possess a better "feel for the game." According to Collier and Morgan (2008), not only will these students be "more familiar with higher education from listening to family members' academic histories, but they also are likely to have more appropriate approaches for dealing with teachers and other educational authorities because of parental coaching" (p. 430). The research of Collier

and Morgan (2008), further enumerate the challenges faced by first-generation college students from the perspective of lacking the necessary cultural capital to succeed in the post-secondary environment. Unfortunately, such challenges are only transferred to the workforce when the world of work is attempted to be navigated by first-generation career seekers.

As described by Collier and Morgan (2008), cultural capital in the social field of education is a kind of academic capital. Non-first-generation college students are given a head start at the "pattern recognition" associated with post-secondary education due to their familial tradition of higher education. The resulting bias is one the allows non-first-generation college students to better understand faculty expectations, the successful navigation of the post-secondary institution, and a cultural currency that is more aligned to the middle-class backgrounds of most faculty members. Collier and Morgan (2008), examined how non-first-generation and first-generation students understood and were able to subsequently carry out instructor expectations in the college classroom. The findings indicated the problem of carrying out expectations disproportionately affected first-generation students, whose lack of cultural capital directly impacted their ability to successfully perform the college student role. This inability to carry out instructor expectations in the post-secondary field was evidenced by first-generation students not being able to adequately understand instructor jargon, inability to understand course expectations by reviewing the syllabus, lack of self-confidence in the college setting, not understanding the purpose of office hours, not having realistic expectations regarding number of classes one could miss, and not understanding faculty instructions about writing a paper (handwriting paper rather than typing the paper) (Collier & Morgan,

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2008, p. 438-441). First-generation college students are confronted with quickly learning

and adapting to the college student role while also attempting to master new and

challenging academic content. The stifled college preparation of non-traditional college

students can be attributed to lack of cultural capital passed down from immediate family,

lack of familial involvement in the discussion of colleges or careers that require a college

education, and lack of involvement within a secondary system of education that cultivates

the values of a college education, among other factors.

First-generation college students often fail at the college student role due to

inadequate counseling at the secondary-level (McDonough, 1997). According to

McDonough (1997), first-generation prospective college students are more likely than

their non-first-generation student peers to be in non-college tracks in high school.

Moreover, first-generation college students are also likely to come from secondary

schools that have underprepared counselors as well as counselors who have multiple

duties that make it difficult for them to devote the needed time for the pre-college

advising process (McDonough, 1997).

First generation college students are more likely to be older and have dependents

than their non-first-generation peers (NCES, 1998). These first-generation students are

often labeled as non-tradition students. As Levin (2007) indicates in community

colleges, non-traditional students are more the norm than traditional students, thus a more

accurate term for these students would be simply "adult students." Adult students do not

possess the same student identity, or student role, as do their more traditional college-

aged and non-first-generation college student counterparts (Levin, 2007, p. 6). Adult

students are closely associated with "risk factors" that will make them statistically less

likely to complete a credential. Adult students are more likely to have children, to be working full-time while taking classes, and are more likely to be enrolled in college part-time (NCES, 2000). Levin (2007) explains the classification for adult students being termed "at risk" because from an institutional perspective adult student are "seen as deficient—in academic background, in economic status, in possessing social and cultural capital—and thus less likely to meet the standards, expectations, and markers of attainment than traditional students who are not deficient (p. 23). In short, the adult student, who is also likely to be a first-generation college student, does not possess the necessary cultural capital to develop the "traditional" college student role.

The lack of cultural capital and the corresponding habitus needed for successfully developing the college student role has been even more detrimental among women and minority first-generation college students. According to Dumais (2002), women in much of the sociological literature have been ignored even though, "gender is one of the main stratifying factors in society" (p. 45). According to Inman and Mayes (1999), first-generation college students are more likely to be female and to be older. Regarding cultural capital, it may be assumed that men and women receive the same type of cultural training that is congruent with their social class. While this may be true, the habitus of men and women may be different, based on their socialization and the opportunity structure that has been available (Dumais, 2002, p. 45). As a result, one's success in the college student role, one's ability to know the nuances and implicit language of college is tied to gender, especially among first-generation college students. The research of Dumais (2002), supports the notion that habitus and socioeconomic background are influential in affecting student grades.

The social organization of family is central to concept of cultural capital and of student role development, in particular. According to Hsaio (1992), first-generation college students perceive that their parents are less supportive of decisions to pursue a college education, when compared to their non-first-generation student counterparts. Pratt and Skaggs (1989), indicated that a lower percentage of parents of first-generation students think that college is important, when compared to non-first-generation parents. Parental interactions with teachers and educational administrators is also an important consideration when evaluating the impact of cultural capital to development of a student role. Lareau (2003) indicated that middle-class parents were more assertive when talking with teachers in public school systems, making their wishes better known than parents of lower classes, which enabled middle-class parents to secure the placement of their children in gifted programs, among other culturally-desirable outcomes. Such assertiveness when communicating with gatekeepers is characteristic of those with adequate dominant cultural capital, which can benefit the educational trajectories of children (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) and the educational entitlement that persists from one generation to the next (McDonough, 1997). According to Dumais (2010), "if parents make efforts to secure important information for their children, or if students themselves interact regularly with teachers and guidance counselors, then interactions may help the students in the college application process and when meeting with professors and counselors once in college" (p. 251). Positive family involvement with the college process is integral for students to develop a successful concept of the student role. Unfortunately, the parents of most first-generation college students are not involved in the college process, are discouraging of the college process, or do not maintain the

needed cultural capital in order to navigate a dialogue with key gatekeepers in order to secure a positive educational trajectory for their children.

First-generation college students are also likely to be the first in their families and social networks to engage in career exploration and intentional formalized career development prior to entering the workforce (first-generation career seekers). Both first-generation college students and first-generation career seekers often lack the dominant cultural capital to succeed in the environments of education and workplace. As a result, successful navigation of the educational environment, especially in terms of career exploration and development, is foundational to success in the workplace.

First-Generation Career Seekers and WBLOs

There are similarities between the role of college student and the role of employee as described by Bowles & Gintis (1972) in their theory of the correspondence between school and work. For participants, both roles mark the entrance into environments that are largely unfamiliar; where unique jargon is spoken, where implicit rules precede specific behavior, and where retention and advancement is directly related to meeting many new and often unspecified demands. School mirrors labor intensive work environments with respect to authority and control, but in the 21st century context, workers are expected to hold more self-direction and professionalism than in the past. While there is a great deal of attention to "first generation college students", this concept does not extend in the literature to adequately describe and explore the challenges associated with individuals who are lacking in necessary cultural capital to succeed in transitioning to the 21st century world of work. The term, "first-generation career seeker," as I have used throughout this essay, illustrates the unique perspective and challenges

experienced by individuals who maintain a limited context for and ability to navigate the world of work. First-generation career seekers lack the habitus needed to interpret and navigate the often implicit environment of work. First-generation career seekers may not have recognized or engaged in the educational or extracurricular activities that allow for career exploration or the development of a career trajectory. Finally, first-generation career seekers may lack parental, familial, or community involvement in career-related planning or development.

How might cultural capital be obtained through WBLOs? One way is through the acquisition of language, behaviors, and dispositions that are in line with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. That is, through an educational system that disrupts the social reproduction of unequal outcomes by educating students about the values, norms, biases, and culture of the dominant class, specifically in the workplace. The other (and more desirable) way is through the integration of that knowledge learned in pursuit of a post-secondary credential—through experiential learning. The effective use of WBLOs in post-secondary education can be a method of "fast tracking" the attainment of cultural capital among first-generation career seekers. Through the effective use of WBLOs, first-generation career seekers may be able to contextualize classroom learning, receive mentoring that will enable them to develop the skills for navigating the implicit cultures of the workplace, and build social connections within an organization that can help with the obtainment of employment post-graduation. According to Brown, et al. (1989), students who participate in WBLOs are "encultured," meaning that they begin to become a part of the workplace culture and act in accordance with community norms. Enculturation is a key component of learning to successfully navigate the workplace

environment through the transmission of cultural capital, especially for first-generation career seekers.

As previously mentioned, an undeniably massive segment of the workforce development conversation focuses on a skills divide between what is taught in post-secondary institutions versus what skills are needed in the workforce. In addition, the notion of soft skills deficiencies among college graduates has taken a primary spot in much of the literature, and an even greater amount of space in the dialogue that chambers of commerce, colleges, and economic development organizations are having with the business community. Cabo (2013) states that the literature supports findings that post-secondary institutions "give too much theoretical preparation and too little preparation about how to face the real world or work," the need for newly hired college graduates to be re-trained, and the lack of employability knowledge (interviewing, specifically) that many students have when searching for a job (p. 71). Hamilton (1990), in writing about youth apprenticeships, explains that WBLO opportunities help to develop social skills and habits that are common to a given community. Evanciew (1994) states, "apprenticeships allow students to more fully understand what it means to be a worker and a member of a community" (p. 112). The emphasis on a technical skills gap, even when defining some of those skills as "soft" is an instrumental one that essentializes skills and overlooks the ways in which students acquire cultural capital and ways in which the social structures of both education and the workplace exclude or embrace students based on the kinds of capital they hold. Future research should attempt to determine if the workforce and the community college training gap is related to the development of cultural capital by students, particularly first-generation career seekers.

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Challenges with WBLOs

WBLOs are an understudied concept. Even more understudied are WBLOs' place in post-secondary curriculum and how such placement impacts students and the workforce from a sociological perspective. It appears that little thought is given to the placement of WBLO opportunities within the community college curricula. More specifically, community colleges seem to simply "cobble together" WBLO opportunities where they seem to fit in a student's program of study. Often it appears "convenient" for WBLOs to be offered during the last semester or penultimate semester of coursework. Certainly, at the end of their program of study students have acquired more technical knowledge; however, by that time, much of the potential impact of an experiential learner's ability to contextualize learning has been lost. The student may be too far along in his or her program by that point to realize the ways in which the "real world" of work in the field might relate to the work in the classroom. As a result, the student might either be much too invested with both time and financial resources to switch to a new program of study. Even worse, the student may not complete their program of study because of a missing connection between school and work. Finally, and most importantly for this paper, the students, particularly first-generation career seekers, have missed out on a vital opportunity to learn about the hidden world of work in which they are preparing to enter. The result of such lack of preparation is most generally summed-up as a deficiency in soft skills or a misalignment with workforce needs. In a recent panel discussion, Dr. Wayne Lewis, Commissioner of Education in Kentucky indicated that 70% of college students in the state leave college without any post-secondary credential (certificate, diploma, or degree). Perhaps such drop out rates are impacted by a lack of congruency— a lack of relevancy—among higher education and the workforce.

Furthermore, most technical education does not address gaps in workplace cultural capital despite a renewed focus on soft skills. What does this recent discussion of soft skills include? According to Kerka (1993) soft skills, often defined in terms of communication and leadership, are essential for success in the modern workforce or knowledge-based economy. Soft skills can be understood in contrast with technical skills. Technical skills are often thought of as the expertise needed to achieve tasks. Technical skills make up much of the competency-based curriculum in our nation's community colleges, and consist primarily of the demonstrative knowledge needed to complete manual tasks. Soft skills, by contrast, are much more difficult to define, because they exist in the arena of human interaction, behavior, cultural awareness, and situational propriety. That is, soft skills exist in the realm of *sociology.* Daniels (2011) defines soft skills in a category of "social-behavioral skills" (p. 3), and yet they are still defined as skills rather than dispositions or attitudes that can be used to interpret new situations as implied in this discussion of habitus. In fact, Cappelli (2015), citing a 2012 report by the Computer and Technology Industry Association, explained that "a large part of their [employers] perceived skill gaps had to do with soft skills…almost 20% said that their concern was only with soft skills" (p. 259).

Summarily, the same 2015 Kentucky Chamber of Commerce report cited at the outset of this essay, referenced the lack of soft skills as one of the most serious threats to economic development in Kentucky. I would argue that what these leaders are really referring to is a kind of workplace capital requiring a specific kind of habitus—a specific kind of workplace cultural capital. According to Brungardt (2011), "three skill areas consistently cited as deficient in incoming hires are the ability to collaborate effectively

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with others in a team environment, critical thinking skills, and the ability to communicate effectively across various constituencies" (p. 2). These skill deficiencies are commonly referred to as soft skills deficiencies, and they are at the center of a major player in skills gaps conversations between business/industry leaders and post-secondary education institutions.

The soft skills expectation can be problematic, particularly for first-generation career seekers, when not understood, evaluated, or designed from a sociological perspective. Again, the conversation surrounding soft skills leaves out the major component of culture; of why those skills were not acquired in the first place, and finally, what real solutions do we have in our repertoire to instill soft skills. Assessing and defining soft skills is simply not enough. Despite this realization, much of our attention is drawn to demonstrating what we already know—there is a deficiency in soft skills.

Conclusion

The topic of workforce misalignment between employers and community colleges has taken a central role in politics, chamber of commerce reports, and scholarly writings in recent years. Despite the centrality of this problem, little research has been gathered regarding its sociological causes, impacts, or solutions. The concept of Bourdieuan cultural capital can provide a sociological lens to view both the problem and the sociological cost of workforce misalignment. Secondly, a curricular initiative in our nation's community colleges to infuse WBLOs throughout a student's program of study, rather than simply as a capstone of their program, would be an effective start to increase both academic and workplace capital among first-generation career seekers and to align soft skills to employment expectations of the employer community.

Research is needed to determine student perspectives of WBLO experiences related to the development of workplace cultural capital. Due to the scarcity of similar research and the urgency for a greater understanding of the often-discussed misalignment between employers and post-secondary providers, such research has the potential to broaden our understanding in at least the following areas: how the workforce development system interacts and solves workforce challenges in partnership with post-secondary education; how students, and especially first-generation career seekers, can be assisted in navigating the intricacies of the workplace; and how the practice of workforce development can utilize WBLOs in order to better serve disenfranchised students and address workforce issues that can positively change the generational trajectory of poverty or lack of access to upward mobility.

Chapter 4 Student Perspectives of Transformational Career Development Utilizing Work-Based Learning Opportunities at Community and Technical Colleges in Kentucky

Introduction

There is much to be discovered regarding the impact of work-based learning opportunities (WBLOs). An exploration of student perspectives from those who have participated in WBLOs certainly tops the list. From the practitioner standpoint, such an exploration could yield important details to influence policy implications, particularly in a climate where much of the conversation in workforce development circles centers on the workforce supply not keeping pace with employer demand both in terms of skill and quantity. This qualitative study seeks to explore the perspectives of community college students who have been engaged in WBLOs. Specifically, this research addressed the following questions:

1. What, if any, role do WBLOs play in influencing or solidifying career pathway decisions?

2. What, if any, are the impacts of WBLOs on developing student workforce expectations after credential completion?

The Kentucky Community & Technical College System (KCTCS) provides the context for this study due to the system's explicit workforce development mission. Dr. Jay Box, in his first year as President of KCTCS, met with nearly two thousand individuals on a listening tour around the state in 2015. The ideas gathered through these conversations with business, industry, and community leaders, as well as students, faculty, and staff, were combined with over 3,200 online survey responses and distilled

into five themes—areas of need in the Commonwealth where KCTCS could contribute to the solution:

- educational attainment at all levels

- economic development and job growth

- a world-class, 21st century workforce

- global competitiveness of business and industry

- prosperity of Kentucky citizens (KCTCS, 2016, p. ii)

These themes served as the foundation of a new KCTCS Strategic Plan for 2016-22 and are reflected in Dr. Box's vision for "a future where all of our students' dreams translate into communities with a college-educated workforce, ready and able to fill the needs of local business and industry" (Box, 2016).

The need for an educated and prepared workforce is not new. The legislative act that established KCTCS states that the colleges of the system shall "be responsive to the needs of students and employers in all regions of the Commonwealth with accessible education and training to support the lifelong learning needs of Kentucky citizens." (Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997). Utilizing data from JobsEQ, a web-based employment trend analysis tool utilized widely in the field of workforce development, the state of Kentucky possesses the following industry sectors noted for high-growth: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Logistics, Business/IT, and Hospitality. In an answer to the current and projected growth in these industry sectors, KCTCS has developed programming leading toward the technical competencies necessary for a variety of jobs in each sector.

KCTCS has been involved in developing and implementing work-based educational programming on a state-wide scale through the KY FAME initiative. The Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (KY FAME) is an apprenticeship-style WBLO that is designed to create a pipeline of skilled workers for the manufacturing sector throughout the state network of KCTCS colleges. The KY FAME model allows for students to work at a sponsoring employer three days per week while attending coursework leading to an associates of applied science (AAS) in industrial maintenance two days per week. The KY FAME program is designed to contextualize classroom learning through hands-on practice and on-the-job training at the work site. All students are employed full-time and earn competitive wages while at work. Some employers also fund the student tuition and educational-related expenses, although doing so is not a requirement of employer participation in the program.

The fact that KY FAME is the only formalized state-wide WBLO program in Kentucky speaks to the scarcity of such programs. Other WBLO programs exist through KCTCS, but these programs are imbedded within credential programs as requirements, or more usually, credit bearing *options* toward credential completion. Across the state, other WBLO options exist in the form of registered and un-registered apprenticeships, labor-union led experiential learning programs, and WBLO programming through industry sector-based training providers such as the construction sector's, Associated Builders and Contractors. KY FAME remains the only formalized state-wide program, and while KY FAME was originally designed to serve the manufacturing sector, other sectors, namely healthcare, have recently been brought on line under the KY FAME umbrella.

This scarcity of formalized WBLO programs is not representative of WBLO-impact, however. WBLOs plan a critical role in the development of the workforce for the demands of the 21st Century economic climate, especially the need for a high volume of specialized workers in growing and advancing industry sectors such as: manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, and information technology. In addition to technical skills, the 21st Century workforce needs to possess the skills to navigate the workforce environment. These skills of navigating the often implicit environment of work are commonly referred to as "soft skills."

The construct of soft skills can be understood through the lens of cultural capital. For this research, cultural capital is understood simply to be "that certain something" that some individuals possess that enables them to move more fluently in the workplace environment. That "certain something" is related to the soft skills concept that has become a major focus in the fields of workforce development and post-secondary education, but I would argue that it is something more than what these fields suggest. Understanding soft skills through the lens of cultural capital does not change the essence of the concepts of cultural capital *or* soft skills. Rather, understanding soft skills through the lens of cultural capital enables us to explore soft skills from a sociological perspective, along with behaviors such as: how employees interact with the workplace environment; how employees build relationships in the workplace, and how employees understand their role in the workplace and their ability to advance.

The concept for this research was based on my experience, as a practitioner in the field of workforce development, that WBLOs play a critical role in introducing workplace cultural capital to students allowing them to build an intrinsic "sense of the

game" in order to become more adept at navigating workplace culture. As a result, students who participant in impactful WBLO experiences are "fast-tracked" in terms of career readiness not only in technical skills, but also in soft skills needed to obtain, retain, and advance in employment. The concept of fast-tracking is especially important for the category of students referred to as "first-generation career seekers." First-generation career seekers often come from backgrounds where immediate family incomes are based on incomes pieced together from two or more part-time jobs, which offers low sustainability, stability, and certainly mobility.

My research questions sought to explore what role, if any, WBLOs play in transmitting workplace cultural capital and what impact, if any, that transmission had on student career development or career pathway decisions. In addition, my research questions sought to determine what, if any, impact WBLOs had in developing workplace expectations post-graduation due to the student's ability to formalize networks within the organization and increased fluency in navigating the workplace environment. Both research questions are important in exploring if WBLOs play a key role in fast-tracking students in terms of career readiness and workplace navigation.

My initial inquiry was based on the kinds of theoretical ideas from my research and my experience as a workforce development practitioner contained in the Chapter 3 essay of this dissertation, titled, "Workplace Cultural Capital: A Fast-Track to Addressing Workforce Mis-Alignment." In summary: The discussion of workforce mis-alignment between community colleges and employers focuses on a lack of marketable skills. The marketable skills representing the mis-alignment are most often the "soft skills" that can be acquired through acquisition of the sociological concept of cultural

capital, which is also necessary for successful navigation of the workforce, whether that means entry into the workforce, retention in the workforce, or advancement in the workforce. The need for dominant workplace cultural capital is most acute among first-generation college students and first-generation career seekers, as both groups often lack the necessary context and career development for successful navigation of the post-secondary and workplace environments, respectively. Impactful WBLOs are important in fast-tracking career readiness, especially among first-generation participants, and in transmitting workforce expectation as well as the skills to successfully navigate the workplace environment. Given the unique workforce development missions of community colleges, it is incumbent on these institutions to target the mis-alignment challenge directly.

Methodology

My research focused on student perceptions of WBLOs as conveyed through participant interviews. Since my research has a particular significance for community colleges, given the unique workforce development missions of these institutions, all of the research participants were current students at one of three community and technical colleges in Kentucky. The state of Kentucky was purposely selected for my research due to convenience (I am a resident of Kentucky), but also due to the relatively recent workforce development focus of KCTCS as highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. In addition to location, I purposefully selected six technical programs, which corresponded with data from JobsEQ detailing the high-growth industry sectors in Kentucky: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Logistics, Business/IT, and Hospitality. Finally, I coordinated with faculty who have led WBLO programs in each of the targeted industry

sectors to interview students who completed a WBLO experience no later than a year prior to the interview. Twenty student interviews were completed before I felt that saturation had been reached. My initial interview analysis confirmed that I had uncovered sufficient thematic material to provide insight into my research questions. A final analysis was completed in order to explore the themes at a more granular level.

Site and Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was utilized for this qualitative study. According to Creswell (2009), purposeful sampling will lead to "information-rich" participants who will contribute to the pool of first-hand experiences. Such an experience pool is desired to distill thematic conclusions for the study. For this study, I wanted to interview former WBLO participants who were no more than one year removed from their WBLO experience. Being no more than one year removed from the WBLO experience helped ensure that the experience was distant enough for adequate reflection (for instance, I did not want to interview current WBLO participants), yet not too distant as to create insufficient memory of details. All study participants were former WBLO participants from Southcentral Community and Technical College (SKYCTC), Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC), and Maysville Community and Technical College (MCTC). Each of these three colleges is a part of the 16 college Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS).

SKYCTC, OCTC, and MCTC were selected as sites based on each college's infrastructure for the delivery of WBLO programming and proximity to the researchers. MCTC has a dedicated center for the placement of students in WBLOs called the Center for Career Development and Experiential Learning. All three colleges represent the

diversity of WBLO programs among the other 13 KCTCS colleges in the industry sectors of healthcare, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, technology, business, and hospitality.

Participants in the study were recruited with the assistance of faculty members who contacted current or former students who participated in a WBLO lasting at least one semester, but whose WBLO was completed no more than a year ago. I was also interested in talking with students from a range of technical areas in addition to manufacturing mentioned earlier. Faculty gatekeepers explained the purpose of the research as an exploration of experiences in WBLOs to the students and that a $10 Visa gift card would be provided to show appreciation for their time. As a result, 20 participants recruited for the study agreed to participate and be recorded for the study. The age range of participants was 20-60 years of age, with a median age of 23 years old. The below cross-section was represented in the study:

Table 4.1

Work-Based Learning Participants by Industry Sector

Number of Participants	Industry Sector
8	Manufacturing (KY FAME)
3	Business
3	Healthcare
2	Technology
2	Transportation/Logistics
2	Hospitality

The majority of participants were from manufacturing-related programs. This is a result of the maturity of the KY FAME program. Eight of the 20 former WBLO participants interviewed for this study were participants in KY FAME, making participation in KY FAME the largest single cohort of interviewees for this study. The relatively large number of KY FAME students in my research is not surprising, since KY FAME is the only state-wide formalized WBLO program in Kentucky at the community college level.

Interview Process

Participant interviews began with the general statement, "Tell me about yourself." This statement was purposefully left broad in an attempt to establish the interview as a place where the participant could speak freely about the experiences and topics that were important to him or her. After this initial statement, I asked two specific questions if they

were not addressed by the participant: "Tell me about your work experience" and "Why did you decide to attend college? Why this college?" As the interview progresses, I intentionally began to ask increasingly specific questions related to work and post-secondary involvement. The next set of questions were designed to explore the participant's reasons for pursuing post-secondary education and the participant's familial involvement and history with work. These questions are as follows: "Sometimes students say they are attending college because of someone else. Do you feel that way? If so, who are you attending college for and why?" "Tell me about your family's work history? What kinds of jobs did your parents or other relatives have?" "Did your parents attend college? If so, what did they study? Did they graduate?"

The next set of questions were designed to explore the WBLO environment and to learn about the people, experiences, and work that has been made possible by the WBLO. The inquiries made in this section consists of grand-tour and mini-tour questions as articulated by Spradley (1979). The questions in this section began with the general request of "Walk me through the typical day in your WBLO." This request was designed to allow the participant to highlight which parts of the WBLO he or she finds most relevant to the discussion, much like the broad statement "Tell me about yourself" that was the first posed at the beginning the interview. After being asked to "Walk me through the typical day in your WBLO," the participant was asked, "Is there anyone at your site that you look up to? Is there anyone at your site that you want to be like? Tell me about that person. What do you like about them?" This set of questions were designed to explore the relationship of the WBLO participant to other workers in the environment. Additionally, the questions were designed to explore how the WBLO

participant views other workers, what characteristics the WBLO participant deems as aspirational related to the work environment, and how the WBLO participant sees himself or herself in relation to the work environment and future work goals and aspirational characteristics. Related to these questions, the interview protocol next posits the question, "Is there anyone at your site that you do not want to be like? If so, describe that person." This question was designed to explore the characteristics found to be undesirable by the WBLO participant related to the work environment. Finally, the questions of "Is there anyone at your site that you look up to/Is there anyone at your site that you do not want to be like" were designed to explore any mentorship relationships that may exist in the WBLO and to determine what notable characteristics and/or experiences, if any, the WBLO participant is able to pull from the work environment related to working alongside others. The final question in this section was "Would you have been able to do work like this without this WBLO?" This question was designed to determine the amount of emphasis the WBLO participant places on the experience's relevance to providing work-related opportunities that would otherwise not be able to be realized. In context of the research questions, this question was important to determining to what degree the WBLO aides in career exploration and career development.

The next set of questions were classified as future-oriented questions. The first question in this section of the interview protocol was the broad question, "What do you want to be?" Like the broad questions at the outset of each new section of the interview protocol, this question was designed to allow the participant to pull broadly from his or her experiences both inside and outside the WBLO. In doing so, I sought to explore what experiences the participant is emphasizing both before and after the WBLO related to

developing career goals. This question was also asked to explore if participants possesses a defined career goal and progression to reach the goal. Subsequent questions in this section of the protocol were designed to explore the timeline related to development of the career goal, the influences contributing to the development of the goal, and the support network present in helping the participant achieve this goal. Specifically, these questions were: "When did you first realize that this is what you wanted to do?" "Why do you think this is something you would like to do for a career?" "Are there people who are helping you achieve this goal?" "What influenced you to pursue this goal?" "How has your college experience helped you get closer to your goal? How has this WBLO helped you with your goal?"

The next section of the interview protocol focused on questions related to experience in the workforce and in the WBLO. The first question in this section maintains a conversational tone, "You've probably had some interesting experiences in your WBLO. Tell me about one or two of those experiences." This question was designed to prompt the participant to recall at least one experience from the WBLO that stands out. In doing so, the participant was provided with an opportunity to stress at least one experience from the WBLO that they self-identify as worthy of highlighting. From the perspective of the interviewer, this question was important because it can demonstrate the degree of reflection about the WBLO performed by the participant. If a participant can articulate experiences from the WBLO that he or she found to be interesting, then the interviewer can more readily determine that the participant reflected on the experience and begin determining the impact of the WBLO on the participant's workforce development.

The final set of questions on the interview protocol were classified as "WBLO-specific" questions. This set of questions began, "What parts of your WBLO have prepared you for your career goals?" This question was designed to prompt the participant to directly tie the WBLO experience to the development of career goals. The question was strategically asked after the experience question, "You've probably had some interesting experiences in your WBLO. Tell me about one or two of those experiences." The WBLO-specific question was prompting the participant to explicitly relate the WBLO experience to career goals, whereas the experience question was designed to determine what relationships the participant draws between the WBLO and career development or other experiences they wish to highlight. The WBLO-specific question can be used to solidify the response of the participant to the experience question or it can be used as a "second chance" to determine if the participant can articulate a relationship between the WBLO and career goals, and if so, what does this relationship look like. The next WBLO-specific question asked was "What parts of your WBLO have surprised you?" This question exists to provide another opportunity for the participant to discuss the WBLO experience. The goal of providing opportunities for discussion was important to listening to what the participant feels is worthy to convey in the interview. The participant's response to such questions presents an opportunity for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to more fully explore the topic of WBLOs. The last question in the protocol is "In your opinion, what are the greatest skills you learned from your WBLO?" This question was again designed to draw the participant into more specific answers. The protocol's general to specific questioning was intentional for the last four scripted interview questions. The participant's answer to the question, "…what are the

greatest skills you learned from your WBLO?" seeks to inform both the depth the participant has reflected on the WBLO experience and what specific skills, if any, can be tied to participation in the WBLO.

The interview protocol was a framework for the interview conversation to take place between the interviewer and the participant. I expected to ask relevant and appropriate follow-up questions for clarity and depth during the course of the interview. The questions on the protocol were intentionally designed to encourage a conversational tone; to listen broadly to the participant; and to explore the participant experience in WBLOs.

Participants

Notably, all 20 of the participants self-identified as first-generation college students. I did not seek to intentionally recruit first-generation college students for the interviews as I thought it might either be too difficult to distinguish their family's educational history through my recruiting strategy and because I did not want to frame the interview to the students as a first-generation student study. This was a welcome result, however, as I was interested in exploring the career seeking experiences of first-generation students as discussed above. Indeed, 16 of the students described their family employment histories in ways that indicated that their immediate family members may not have modeled a clear career trajectory and as a result the participant did not have a clear idea as to what to expect in the workforce. They were, what I call "first generation career seekers". The other four students identified family members with career histories and indicated experience with career exploration. These categories were considered in the interview protocol below.

It is not surprising that all of my participants self-identified as first-generation college students, given the historical significance of community colleges in serving those who are the first in their families to attend college. Interestingly, but not surprising, my participants not only self-identified as being first-generation college students, but also identified as being poor and not pursuing initial career interest due to lack of financial and social resources. Throughout this narrative I will try to give you a sense of the individual personalities of the former students who participated in my study. Carrie (all names are pseudonyms), whose story follows, is exemplary of these first-generation stories.

Carrie: Carrie was a non-traditional student at Maysville Community in Technical College (MCTC) studying in the Culinary Arts program. Carrie attended college due to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding after a layoff from a regional manufacturing employer. Carrie always enjoyed cooking and baking, and when given the opportunity to attend college, culinary school seemed like a self-described "natural fit." Carrie explained that the layoff from her employer of 22 years was a "blessing in disguise," as it allowed her to begin a course of study that she always wanted to pursue and have a career in a field that she loved. Carrie stated, "My mom and dad had me when they were 18 years old. They never went to college, and college was never stressed in our house. It was expected that when you graduated high school, you'd go to work, and that is what I did. I worked in fast food for a few years, then I got the job that laid me off at Emerson Electric. Working at Emerson was a good step after working in fast food for a while, but it was far from perfect. I never thought about going to college and getting out of Emerson, because I had bills to pay and could not stop working…and, I

could not afford to go to college." Carrie also stressed that she never had a good support network from friends and especially family to attend college. Carrie explained, "most of my friends and family were never concerned with going to college. It's something that people did in the movies or something the rich kids did at school."

Data Analysis

My analysis took an iterative approach. I transcribed interviews from audio recordings. As I was transcribing the interviews, I began to notice themes that were consistent. After all the participant interviews were transcribed, a more in-depth analysis was completed. The in-depth analysis was conducted by rereading each interview while highlighting phrases that I thought were of interest as I explored student's perceptions of their background and of the WBLO experience. This first phase of analysis resulted in three preliminary categories for further analysis: 1) First-Generation Student Experiences, 2) Career Pathway Development, 3) On-the-Job Mentorship. After exploring these categories further, I came to believe that WBLOs provided these students with an opportunity to combat the phrase they regularly used, "I never…". Furthermore, their experiences embodied a sense of opportunity to "connect with people" in the field, and to more fully realize their "hopes and wishes" for a career. Finally, the participants in my study showed how WBLOs are important in fast-tracking career readiness, especially among first-generation career seekers.

"I Never"

Carrie's interview contained themes that were characteristic of other interviews. For example, Carrie repeatedly used some combination of, "I never…" as in "I never thought I could go to college…" or "college was never stressed in our house." The usage

of "I never…" or some derivative thereof, speaks to the environment that Carrie and others were used to navigating. This environment is one of limited opportunity. Interestingly, another opportunity did not become possible for Carrie until she was laid off from employment. It took a major event such as a layoff, which at the time was viewed as a devastating reality, for Carrie to move beyond the "I never thought I could go to college." Carrie later referred to the layoff as a "blessing in disguise," because it meant that she could obtain funding to earn a degree in a field that was of long-time interest for her. Interestingly, the financial barrier mentioned by Career in the interview was the only barrier explicitly titled as such. However, there were other barriers as real as the financial barrier, but not as explicitly stated.

Carrie indicated later in the interview, "I never thought I was smart enough to pass the tests" to initially get into the college [Maysville Community and Technical College] or to keep up the grades necessary to remain in college. This though of "not being able to pass the tests" related to entrance is worth noting, because as an open access institution, Maysville Community and Technical College does not have entrance testing requirements for entrance into non-selective admission programs like Culinary Arts. However, it is the *thought* (the *perception*) that Carrie would not gain access that is most worthy of exploration. Carrie perceived a barrier that did not exist in terms of minimum scores needed on entrance tests. The underlying barrier seems to have been the "I never…" During my interview with Carrie, it became clear that she had never pursued post-secondary education because the environment she was most familiar with contained a fatalistic view of good opportunity, as in "I've never done this before, why do I think I would be able to do this now."

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Other students in my interviews from similar backgrounds indicated nearly identical expressions of "I never…" Another participant, Dan, stated, "I never thought I would be good at doing anything other than working in a factory." Dan explained that he desires for a career that was not on third-shift and that paid more than the $13.00 an hour he was making through a temporary staffing agency. Dan indicated, just like 12 other participants using similar phrasing, "My parents never got any training in college, so I never thought that I'd fit in up there [in college]." Such a sentiment is representative of the "I never…" theme.

There were four students who were first-generation college students, but whose parents maintained a clear career trajectory. These students are not classified in my research as first-generation career seekers. Interestingly, these four students never used the phrase, "I never…" or any of its derivatives during the course of the interview. I attribute this lack of usage to these students having opportunities for career development and exploration that were open ended. That is, opportunities that illustrated that "I can be this, if I do this…" The "I never…" group never saw the "I can be this, if I do this…" concept as a conditional. It is important to note that the "I can be this, if I do this…" phrase was never mentioned verbatim as such in the interviews. It is a construct based on the interviews that suggests the attitude of these four students.

One of the non-first-generation career seeker students, Michael who is studying Business, stated that his father was now president of a construction company that was owned by his grandfather. Michael stated, "It was never a question of what kind of work my dad would go into…he was working in the family construction business when he was old enough to hold a hammer." Michael indicated that his career pathway was similarly

chosen, and appeared pleased that he did not need to make a decision about what to do for a career, "Sure, it's expected that I enter the family business, but I wouldn't have it any other way…the company has a lot of potential, and I am excited that I can help take it to the next level just as my dad has done." Interesting, Michael has a similar lack of perceived options in choosing a career as the students in the "I never…" group. In analysis, the difference is the potential that Michael believes his family's business to hold. More specifically, Michael mentioned six times in the course of the interview the perceived sentiment that his family's business has "unlimited potential." As a result, although Michael's career path appears pre-determined, it is pre-determined in such a way to allow for the potential (or at least Michael's perceived potential) for maximum upward mobility and career trajectory.

Samantha, another non-first-generation career seeker indicated that she learned good work ethic from her parents and that she plans to "model what she has learned" to become an RN. In fact, she pointed to her mother's friend, who is an RN, as inspiration stating that, "although when my mom's friend went to nursing school, it was a lot different than it is today, she still helps me stay encouraged." One way Samantha's mother's friend encourages her is by talking about the number of job openings that can be obtained as an RN. Samantha mentioned the perceived mobility of working as an RN as a key attribute leading to her decision to enter that program of study, "I could go anywhere and find work…I never want to be stuck." This concept of "going anywhere" is a stark contrast to the first-generation career seeker students who indicate a lack of potential and mobility. The concept of career pathways is the subject of the next section and will explore the idea of mobility and career trajectory in greater detail.

Career Pathway Development

Developing a concept of a career pathway is difficult for many students, especially first-generation college students. For this research, the concept of a career pathway is defined as the starting point in a trajectory to obtain employment is a specific field or role. First-generation college students often struggle with the concept of career pathways in relation to their interests, and how those interests and skills fit in the workforce. Research conducted in focus groups by Terenzini, et al. (1994), indicated that first-generation college students often feel they have to make an "all or nothing" decision regarding whether to maintain their parents' way of life or reject familial culture in pursuit of their academic and/or career goals. Such a rejection of familial culture can lead to a rejection of familial experiences in the world of work. Brooks-Terry (1988), explained that first-generation students, upon entering college, experience conflicts with values and have a more difficult time reconciling those conflicts than do non-first-generation students. London (1989) indicated that first-generation college students experience a form of culture shock when they begin their post-secondary studies. McGregor, Mayleben and Buzzanga (1991) indicated that first-generation students felt generally less socially-accepted in the college environment.   Lack of support for first-generation students does not stop at lack of support to attend college, but also includes lack of support to enter into a career that is removed from familiarity of the family.

Thomas, a non-traditional student in the KY FAME program at South Central Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) began college at Lindsay Wilson College on a sports scholarship and graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Although Thomas had his "ticket" of a bachelor's degree, he had difficulty locating a job

in the criminal justice field. Thomas applied for a position as a temporary employee at Logan Aluminum in Logan County, Kentucky. While at Logan Aluminum Thomas became interested in a career in manufacturing. Thomas's story helps us understand what it is like to find his path as a first-generation college student and first-generation career seeker.

Thomas: Upon graduated with his bachelor's, Thomas stated, "I never thought I wanted to work in manufacturing before working as a temporary at Logan Aluminum. Before coming here [Logan Aluminum] I thought manufacturing was dirty and really nothing more than pushing a button on some machines all day. Every day at Logan, I get to do a diversity of things, and the place is incredibly clean and there is so much room for moving up in the company. That's why I wanted to pursue a degree in industrial maintenance. That will really allow me to advance quickly and to become even more valuable to the company." Thomas' understanding or mis-understanding of the fundamentals of the manufacturing industry provides evidence for White's (2013) observation that entry-level candidates who are getting ready to take the next step into full-time employment are "clueless" about the fundamentals of the workplace. Thomas' experience at Logan Aluminum demonstrates that a temporary employment experience can contribute to someone's development of a career. It is clear the Thomas' definition of a career is one in which upward mobility and value to the employer is important. It is also interesting to note that Thomas stated that his experience with temporary employment played a vital role in altering his view of the entire manufacturing sector from one of dirty and mundane to one full of opportunity and diversity. Thomas' temporary experience is just one of the experiences he has had with developing a career

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definition. Thomas, as a participant in KY FAME, also is involved in an apprenticeship-style curriculum, which has played an important role in his development of a career definition. In his own words, Thomas' role in KY FAME, has enabled him to, "practice what he learns in the classroom on the job. Doing so, has helped me be even clearer that working in manufacturing is the right career for me. The program [KY FAME] has allowed me to have experiences that I would not have been able to have otherwise. It has really caused me to define what it is I want to do for a career."

"Hopes and Wishes for a Career"

Thomas' interview demonstrates how career pathway development is foundational in determining "hopes and wishes" related to a career. Unlike the "I never…" theme, the theme of "hopes and wishes" demonstrates that students perceive a sense of stability in their career exploration from being on a structured career pathway. This is true even if the student first indicated that they "never" thought they would be able to pursue a college education or career. Interestingly, twelve students used language related to "hopes and wishes" in terms of a career. In some instances, this language was used in such a way to state that "I had hoped for a career like this…BUT" or "I always wished I was a [insert job title/function here] …BUT." These interviews were closely aligned to the interviews possessing the "I never…" theme. However, the "hopes and wishes" theme presented a clear distinction when contextualized in the interview segments that were describing WBLO experiences. When the "hopes and wishes" phrasing was used in the context of WBLO participation, the meaning was focused on the optimistic future outlook of career obtainment due to the preparation afforded by WBLO participation.

Diana, one of the interview participants stated, "I had hoped for an opportunity in healthcare, but was not able to find employment in this field due to my lack of experience. Working with patients was a big reason I wanted to get into healthcare, but without training your opportunities for working with patients is limited." Diana went on to explain that the WBLO experience enabled her to gain meaningful hands on experience prior to choosing if she wanted to pursue the technical programs of medical office assistant of phlebotomist. Diana ultimately chose to pursue the medical office assistant track due to her experience at a regional hospital. Diana explained, "When I was growing up, I had hoped to become a nurse. My parents didn't have the money for me to go to nursing school, so I settled on becoming a cosmetologist. I'm in my late-50's now, and I don't think that anyone as old as I am should just be starting to become a nurse…the job is too demanding, so I chose to become a medical assistant after completing my shadowing experience."

The use of the "hopes and wishes" language is important to detail the transformative capacity of WBLOs in the lives of students. Another student stated, "When you are growing up the way I did all you can do is wish for a better way of life. You see it every day…people going to work at a job that they don't like…One of my teachers once told me, 'go to a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.' I try to live by that…that's why I decided to go to college after all of these years and get an education." The same participant, when asked about her WBLO participation said, "I wished I would've done it sooner. It has really caused me to think I can do things…I can have the kind of career that makes me love going to work every day." This notion of "wishing" to have completed WBLO experiences sooner was common throughout the

interviews. Such a notion speaks to the impact WBLOs have in the lives of students.

Additionally, the notion helps contextualize the findings of Symonds, Schwartz, and

Ferguson (2011), which demonstrate that WBLO programming infused with classroom

learning over a period of two or three years "advances a broader pedagogical approach"

(p.38). A broader pedagogical approach contains the opportunity for students to engage

in meaningful work-based experiences that will help them contextualize classroom

learning and develop the skills to more fluently navigate the workplace environment.

On-the-Job Mentorship

The mentorship category points to the important need indicated by most students

in the interviews, all of whom are first-generation college students, to connect with co-

workers to learn the implicit and explicit rules of the workplace. The role of mentors is a

much-studied topic in the post-secondary education literature. Sorrentino (2007), views

mentoring to be key to student success in the community college arena. Crisp (2010),

confirmed much of the past literature regarding the importance of mentors in directly

contributing to the retention and success of community college students. Research by

Campbell and Campbell (1997) explains that mentors have been demonstrated to

positively contribute to student GPA and persistence through a program of study. In this

research, students indicated that WBLOs provided a unique opportunity to connect with

people in the field. This kind of connection is important to building mentor relationships

and in transmitting the kinds of qualities that make for a successful employee, which is

particularly valuable for first-generation career seekers. Jamal's story helps us

understand how important it is for WBLO participants to connect with people they "look

up to" at the WBLO site. These role models and perhaps mentors are instrumental in

contextualizing the world of work for participants. Conversely, WBLO participants are keenly aware of individuals (and their characteristics) in the workplace that they do not want to emulate. Jamal was a student at South Central Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) in the Commercial Drivers License (CDL) program. Jamal became interested in the CDL program through a Workforce Innovation an Opportunity Act (WIOA) initiative, which provides work experience internships to individuals who have been dislocated from employment. Jamal previously worked in the plastics industry as a machine operator until he was permanently separated from employment due to "operations going overseas." Jamal was raised by a single mother who worked independently as a house cleaner. Jamal indicated that he started work after high school without giving much thought to future career goals. As a first-generation college student and first-generation career seeker, Jamal indicated that he did not have mentors for career development prior to his WBLO.

After being dislocated from employment, Jamal met with a career counselor at the Kentucky Career Center in Bowling Green, KY. Based on a career aptitude assessment and an individual training plan, Jamal was placed in the logistics department of a large manufacturing employer in Bowling Green for an internship. Shortly after beginning the internship, Jamal began to talk with the truck drivers on a regular basis as he assisted in the loading of materials into the trucks. The relationship Jamal built with one truck driver in particular was pivotal in his decision to pursue his CDL. Jamal indicated, "From the time I met Bill, he took me under his wing. He asked me about my work driving the fork truck in the logistics department, and he shared with me the company's need for more truck drivers. He told me about the hours, the pay, and the daily

responsibilities. I guess you could say that I really looked up to him because he took an interest in me, and I really admired his work ethic and knowledge of the work I was doing. In fact, he even started in logistics just like me. When he was in my department, the company paid for him to get his CDL, which was a pretty big pay raise from what he was making in logistics." Jamal explained that he developed a close relationship with Bill over a period of weeks, and Bill was instrumental in encouraging Jamal to earn his CDL. Jamal explains, "I probably wouldn't have gotten my CDL without Bill's encouragement. It was more than encouragement, thought, it was seeing him be successful in his job, and being there for others. I'd like to be that one day. I want people to look up to me, and I want to help people." Jamal indicated that he did not possess a clear career progression after graduating high school. Jamal explained, "…my internship allowed me to find a career that I probably would not have found if not for the internship. Sure, I worked in a factory before getting laid off, but I didn't have opportunities there to do things that were outside of my job duties…I also didn't have the chance to meet many people outside my department. We all just did the same thing pretty much every day. I'm really thankful that I got laid off. It allowed me to find a new job—something that I can make a career out of."

Fifteen students in total indicated the unique ability of WBLOs to allow students to "connect with people" in the field.   One student stated, "I grew up in an area where the highest paid people were the school teachers…. they were the only ones with what I guess you'd call a career. There wasn't anyone I would say that I would want to really ask about having a career." This same student explained, "My internship really opened my eyes to a lot of things…one of the most beneficial things is the relationships I've

made with the people I look up to here at work. These relationships have showed me what it is like to be a successful employee here." For this student, connecting with employees on-the-job was foundational in the understanding the workplace culture, and in learning the kinds of skills needed to successfully navigate the environment. Like this student, it is interesting that students throughout the interviews refer to WBLO sites as their "work," as in their "place of work." Such emphasis speaks to the level of cohesion students feel with the WBLO site and the sense of belonging they have developed. For this student, it is worth noting that the WBLO experience was transformational in her ability to recognize people that she "looks up to" and take cues from them about what is expected to be a successful employee in her work environment. Another student expressed a similar observation related to connecting with employees, "There is no way I would have been able to have experiences like I've had without SKY FAME. I have been able to get coaching at work from people who have a really great understanding of the material we are learning in class. Connecting with them really helps what we study stick, because I'm a hands-on person and I get to practice what we learn three days a week with help from the guys I work with." Like this student, one of the most common characteristics assigned to WBLOs is the opportunity they provide to participate in the workforce that would not have otherwise been available. The ability to connect with employees on-the-job is the central focus of what students indicate that they would not have been able to do without WBLO participation. The ability to connect with employees is impactful in the career development of students and appears to be one of the ways students are fast-tracked due to WBLO participation.

Connecting with employees also provides an opportunity for students to observe the kinds of behaviors they do not wish to emulate. Each student in the interviews was asked the question: "Is there anyone at your WBLO site that you do not want to be like? If so, describe that person." All 20 students stated that they had observed employees at the worksite that they did not want to be like. Among the common characteristics listed for these individuals are: laziness, not willing to be a team player, and lack of initiative.

The Impact of WBLOs in Student Career Pathway Decisions

The first of my two initial research questions concerned what role, if any, do WBLOs play in transmitting dominant workplace cultural capital and how that transmission impacted student career pathway development. In the research, all interview participants indicated that WBLO participation was foundational in their career exploration. In addition, all participants indicated that they would not have been able to have meaningful work experience like the ones completed in the WBLO if not for the opportunity for WBLO participation. For seven first-generation career seekers, in particular, the WBLO opportunity was the first time they were personally exposed to work (outside of the public social service, educational, and healthcare systems) that did not consist of a combination of seasonal and part-time positions leveraged to constitute income. For these seven students, this was the first time they were exposed personally to employment that maintained benefits such as paid time off, health insurance, and retirement savings plans. Such exposure is instrumental in the development of a refined context for which to view the world of work.

When describing participant experience related to work, the modifier of "personally exposed to work…" is an important one. As one participant pointed out, "I

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watched people with careers on TV, and wondered if that is really what it is like to be a cop or to be a doctor…" Later in the interview, the participant revisited the notion of careers as depicted on TV after having participated in a WBLO and explained, "…I think that TV makes work more exciting than it really is. Some of the full-time workers at my internship talked about how people my age would come to work and leave on break and never come back…they would just quit…I think that is because sometimes work is exciting, but more often than not, it is just doing tasks, getting paid, and going home." This participant realization is particularly interesting, because the participant's WBLO was completed at a hospital, which has often been depicted on TV as an environment filled with excitement and intrigue. Despite the realization that work is less exciting than often depicted, the participant indicated that the work experience produced by the WBLO was valuable. In fact, the participant found value in the realization that work is *not* as it is often depicted. The WBLO provided the participant with a new context from which to view the world of work. Context development for "real world" work supports the research of Hayward and Horvath's (2000) finding that students involved in co-op experiences possess greater social skills and a fuller understanding of work related to society.

This research indicates that WBLO experiences are important in developing a context for the work environment. Context includes a refined view of what the world of work, to borrow a descriptor from an interview participant, is "really like" (i.e. the world of work is not usually how it is depicted or described on TV or in media). That is, what the world of work *is not*. Context is also important in developing a notion of what the world of work *is*. From my research, the role of context is important for participants to

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understand the work environment. From context, dominant workplace cultural capital is developed with the key role of navigating the workplace environment. It is anticipated that the development of dominant workplace cultural capital will enable employees to navigate the intricacies of what is required to retain employment, advance in employment and earn a raise, among other important markers of success in the workplace.

In my research, the development of dominant workplace cultural capital begins with meaningful workplace exposure provided by WBLOs. On a first pass, I was able to identify four consistent markers of the characteristics of a meaningful WBLO experience: 1) the student matched with a work environment related to field of study; 2) the student engaged in work that is substantive, yet realistic given the participants skills; 3) the student was involved in structured reflection throughout the WBLO experience; and 4) the student developed professional relationships with employees on-site at the WBLO. These elements of a successful WBLO reflect the literature regarding positive experiential learning and are not surprising. Deeper analysis, however, showed the important role of WBLOs in developing workplace cultural capital related to the workplace environment.

This research found that participants became equipped to more fluently navigate the cultural environment of the workplace after completion of their WBLO. Sixteen students indicated that the WBLO experience enabled them to hone in on a career pathway and to learn the skills needed to navigate the workplace environment. One student noted, "My internship allowed me to have my first experience in a professional environment. This was a change for me, because I had worked in a gas station before and that's it…In my internship, I was expected to wear professional clothes and to act

differently." Another student who interned at a CPA firm explained, "I never thought I would be able to get into this kind of job, but my work experience [from a WBLO] showed me what it takes to get a job in this field. I am studying accounting now, and thought that I may want to be a bookkeeper, but my internship helped me determine that I want to earn my bachelors in accounting and sit for my CPA." Both of these student interviews are important, because part of navigating the cultural environment of the workplace is developing a career pathway based in that culture.

Only three students indicated that WBLO participation did not equip them to more fluently navigate the workplace. Interestingly, all three students were non-first-generation career seekers. For this group, the WBLO experience was beneficial in providing access to the workforce but was not perceived as needed to develop the skills to navigate the workplace environment. The three non-first-generation career seekers used language to indicate that prior workforce exploration and engagement with social networks and family was central in the development of a career trajectory. The WBLO experience, although helpful, was not foundational in the arena of developing fluency in navigating the cultural environment of the workplace nor in developing a career pathway.

Fluency in navigating the workplace environment is an important attribute of dominant workplace cultural capital transmission from a WBLO experience. Along with this transmission is the development of career pathway decisions. For many students, impactful participation in a WBLO can enable them to learn the "rules of the game," as is often described in the acquisition of dominant cultural capital.

WBLOs and the Development of Workplace Expectations Post-Graduation

The second of my two part initial research question concerned what impact WBLOs have in developing workplace expectations post-graduation. From this research, it seemed that participants experienced a noticeable shift in their confidence related to the ability to 1) stay in college and 2) develop workplace expectations post-graduation. The group of students with the most dramatic shift in thinking due to WBLO participation were the students in the "I never…" group. Of the 16 students in the "I never…" group, 14 of them indicated a shift in thinking that occurred during the course of their WBLO experience. Carrie, who was introduced in the "first-generation" section of this chapter, commented, "…working in the College Café for my [culinary] classes really helped me see that I could do this…" The part of the quotation I wish to highlight is: "…helped me see that I could do this…" Here, Carrie is explaining that the WBLO experienced helped her see that she could complete college and locate a job that she finds meaningful. This discovery is congruent with the findings of Weible (2009) whose research describes student benefits of WBLO completion as higher staring salaries and job satisfaction, more (and earlier) job offers, higher extrinsic success, development of communication skills, and better interviewing and networking skills (p. 59-60).

Another student in this group, Jon, explained that he was never expected to attend college due to his family background. Jon indicated that he eventually found himself in community and technical college due to a closure of a Rent-to-Own store where he had been employed for four years. Jon indicated that he, "felt lost when the store was closed." He stated, "I never really liked working in retail, but it's all that I've known…the hours are horrible, and the pay is not good, but it was a job…I thought about

attending college, but I never thought I really had what it took to be good at school…"
Like other students, Jon did not enroll in post-secondary education until a layoff from current employment. Jon enrolled in a maintenance program, which was completely new to him. "A lot of the students in my classes had experience working in factories, so they were much farther along…" Jon was able to eventually able to register for a WBLO experience in order to gain more familiarity with manufacturing equipment. Jon stated, "I didn't get to do much too hands on at the factory [during the WBLO], but being there, talking with people, and just hearing the words they used helped me understand my classes better."

Jon indicated that his WBLO experience was foundational in determining a career pathway in the manufacturing sector. "When I enrolled, I just picked a program that I thought looked interesting. It wasn't until my co-op that I really felt like I could see myself working in this field." Jon's experience in the WBLO enabled him to "feel more able to understand the class." The context provided to Jon by his WBLO experience helped him, as he mentioned, "make up for lost time," in that he perceived the WBLO experience to get him on the same footing as the students with manufacturing backgrounds that were "much farther along." The context provided by the WBLO experience was instrumental in helping Jon not "stop out" of college, as it provided a mechanism for Jon to better understand the technical components of the coursework "…just hearing the words [used in the WBLO] helped me understand my classes better" and feel a sense of belonging in a class with other students who "had experience working in factories, so they were much farther along…" It is interesting that Jon was not able to gain much "hands on" experience in the WBLO, but his participation in "being there,

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talking with people, and just hearing the words they used…" helped in developing his workplace expectations to such a degree that he "could see himself working in this field."

Other students used a combination of the "I never…" and the "hopes and wishes" language in the context of the WBLO experience playing an integral role forming career expectations post-graduation. Gwen indicated, "I had always hoped for a career in business...I just knew that I wanted to work in that kind of environment. However, I was not really sure what area in particular because the field of business is so broad…I guess in a lot of ways that's what draws me to it…" Gwen also stated, "…when I was in high school, I thought off and on about going to college…part of my wanted to and part of me didn't. It was not easy to make the decision to go [to college] …it would have been easier for me to just do what was expected of me and get a job after high school…I never thought I'd be here… [in college]." Gwen explained that her WBLO experience was foundational in building confidence in her decision to attend college, due to doubts she occasionally had about her ability to complete her associates and earn a bachelors in business administration through transfer. Gwen also explained that her WBLO gave her a better idea of "what areas in the business field I wanted to concentrate on." At the time of the interview, Gwen had narrowed her career pathways down to about three options as a result of her WBLO experience. Gwen is an example of a student whose engagement in a WBLO enabled her to make career pathway decisions, develop and narrow career expectations post-graduation.

The development of workplace expectations post-graduation is an important component of a student's post-secondary experience. Many students, particularly first-generation college students and first-generation career seekers, do not possess the

workplace context from which to build career expectations. Put simply, many students

do not know where they see themselves after credential completion. In this research,

students indicated that WBLO experiences were important in "…knowing what I could

see myself doing after graduation," "…being able to narrow my focus," and "knowing

what it is I definitely don't want to do for a career." The impact of WBLOs were

instrumental in the development of workplace expectations post-graduation and in post-

secondary retention.

The Role of WBLOs in Fast-Tracking of Career Readiness

My exploration of WBLOs from a sociological perspective demonstrates that

WBLOs can positively impact the development and transmission of dominant workplace

cultural capital. A scarcity of research exists in this arena, despite a multitude of research

related to first-generation college students, experiential learning programs, and essential

skills development, all of which are contextualize of this research. This research is a

small dip into the great depth needed to engage the kind of understanding needed for

substantial programmatic and policy change. Such a shift in thinking and action is

needed to more effectively leverage WBLOs as a tool to increase the potential for upward

mobility among students with limited exposure to career development activities and

limited career contexts formulated through familial and/or social network involvement in

career development.

WBLO programs should be developed based on applied research utilizing the

perspectives of faculty, students, and employers. Additionally, research into WBLOs

should expand on the four consistent markers of the characteristics of a meaningful

WBLO experience found in this research: 1) Students are matched with a work

environment related to their field of study. Students consistently indicated the importance of being matched to a work environment that was meaningful to their exploration. In some cases, this match was to solidify a student's major, "I was not sure I picked the right program [to study]. I just thought that I wanted to be in this field." In other cases, this match meant learning what the student did not want to do in the field, "I really learned that I did not want to be in the clinical track of healthcare. I found that I wanted to be in healthcare but move up to an administrative role." This student credits her WBLO experience with learning about other options in the field of healthcare. Before the WBLO, she was only aware of the clinical track. Now, she is aware of other tracks, and has decided to pursue a career as a medical social worker as a starting point to a career in healthcare administration. Finally, being matched to a work environment in the student's field of study is important in post-secondary retention, "I really feel like I entered the right major after completing my internship. Before then, I had doubts that I had chosen the right thing, because the coursework is a lot different than I thought it would be. Actually being in the workforce showed me how the coursework relates to my [career] goals."

2) Students are engaged in work that is substantive, yet realistic given the participants skill. Sharma, Mannell, and Rowe's (1995) research demonstrated the importance of WBLOs being relevant to a student's career aspirations, even if such aspirations are overly broad or ill defined. Only three of the students interviewed mentioned that there WBLO experiences were initially not substantive based on their skills. One student was able to locate a different and more impactful WBLO experience after meeting with her internship coordinator and the other two students explained that the WBLO experience

became more impactful after changing functions within the WBLO site. Students consistently indicated that substantive work is important in the WBLO experience, "My internship was very hands-on. I was able to gradually get more responsibility, which really made the experience meaningful." Another student indicated, "I was not always able to be very hands-on due to the nature of the work, but I was able to make some really good connections and learn from others as they were doing the job." WBLOs do not always have to be "hands on," but impactful WBLOs facilitate learning through mentorship relationships, "I was able to really look up to him and learn a lot from him…" and through structured observation, "They [the WBLO site] had all of us participate in observing how one of the employees repaired a machine that was worth like $100,000. It was a difficult fix, but I learned a lot by just watching and then talking with the guy who did it."

3) Students are involved in structured reflection throughout the WBLO experience. Students consistently indicated that reflection was a key component in learning from the WBLO experience. This type of reflection was a particular focus for the students in the KY FAME program. The KY FAME model is built around contextualization of the classroom and the worksite, with three days spent working eight hours a day and two days spent in classroom instruction eight hours a day. The students in the KY FAME program indicated, "The classroom part of our work is really good in relating to what we did at work that week." Two students stated that their instructor required them to keep a daily journal of their work and classroom experiences, one student explained, "The journal was really good for me to see what we did that day…it caused me to think about

how I could relate what I did at work to what we were doing in the class. It also helped

me see what questions I needed to ask in order to have a better understanding of the job."

4) Students develop professional relationships with employees on-site at the WBLO.

Students consistently indicated the impactful relationships they were able to develop with

employees. Such relationships are particularly beneficial to first-generation career

seekers in modeling career development and career trajectory. One student explained,

"Nate is the most knowledgeable person I've ever met…there are a lot of people who ask

for his help at work." That same student later indicated that they would like to follow a

similar career trajectory, "…I would like to start out in maintenance and learn all I can,

then apply for a job as a team leader. This is what Nate was able to do, and the

maintenance background he has is important in keeping the operation going…he

understands how production works." Another student explained the kind of mentoring

relationship that extends beyond observation as being transformative, "I was able to get

paired with Gary at work, and he took a real interest in helping me learn the job…he

often talked about how young people didn't seem interested in working much these days,

and that when he comes across a young person that wants to work, he will do everything

he can to help them. Gary was always available to answer my questions or show me

something that was kind of an odd example to let me see how to troubleshoot it…Gary and

I still remain in contact even after my co-op, and I'm going to use him as a reference as

soon as I start applying for jobs."

Conclusion

Structured WBLOs have the ability to "fast track" career readiness among

students with limited workplace cultural capital. Post-secondary institutions should

develop a curricular plan to incorporate WBLOs throughout a student's program of study regardless of the students' level of preparation for work. Often, WBLOs are cobbled together and placed in or near the last semester of study. One student, called Kate, indicated, "I wish I could have started this internship my first year of college. I learned a lot that could have helped me decide on a major earlier." There is also often hesitation among institutions to connect students with lower soft or technical skills to the employer community. A simulated WBLO environment can be achieved for students who need upskilling prior to connecting with the employer community. Such an environment might consist of the student participating in work-related interactions using software like CareerEdge.

In Kate's instance, she wished she could have started a WBLO earlier in her college experience. The college could have provided Kate with WBLOs either through a "work and learn" program in the institution or through a work-based program early in the program of study that could have informed Kate about career options and associated programs of study. This type of WBLO delivery could have helped Kate formalize a context for the general work environment and could have helped her decide in a program of study, since she mentioned, "I wish I could have started this internship my first year of college. I learned a lot that could have helped me decide on a major earlier." Based on this research, meaningful WBLO experiences instill transferrable essential skills needed for entry into the workforce. Supiano (2015) found that students who met with a career counselor before they entered the classroom or in their first semester were much more fluent in developing career plans than students who did not have career counseling experiences early in the program of study. In addition to infusion of WBLO experiences

throughout a program of study: Students should be matched to a work environment related to their programs of study or career interest, if known; students should be provided with work experience that is substantive, yet realistic given skill level; students should be engaged in structured reflection through the course of the WBLO; and students and employers should be encouraged to develop professional relationships.

Interviews with participants indicated that the post-secondary environment and the workplace environment are similar in relation to the required skills needed to navigate the often implicit rules that have been constructed. Among the group of first-generation career seekers, it is important to consider that WBLO experiences are important in not only career, but academic success. Looking back at the experience of Jon, the context provided by the WBLO experience was instrumental in helping him remain in post-secondary education, as it provided a mechanism to better understand the technical components of the coursework "…just hearing the words [used in the WBLO] helped me understand my classes better" and feel a sense of belonging in a class with other students who "had experience working in factories, so they were much farther along…" Success in the college and workforce environments is defined by participants similarly. That said, post-secondary education would be do well to place a more strategic emphasis on WBLO experiences. This is especially the case among community colleges where a majority of students are first-generation college students, who are at a much higher risk than their non-first-generation peers for attrition (Stebleton & Soria, 2012). Early student introduction to meaningful WBLO experiences can be instrumental in the acquisition of the needed cultural capital to not only succeed in role of employee, but also in the role of student.

Finally, employers in all industry sectors need to be engaged in WBLO program development and advocacy. Workforce development professionals throughout the U.S. are involved with developing solutions for the top priorities of employers. Among the top of these priorities is the creation of programming to combat deficiencies in the category of skills that are commonly referred to as "soft skills." This research provides insight into the sociological nature of soft skills related to the acquisition of dominant cultural capital—a conversation that, to date, has not taken place in the literature or workforce development practice. The students in the interviews, particularly first-generation career seekers, indicated a greater fluency in navigating the workforce environment in terms of non-technical skills and expectations. One student commented, "I had little knowledge of what would be expected in this kind of work. During my internship, I was able to learn from others what was expected on-the-job." Another student explained how the WBLO experience helped him develop new skills, "Every place is different and I learned what to do and what not to do at work. I wouldn't have had this opportunity if not for my internship."

Often the development of WBLO experiences is limited to the number of employers willing to serve as training sites. Employers should be the greatest advocate for WBLO experiences and that advocacy should take the actionable step of WBLO of serving as a meaningful WBLO site. Of course, employers are not in the business of creating training programs, although some have been quite successful in that arena in recent years. A healthy workforce development ecosystem consisting of employers, local workforce boards, and educational institutions should be ready to coordinate the effort to create meaningful WBLO sites.

The need for WBLOs is not simply a workforce development issue. It is also a post-secondary education issue. And, perhaps, what it is greatest: a sociological issue. Lack of understanding how work place cultural skills are developed is a problem of understanding how people acquire skills in the first place. It is a lack of understanding how the role of context and background can prevent someone from upward mobility, while giving others the skills to navigate the implicit "rules of the game" as if it were natural. Structured WBLOs, understood and designed from a sociological perspective, have the ability to positively change the lives of students who would otherwise possess limited opportunities for career development and who would likely be shut out of entry or advancement in the workforce.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

WBLOs possess the ability to help students, particularly first-generation career seekers, develop the necessary workplace cultural capital to navigate the often-implicit world of work and to fast track career readiness. Knowledge of the transformative nature of WBLOs can illuminate how faculty, post-secondary administrators, and employers structure WBLO programming and allocate resources. There is much to learn from the continued sociological study of WBLOs, and some initial recommendations have been made from this research. One thematic recommendation throughout this dissertation is to more cohesively build WBLO experiences into the entirety of a program of study. This recommendation is based on the level of intentionality in WBLO design described by my colleague and coauthor, Lauren McCrary. Often WBLOs are simply "cobbled together" in a program of study during or near the last semester. The impact of WBLOs would be far greater in terms of career exploration, career readiness, and cultural capital development if the WBLO was more fully infused into the length of the entire program of study. However, additional research specifically exploring this recommendation would be welcomed. In fact, the most prescriptive finding in this research was the realization that additional research into WBLOs from the sociological perspective is very worthy of pursuing. There appear to be a wealth of future research topics touched upon during the course of my exploration, which could further the development, delivery, and impact of WBLO programming.

The key finding in this research indicates that WBLOs have the ability to fast-track career development, particularly for those students who are first-generation career seekers. For most of my interview participants, the world of work was an unknown and

uncharted place; a place that could not be described in a preparatory kind of way by family and social networks. The participants in my interviews overwhelming described how their WBLO experiences were the first real exposure to a "career." That is, employment with a trajectory that required fluency in navigation, along with good pay and benefits. As such, WBLOs played a critical role in the first introduction of students to career pathways. Such a realization is not to be taken lightly, given the skills gap that is currently experienced in most of our country. There are, in fact, more open skilled positions than there are people to fill them in most parts of the country. Most importantly, WBLO experiences did not stop at introducing the notion of career pathways. Rather, WBLOs prepared students to enter into a career by helping them, usually through a mentor-type relationship, in developing the needed workplace cultural capital to get hired, retain employment, and advance in a pathway of upward career mobility. In doing so, WBLOs possess the unique ability to change not just one career trajectory, but the career trajectories and potential for upward mobility of entire subsequent generations.

The conversation surrounding soft skills development that is presently occurring at full throttle in workforce development and post-secondary education circles has a foundational place in my WBLO research, as well. The term soft skills has never really sat well with practitioners who realize the importance of such skills. The qualifier "soft" has a way of downplaying the significance of these vital skills. In reflection and through the lens of workplace cultural capital acquisition, soft skills are really "entry-level skills." Describing *soft skills* as *entry-level skills* is important to illuminate the findings of my WBLO research. Entry-level skills, by definition, are the skills needed to enter the

gateway of employment. Entry-level skills are not simply for entry-level employment. Rather, entry-level skills represent the gateway through which job-seekers must enter in order to find employment, sustain employment, and advance in employment. In the current climate, many job seekers are shut out of the gateway for employment (and certainly shut out from advancement in employment) without "entry-level skills." Through the lens of this research, it is important to be mindful that entry-level skills are a social construct and can be learned or transmitted provided the kind of exposure often afforded through WBLO participation. My coauthor, Lauren McCrary, notes in her exploration that faculty view WBLOs as a mechanism to expose students to a learning environment of professionalism. Such a perspective provides further evidence that entry-level skills can be acquired though the structured environment of WBLOs.

Reflection

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to complete my masters and my doctoral work while working full-time. I realize that working in demanding full-time professional roles while completing challenging graduate programs might seem like an odd circumstance to celebrate as "fortunate." In alignment with this research, my experience of completing seven years of graduate school while working full-time allowed me to understand both work and coursework more deeply. For me, the learning experience was not siloed, but was rather blended with life. I know that I am a better student due to my employment and I am a better employee due to my coursework.

Like all of the students in this research, I am a first-generation college student. And, like most of the students in my research, I identify as being a first-generation career seeker. My parents divorced when I was five years old. My mother cobbled together an

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income to make ends meet, working in a factory with limited advancement potential during the day and a women's clothing store at night. I was largely raised by my great-aunt, who was functionally illiterate, having dropped out of school in the fourth grade to help care for my grandmother who contracted polio. The stories conveyed by many of the research participants could have been autobiographical.

Upon graduating from high school, I had no idea how to navigate the college environment or the workplace. I stumbled around undergrad, changing my major, failing classes, until one of my professors suggested that I work in his lab as a research assistant. My GPA nor my academic direction was characteristic of the caliber of students who were selected to participant in these kinds of opportunities. Despite this reality, I gained entry, worked in the lab for five semesters, gained entry-level skills (in fact, for the longest time, this experience was the first line on my resume), and learned how to navigate both the world of work and the world of higher education. This WBLO experience was foundational in my application and acceptance into an MPA program, which I completed at the top of my class being named the "2014 College of Business and Public Affairs Outstanding Graduate Student," while working full-time with a wife and two young children at home. While still completing my MPA, I was one of fifteen KCTCS employees selected to participate in the 2014 Class of the President's Leadership Seminar at KCTCS, which allowed me to earn my first three doctoral credit hours, and subsequently paved the way for me to begin my journey officially as a doctoral student.

At the age of 36, I now have a six-figure income serving as president/CEO of one of the state's largest workforce development organizations. I regularly contribute to presentation material for national workforce conferences, utilize my expertise to develop

workforce development programming with partnering organizations from the ground up, and oversee millions of dollars in workforce investment in the economically booming region of south central, Kentucky, just north of even greater economic powerhouse of Nashville, TN. There is little doubt that my career trajectory would have been no trajectory at all if not for the WBLO experience that changed my life. My exploration of WBLOs, related to the development of career pathways, was a deeply personal pursuit for me. It is my hope to continue researching WBLO experiences in order to lead positive and impactful change in the lives of others.

Significance and Utility of the Study

One significant attribute of this study centers on the lens through which WBLOs were explored. Workforce development programs, WBLOs included, are often not viewed through a lens of culture and sociology. As a result, programs are often not evaluated with consideration given to the intricacies of how participants interact with environments. This research was begun based on the assumption that understanding human behavior and backgrounds related to the work environment was important in evaluating and building impactful, life changing WBLOs. This research is significant, in part, because it sought to explore WBLOs from a unique perspective.

Related to perspective, the research is also significant because it indicates that students perceived WBLO experiences as a way of fast tracking fluency in the work environment. It is important to note that such fluency in the form of cultural capital is mostly transferrable to a host of workplace environments and is not industry-specific. WBLOs were foundational in students obtaining skills that are essential and expected for entry into the world of work.

Finally, the research is significant because it points to the transformational potential of impactful WBLOs on the career development and career trajectory of students, especially those students who have limited exposure to career exploration opportunities at home, through social networks, and through school. For many students, WBLOs provide the only context for understanding the work environment and what it takes to be successful in that environment. Pointing to the transformational potential of WBLOs is important to understanding the value of intentionality in designing WBLO programs and in the evaluation of WBLO programs that are already in existence.

It is intended that post-secondary administrators, faculty, and employers will utilize the findings of this study to 1) increase the emphasis on WBLO programming, especially among populations of students who could be characterized as first-generation career seekers, 2) design and evaluate WBLO experiences that seek to maximize career development through curricular integration over the entire span of a program of study, and 3) emphasize the key role of employers in the WBLO design and delivery process as well as seek to increase the availability of impactful WBLO sites in the employer community.

WBLOs are not intended to be a panacea for all challenges related to the 21st Century workforce. WBLOs, however, certainly have the potential to be more fully leveraged as a mechanism to fast-track career readiness for students, particularly those with limited exposure to important career development and career exploration experiences. In addition, WBLOs, when more fully understood and utilized, have the potential to help transmit the workplace cultural capital needed to successfully navigate the workplace environment, leading to job retention and advancement. It is my hope that

this research contributes in a meaningful way to a renewed emphasis, delivery, and

evaluation of WBLO programming.

Appendix I: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study by Robert Boone, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation at the University of Kentucky under the advisement of Dr. Jane Jensen, Associate Professor of Education. The purpose of the study is to explore how students within the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) make sense of Work Based Learning Opportunities (WBLOs).

You have been invited to participate because you are currently a student in a course with a work-based learning opportunity component. The expectation, if you choose to participate, will be an interview lasting about 60 minutes that will ask questions about your experiences in the work-based learning opportunity, your past work and educational experiences, you family's educational background, and your future career aspirations. Some of the interview questions will also ask about the involvement of important people in your life related to your education and career development. Some questions will focus on your thoughts and feelings on various topics, and you are under no obligation to answer questions that you do not wish to answer.

This interview will be recorded using an audio recorder, and some notes will be taken on a notepad. All of this recorded material will not identify you by name, and will be kept in a secure location.

There are no perceived potential inconveniences or discomforts related to this interview. There are no guaranteed personal benefits related to this interview. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. You will not be personally identified. When referencing the interview in the report, the interviewee will only be identified by a fictional name, and the data will be stored on an electronic password protected storage device.

Your participation is voluntary and at any point you may end your agreement to participate. In addition, you can ask to skip questions during the interview process. Please note, individuals under the age of 18 are not invited to participate in this study. There will be no penalty should you decide to no longer participate. At the end of the interview, you will be provided with a $10 Visa gift card (which can be spent at any location that accepts Visa) in appreciation for your participation.

I, _____, am over the age of 18 and has had the opportunity to ask any questions and have received answers. Robert Boone is the primary researcher and can be reached at rsmboone@gmail.com or at 270-935-0518.

_____ Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study
Date_____

_____Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study
Date_____

_____Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent
Date_____

Appendix II: Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol for WBLOs and Career Identity Development among First

Generation Career Seekers

Opening Instructions: Good morning (afternoon). My name is Robert Boone (or Kevin

Beardmore). Thank you for coming. The purpose of this interview is to explore how

students make sense of WBLO experiences within the Kentucky Community and

Technical College System. You have been invited to participate because you are

currently a student in a course with a work-based learning component. There are no right

or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to be comfortable with

saying what you really think and how you really feel. Please take a few minutes to

review the consent form, and let me know if you have any questions.

If student consents to the interview, sign consent form! Then begin with the

following instructions.

Recording Instructions: As mentioned in the consent form, this interview will be

recorded. Occasionally, I'll be taking some written notes. The purpose of the interview

recording is to simply make sure that I capture everything needed to compile a detailed

study. Again, you will not be identified by your real name in the recordings or in the

final report. Are you ready to begin?

Opening Questions

1) Tell me about yourself.

      a. Tell me about your work experience.

      b. Why did you decide to attend college? Why this college?

c. Sometimes students say they are attending college because of someone else. Do you feel that way? If so, who are you attending college for and why?

d. Tell me about your family's work history? What kinds of jobs did your parents or other close relatives have?

e. Did your parents attend college? If so, what did they study? Did they graduate?

Grand-Tour/Mini-Tour Questions

2) Walk me through the typical day in your internship (or other WBLO).

a. Is there anyone at your site that you look up to? Is there anyone at your site that you want to be like? Tell me about that person. What do you like about them?

b. Is there anyone at your site that you do not want to be like? If so, describe that person.

c. Would you have been able to do work like this without this internship (or other WBLO)?

Future-Oriented Questions

5) What do you want to be?

a. When did you first realize that this is what you wanted to do?

b. Why do you think this is something you would like to do for a career?

c. Are there people who are helping you achieve this goal?

d. What influenced you to pursue this goal?

e. How has your college experience helped you get closer to that goal? How has this internship (or other WBLO) helped you with this goal?

Experience Questions

6) You've probably had some interesting experiences in your internship (or other WBLO). Tell me about one or two of those experiences.

If student indicated work experience in question 1.a, and did not provide much detail ask: 7) What has been your favorite job/what has been your worst job (if multiple jobs provided) and why? What are some of your favorite and least favorite parts of your job (if one job is provided) and why?

8) What are some of your favorite parts/worst parts about your internship (or other WBLO) and why?

WBLO Specific Questions

9) What parts of your internship (or other WBLO) have prepared you for your career goals?

10) What parts of your internship (or other WBLO) have surprised you?

11) In your opinion, what are the greatest skills you learned from your internship (or other WBLO)?

Wrap-Up

Thank you so much for your time. You have been a great help. I know it's not much, but please accept this $10 gift card in appreciation for your help today. I have plenty of time, do you have any final thoughts about your internship (or other WBLO) for me. Do you have any questions? Thank you, again.

Appendix III: Letter of Support from Colleges

Letter of Support

Thank you for helping be obtain a letter of support for OCTC. As you know, my research focuses on student experiences in work-based learning opportunities (WBLO's). In order to obtain data, I will need to conduct interviews with students who have been enrolled in WBLO programs. Lauren McCrary is performing research with faculty regarding WBLO's. My hope is for the same faculty to ask their students to participate in my interview, for a small token of appreciation in the form of a $10 VISA gift card.

The letter of support would need to state that I am supported in reaching out to faculty and in making the request for their students to participate in my research. In addition, the letter would need to state that I am authorized to conduct interviews in on OCTC property, such as a conference room, private office, or available classroom.

Please see below for more information regarding my proposed study:

A sample of students who are currently enrolled in elective, high enrollment WBLOs will be identified to participate in the study. We anticipate that there will be approximately 189 potential students in high enrollment WBLOs. Interview selection will be purposefully based on representation from different kinds of applied fields (automotive, computing, industrial manufacturing), male and female students, and family educational history. Following the matrix below, interview data will be gathered to the point of saturation, with an estimated 20 students being interviewed:

Interview Selection Criteria

Automotive Technology

Comp Manufacturing & Mach

Computer-Aided Design

Cooperative Education

Diesel Technology

Engineering & Electronics Tech

Industrial Maintenance Tec

To generate data, students will be contacted for an interview based on the selection criteria outlined in the matrix and offered a $10 Visa gift card as an incentive.

Each interview will be held in a private room in a public building (such as a public library) near the student's campus. The time frame of each interview will be about 90 minutes. The students will be recruited to participate in the study by instructors who are being interviewed by collaborative dissertation partner, Lauren McCrary.

Each category in the matrix was selected to explore a range of student experiences. Gender is an important consideration in exploring student sense making of WBLOs relative to personal backgrounds and dispositions. First, gender is key in the development of an individual's personal background, how they view the world, and how the world views them. Second, technical programs have historically been divided against gender lines. It is anticipated that additional characteristics will emerge, such as SES, familial educational levels, work experience, etc., but those characteristics are too limiting to use as initial selection criteria.

Data will be generated through direct interviews with students. According to Spradley (1979), "cultural ignorance" will be exhibited on the part of the interviewer to encourage the participant to give great detail about his or her experience. Also, for the sake of detail, "grand tour" questions will be asked. Grand tour questions consist of repeated phrases, which expand on a basic broad question, allowing the interviewee time to think and prepare a detailed answer (Spradley, 1979, p. 62). During the course of data collection, it will be critical for the interviewer to express interest both verbally and non-verbally, thus providing feedback to the participant to encourage participation. The interview will be conversational in style, and every effort will be made by the researcher to not simply ask a list of questions. Rather, questions will serve as a guide for the conversation with interviewee-specific questions being asked for clarification, for depth, or for follow-up. Participants will not be randomized and no depiction will exist in the study. The data will be collected by an audio recording device, and to ensure confidentiality, the electronic files will be coded by number and only contain the demographic details from the initial survey. A transcriptionist will be hired to transcribe the interviews. In addition to audio recording, the researcher will take reflective notes.

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Appendix IV: Soft Skills – A Consensus List

Nine publications from the last eight years with clear and detailed references to soft skills were used to identify labels for general categories of skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Toner, 2011; Robels, 2012; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Adecco, 2013; Cobo, 2013; Burstein, 2014; Wonderlic, 2016; Rider, 2016). Once this was complete, the labels were used to guide the categorization found in Table 1 based on the skills the six publications identified below. These were selected based on primacy (original surveys), timeliness (recently published), comprehensiveness (in-depth list or results of a meta-analysis), proximity (Kentucky), authority (supported by multiple professional organizations), and scope (national or international organizations/governments).

Direct references to soft skills:

- Robles (2012). Forty-nine business executives were interviewed. In a follow-up survey, the same executives identified 517 (duplicated) soft skills. The top ten skills were determined based on the number of mentions. The locations of the business executives were not disclosed, but the interviews and surveys originated from Eastern Kentucky University. Selected for primacy, comprehensiveness, timeliness, and proximity.

- Wonderlic (2016). Based on a nationwide survey of 759 employers. Selected for timeliness and scope.

- Cobo (2013). Dede's 2010 analysis of selected 21st century skills was used as a basis for this compendium of soft skills. Selected for comprehensiveness, timeliness, and scope.

Direct references to skills for the success in the workforce/marketplace:

- SCANS 2000 (1991). While the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) effort is a quarter of a century old, it was remarkably prescient and has aged well. Not only is it the last comprehensive federal effort (led by the U.S Department of Labor), it remains the basis for the workplace skills embedded in KCTCS certificate and diploma programs. Selected for proximity, comprehensiveness, authority, and scope.

- 21st Century Skills (2015). A collaborative of major corporations, foundations, and twenty states (including Kentucky), the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) has identified "learning and innovation skills" and "life and career skills" for the twenty-first century. Selected for timeliness, comprehensiveness, proximity, authority, and scope.

- World Economic Forum (2015). Based on an international meta-analysis of research on the skills needed for the 21st century marketplace. Selected for timeliness, comprehensiveness, authority, and scope.

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    generation and second-generation college students. Journal of College Student

    Development, 32, 116-122.

Vita

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UNDERLINE: EDUCATION
Morehead State University   Morehead, Kentucky
Master of Public Administration   Graduated: 2014
Non-Profit Management and Community Development

University of Georgia   Athens, GA
Bachelor of Science   Graduated: 2008
Psychology

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
President/CEO
South Central Workforce Development Board   August 2017-Present

Founding Director
Center for Career Development and Experiential Learning
Maysville Community and Technical College   August 2014-July 2017
Corporate Trainer   October 2016-July 2017
Program Manager, Workforce Transitions   October 2011-August 2014

City Commissioner
City of Maysville, Kentucky   January 2015-January 2017

Workforce Development Program Manager   August 2010-October 2011
Buffalo Trace Area Development District

Director of Restorative and Therapeutic Activities   August 2008-August 2010
Uni-Health Post-Acute Care at Athens Heritage

Research Assistant   August 2004-August 2008
The University of Georgia, Psychology Department

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
- Awarded "Outstanding Board Leadership Award" from Leadership Horizons, Inc. (2017)
- Awarded "Outstanding Rotary Leadership" recognition for service as president of the Maysville Rotary Club (2017)
- Selected and graduated from 2014 Kentucky Community and Technical College's *President's Leadership Seminar* (2014)
- Awarded "2014 Outstanding Graduate Student" from the College of Business and Public Affairs at Morehead State University (2014)