

MyWays Real-World Learning Toolkit

Key Elements of Real-World Learning Tool

About the Real-World Learning Toolkit

Connection to the MyWays Student Success Framework. NGLC’s MyWays project team spent three years exploring the broader, deeper competencies required for a complex future. One of the most striking conclusions of this work was that it’s difficult, if not impossible, to help learners develop these competencies without going outside the classroom walls. Learners need the complex, authentic, and inter-connected environment of real-world learning as well as the relationships with adults and development of social capital that environment brings.

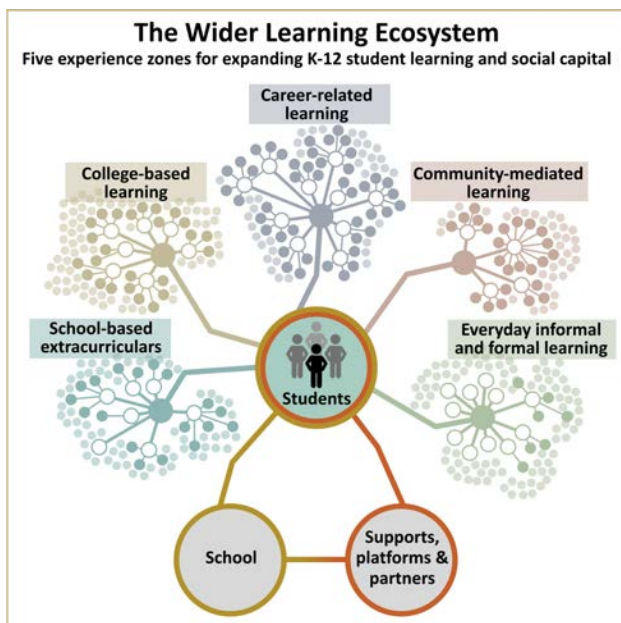
Learning and design principles. The MyWays tools are designed with the following principles in mind: **students at the center**; **equity in access and design** (addressing barriers for historically marginalized learners); **learning mindset**; **learner-driven, personalized pathways**; and **high expectations with commensurate supports**.

What’s included in the toolkit and where does this document fit? The Real-World Learning Toolkit enables educators, school designers/redesigners, and their community partners to make the case for offering their students the benefits of real-world learning; assess their current state and assets; set the cornerstones for real-world learning design; and make plans for further design and piloting in their schools or districts. The tools are designed to be flexible — they can be used in a variety of ways, either individually or in combination.

Additional support is available. For help introducing real-world learning or other changes focused on your learner and educator needs, please contact [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) to learn about our services and events.

Introduction

What needs does this tool address and how can I use it?



Real-world learning shares characteristics with other types of authentic, active learning, but it also provides the unique benefits, motivations, and opportunities of tackling real problems in the environments in which they occur, in all their messiness and urgency. As [Learning Design for Broader, Deeper Competencies](#), Report 11 of the MyWays Student Success Series concludes, **“one of the most striking implications of our exploration of the broader, deeper competencies required for a complex future is the realization that it is difficult, if not impossible, to help learners develop them without going outside the classroom walls.”** The Key Elements of Real-World Learning (RWL) Tool highlights the important characteristics of real-world learning experiences as revealed in the MyWays research and through the work of practitioners in the NGLC network of schools and districts, a number of whom have extensive experience incorporating real-world learning. These key elements are meant to help participants think about the benefits to learners that can be accessed outside the classroom.

The tool can be used in these ways:

- Introduce the key elements of real-world learning through exploration of sample experiences
- Assess and improve/redesign an existing RWL experience
- As a set of design criteria for developing a new RWL experience

What's Included

- This introduction
- A personal experience opening activity
- A graphic to introduce the concept and elements to be used in the tool
- A completed tool illustrating two examples of RWL experiences
- Instructions for completing the tool, for one to three potential use cases
- A blank tool worksheet

MyWays RWL Key Elements Personal Experience Opener

1. Jot down here the most memorable learning experience you had during your high school or middle school years, inside or outside of school:

2. Now list a number of the key attributes of that experience that made it such a valuable, lasting learning experience for you:

-
-
-

3. Share with partners/tables, and then with the room. What are some common elements that seem to characterize such experiences?

Now let's see how the common elements of this group's experiences align with those from the MyWays research on authentic learning.

MyWays RWL Key Elements

The MyWays research and lessons learned by the innovators in the NGLC network suggest six key elements behind effective real-world learning. Ask yourself the following questions to help determine how well your group's experiences match up:

Six key elements of effective Real-World Learning

- 1 Offers authentic tasks in real-world situations**
Includes an abundance of complexities as well as opportunities to contribute to meaningful outcomes.
- 2 Directed by learner in ways supporting youth development**
Develops learner agency and youth identity, including cultural identity
- 3 Enhances deep, holistic learning**
Requires learners to engage with the seven interconnected principles of Whole Learning
- 4 Engages broader competencies**
Provides opportunities to develop Habits of Success, Creative Know How, Content Knowledge, and Wayfinding Abilities
- 5 Incorporates adult relationships**
Offers connections to mentors, brokers, and other forms of social capital outside the classroom
- 6 Provides equitable access**
Ensures access and structural support for at-risk learners, while building on their assets and funds of knowledge

Does the learning experience result in a public display of an authentic product for external feedback? Does it offer "whitewater learning" that approximates the speed and degree of change happening in the world around us?

Does the experience address student expectations? Does it develop agency by providing experience in real and diverse situations? Can it develop identity through connections to learners' personal and community lives? Will it provide "visions of the possible" for learners who won't otherwise have these?

Does the experience enhance learners' ability to "learn by wholes" in a worthwhile way; to work on the hard parts, in a variety of settings; to uncover hidden rules and norms; to enable learning from others and together, while at the same time learning how to learn?

Does it provide exposure to authentic contexts that enhance the development of skills, habits and knowledge? Does it address important skills and competencies in all four domains of the *MyWays Student Success Framework*?

Does it involve caring friends and adults, near-peers and role models, mentors and coaches, networks and weak ties, and resources and connectors? Does it connect learners with community and professional networks?

Is the experience open to all, with minimal academic prerequisites? Does it provide supports to surmount barriers, from skill building to practical matters (suitable clothing or sibling childcare responsibilities)? Does it raise critical consciousness on barriers to be challenged rather than just overcome?

One way to gain a deeper understanding of these elements is to use them to analyze a few sample real-world experiences. Consider, for example, the two learning experiences that follow: a work-based internship and a high school theater production. How do these learning experiences integrate the six key elements of RWL?

MyWays RWL Key Elements — Sample Experience Analysis #1

Six Key Elements of effective RWL	Work-based internship
Offers authentic tasks in real-world situations Includes an abundance of complexities and opportunities to contribute to meaningful outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offers authentic learning in the real world with internship tasks that provide substantive work of value to organization and learner - Designed/scaffolded to ensure internship incorporates the design, preparation, and supervision to ensure learning and reflection as well as contribution to the work
Directed by the learner in ways supporting youth development Develops learner agency and youth identity, including cultural identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addresses student needs and expectations - Choice of sectors and internship roles can help develop youth identity - Responsibilities in workplace foster agency and development - Balances learning goals, personal development goals, and career development goals
Enhances deep, holistic learning Requires learners to engage with the seven interconnected principles of Whole Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides the opportunity for whole learning, with resulting increases in engagement and learning - Interns “work on the hard parts” (to develop field or task knowledge and skills), apply academic knowledge and skills in different situations, “uncover the hidden game” of an industry, profession, or community of practice
Engages broader competencies Provides opportunities to develop Habits of Success, Creative Know How, Content Knowledge and Wayfinding Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HoS: engages perseverance, social skills, responsibility - CKH: focuses on critical thinking, creativity, collaboration - CK: often draws on core academic knowledge, as well as offering the opportunity to apply interdisciplinary and career tech skills - WA: offers insight into career landscape and opportunities to try out roles and identify interests or strengths
Incorporates adult relationships Offers connections to mentors, brokers, and other forms of social capital outside the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design focuses as much attention to the workplace mentorship relationship as to the internship work task(s) - Connects interns to a variety of adults in the workplace, career stories, and a variety of resources and networking links - Provides opportunities to observe professionals in action
Provides equitable access Ensures access and structural support for at-risk learners, while building on their assets and funds of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal academic qualifications required, so those with stronger interpersonal, practical, or career skills have an opportunity to shine - If costs for students (e.g., for business attire, transportation, or after-hours work) are involved, scholarships or stipends are provided to remove financial barriers to participation - Advisors or internship coordinators work with individual learners to address other hurdles

Work-based internships are naturally rich in real-world learning elements. This kind of experience can offer many benefits, but it needs to be intentionally designed to ensure that it is both challenging and appropriately scaffolded to result in a meaningful learning experience.

MyWays RWL Key Elements — Sample Experience Analysis #2

Six Key Elements of effective RWL	High school theater production
Offers authentic tasks in real-world situations Includes an abundance of complexities, and opportunities to contribute to meaningful outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This extracurricular activity may take place within the school walls, but it provides a much more authentic learning and doing experience than most classroom learning - Final production provides authentic purpose and an external, real-world product/display - Performance date and inevitable hiccups provide experience in real-world pace and the need to adapt and persist
Directed by the learner in ways supporting youth development Develops learner agency and youth identity, including cultural identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cast and crew's real-world roles and responsibilities foster agency, personal development - Choice of play and interpretation can help develop youth identity, especially if culturally or thematically relevant to learner population(s) - If theater group writes their own play (e.g. as in some One Act festivals), agency and identity development are further addressed
Enhances deep, holistic learning Requires learners to engage with the seven interconnected principles of Whole Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieving a whole outcome, while also learning the component parts, provides an excellent example of "whole learning," increasing both understanding and motivation - Cast and crew work on the hard parts (practicing until they get it right), experience the rules of a community of practice, and learn how to drive and manage their own learning (learning how to learn)
Engages broader competencies Provides opportunities to develop Habits of Success, Creative Know How, Content Knowledge & Wayfinding Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HoS: needed to fulfill roles, process responsibilities, meet deadlines - CKH: requires collaboration, communication onstage and off, problem solving - CK: draws on ELA, social studies, and arts knowledge for interpretation; math and career tech skills for technical theater - WA: provides line of sight to career options for some and opportunities to reflect on strengths and identity for all
Incorporates adult relationships Offers connections to mentors, brokers, and other forms of social capital outside the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apprenticeship learning from near-peers - Mentorship by local professionals who assist with choreography, set production, diction, or other skills - Director/other faculty/theater alumni offer connections and resources, links to networks
Provides equitable access Ensures access and structural support for at-risk learners, while building on their assets and funds of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal academic qualifications required, so those with stronger interpersonal, practical, or creative abilities have an opportunity to lead - If costs to students involved, provide fee waivers or scholarships - Practice times and total time commitment should consider the needs of working learners - Director/adult sponsor can look out for other hurdles to be addressed (language, responsibilities for younger sibling care, etc.)

This analysis of a high quality, student-led extracurricular experience illustrates that real-world learning can take place outside classroom walls but in the school setting. This analysis shows how authentic such an activity can be, as long as students are given responsibility for all the key aspects and are expected to perform for a real audience.

MyWays RWL Key Elements — Analysis Worksheet

Six Key Elements of Effective RWL	Learning experience or program to be analyzed:
Offers authentic tasks in real-world situations Includes an abundance of complexities, and opportunities to contribute to meaningful outcomes	Does the learning experience result in a public display of an authentic product for external feedback? Does it offer “whitewater learning” that approximates the speed and degree of change happening in the world around us?
Directed by the learner in ways supporting youth development Develops learner agency and youth identity, including cultural identity	Does the experience address student expectations? Does it develop agency by providing experience in real and diverse situations? Can it develop identity through connections to learners’ personal and community lives? Will it provide “visions of the possible” for learners who won’t otherwise have these?
Enhances deep, holistic learning Requires learners to engage with the seven interconnected principles of Whole Learning	Does the experience enhance learners’ ability to “learn by wholes” in a worthwhile way; to work on the hard parts, in a variety of settings; to uncover hidden rules and norms; to enable learning from others and together, while at the same time learning how to learn?
Engages broader competencies Provides opportunities to develop Habits of Success, Creative Know How, Content Knowledge & Wayfinding Abilities	Does it provide exposure to authentic contexts that enhance the development of skills, habits and knowledge? Does it address important skills and competencies in all four domains of the <i>MyWays Student Success Framework</i> ?
Incorporates adult relationships Offers connections to mentors, brokers, and other forms of social capital outside the classroom	Does it involve caring friends and adults, near-peers and role models, mentors and coaches, networks and weak ties, and resources and connectors? Does it connect learners with community and professional networks?
Provides equitable access Ensures access and structural support for at-risk learners, while building on	Is the experience open to all, with minimal academic prerequisites? Does it provide supports to surmount barriers, from skill building to practical matters (suitable clothing or sibling childcare responsibilities)? Does it raise critical consciousness on barriers to be challenged rather than just overcome?

Facilitator Instructions

Option 1: Use the tool to introduce the key elements of authentic, real-world learning experiences

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners who will be involved in assessing your current state and assets and/or designing a new real-world learning initiative. Assign pre-reading of “Learning Design Construct 1: Whole Learning, through junior versions” in [Learning Design for Broader, Deeper Competencies](#) (pages 11-22) of the *MyWays Student Success Series* if you determine that is appropriate for your workshop style and participants.
- Introduce the “Most Memorable Learning Experience” reflection sheet contained in this tool. The characteristics that come out of this exercise are likely to be aligned with, and provide a segue into, the RWL Key Elements.
- Introduce the important concepts necessary for this analysis using the Key Elements graphic contained in this tool.
- Facilitators should review pages 15-20 of [5 Essentials for Building Social Capital](#) for three ways students can master social capital and three ways adults can build social capital systems for young people.
- Engage with the two sample Key Elements worksheets completed for a high school internship and student theater production. These examples will showcase the Key Elements that came out of the MyWays research, introduce the MyWays RWL Key Elements Analysis Worksheet and provide two examples of the different ways in which RWL can occur as part of a school-sponsored experience. Suggest that participants pick a few of the elements and discuss how they have seen these exemplified in real-world learning experiences they have observed or participated in.

Option 2: Use the tool to assess an existing real-world learning experience

- Assemble your team of educators, community partners, and learners to assess an existing RWL experience that you would like to improve. In this case you will be using the Key Elements Analysis Worksheet to evaluate the quality of the experience.
- **Work through Option 1 as described above, unless the group has already done this.** At this point the participants should be ready to use the Key Element tool to analyze one of their school’s learning experiences.
- Choose an existing real-world learning experience that your school or district offers. For this exercise, we suggest selecting a multi-faceted experience that runs for a month or longer.
- Working individually, map how the learning experience aligns with each of the six Key Elements. Record the strengths and weaknesses associated with each key element within the chosen experience. (See the sample analyses for guidance.)
- Discuss and combine the individual responses. Come up with a joint analysis and action plan based on that analysis.

Option 3: Use the tool to design a new real-world learning experience

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners you want to involve in developing a new RWL experience for which you have identified a need. In this case you will be using the Key Elements as an initial set of design criteria.
- **Work through Option 1 as described above, unless the group has already done this.** At this point the participants should be ready to use the Key Elements tool as part of their design of a new learning experience.
- Working individually, note ways in which your design for a new experience might address each of these elements. Discuss and combine the individual responses. This should provide you with a broad initial design concept that you can share, solicit feedback, and iterate on as part of the design process.



myways.nextgenlearning.org