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:
   - o
   - o
   - o

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.

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?
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.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six Key Elements of Effective RWL</th>
<th>Learning experience or program to be analyzed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offers authentic tasks in real-world situations</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes an abundance of complexities, and opportunities to contribute to meaningful outcomes</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directed by the learner in ways supporting youth development</strong>&lt;br&gt;Develops learner agency and youth identity, including cultural identity</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhances deep, holistic learning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Requires learners to engage with the seven interconnected principles of Whole Learning</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engages broader competencies</strong>&lt;br&gt;Provides opportunities to develop Habits of Success, Creative Know How, Content Knowledge &amp; Wayfinding Abilities</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incorporates adult relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Offers connections to mentors, brokers, and other forms of social capital outside the classroom</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provides equitable access</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ensures access and structural support for at-risk learners, while building on</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.