Chapter 11

Comprehensive Learner Record as a Vehicle for Assessment and Learning Transparency in a Skills Economy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines assessment technology that supports the development of Comprehensive Learner Record, or CLR. Here the authors present the theoretical landscape upon which current credentialing innovation builds, explore advancements through a case study of practice between University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and the Greater Washington Partnership (GWP), and culminate with an overview of the assessment technology that ultimately facilitates recognition, validation, and portability of learning in the form of a comprehensive learner record.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines assessment technology that supports the development of Comprehensive Learner Record, or CLR, "the new generation of secure and verifiable learning records which includes the context of learning achievements within courses, competencies and skills, and employer-based learning achievements" (Wolf & Carbonaro, 2021, pp. 1). The authors present the theoretical landscape upon

which current credentialing innovation builds, explore advancements through a case study of practice between University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and the Greater Washington Partnership (GWP), and conclude with an overview of the assessment technology that ultimately facilitates recognition, validation, and portability of learning in the form of a Comprehensive Learner Record.

BACKGROUND

The landscape of credential options is growing steadily, but transparency is limited for credential differentiation and choice, and there is scant knowledge on quality or overall credential value (Carnevale et al., 2020). To navigate a marketplace of credential options, students need to be savvy consumers ensuring they locate the correct credential associated with desired employment opportunities without wasting resources such as time and money on unrelated credentials. Credential Engine—a nonprofit organization with a mission to bring transparency to credentials and document the marketplace of credentials—began releasing an annual report in 2018 providing a comprehensive count of every available credential in the United States. With the initial report in 2018, a total of over 330,000 unique credentials were counted including micro-credentials and nanodegrees (Credential Engine, 2018). In 2019, that number had grown to over 730,000 unique credentials within 17 different credential categories (Credential Engine, 2019). In 2020, the number had increased further to over 965,000 unique credentials (Credential Engine, 2021). A separate report focused on digital badges counted 475,000 badges available, with over 43,000,000 badges issued to date (Credential Engine, 2020). In relation to prior data on badges, that is a documented 82% increase in available badges from 2018 to 2020 (Credential Engine, 2020).

Collectively, these numbers indicate a rapid increase in the amount of credential options available to learners as well as credential forms. While some of this growth can be attributed to researchers getting better at capturing an accurate picture of the number of credential options available, the landscape of possible credentials has indeed grown vast and more dense and includes credential providers beyond traditional educational institutions. This growth has raised the need for transparency regarding what is actually *inside* a credential that helps users distinguish between different credential options and determine credential worth and value. The need for credential transparency from institutions of higher education is so pronounced, that in 2019, 15 national postsecondary education organizations signed a joint statement to use the credential registry and common language to describe credential information in an attempt to make credential data easier to understand for employers, students, and other institutions. On the employer side, the efforts of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation supported the creation of an employer-led job registry to send clearer signals of credential and competency needs to potential employees and institutions of higher education (Tyszko et al., 2017). In this context, all stakeholders are responsible for credential transparency.

The continued wave of interest in credential transparency is due in part to the desire of postsecondary institutions to ingest existing credentials and convert them into meaningful credit and skills. By converting credentials to credit along an academic pathway, institutions are positioned to move learners more quickly to degree completion or additional credential attainment to keep learners more relevant, pathways cost effective, and meet employer demands (Perna & Finney, 2014). In order to ingest and make sense of credentials, educational providers need to know what is inside the credential in the form of relevant competencies as well as view evidence of the credential holders' attainment of stated knowledge, skills, competencies, or learning outcomes. In essence, transparency is needed to make sense of the credential

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