Pitzer College

Workforce Development Programs

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

In this paper I review the current literature related to workforce development in the United States. Workforce development is a tricky topic because it a lot is encompassed under its umbrella. Workforce development can include technical and vocation training, soft-skill attainment, remedial education, wages and earnings, health care, labor policy reform, and more. The wide net that workforce development casts can make it difficult to understand what it actually means. Workforce development aims to prepare future and current workers with relevant training that will enable them to enter the labor market with pertinent skills to succeed and stay employed. Workforce development also aims to provide skillful and educated workers to businesses where there are gaps in the labor field. This requires workforce development programs to work with prospective workers *and* businesses to understand the needs of our economy and the educational needs of our workforce.

In order for workforce development programs to achieve this goal they must develope porgrams that are, not only relevant to the current needs of a specific industry but, culturally competent to the needs of their students. This will equip educators with better skills to engage with their participants and ultimately help ensure their success. Intersectionality would, in addition, also help achieve this goal because by using a intersectional mindset we can see more clearly how privileges and discriminatons hinder participants and, thus, provide them with resources to make the program more equitable. Lastly, collaboration across sectors may be the most important aspect in designing workforce development programs. Collaboration will enable insight and expertise from business leaders to influence workforce development curriculums where as collaboration with community colleges and schools could aid young people in entering

the labor market. Through collaboration, the possibilities for workforce development are nearly endless.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I review two reports by the University of California Riverside's Center for Social Innovation report entitled, *State of Work in the Inland Empire* and *State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire*. I also reviewed a report by George Lorenzo in partnership with Ferris State University on the *State of Workforce Development Iniatives at Community Colleges*. I then overlook a report on the State of Connecticut's transformation efforts in workforce development in the mental health sector entitled, *Workforce Development and Mental Health Transformation: A State Perspective* authored by Michael A. Hoge, Jessica Wolf, Scott Migdole, Elisabeth Cannata, and Francis X. Gregory. Lastly, I reviewed a *Profile of Workforce Development Educators: A Comparative Credential, Composition, and Characteristic Analysis* by Thomas O. Williams Jr., Jeremy V. Ernst, and Aaron C. Clark to better understand workforce development educators and their students.

CSI UCR: State of Work in the Inland Empire November 2018 (part two of a series)

University of California Riverside's Center for Social Innovation's (CSIUCR) report of the state of work in the Inland Empire provides an overview of the current conditions of labor and employment. The Center for Social Innovation's goal is to provide sound research that can become a catalyst for civic leadership and policy development. The Center attempts to bring together researchers, community organizations, and civic stakeholders "in collaborative projects and long-term partnerships." (CSIUCR State of Work in the Inland Empire p. 24) The Center

commits itself to an asset-based approach to impacting their communities. This report provides economic historical context on the region–stringing together a narrative of how the Inland Empire became what it is today. The report also touches on topics such as unemployment and job growth, local industries, wages and earnings, as well as hours and benefits. The report goes one step further by offering a data snapshot on the region, including topics on commuting patterns, poverty and housing costs, workers with disabilities, difference by race and gender, differences by subregion, and public sentiment. The report ends by giving examples of promising initiatives and policy options. This is then contextualized through five community member profiles. This report, while simultaneously broad and specific, effectively shows the factors that make the Inland Empire what it is.

At the end of this thorough and in-depth analysis of the state of work in the Inland Empire, the report suggests four areas that "merit further research and potential implementation," in addition to what is already being done within the area. These recommendations include:

1. Effective labor market regulation and enforcement that can improve wages, benefits, and working conditions, including on "gig", subcontracted, and self-employed work

2. Regulatory reforms that can promote job growth as well as improve environmental conditions

3. Effective public investments–in infrastructure, educational institutions, health care, and more–that can expand access to good jobs

4. Strategies to retain the region's college graduates, ranging from venture capital investment and other entrepreneurship support to the development of more vibrant commercial and cultural centers that attract workers and employers alike.

   (CSIUCR State of Work in the Inland Empire p. 22)

The report does an excellent job of making the reader understand why this region's success is important and the positive ripple effects that economic and workforce growth of this region could provide. This report offers concrete steps that the region can take as well as examples of programs that are already occurring to further this development.

In all honesty, this is a very difficult report to critique. It does a thorough job of taking an intersectional approach to understanding the state of work and provides extensive qualitative biographical data in addition to quantitative demographic data. By using an array of different kinds of data points, the report successfully provides an equally detailed and overarching picture of the State of Work in the Inland Empire.

CSI UCR: State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire of September 2020 (part 6 of a series)

In another in-depth report by the University of California Riverside's Center for Social Innovation, researchers looked closely at the state of education equity in the Inland Empire. The report begins with an executive summary and a history of education equity in the Inland Empire. The report has sections on student perspectives, race and intersectionality, early childhood education, post-elementary concerns, educational attainment, education and COVID-19, promising programs and initiatives, and policy options. The report also touches on other areas such as key facts related to the area and study, testing, experiences of multi and dual language students, student homelessness, representation, and the effects of school suspension. The report provides extensive quantitative data that is coupled with an array of qualitative community profiles and interviews.

In a similar fashion to their other reports, the State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire report concludes with suggestions for specific policy options to address the issues relating to education equity. Before offering these suggestions, the report outlines local programs and initiatives that are already taking place in the Inland Empire. The report stresses heavily that, in order for real systemic change to occur, there must be a strong collaborative effort between parents, schools, administrators, community, and local government. The report specifically highlights individuals like Dr. Judy White, Riverside County's Superintendent of Schools, supporting their efforts to uplift equity in education as an issue. The report acknowledges that the communities themselves are the "the largest asset" that is driving the achievements in education equity. This is because they are creating change at the local government level with their demands and by holding their representatives accountable. (CSIUCR State of Education in the Inland Empire p. 26) While recognizing that there are many avenues for policy development that would improve education equity in the Inland Empire, the report offers three broad areas of intervention:

1. Increase diversity in teachers, administration, and other school leaders

2. Encourage and improve access to programs like ethnic studies so that all children learn about the challenges and achievements of people of color

3. Increase funding for underserved schools and districts.

    (CSUCR State of Education in the Inland Empire p. 26)

The Inland Empire is a microcosm of the rest of California and, in many respects, of the United States. This report shows that by investing in the Inland Empire, you are effectively creating a roadmap to solve these problems in the rest of California.

This report is a valuable asset to change-makers in, not only the Inland Empire but the rest of the United States. The Inland Empire, while unlike anywhere else in countless ways, can represent counties outside of larger cities throughout the United States. The issues and struggles faced by the Inland Empire are not unique to this region but neither are the solutions. This report also shows the far-reaching impact that good, equitable education can make on communities. The solutions in this report are specific to education equity but would have effects on every other sector.

The State of Workforce Development Initiatives at America's Community Colleges

The State of Workforce Development at America's Community Colleges is an overview of the role that community colleges play and the impacts they can and have made in developing America's workforce. The report is authored by George Lorenzo with sponsorship from Ferris State University. The report was created because workforce development has long been understood as a key component in community colleges' mission but is often understood in a myriad of ways. This report provides clear criteria for establishing effective workforce development programs in community colleges. The report is comprehensive and covers topics ranging from what is workforce development at community colleges, qualifications for workforce development program leaders, success factors, innovative approaches, the emerging workforce, grant acquisition, and more. This report argues that community colleges play a pivotal role in developing American workers and their efforts create real, tangible, change in the lives of people and businesses. Given their accessibility, curricula in general education and liberal arts, as well as studies that lead to technical skill attainment, this report asserts community colleges are well situated to take on the challenges of preparing America's workforce.

The State of Workforce Development at America's Community Colleges took stock of the literature surrounding workforce development in community colleges in addition to interviewing twenty experts in the field. The report aims to highlight institutions and practices that have had success in new and innovative ways in regard to workforce development. Workforce development can look very different depending on its goals, the population it engages, the institution in which is it based, as well as the location in which it takes place. Differences in these factors largely shape what workforce development programs will look like. The article describes the qualifications to look for when filling the positions in a college's workforce development department by providing examples of job descriptions and qualities of current personal who hold these positions. Following this section, the article stresses the importance of community colleges and workforce development leaders being cognisant of change and growth drivers in higher education. Community colleges can respond more quickly to changes in workforce needs and population in a way that larger institutions cannot, stating that they "are not as nimble and responsive as smaller schools can be. There's often a bureaucracy that binds them down, and they lose the edge that they need to do this kind of work well." (Lorenzo p. 6) The article then provides ten "common sense" practices that have led to success in other institutions. Businesses need contract training and the report discusses the benefits of community colleges being able to offer professional development as a way of sustaining their efforts. The article then provides examples of innovative approaches taken by community colleges and the importance of innovative, open-minded leadership. Changes in the emerging workforce, staying relevant in a global society, and offering support to those who need it most are all also discussed in this article. The article touches on the logistical side of workforce development programs in community colleges by exploring how these programs can be profitable and the importance of

having a staff that is sufficient in grant proposals. While recognizing that there are still significant gaps in effective workforce development, the report concludes that community colleges are uniquely situated to "significantly contribute to the development of American workers and the growth of business." (Lorenzo p. 24)

This report provides valuable insight into what makes workforce development programs successful but lacks an intersectional lens, failing to recognize how race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, and other social identities can affect the success and experience of individuals in these programs. This report cannot claim to uncover how to create effective workforce development programs because, without proper consideration of the ways that identities shape an individual's understanding and experience, these programs will not be effective for all. In a similar vein, the author does not make any effort to acknowledge their positionality, demonstrating a lack of understanding of how personal bias, privileges, and experiences shape our research. The report also tends to take a deficit-based approach when referring to people and an asset mindset when referring to businesses. This shows that the report does not recognize the value of seeing local community stakeholders as assets, and instead, as people who lack something.

Workforce Development and Mental Health Transformation: A State Perspective

Workforce Development and Mental Health Transformation: A State Perspective illustrates Connecticut's efforts to bolster its workforce in the behavioral health sector as a part of the federally supported transformation of mental health services. Workforce problems can appear daunting to tackle at the state level but this report shows the ways in which the State of Connecticut is "systematically strengthening its workforce," in the behavioral health sector.

(Hoge p. 323) The article starts by recognizing the claim made by the President's New Freedom Commission in its report, Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America, that the mental health system was a "fragmented 'patchwork relic' that presented barriers to access and burdened individuals and their families." The report called for a "fundamental transformation of the nation's systems of services centered around six major goals." (ibid) From this report, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration created the Federal Action Agenda, Transforming Mental Health Care in America and, in an effort to aid the transformation of mental health services, awarded over $100 million in Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grants to nine states. Under the leadership of the Governor's Office, the State of Connecticut submitted a proposal and was awarded $13.7 million. Following this, fourteen Connecticut Executive Branch agencies along with the Judicial Branch signed a Memorandum of Agreement to "to transform the mental health system to provide citizens with ''…meaningful choices from among an array of effective services and supports responsive to diverse cultural backgrounds and across the lifespan.'' (ibid) In this report, the priorities of workforce transformation are identified as well as the means by which those priorities were decided. The workforce transformation projects and their impacts are also described as well as a review of the sustainability of these programs after federal funding stops. The report ends with five recommendations from the authors on how to approach "comprehensive state workforce development." (ibid)

The report starts by describing the methods in which they determined Connecticut's transformation priorities. Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in partnership with the Yale University School of Medicine Department of Psychology created a workforce workgroup. The workforce workgroup consisted of persons in recovery, family

members, advocates, state administrators, providers, educators, researchers, and workforce experts. Forty focus groups took place across the state as part of their workforce assessment process. Of the six goals provided by the New Freedom Commission, none of them directly involved workforce development. From these workforce workgroups, workforce development "emerged as one of the four most highly ranked and funded areas among Connecticut's transformation priorities." (Hoge p.324) Due to this influence, the seventh goal of workforce development was added. Planning sessions were then held where each workgroup proposed potential projects followed by a review by an inter-agency review committee. Previous state reports and data on workforce problems were also reviewed. This eventually led to a more concrete "set of interventions focused on the workforce that cares for individuals across the lifespan and on strengthening workforce roles for persons in recovery and their families." (ibid)

The interventions discussed in this article include supervision standards and competency development, higher education curriculum reform, peer-run employment services, parent leadership development, as well as additional smaller-scale initiatives. The supervision standards and competency development intervention came out of the recognition that influencing supervisors could have far-reaching effects given their diverse responsibilities and concern that supervision was declining. This intervention was deemed transformative, and therefore effective, and continued after Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grants ended. The higher education curriculum intervention was deemed necessary because graduates in the behavioral health sector were unfamiliar with evidence-based practices, in which Connecticut had significantly invested. This program was deemed a transformative "departure from business as usual" as it taught graduate students relevant knowledge about evidence-based practices. (ibid) The course that was created has had continued popularity and demand. The peer-run

employment services intervention was based on the value and positive impact that individuals in recovery can have when employed in the behavioral health workforce. The program surpassed its goals in terms of employing individuals and was considered to be transformative as it took innovative approaches. Unfortunately, due to the economic recession, federal funding stopped and the program ended in January of 2011. The fourth intervention centered around parent leadership development in an effort to raise knowledge and skills in parents to "to address the special needs of their children." (Hoge p. 327) From here, the report describes the smaller-scale initiatives that included first responder training, career pathways identification, leadership development, and a wraparound initiative.

This report is a good example of how workforce development initiatives can take place at the state and local level. The report also admits that one drawback to these initiatives is the inadequate evaluation measures of the initiatives. While the authors believe that these programs in this study would benefit from empirical evaluations they do still hold the results of the programs speak for themselves. I think that report would be more useful if it tried to relate its findings to states besides Connecticut. I think that this report took an innovative and transformative approach to include stakeholders in the process and I believe that this could have gone even further. I believe the researchers and authors could have done more to apply an intersectional lens to their work.

Profile of Workforce Development Educators: A Comparative Credential, Composition, and Character Analysis

In this article, the authors attempt to create a profile of features and characteristics associated with educators in Career and Technical Education. The characteristics reviewed

include gender, age, teaching experience, teaching status, race and ethnicity, educational level, certification status, the caseload of students with categorical disabilities, and the caseload of students with limited English proficiency. These attributes are analyzed in context with seven identified workforce development teaching areas as well as STEM education fields of science. The seven areas are agricultural education, business and information technology education, family and consumer sciences education, health science education, marketing education, technology and engineering education, and trade and industrial education. This analysis of characteristics enabled the researchers to create a profile of workforce development teachers, the students they teach, how they compare to each other within career and technical education, and how they compare to other STEM teachers. The report paid special attention to students with disabilities, as defined by the *Disabilities Education Act*, and those with limited English proficiency. This is relevant because the study found that workforce development classes and programs positively impact students within these demographics. The report poses two main research questions to guide their exploration: 1. What are the characteristics and credentials of Workforce Development teachers? 2. What student population features and characteristics are identifiable within Workforce Development classrooms? (Williams p. 16)

The report provides a lot of aggregate data that help paint a picture of workforce development educators and the students they teach. The report states that students enrolled in workforce development courses are more likely to perform as well or better than those not in workforce development programs. It also states that students in workforce development programs have lower dropout rates and have a greater chance of receiving higher wages than those not enrolled in workforce development programs. Workforce development programs are particularly relevant to students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. Participation

in workforce development programs was determined to consistently be a positive indicator of employment and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The component of inclusion was central to this outcome. The report showed that one-third of K-12 teachers science teachers had no training in teaching students with disabilities. The report also found that workforce development had higher levels of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency than science or math.

The data profile outlined in this article is important because it informs teacher development and professional development training and aids intentional evidence-based decisions. It also helps identify "deficiencies, surplus, and need" within the workforce development education field. This article lacks a community stakeholder's perspective. It would be useful to hear from potential or former participants of these programs about what they believe they need. I also believe that, while a profile of workforce development educators is useful, a profile on the individuals (ie. potential students) who currently do–as well as currently do *not*–benefit from workforce development would be more salient. I believe that this would provide program designers with useful information on the needs, assets, and goals of this population

Research Setting

I am doing research for and with the Youth Mentoring Action Network (YMAN). Due to the implications of the Corona Virus, I am engaging with this organization entirely remotely–through frequent zoom calls and emails. YMAN is located in the Inland Empire of Southern California. The Inland Empire encompasses two of the nation's largest counties, San Bernardino County and Riverside County, making their area of engagement quite large. YMAN recognizes the power that stems from positive mentoring relationships and utilizes this energy to

create a more equitable and just world for young people. Mentoring is central to YMAN's mission, but it is only part of all that they do.

YMAN was founded by Torie Weiston-Serdon and Gayle Weiston-Serdon, both of whom were previously educators. In their experiences teaching, they learned the value of relationship building with young people and understood that young people are "at their best when their voices [are] heard and feel supported." (yman.org/about) This is truly the guiding principle of YMAN's work: listen to young people and allow them to guide our work. YMAN recognizes that the goals of one young person are often very different from their peers. This means that YMAN's work can vary drastically and depends on their current youth partners. Many mentoring programs goals are centered around "adult goals" or goals that adults perceive to be of the most importance, such as high school graduation, college admission, GPA increase, etc. While these are all worthwhile goals, they are not necessarily the goals of the youth. YMAN makes sure that their goals are in line with the goals of their youth partners. While they still offer programs that aid in these quantifiable "adult goals", such as their College ABC's Bootcamp, they do not force these values and goals on to their youth partners. For instance, if a young person needs assistance in finding employment or wants to learn more about acquiring a trades degree, YMAN will not try and sway them into applying to college because it makes their numbers look better to funders. YMAN will work towards the individual goals of their mentees. This is largely because of their core value of Youth Centrism. YMAN recognizes that they must center that community in every process of their work if they are to effectively engage with a community. It is not educators, nor parents, nor any other adults, but the youth who inform the work. Youth must be the people who inform their research questions in order to ensure they are asking the right questions. Youth must be a part of research analysis so that YMAN knows they are

interpreting the data correctly. It is crucial that youth be a part of the project planning process so that YMAN's projects actually tend to the issues outlined by youth.

Alongside their commitment to Youth Centrism, fostering community collaboration and partnerships is central to the Youth Mentoring Action Network's mission. YMAN also offers professional development to youth-serving professionals and organizations. This is all in addition to research and knowledge that the Youth Mentoring Action Network continuously contributes to the field. Through listening sessions conducted by YMAN's members and youth partners with community youth, they identified what youth in their community were demanding: employment opportunities and resources for youth. Young people are an extremely motivated group of people who can offer a critical lens to a range of issues and topics. Young people are already disadvantaged in terms of employment and with the rise of COVID-19, these effects have only been compounded. This past October, YMAN worked with IE Rise, a coalition of organizations throughout the Inland Empire, to put on a Labor Policy Summit with California's Secretary of Labor. The goal of the summit is to inform California's Secretary of Labor on the demands and needs of communities throughout the Inland Empire. Various organizations, including YMAN, representing various demographics in the community, worked hard prior to the summit to conduct research that would inform policy that was presented to Julie Su, California's Secretary of Labor. While this summit is not specifically focused on youth employment, YMAN is able to provide expertise in how this summit can engage young people and, more importantly, inform stakeholders of the needs and demands made by young people.

Research Methodology: Aims of Engagement, Research Methods, and Theoretical Approach

One of the issues that YMAN currently faces is employing people in the Inland Empire, one of the fastest-growing labor markets in the country, with good, well-paying, respectable jobs. In the beginning of my time with YMAN, my responsibilities were unclear and I mostly attended meetings and planning sessions to take notes on what was being discussed. In time, I was brought up to speed and was able to provide research assistance for their YMAN's presentation at the IE Rise California Labor Policy Youth Summit. After numerous meetings with my supervisor at YMAN, it became clear to her and I that workforce development is of high importance to our stakeholders and YMAN would benefit from research on workforce development programs. Now, the aims of my engagement became more clear and it was decided that I would be most useful providing research on the topic of effective workforce development programs.

By joining the YMAN team on their current projects I was able to engage in participatory observation. This allowed me to understand from the inside how the Youth Mentoring Action Network does its work. Participatory observation allows me as a researcher to contextualize what they do from an outside perspective while gaining a subjective understanding as a participant in the organization. As a participant, I would attend meetings with my supervisor, Isabella Chavez, as well as other members of the YMAN team. At these meetings, I was able to learn about current and past projects that YMAN had worked on and saw first-hand how they went about planning and approaching their projects. These meetings also made it clear to me how committed YMAN is to its core values and mission. YMAN's invaluable insight into working with young people puts them in high demand. It is not uncommon for projects to unexpectedly land in the laps of YMAN's team and often the turnaround is fast. Still, despite the high demand for their engagement, YMAN approaches every project with a meticulous and

methodological ethic that, when paired with their core values, holds them to the highest of standards.

For all intents and purposes, I acted as a research assistant to YMAN. This was appreciated because research, in nature, can be tedious and slow-moving. By assigning me to research, it allowed for other members of the YMAN team to focus on other aspects of the work. This was especially apparent during preparation in the weeks prior to the Labor Policy Youth Summit. The majority of my research for this paper came from a review of the literature that has been written on workforce development in the United States and built off of what I had learned from working at YMAN. Writing a literature review allowed me to better understand how workforce development is understood as it currently stands and to learn about the various approaches to workforce development that have been taken. It also reinforced my belief in the necessity of workforce development and the positive impacts that it can have.

I used a combination of two theoretical approaches, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, in contextualizing and analyzing my research. Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework rooted in critical theory. Critical Race Theory highlights the ways that race and institutional power interact with one another within our society and culture. Critical Race Theory is underpinned by the belief that white supremacy exists and has persisted throughout history and, furthermore, recognizes that institutions maintain this status of white supremacy. Critical Race Theory also posits that it is possible to change this oppressive relationship between race and institutional power. In my research, Critical Race Theory pushed me to think critically about how workforce development is being done and to whom it is offered. In my understanding, workforce development can be a powerful manifestation of the values of critical race theory. Workforce development has the potential to uplift people in unique ways

because it provides individuals with the tools to make their own change. Workforce

development is one of the best ways that we can provide people with more opportunities and

choices on their path to a better life. Workforce development must be easily accessible, teach

current and relevant curricula, and be effective for all racial and cultural demographics.

The positive impacts of workforce development are too valuable for it only to be relevant

to the few. It is not enough to make workforce development programs accessible, although this

is important and easier said than done. In order to make workforce development programs

effective, they must undertake an intersectional approach in designing these programs.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework accredited to Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality

functions on the understanding that by unearthing the multiplicity of our social identities, we can

more accurately and consciously understand our experiences with, both, oppression and

privilege. In an Intersectional analysis, our multiple identities interact or are compounded, with

one another to create a unique experience and perspective. Workforce development programs

engage with a diverse range of people with various combinations of social identities. An

intersectional lens would allow workforce development program designers to create programs

that take the unique experiences of their participants into consideration. Raising the value of

cultural competency and intersectional understanding within the field of workforce development

would greatly increase the effectiveness of these programs because they would be more relevant

to the people in the programs.

Positionality

My existence, my identity, my being, whatever you want to call it, is not static, rather, it constantly creates itself, becoming and not. It's hard to create a snapshot of who I am because I exist in flux. As soon as that snapshot is taken, it is outdated. Nevertheless, it is still important to critically reflect on who we were, are, and will become. In social justice work, it is crucial that I foreground my personal identities to recognize the ways in which my positionality provides privilege, shapes my values, and alters my conceptions of reality.

I am a white, cis-gender male, with loose religious affiliations, belonging to an upper-class family, straight passing, English speaking, able-bodied, young American. Whoa, that was a mouthful. All of these identities affect the way I see the world and, in turn, how the world sees me. Society denotes privilege to most, if not all, of my identities. I am not prejudiced due to the color of my skin and therefore my life has not been more difficult as a result. The gender I was assigned at birth feels congruent with how I perform my gender allowing me to live comfortably within my body. Additionally, as a man, especially as a white man, I receive privilege from society's dominant patriarchy.

I grew up in a house where religion was offered but hardly practiced. Therefore, I was educated in dominant protestant cultural norms allowing me to relate to dominant cultural norms while also having my familial culture affirmed and recognized by the dominant culture. Interestingly, though, my appearance, for many, made people question what group affiliations I held. Despite not being culturally Jewish, it was made clear to me in my years throughout elementary, middle, and high school that I had certain physical markers that were demarcated as Jewish. This was simply because I had dark brown-hazel eyes and very large curly brown hair.

As I have grown older I have gained a better understanding of me and my family's economic status. For a long time, it was difficult for me to know if my family was upper-class,

upper-middle-class, or middle-class and I think this is because of the cultural nuances that are wrapped up in these identifiers. Some of our cultural norms and practices seem to intentionally obscure our self-awareness of wealth, class, and status. Some of the wealthiest people in the United States live in my hometown of Winnetka but yet, culturally and economically, I still feel a great deal of distance between where my family and I stand and where 'they' stand. That is not to say that I am not privileged–I am. As I have grown older, I have thought more about the markers that I use as class identifiers (car make, house size, vacation destinations, clothing, etc.) I realize, now, the false narratives they spew and the imaginary realities they create. When I think of my career, I tell myself I am not concerned with money. But does this come from a place of privilege? I'm almost certain. If I didn't come from the affluence that I have and my parents didn't have retirement savings, would I be more concerned with providing for my parents the way they have provided for me? I'm sure I would. When my parents inevitably leave this earth and a part of their wealth is passed down to me, am I perpetuating a historic trend of wealth inequality? The answer is likely yes, but what do I do? Inheritance is a large point of inner contention for me. I am not the heir to a massive trust fund, mind you, but I do know that inheritance is one of, if not the leading cause, of wealth disparity. Do I pass it on to my children and continue this trend of keeping wealth out of black and brown communities and families? Or do I invest in a community in the hopes that it will be a step in the right direction? Do I leave nothing to myself or my children, burdening my next of kin with the responsibility of taking care of me? This is a large source of ambiguity for me, so I apologize for the incoherence in this section. There is still a lot of reflection that is necessary for me here.

My sexual orientation is another facet of my identity that I have had to do some wrestling with. I am not going into my personal orientations because I am not sure it is entirely relevant to

the question. My tension with this identity is: if I'm walking down the street–presenting as I

normally do–I believe I am straight passing. That is not to say that there is a specific way in

which straight or queer people act or present themselves. I mean to say that I do not believe I

present myself in a way that would call my straightness into question. This is a loaded concept

in itself because it requires us to say there are ways in which you can demarcate someone's

orientation based on their appearance. At the same time, though, it would be willfully ignorant

to say that all people are treated the same, regardless of the performance of gender or their

orientation. I am not sure if I expressed this in a way that makes sense but to put it in other

words, I am capable of playing up the aspects of my identity that feel more heteronormative in an

effort to gain social standing or power and protection.   Although, this process often makes me

feel like I am silencing aspects of myself or allowing other parts of myself to play second fiddle

to my straightness in an effort to fit into a masculine enclosure. In this sense, I feel like there is a

part of me that is not fully being realized or becoming but yet even in this position I am still able

to find privilege from the dominant powers.   As a young, white, man with no physical

disabilities I have full autonomy over my body. Lastly, as an American, I can trust that my

political values, my epistemologies, my ontologies, my conceptions of the world, are all likely

congruent with the dominant oppressive regimes.

      `   When I think of where my values come from my mind draws towards my family.

I think about all the little idioms and truisms that I have learned from family, especially my mom

and dad. Those values feel most fundamental to my being. Some are small sayings like, "an

ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," while others are more overarching such as

approaching others with love and kindness–the natural human capacities that are talked about in

Birdsong. I feel like those were given importance through my family. Family taught me those

are crucial tenants of my humanity. Diving deeper, past the values encouraged by my family, I believe I must engage in some sort of doublethink (or maybe it's actually triplethink) because my brain immediately corrects itself and is reminded of the values that language, culture, and society encourages. Or more broadly, I am reminded of the values that have been created outside of myself, the ones I am supposed to take for granted and apply universally, the ones that are learned. It makes me question what I truly value. What beliefs and convictions have I arrived on my own and what values have been learned and are ll nothing more than learned associations (Capitalism=Freedom, Freedom= individuality, etc.)? My race is a part of me that unconsciously informs my values. I think that this is because whiteness is downplayed while other races are emphasized. I have been socialized to take my own race for granted and simultaneously use race as a point of judgment and prejudice. My place is an aspect of my identity that makes me feel very empty. I struggle with the idea that I come from a place. I think I lack an origin story to give me a sense of where I come from and where I might belong. Reflecting on my relationship with place makes me realize how I often neglect this connection. Increasing connection to place is not encouraged in dominant circles and for that reason, we have to remind ourselves to do so.

Reflecting on my motivations to be involved in social work is not easy. It requires a fine comb to tease out the genuine motivations from the pseudo, counter-productive, learned motivations. It's a bit like teasing lice out of someone's hair. We have these values that, for the most part, seem benevolent and harmless and for the greater good. As we tease them out, though, we begin to see all the problematic shit, for lack of a better word, that these motivations are entangled. I believe that each person has a life force that contains energy. We go through our lives depositing our energy into different things. When I think about my place in the world, I can begin to feel very small and insignificant. Something that helps me is to think of my life in

this way, as energy deposits. When I am no longer on this physical plane, I would like to be able to look back on my life and say that I put my lifeforce energy behind something that matters. This may be toxic individualism talking but I like the idea of my life contributing to the good in the world. That's not very tangible, though, and I don't think it is a necessarily hot take on what motivates us to do good in the world. Lilla Watson's quote from one of our readings opened up a new avenue of motivation for me: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." Conversely, I believe if I am not working to liberate others then I am not liberating myself. Oppressive regimes inspire prospective possible futures that motivate us. I am motivated by my dissatisfaction with the state of our world. I am motivated because my humanity is not fulfilled in this regime. I want to be on the human team. There is something empowering and enriching about being a part of a community. I am tired of fighting for individuality while simultaneously being forced to fit into enclosures. I'm not saying I want to be a sheep but I am ready to foreground the community in my ontologies. I am motivated by my privileged identity and the pain that it brings to others. I am motivated by the prospect of change.

Data Coding and Analysis

My data coding efforts consisted of reviewing my field notes from all my interactions with the Youth Mentoring Action Network to identify recurring themes that appeared throughout the semester. I used sticky notes to identify when I would come across an example of a theme. These are the themes that I found most apparent.

The first theme that I found was the YMAN continuously tries to offer useful services, such as their College ABC's Bootcamp, to youth identifying individuals. This is noteworthy because organizations similar to YMAN can become overwhelmed with research and funding responsibilities at the expense of the services they provide. This is not the case with YMAN, as this is just one example of how YMAN stays committed to making a difference in young people's lives for, not only the future but in the here and now.

YMAN's expansion of what it means to be a mentorship organization is another theme that I found throughout the year. YMAN provides research, professional development training, and engages in so much more in addition to their efforts in mentoring. Their intersectional approach to mentoring allows them to better understand the needs of their stakeholders and recognizes the complexity of each individual's experience.

The Youth Mentoring Action Network rejects the scarcity model that has been known to plague the Inland Empire because of how it hampers meaningful collaboration. Instead, YMAN encourages collaboration between stakeholders, other nonprofit grassroots organizations, as well as state and local government. From this collaboration, YMAN is able to broaden its scope of influence and create a greater impact than it would on its own.

The most salient, and perhaps most impressive, recurring theme of YMAN is its unwavering commitment to Youth Centrism. Youth are more than simply YMAN's target demographic. The youth are the driving force behind everything that YMAN does: its research inquires, project development, and overall direction of the organization. Without young people, YMAN would cease to exist–not just because that is the community they work with, but because young people truly are the lifeblood of the organization.

In addition to identifying reoccurring themes from my fieldnotes, I took to the readings from my literature review with the same strategy. I found that within the readings I read, most of the readings stressed the necessity of diversifying our educators–all the way from the school board administrators to K-12 teachers. Specifically, in the *State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire*, the authors call for educators that represent the demographics of the students that they teach. This would improve the cultural competency of faculty which has been shown to lead to better outcomes for minority students, particularly those with behavioral challenges or issues with English as a second language. (CSIUCR State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire) This is relevant to workforce development because workforce development is essentially occupation education. If this holds true in education, then there is no reason why it would not also be true in workforce development programs–especially considering that workforce development programs have higher rates of special interest students. (Williams p. 22) Cultural competency and intersectionality would make workforce development programs more effective but seldom of scholarly articles discuss the importance and merit of the inclusion of these theoretical frameworks.

The most common theme I found throughout the scholarly literature that I reviewed was the high value that scholars put on collaboration when designing and implementing workforce development programs. Workforce development is incredibly broad and covers areas of education, technical skill or certification, STEM knowledge, as well as more abstract ideas like leadership, teamwork, or entrepreneurship. This makes it exceptionally difficult for any one person or organization to create a workforce development program on their own because that would require that they have personnel with expertise in all of these areas. It is, for this reason, that collaboration is so crucial because, without it, workforce development programs are

incomplete, halfhearted attempts to prepare participants for jobs or the labor market of which has

been inaccurately described. Collaboration across sectors (business, state and local government,

nonprofit organizations, educational institutions) is fundamental to the sustainability, relevancy,

and effectiveness of workforce development programs.

<u>Conclusion</u>
The importance of Workforce development cannot be overstated. I would argue that

workforce development, in many ways, is the lifeblood of our economy. Workforce

development is what prepares the future worker for the jobs of tomorrow. It is a critically

important task. When effective, workforce development is capable of changing a persons life

path for the better, exposing them to opportunities that they would never have had otherwise.

Workforce development, however, also has the capacity to be ineffective. If workforce

development programs are not designed in a way that recognizes the cultural differences of its

students or the socioeconomic inequities that prevail throughout our society then it will fail to be

fully impactful. There is a incredible capacity that workforce development has to uplift people

but it has to be honest about the environment in which it operates. The complexities and cross

sector nature of workforce development, as describe above, make it difficult, near impossible, for

one organization to create comprehensive workforce development programs alone.

Collaboration across sector is the best way to create workforce development programs that attend

to all aspects of the worker and labor market. Collaboration allows for workforce development

programs to become multi-faceted and effectively prepare the participants, in multiple ways, for

the labor market.

Appendix

Researcher Field Notes:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1To-gsSmv-NY4eda_hKa6cHYK4GYDr9IN?usp=sharing

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