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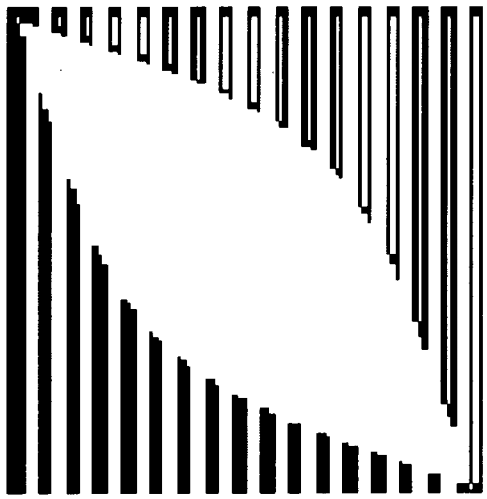
ABSTRACT

This document analyzes main issues concerning adult learning and policy responses in Canada. Section 1 introduces a background report (available separately), discussions with stakeholders, and site visits. Section 2 addresses the general context of adult education (AE). Sections 3-6 cover four themes that structure the Thematic Review of Adult Learning. Section 3 examines incentives for AE participation, describing the magnitude of AE; examines populations with less access; and examines the extent of informal learning and efforts to build on informal and prior learning through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition programs. Section 4 addresses developing integrated approaches to AE provision, including local systemic approaches to postsecondary education; provincial variations making it difficult for individuals and employers to understand overall offerings in AE nationwide; partnerships that are important methods of linking institutions and programs; and creation of mechanisms of outreach and information related to adult offerings. Section 5 examines improving AE quality, pedagogy, and variety of learning. Section 6 examines policy coherence and effectiveness and these two challenges: adult programs that result largely from postsecondary policies, and division between federal and provincial governments. Section 7 presents these future issues: coming recession, electronic learning, and continued urbanization of the population. (Contains 25 references.) (YLB)

THEMATIC REVIEW ON ADULT LEARNING



CANADA

COUNTRY NOTE

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THEMATIC REVIEW ON ADULT LEARNING

1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives and Organisation of the Thematic Review

When they met in January 1996, OECD Education Ministers argued that far-reaching changes were needed to make lifelong learning for all a reality. "Strategies for lifelong learning need a wholehearted commitment to new system-wide goals, standards and approaches, adapted to the culture and circumstance of each country". Recognising that adults encountered particular problems in participating in lifelong learning, Ministers called on the OECD to "review and explore new forms of teaching and learning appropriate for adults, whether employed, unemployed or retired". In October 1997, OECD Labour Ministers amplified the message. They recognised the adverse labour market consequences that arise due to the lack of access to lifelong learning opportunities, and "underlined the importance of ensuring that lifelong learning opportunities are broadly accessible to all persons of working age, in order to sustain and increase their employability".

In 1998, the OECD and the U.S. Department of Education co-organised an international conference, *How Adults Learn*, to review recent research results and practices with regard to teaching and learning adapted to the needs of adults (OECD and US Department of Education, 1999). One of the conclusions from the conference was that a cross-country thematic review could be a valuable tool for understanding the role of policy and institutional environment in promoting adult learning and drawing policy lessons from different national experiences. In late 1998, the OECD Education Committee launched the Thematic Review on Adult Learning as a joint activity with the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.

The purpose of the activity is to analyse adult learning policy options under different contexts. It reviews the adequacy of learning opportunities, how to improve access and participation in adult learning and how learning interacts with the labour market. Among the different issues object of analysis are: The patterns of participation in adult learning; diagnoses of the problems that arise because of these patterns; policy programmes and institutional arrangements that have been used by OECD member countries to expand learning opportunities for adults; options that can be regarded as "good practices" under diverse institutional circumstances and how these can be applied more widely within and across countries.

A meeting of national representatives to discuss the terms of reference and indicate interest in participation took place in Paris in June 1999. As a result, ten countries are participating in the Review: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. A team of three reviewers, which comprises a rapporteur, from different countries and backgrounds (such as pedagogy, education, economics or social sciences) and two members of the OECD Secretariat visit each country. Each visit lasts about ten days and allows reviewers to capture both education and labour market issues. Each country prepares a Background Report drafted according to guidelines agreed by country representatives and the OECD Secretariat.

The visit enables the reviewers to analyse adult learning in the country on the basis of the Background Report, discussions with representatives of government, administration, employers, trade

unions and practitioners, and through site visits. After each visit, the rapporteur, with the help of the review team, prepares a Country Note analysing the main issues concerning adult learning and policy responses in the country under review. The note addresses the four major themes that impinge on participation by adults in learning: Inadequate incentives and motivations for adults to learn; complex pathways between learning settings and a lack of transparency in signalling learning outcomes across a variety of formal and non-formal settings; inappropriate teaching and learning methods; and lack of co-ordination between various public policies that directly or indirectly affect lifelong learning. A final Comparative Report will address the different issues and policy responses in a comparative perspective, including the insights gathered from the participating countries.

1.2. Canada's participation in the review

The Canada review visit took place on January 8 to January 19, 2001. It included visits to Ottawa for the federal perspective and subsequent visits to four provinces (Quebec, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia). On the last day, the OECD team reviewed their preliminary conclusions with two groups: a group of experts on adult education, from British Columbia; and then, by teleconference, a group of government officials from Ottawa and the four provinces. The members of the Canada Pilot Group, the authors of the Background Report and the members of the review team can be found in the Annexes 1 and 2 to this document. The review team would like to thank the Pilot Group; the authors of the Background Report (Bill Ahamad, Doug Giddings, Kjell Rubenson, Derek Hum, and Wayne Simpson); and the many individuals who provided information during the visit about adult learning in Canada. We are particularly grateful to the individuals who were our guides in the four provinces: Alain Mercier of the Ministry of Education in Quebec; Louise Boudreau-Gillis of the New Brunswick Department of Education and Pam Nadeau of the New Brunswick Department of Training and Employment Development; John Biss of Postsecondary Education and Skills Training, Saskatchewan; Nick Rubidge and Denine Marasco of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology, British Columbia; and Wendy Salmon of HRDC. The individuals we spoke with in many programs were uniformly helpful in describing their efforts and in explaining practices that were unfamiliar to us, and we want to thank them for their participation. The government officials were also open about their policies, recent developments, and the problems they still seek to overcome.

2. THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN CANADA

Some aspects of Canada make studying its adult education particularly challenging. The country is vast — it is the second largest country in the world, after Russia. While much of the population is concentrated in cities along the southern border, considerable numbers of people live in relatively sparsely populated northern areas, making the provision of services difficult and making it hard to understand what services are available in far-flung regions of the country. The country has an enormous cultural diversity, with different ethnic and historical backgrounds among First Nations, Métis, French, Anglo-Saxon, and other immigrant populations from all over the world adding to the variety of values and perspectives.

Canada is a country with a federal system, with 10 provinces and 3 territories (the Northwest Territory, the Yukon, and Nunavut) sharing responsibilities with a federal government. As in other countries with a federal structure (like Switzerland and the United States, also included in the OECD review of adult education), this means there are effectively 13 different systems of adult education to understand rather than one, plus a federal system, and there are inevitably conflicts in the balance of provincial versus federal responsibility — an issue we examine in Section 4.2 in particular. Because we visited only 4 of the 13 provinces and territories, our Note is based on these 4 provinces and not on all 13, While we believe the broad patterns we identified are generally true for the country as a whole, there may

be practices in other provinces that would change our perspectives. Therefore our review cannot be considered comprehensive. Our own difficulties in developing a comprehensive review are, we think, shared by many Canadians: because there is relatively little communication across provincial boundaries, most participants in adult education are familiar with practices in their own region but nowhere else. The result is considerable difficulty in understanding the range of practices across Canada, even among Canadians.

In Canada, the provincial governments have constitutional responsibility for education including adult education. However, the federal government has come to provide support for various kinds of short-term job training as well as certain forms of education, particularly through student loans, research, and provision of research and information. In practice, therefore, adult education is supported by a mixture of provincial and federal funds. The issue of federal-provincial relations is one of the most pervasive in Canada; while we postpone our discussion of this issue to Section 6, which is concerned with the overall coherence and effectiveness of policy, the balance of federal and provincial responsibility influences nearly every aspect of adult education in Canada.

The history of Canada has profoundly affected what it now provides, not surprisingly. Canada is a relatively young country, having been incorporated in 1867, with other provinces joining as late as 1949 when Newfoundland joined the Confederation. Many practices in education that other countries take for granted were instituted comparatively recently; for example, while universal schooling had been legislated in most jurisdictions by the 1870s, the rural nature of the country made it difficult to enforce school attendance. As a result, in 1931 only 46% of 16-year-olds were enroled in school. There are still regions within the country where individuals have had little schooling, and where low literacy is therefore an issue. Overall, however, Canada now has one of the highest levels of formal education of any nation: in 1998 80% of the population aged 25 to 64 had at least an upper secondary education, compared to an OECD average of 61%; 19% of Canadians had completed university education, compared to 14% in all OECD countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the population 25 to 64 years of age by level of educational attainment, 1998

	Pre-primary and primary education	ower secondary education	LUpper secondary ed.			Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Tertiary-type B education	Tertiary-type A and advanced research programmes	All levels of education
	SCED 0/1	SCED 2	SCED 3C Short	SCED 3C Long / 3B	SCED 3A	SCED 4	SCED 5B	SCED 5A/6	
Canada	(1)	x 0.3	2 (1)	X (1)	x 7.9	2 2.9	1 0.2	2 8.6	1 100
OECD country mean	6.2	1 2.0	2 .4	3 4.4	1 4.1	2 .0	2 .7	7 4.1	1 100

(1) data included in next column.
Source: OECD (2000), *Education at a Glance*, Paris.

While adult education in Canada has a history dating back at least to the early years of this century, many individuals in the adult education system are unaware of that history.[1] The growth in adult education seems to be relatively recent, according to Livingstone (1999, Table 1.6): the participation rate in adult education increased from 4% in 1960 to 20% in 1981-83, to 28% in 1991 to 38% in 1995. According to these figures, much of the expansion of adult education is a product of only the past 40 years.

Currently, however, there is great interest in expanding education at all levels, principally as a route to economic development. As the 2001 Speech from the Throne declared,

> *Expanding Canadians' access to knowledge and skills is one of the most significant challenges facing us as we prepare for the 21st century. Our quality of life as Canadians and our economic prospects as a country depend on our abilities to think, innovate and create in a world transformed by information and technology.*

Along similar lines, the Expert Panel on Skills appointed in 1998 recommended making lifelong leaning a national priority, helping employers upgrade the skills of their employees, addressing the special learning and skills needs of Aboriginal communities, and further developing new computer-based learning technologies (Background Report, p. 178, p. 204). All this is consistent with rhetoric in most other OECD countries about the importance of education (including adult education and lifelong learning) in the coming decades.

Most important of all, Canada is a country within the tradition of several other English-speaking countries (including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia) of relatively limited government intervention in the economy or into employer prerogatives. Therefore policies familiar from other OECD countries — like the educational leave policies or the very high levels of adult participation in Scandinavian countries — are politically challenging to apply in Canada. We raise the question in Section 3 whether Canada should have a nation-wide discussion about its overall support for and participation in adult education, but we do not think it appropriate to suggest specific policies from countries with very different political cultures.

We should note three special problems in studying adult education, in Canada or any other country. The first involves the relationship between lifelong learning and adult education. While interest in lifelong learning is high - among the OECD Education and Labour Ministers as in Canada - and often motivates the interest in adult education, the need for lifelong learning is not always clear. One common argument is that, since adults often have to change occupations in modern dynamic economies, countries need flexible adult education systems to accommodate retraining and the development of new skills. The statement of the OECD Labour Ministers, about "lifelong learning . . . to sustain and increase their employability", is an example of this point. One version of this argument is clear in Canada: a number of sectors including fishing, agriculture, and forestry have been in relative decline, and therefore retraining for other sectors is often necessary. There is also evidence of a shift to occupations using higher levels of skills (Lavoie and Roy, 1998), though these skills would normally be provided through initial education. Overall there is no evidence of skill shortages in Canada, though there may be some spot shortages in specific sectors (Gingras and Roy, 2000) However, because some individuals may complete their initial education without mastering the competencies necessary in a modern economy, another rationale for lifelong

1. The history includes labor education by unions, the social gospel movement between 1900 and 1928, university extension in Alberta in the 1920s, the Antigonish movement in the Maritime provinces in the 1930s, and many other strands. It's possible that these forms of adult education, with their community and political focus, have been disconnected from the more instrumental and economic forms of adult education in many public programs today.

learning provides a second chance to such individuals, through various forms of remedial education including adult basic education. A third rationale for adult education includes the upgrading of existing skills as jobs change. Finally, a fourth rationale for lifelong learning is less economic, and more concerned with the abilities of adults to continue learning for personal purposes throughout their lifespans. These different rationales for lifelong learning reappear when we discuss the occupational and non-occupational forms of adult education, particularly in Section 3.2.

A second problem with the rhetoric about lifelong learning, in Canada as in many other countries, is that it is not always clear what steps should be taken once one accepts the need for lifelong learning. After a diligent reader works through the rhetoric, two approaches seem to dominate. The first can be called a pedagogical approach: if individuals are well-prepared in their basic education (say, by the end of secondary school) to be independent and autonomous learners, they can by themselves understand when they need further education and what steps they should take to acquire it. This approach often concentrates on reforming elementary and secondary education so that individuals are more active and autonomous, rather than passive learners who simply react to the requirements of their teachers and schools. A second approach focuses more on institutional reform. If adults are going to require education throughout their lifespans, then education and training programs must accommodate the special needs of adults: The requirement of subsidising living costs as well as tuition; their needs for flexible scheduling and non-traditional programs, their needs for support services like child care, or guidance and counselling about alternatives, their dislike of child-oriented pedagogies and their preferences for adult-centered approaches, for example. Those who focus on adult education, and most of this Country Note, are usually taking an institutional rather than a pedagogical approach to lifelong learning; for example, we will have nothing to say in this Note about the elementary-secondary education system in Canada and its ability to prepare autonomous learners. But we should note that the two approaches to lifelong learning should ideally be seen as complementary, not as substitutes for one another: Autonomous individuals may not be able to obtain the education they need if the institutions don't exist to provide it. Conversely education and training focused on the special needs of adults may find themselves without many adult students if they have insufficient motivation or information to enrol in further education. When we discuss the distinctions between policies that focus on individuals versus those that emphasise the improvement of institutions, therefore, it may be that both are necessary.

A third problem in studying adult education is the variety of forms it can take. Within most OECD countries, the various levels of an education system are marked by distinctive regularities, making it possible to describe quite precisely what primary schools or secondary schools or universities are like. But even OECD's definition of adult education — the education and training for adults 25 and over who have completed their initial schooling and then returned to further education — encompasses a variety of specific forms of education, with different (and often inconsistent) goals, different populations targeted, and different criteria by which to judge the effectiveness of these programs. Adult education therefore includes training provided by employers for their own workers; union-sponsored training; training provided by governments to upgrade the skills of particular employees, or to allow individuals to change from one occupation to another (particularly with economic shifts); avocational programs; programs that some people consider basic rights, like literacy programs, or other programs concerned with advancing citizenship; programs with specific social goals, like those for Aboriginal populations or for immigrants; welfare-related education and training to enable individuals to move into the economic mainstream and become self-sufficient.

Some of these can be evaluated by conventional criteria of efficiency, because of their straightforward economic and occupational purposes. In these cases one can justifiably ask, for example, why private provision of education is inadequate (that is, why there might be private market failures) and why there should be public intervention. Conversely, when there are public subsidies to private providers, one might ask what dimensions of efficiency or effectiveness justify public subsidy of private rather than

public institutions. Other forms of adult education without economic purposes (like citizenship or avocational programs, for example) can be judged according to their effectiveness in meeting certain goals, but not by efficiency or concerns about market failure. Some, including those programs to develop Aboriginal autonomy, or community development efforts, have goals that are so diffuse that even criteria of effectiveness are difficult to apply. Throughout this Note we try to specify when we are applying different criteria, but it should be clear that there is no universal set of criteria by which to judge all adult education.

We were impressed by many of the programs we visited, and we have highlighted some of the most notable in a series of boxes. Canada has many programs to be proud of, and many models in adult education that could provide inspiration both to other providers within Canada and to other countries. The sheer size of the country, the variations among provinces, and presence of both provincial and federal initiatives means that the country has a vast amount of experimentation and innovation. We stress throughout this report the most interesting examples we saw — though of course our information is limited by the scope of our visit to Canada and by the fact that we visited only 4 of the 13 provinces.

At the same time, our purpose in this Country Note is not to highlight individual exemplary programs, but instead to evaluate the policies establishing programs — policies that might allow effective and exemplary practices to spread throughout Canada, and by extension to other countries. Therefore most of the points we make, in four subsequent sections of this Note, are not about individual programs but instead about patterns that we observed in both federal policy and in provincial policy, in the four provinces we visited.

In this Note, we cover four themes that structure the Thematic Review of Adult Learning. Section 3 examines the first theme, about the incentives for participation in adult education. We first describe the overall magnitude of adult education in Canada, in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, and then go on to examine certain population groups that appear to have less access to adult education (in Section 3.3). Finally, Section 3. 4 examines the extent of informal learning and the efforts to build on informal and prior learning through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) schemes.

Section 4 addresses the second theme of developing integrated approaches to the provision of adult education. We were impressed by systemic approaches to postsecondary education in some places, particularly in British Columbia. However, the variation among provinces, the subject of Section 4.1, makes it difficult for individuals and employers to understand the overall offerings in adult education throughout Canada. Partnerships have been important methods of linking different institutions and programs (Section 4.2), and many mechanisms of outreach and information have been created to help individuals learn about adult offerings (Section 4.3). Still, the effectiveness of these mechanisms vary, among regions and provinces.

Section 5 examines the third theme of improving the quality, pedagogy and variety of learning in adult education. In general, we were able to learn less about this topic than about other themes, despite evidence of some interesting pedagogical practices. In general, the effectiveness of adult education has not been extensively examined in Canada (Section 5.1), though some promising approaches are now being developed in some colleges.[2]

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2. In Canada, colleges offer one- and two-year programs, and are comparable to community colleges in the U.S., TAFE colleges in Australia, and further education colleges in Great Britain. There are important variations, like the regional colleges in Saskatchewan and the university colleges in British Columbia, but we use the term colleges to refer to all of these.

Section 6 examines the fourth theme of the OECD Thematic review, about the coherence and effectiveness of policy. In this area there are two great challenges in Canada. One is that the programs for adults are largely the result of *postsecondary* policies, not of policies focused specifically on *adult* education — with consequences we explore in Section 6.1. A second, and one that influences virtually every aspect of education in Canada, is the division between the federal and the provincial governments. We explore the dimensions of this relationship in Section 6.2, clarifying the variety of issues that cannot be resolved without a more constructive approach to federalism.

Finally, the conclusion, Section 7, presents a series of issues that are now beginning to confront Canada, and will in all likelihood become even more serious in the near future. We then bring together the recommendations we have made throughout the Country Note in Section 7.2.

Our purpose throughout is to raise issues that merit greater attention — both in Canada itself and, we suspect, in a number of other countries that aspire to providing coherent and effective systems of adult education. These findings will be incorporated into the Comparative Report on adult education in OECD countries. We hope that our observations will provide Canadians with a different perspective as they consider developments in the coming years.

3. IMPROVING THE INCENTIVES AND MOTIVATION FOR ADULTS TO LEARN

The first theme of the OECD Review asks whether the incentives for participation in adult education are strong enough, and if not what the ways of improving them might be.

In Canada, a considerable number of adults participate in some form of education - about 27.7%, according to the recent Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS). International figures place Canada near the middle of comparable countries, as we clarify in Section 3.1. Canada provides a number of subsidies and incentives for participation in adult education, including provincial subsidy of colleges, universities, and literacy programs; federal loans and some grants for postsecondary education; and programs aimed at specific issues and populations like Aboriginal groups, women, and the disabled. However, there seems to have been little pan-Canadian discussion of the ideal overall levels of participation in adult education, as we examine in Section 3.1. Furthermore, the provision of adult education is now dominated (as it is in many countries) by employment-related training, so that non-occupational forms of adult education have received relatively less attention — an issue we examine in Section 3.2.

Overall, it appears that the supply of adult education is not adequate to meet demand. Throughout Canada we heard evidence of shortages and waiting lists for different forms of adult education; such shortages include the view from several groups that the amount of firm-sponsored training may be insufficient (see Section 3.1). The demand for adult education is particularly strong relative to opportunities for certain population groups, of which we pay special attention in Section 3.3 to those in need of basic literacy, to Aboriginal groups, and to the working poor. Furthermore, while the conditions and complexity of adults' lives partly explains why some individuals who would like to participate in further education and training do not, institutional factors, including the unavailability of programs, have been the dominant explanation. Overall, then, we conclude that the motivation and incentive for adults to participate are strong enough, but that the supply of programs is not adequate to meet demand.

3.1 The Overall Level of Participation in Adult Education

Canada has recently undertaken a comprehensive Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS). The results of this Canada-specific study, displayed in Table 2, indicate that 27.7% of Canadians

participated in some form of adult education in 1997 (Country Report, Table 3.1).[3] Furthermore, this figure has been increasing relatively steadily, from 20.6% in 1983 to a high of 30.3% in 1993, before falling slightly to 27.7% by 1997.[4]

Table 2. Percentage of adult population[1] participating in adult education and training by province, study orientation, and employer support, 1997

	Overall Participation	Job-related Programs/courses	Personal interest Programs/courses	Employer-sponsored Programs/courses[2]	Non-employer-sponsored programs/courses
	%	%	%	%	%
Province					
Newfoundland	18.6	15.3	4.5	17.8	9.1
Prince Edward Island	22.2	17.3	6.9	19.0	10.7
Nova Scotia	28.8	22.6	9.8	28.5	13.2
New Brunswick	23.4	17.1	8.4	20.2	11.8
Quebec	20.6	14.6	7.9	15.1	12.0
Ontario	30.8	23.9	10.3	27.2	14.8
Manitoba	27.6	21.4	9.5	24.9	13.3
Saskatchewan	28.0	22.6	8.8	26.3	12.1
Alberta	31.1	24.7	10.5	27.1	13.9
British Columbia	31.9	23.5	12.7	25.8	18.1
Canada	27.7	21.1	9.8	23.7	14.1

Notes

The adult population is defined by excluding individuals who were (1) 17-19 years old and enroled full-time in a non-employer sponsored elementary or secondary program or (2) 17-24 years old and enroled full-time in a non-employer-sponsored post-secondary program.

Estimations are based on respondents who worked in 1997.; *Source:* Adult Education and Training Survey, 1998.

Source: Canada Background Report, Table 3.1drawing on Statistics Canada and HRDC (2001).

The AETS further distinguishes adult education into two categories: job-related education and personal interest programs and courses including personal development, personal health or fitness, participation to develop new friends, and efforts to upgrade knowledge or acquire formal qualifications unrelated to employment. These more detailed results reveal overall participation of 21.1 percent in employment-related education, 9.8 percent in personal interest programs and courses, and 3.2 percent in both.

From cross-national data collected in relatively similar ways, Canada is near the middle of a group of relatively developed countries. Data from the International Adult Literacy Survey in Table 3

3. These results are based on interviewing households about their participation, and therefore are different than those that might be developed using the enrollment figures of individual public and private programs. Provincial officials were often reluctant to accept the AETS figures, since they were often inconsistent with provincial experiences. The AETS figures include all individuals age 16 to 65 excluding those 17-19 enrolled full-time in an elementary or secondary education program, and those 17 - 24 enrolled full-time in a postsecondary program. Compared to the Thematic Review definition of adult education, they surely include some individuals attending college and University part-time who are in their initial training, not in adult education, and these figures may therefore be too high relative to the OECD definition.

4. See Statistics Canada and HRDC (2001), Table 2.1. It's unclear that these differences in participation rates are statistically or practically significant, given variation in survey methods and different interpretations of what defines adult education. What might be important is the decrease in the trend in a period when there seems to be a growing focus on adult learning.

indicates that 37.7% of Canadians participated in adult education and training,[5] much lower than the figures in Scandinavian countries (52.5% in Sweden, 47.9% percent in Norway, and 55.7% in Denmark), comparable to figures in the United States (39.7%), Australia (38.8%), and the United Kingdom (43.9%), and higher than many lower-income countries.[6]

Table 3. Percentage of 16-65 year olds participating1 in education and training and average number of hours of participation in the previous year, by type of training, 1994-1998

	All continuing education and training					Job-related education and training				
	Total participation rate		Mean number of hours per participant		Mean number of hours per adult[2]	Participation rate		Mean number of hours per participant		Mean number of hours per adult[2]
Canada	37.7	(1.0)	305.07	(54.3)	115.1	31.8	(1.3)	309.69	(69.4)	98.3
Ireland	24.3	(2.3)	331.72	(19.4)	80.7	18.6	(1.8)	323.08	(21.6)	60.0
Netherlands	37.4	(1.2)	242.38	(14.1)	90.6	25.4	(1.1)	274.09	(23.1)	69.5
Poland	13.9	(0.9)	149.22	(18.3)	20.8	10.5	(0.7)	119.95	(11.4)	12.6
Sweden[3]	52.5	(1.1)								
Switzerland	41.8	(0.9)	140.14	(6.7)	58.6	27.2	(0.7)	145.50	(11.4)	39.6
United States	39.7	(1.4)	169.62	(14.6)	67.4	38.0	(1.6)	162.97	(16.1)	61.9
Australia	38.8	(0.7)	263.66	(8.2)	102.2	33.0	(0.7)	205.78	(8.7)	67.8
Belgium (fla)	21.2	(1.1)	129.11	(15.4)	27.4	13.8	(1.0)	101.63	(15.0)	14.0
New Zealand	47.5	(1.2)	284.27	(14.8)	135.0	40.8	(1.3)	276.78	(16.8)	112.9
United Kingdom	43.9	(0.9)	213.85	(11.6)	93.9	40.9	(1.0)	188.71	(13.4)	77.2
Czech Republic	25.5	(0.9)	167.56	(20.3)	42.7	21.1	(1.0)	117.96	(12.1)	24.9
Denmark	55.7	(0.7)	219.62	(9.8)	122.2	48.3	(0.8)	212.95	(10.8)	102.9
Finland	56.8	(0.9)	213.47	(9.2)	121.2	39.9	(0.8)	213.62	(11.3)	85.2
Hungary	19.3	(0.7)	187.62	(16.6)	36.1	13.4	(0.7)	147.85	(15.7)	19.8
Norway	47.9	(1.5)	239.69	(13.9)	114.9	44.7	(1.3)	212.76	(13.4)	95.0
Portugal[3]	14.2	(1.0)								
Slovenia	31.9	(1.1)	210.92	(12.7)	67.3	25.4	(1.0)	185.54	(12.2)	47.1
Average	35.0	(0.6)	195.98	(8.0)	68.7	30.3	(0.8)	178.25	(9.8)	54.0

[1] Full-time students aged 16-24 and people who obtained less than 6 hours of training are excluded.

[2] Mean number of hours per adult = Mean number of hours per participant * Participation rate/100.

[3] Sweden and Portugal did not ask about job-related training in a comparable way, nor did they ask about training duration.

Note: Germany is excluded because the survey did not ask about adult education and training in a comparable way.
Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, 1994-1998.

5[5] It's difficult to know why the AETS figure is lower than the IALS figure. In general, we rely on AETS figures for comparisons within Canada, and on IALS for comparisons with other countries.

6. OECD and Statistics Canada (2000), *Literacy in the Information Age*. Table 3.11. These figures exclude full-time students age 16 to 24 and those with less than 6 hours of training, so — like the AETS figures — they include part-time students in postsecondary education in their pre-employment education, who would not be considered adults by the OECD definition.

However, it is difficult to know whether the proportion of 27.7% is high or low, in Canada's own terms. The question we posed to the Canadian educators and officials we met is whether there is a national discussion or a national consensus on what this proportion should be. As we travelled throughout Canada, most of our contacts — who tended to be educators, and therefore committed to expanding levels of support for education — felt this figure to be too low. To corroborate their perspective, we heard everywhere about long waiting lists for programs — even programs like those in community colleges that are supposedly open to all students without a selection process. In addition, the AETS itself suggests that, for adults who planned to take some form of education but did not enrol, institutional factors — including the unavailability of a program at an appropriate time or location, high costs, and the program not being offered — were important, though being too busy at work was also an important factor (Country Report, Table 3.13). Many providers indicated that the number of students they enrol is strictly established by the federal or provincial program that funds them, rather than by interest in the community, again implying that demand is greater than supply. Apparently the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is currently discussing the pervasive sense of shortages in education, though this has not yet become a public discussion. For certain forms of adult education — especially basic literacy efforts, as well as programs for Aboriginal people and for the working poor — under provision seems especially serious, as we point out in Section 3.3. In addition, we suspect that governmental support for adult education has fallen during the 1990s, as a result of federal government withdrawal from the provision of certain services (described in Section 6.2 below); one prominent federal official acknowledged that the emphasis during the 1990s has been on youth, not adults; confirmed by official government documents. We suspect, therefore, that individuals seeking adult education as well as educators providing it would consider the 27.7% percent overall participation to be too low.

From different accounts, the business community appears to be relatively satisfied with the current level of employment-related adult education., although some opinions reflect the view that Canadian employers underinvest in training when compared to countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States.[7] Canada now spends about 1.5% of its wage bill on training, about in the middle of developed countries, and there is no widespread movement that we know of to increase this fraction.[8]

One group representing business — the Conference Board of Canada — claims that "employers don't get it on this issue" and fail to understand the importance of training. The Conference Board has been a prominent advocate of expanding employment-related adult education, trying to get their corporate members to expand their own support for further education as well as expanding and improving public education and training. Their concerns include competition with other countries, since Canada is so dependant on exports, and the difficulty of national companies doing business in a country with no

7. In the early 1990s a perception developed that there was inadequate support for firm-based training, and Training Trust Funds were instituted to collect both federal and employer funds for firm-based training. Since 1995 the federal payments have been eliminated, however, and the employer contributions have fallen with the end of federal matching funds. In addition, the Canada Labor Force Development Board was created in 1989 to create some consensus on the appropriate level of training, but it was disbanded in 1999 when no consensus on an increase seemed possible

8. There's a continuing debate in many countries about whether employer-provided training is adequate or insufficient; see, for example, Lynch (1994). In competitive markets, employers ought to provide the optimal level of training for their own workers. However, there will be under-provision if there are general (rather than employer-specific) components to some forms of training that lead to firms "poaching" workers from one another, if employers (especially small employers) are unaware of the potential benefits of training, if there are diseconomies of small size in the provision of training, or if small employers find it difficult to organize themselves in order to express their demand for training (Stern and Ritzen, 1991). Some of the councils established by provinces — especially the industry councils in Quebec and the Industry-Education Councils in Saskatchewan — are in effect ways to remedy some of the inefficiencies associated with small size and lack of organization.

coherent pan-Canada policy on adult education (discussed in Section 6.1 below); representatives of this group expressed frustration with the lack of action because of federal/provincial differences (further examined in Section 6.2 below). In addition, a concrete expression of the view that employment-related training has been inadequate or of the increasing need for training is the recent employer tax in Quebec, described in Box 1; while this was originally passed over the objections of business, they have since come to accept its value. Finally, in British Columbia there is apparently a shortage of trained middle-level workers, including those in the trades. Firms however, have not been willing to take on more apprentices and the community colleges and technical institutes are unable to fill the demand, since they have long waiting lists as it is. There are, therefore, some indications that employer decisions are not necessarily optimal, and that steps might be taken (of which the Quebec tax is only one option[9]) to enhance the extent of employment-related training.

Box 1. The Quebec Employer Tax

In 1998 Quebec passed a "pay or play" tax on employers over a certain size (a $250,000 payroll), amounting to 1% of their wage bills. Employers had the choice of either providing this amount of training to their workers ("playing"), or paying the amount into a fund ("paying") which would then be redistributed among employers for training purposes. These resources can be spent on 10 or 12 different activities including the purchase of training from private providers, training done in-house, and training provided by unions. The intent was never to collect a large amount of taxes, but rather to stimulate employers to provide training, and this goal has been achieved: in 1999 only $25,000 (.004% of the provincial wage bill) was collected under this tax. Any training provider under this tax mechanism must decide on training with the help of a council that includes union and labor representatives as well as employers; unions seem to be enthusiastic about the tax as a mechanism for generating discussion about training needs. Apparently employers themselves, initially opposed to the tax, have moderated their opposition and come to embrace the tax as both a legitimate use of resources and as a forum for discussing training issues. The tax itself is frequently mentioned in Quebec as a symbol of commitment to public support of employment-related training.

It remains unclear how much the tax has increased spending on training, despite the belief of many Quebec officials that it has increased training substantially.[10] In 1999 eligible businesses apparently contributed 1.53% of payrolls to training, a figure taken as evidence that employers have increased training by more than the tax requires. However, it's quite possible that the tax merely gave credit for training to large firms who were already providing training, rather than causing them to increase training. Nevertheless, the tax is still valuable for generating public discussions about the need for training and for including a variety of social partners in training discussions; the unions feel that it has improved the equity and breadth of training.

Overall, then, a variety of evidence including patterns of shortages suggests that adult education may be under-provided in Canada. Whether there is or is not a shortage is, of course, something for Canadians to decide. But a further problem is that there is currently no pan-Canadian forum in which to

9. A number of employers mentioned wistfully that Canada does not have any system of tax credits for employer-provided training, as the U.S. and other countries have had. This Note is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of different approaches to increasing employer training, but we do note that tax credits are often highly inefficient instruments of public policy — that is, they tend to reward those firms that are already providing training, rather than inducing firms without training to begin supporting it. (This may also be a problem with Quebec tax, as we note in Box 1.) The development of a coherent policy toward all forms of adult education, as we suggest in Section VI.1, would require greater attention to the efficiency and effectiveness of different approaches.

10. For example, the Adult Education and Training Survey indicates that only 20.6% of adults in Quebec participated in adult education and training in 1997, compared to a national average of 27.7%. See Country Report, Table III.2. But Quebec officials consistently disputed this figure, claiming that the 1999 tax has increased participation at least to the national average.

discuss this issue. Most discussion about education take place in the different provinces, and there has been considerable resistance to a federal role in education (as we discuss in Section 6.2) — and therefore federal commissions and agencies are not necessarily the best places for pan-Canadian discussions to take place. Furthermore, the policies that now exist are generally policies for postsecondary education, in which adults are include by default but not by intention, rather than policies for adult education specifically — as we point out in Section 6.1. It's possible that the current efforts by the federal government to develop a new skills and learning agenda (described to the best of our ability in Section 6.2) will create such a forum, though these efforts are likely to be challenging given the federal-provincial structure. In addition, there are currently efforts in Quebec to develop a policy of continuous education,[11] and in Saskatchewan to evaluate basic education — though such provincial planning cannot create a pan-Canada discussion, and the topics they are addressing are relatively limited. Whatever form it takes, therefore, we perceive a need for Canada to create a forum in which adult education, its appropriate level, and its composition are the subjects of discussion, in which all Canadians can participate.

3.2 The Dominance of Employment-related Adult Education

In Canada, as in many other countries, a sizeable majority of adult education is related to employment. In data from the Adult Education and Training Survey, 76% of all those in adult education were in job-related programs and courses; 86% were in employer-sponsored programs or courses (Country Report, Table 3.1)— a higher figure because employers may also pay for their employees to participate in non-job-related programs. These proportions vary somewhat among provinces,[12] but they are uniformly quite high.

From one perspective, the dominance of employment-related adult education seems quite appropriate because advancing in employment is, after all, one of the central concerns of most adults; responding to changes in the economy and maintaining the skills of the labor force are also important goals of employers and government. Indeed, as we mentioned above, it's possible that the resources devoted to job-related adult education are too low in Canada, rather than too high. But there are at least two major drawbacks to the high proportion of adult education that comes through employment. The most obvious is that individuals without stable connection to employment — including the poor and working poor in particular, Aboriginal groups, some women, the disabled, the elderly — have less access to adult education. In addition, employers tend to provide greater amounts of training to employees who already have high levels of education, particularly to their upper-level managers and technical workers. Similarly, participation in adult education is higher for those in professional and managerial jobs than in blue-collar jobs, for those in supervisory positions, and for individuals in larger firms (especially those over 100 employees). As a result, access to adult education in the Canadian population is quite unequal: only 17.2 % of those at literacy level 1 participated in adult education, compared to 60.5% of those at levels 4 and 5; only 16.4 % of those with elementary education participated, compared to 59.3% of those with university degrees (Country Report, Table 3.3). Most of this variation was due to differences in employer-sponsored training, with other forms of adult education more evenly distributed. Thus those individuals who may need adult education the most in fact receive the least.

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11. This policy will focus on ensuring basic education to all people trying to move beyond literacy levels 1 and 2, and on providing 9 years of education to all. This could therefore be a response to the underprovision of ABE noted in Section III.3

12. Both participation rates in job-related training and the proportion of adult education that is job-related were lowest in Quebec, perhaps explaining the effort to develop an employer tax there.

Table 4. Percentage and likelihood of adult population participating in education and training by labour force status and study orientation, 1997

	Overall Participation			Job-related			Personal Interest		
Labour Force Status	%	Odds	Adjusted odds	%	Odds	Adjusted odds	%	Odds	Adjusted odds
Not in labour force	12.7	1.00	1.00	6.1	1.00	1.00	7.5	1.00	1.00
Employed	36.2	3.88 [1]	1.70 [1]	29.4	6.36 [1]	2.41 [1]	11.3	1.58 [1]	0.96
Unemployed 0-6 months.	23.5	2.11 [1]	1.00	19.2	3.64 [1]	1.48 [1]	5.4	0.71 [2]	0.50
Unemployed 7-12 months	28.8	2.77 [1]	1.28	22.7	4.49 [1]	1.84 [1]	9.1	1.24	0.78
Unemployed one year or more	28.6	2.74 [1]	1.45 [1]	20.0	3.83 [1]	1.76 [1]	9.8	1.36	0.98

Notes:
Variables included in the adjusted odds model are age, gender and educational level.
Statistical significance: (1) at the level of .01; (2) at level of .05.
Source: Adult Education and Training Survey, 1998, reported in Statistics Canada and HRDC (2001)

A second problem with the dominance of job-related adult education is that non-occupational forms of education — including basic literacy, citizenship programs, community-oriented education, and various forms of avocational and personal interest courses — are comparatively neglected. According to these data, only 9.8% of Canadians participated in such courses.[13] We point out below, in Section 3.3, that certain forms of non-occupational adult education — basic literacy programs in particular — seem to be seriously under-provided, and this contributes to the relatively low participation in non-occupational adult education. Our understanding is that the withdrawal of the federal government from funding adult education in the mid-1990s caused serious declines in funding for citizenship and community-oriented adult education in general, including programs operated by the Canadian Association for Adult Education, Development Education Centers to support learning about international development, women's centers, and other community groups. In light of the growing recognition of the role of social capital in a balanced economic, social and cultural development, this type of adult education certainly deserves a renewed impetus. It's possible that very recent initiatives may reverse the decline of the 1990s: the January 2001 Speech from the Throne supported adult learning, although with the overall purposes of succeeding in the "new economy", and there are current proposals for spending more on citizenship education. But overall reports from local providers indicate that there has been a steady decline in the resources for non-occupational adult education.

As part of any potential pan-Canadian discussion about the overall levels of adult education, then, the *forms* of adult education should be discussed as well, particularly the issue of whether there is sufficient access to various basic literacy, citizenship, community-based, and personal interest courses. We note that the slogan of lifelong learning that has become so popular, in Canada as in many other countries, should not be confined to the learning necessary as the economy changes and job requirements shift; other changes — political changes, cultural shifts, and regional or provincial developments — are equally important for adults, and changes in interest over the life cycle are important as well. An adult education policy that ignores these non-occupational aspects of adult life will remain relatively limited.

13. The International Adult Literacy Survey confirms low levels of participation in non-job-related adult education: while 37.7 percent of Canadians reported enrolling in some kind of adult education, 31.8% were in job-related education and training — so at most 5.9% were enrolled only in non-job-related adult education (though some are enrolled in both, of course). OECD and Statistics Canada (2000), Table 3.11.

Table 5. Percentage and likelihood of employed adult population participating in employer-sponsored education by workplace characteristics, 1997

	Participation Rate	Odds	Adjusted Odds
Type of Job			
Part-time	19.9	1.00	1.00
Full-time	26.9	1.48	[1] 1.24
Occupation			
Blue collar	15.7	1.00	1.00
Professional, managerial	35.1	2.91	[1] 2.64
Clerical, sales, service	19.4	1.29	[1] 1.29
Job status			
Employee without supervisory roles	21.1	1.00	1.00
Employee with supervisory roles	37.9	2.21	[1] 1.94
Self-employed without employees	11.3	0.52	[1] 0.61
Self-employed with employees	18.2	0.87	1.20
Firm Size			
Less than 20	16.4	1.00	1.00
20 – 99	21.2	1.37	[1] 1.23
100 – 500	33.6	2.57	[1] 2.14
Over 500	33.9	2.61	[1] 1.95
Ownership			
Private sector	20.0	1.00	1.00
Public sector	35.2	1.91	[1] 1.30
Industry			
Construction	13.7	1.00	1.00
Agriculture	10.1	0.51	[2] 0.50
Other primary	24.2	2.18	[1] 1.51
Manufacturing	19.4	1.09	0.76
Utilities	44.1	3.45	[1] 1.98
Transportation	29.1	1.84	[1] 1.27
Trade	20.0	1.11	0.78
Finance, insurance & real estate	37.7	2.69	[1] 1.56
Education, health & welfare	33.9	2.27	[1] 1.09
Business, personal & misc. services	18.5	1.08	0.72
Public Administration	41.0	3.30	[1] 1.74

Notes:
Variables included in each of the adjusted model are main occupation, firm size, type of job, age and gender in addition to the variables presented in the table.
Statistical Significance: (1) at the level of .01; (2) at the level of .05.

Source: Adult Education and Training Survey, 1998, reported in Statistics Canada and HRDC (2001).

3.3 Unequal Access and Underserved Populations

We have partly addressed the issue of unequal access to adult education in section 3.2, as one consequence of the predominant role of employment-related education. The figures on levels of participation by literacy levels are one indication of unequal opportunities; other symptoms are the widespread dissatisfaction with rising tuition levels and with the system of student loans, and the growing indebtedness of students. (The problems with loans and indebtedness have been found in many countries;

for an overview of evaluation studies of student loan schemes see Vleugels and Nicaise, 2000.[14]) In addition, in our visits to different provinces and providers, we heard many times about waiting lists, suggesting that some forms of adult education are inadequate to the demand.

However, there are several populations who seem particularly underserved. In this section we highlight the problems of individuals with low levels of literacy, Aboriginal people, and the working poor.[15] (There may be other groups we do not mention who are just as underserved, like welfare mothers or the disabled, about whom we learned very little — except see Box 6 on community access centers for the disabled.) In each of these cases there is powerful national rhetoric about the importance of providing education and training so that individuals can live up to their potential, or so that they can join the economic mainstream. Yet for these and other specific populations, several persistent issues prevent adequate programs from being provided. In many of these cases, federal-provincial tension has prevented the development of a clear policy; weak political power of these groups makes it difficult for them to make their voices heard; a lack of consensus on appropriate approaches or models of education creates uncertainty about how best to proceed. As part of any process of creating a coherent policy for adult education (see section 3 below), the specific issues of underserved population should be addressed.

a. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Individuals with Low literacy Levels

There's widespread recognition in Canada that substantial fractions of the population have low literacy levels — too low to function in a modern economy, or to adjust to changing skill requirements. According to the figures of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 16.6 percent of Canadians aged 16 to 65 were at Level 1 and 25.6 percent were at Level 2 (of 5 possible levels) of the prose literacy scale in 1994-95 (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000, Table 2.2). A total of 42.2 percent of Canadians were at levels often deemed too low for modern roles as workers, citizens, and family members. (At the other end, 22.7% were at literacy levels 4 and 5.) These numbers are widely known among educators in Canada, and the problem of low literacy is widely cited as one of the most pressing for the country as a whole. The causes include very low levels of schooling levels in large areas of the country, particularly regions based on fishing, forestry, and agriculture where children went to work quite early, and (in some regions) the practice of young girls dropping out of school to care for younger siblings. Stories of individuals with one or two years of formal schooling are also common.

However, in all provinces we visited, there seems to be inadequate provision for Adult Basic Education (ABE) — that is, for the lowest levels of literacy instruction, at the functional equivalent of elementary and middle school reading and writing.[16] In all provinces, we heard of long waiting lists for ABE programs; for example, the lowest-level literacy programs in Saskatchewan (at grade equivalent levels 1 – 4) had waiting lists of 6 – 9 months, and officials estimated that they could easily double enrolment in literacy programs. (The most striking shortage in provision is found in the most elementary

14. Apart from their limited impact on equalization of opportunities, student loans tend to involve high default rates, reimbursement problems, and administrative and juridical complexities. For these reasons we reject the theoretical view that loans are efficient and advocate grant schemes as a better alternative.

15. See also the Canada Background Report, Section V.3: a survey of regional HRDC offices revealed the greatest problems in finding and keeping employment among the long-term unemployed (by definition), the disabled, Aboriginal people, and youth.

16. The provision of basic skills instruction at higher levels is somewhat better, since community colleges usually provide basic skills courses leading up to "college-level" work. However, below some level community colleges usually send potential students to community-based ABE courses. An exception is the comprehensive community college profiled in Box 3, Malaspina University College, which provides community-based ABE that is articulated with higher-level courses at the college.

courses, the equivalent of grades 1 – 5.) The federal government has reduced its support for basic literacy efforts, and now confines its activities largely to supporting pilot projects, convening interested groups, and fostering coordination. Therefore funding for ABE is largely provincial. However, as we have already pointed out, provinces vary in their ability to fund education of all types, and some of the lowest-income provinces — the Maritimes in particular — also appear to have the highest concentrations of adults with low literacy efforts, because their economies have been based on fishing, agriculture, and other extractive sectors that have fostered low schooling levels. ABE is a good example of a form of adult education that is unlikely to be adequately provided without federal assistance because of the differences among provinces in the ability to support social programs.

Table 6. Participation in learning of 25-64 year-olds according to job status, type of training and Educational Attainment, 1997-1998 (%)

	All type of training			Job-related training		
	Less than Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post Secondary	Less than Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post Secondary
All	19.6	31.2	54.9	13.6	25.1	46.5
Employed	24.0	33.5	57.5	20.8	28.9	52.7

Source : IALS (prepared by the authors).

In addition, many provinces have not, apparently, wrestled with the problem of *how* to move individuals from low levels of literacy to the sophistication necessary for the modern world. The simplest aspect of this problem conceptually, but the most difficult to resolve, is the intensity of efforts to move someone to Level 3 literacy. Realistically this might take 6 to 12 months of full-time study, under the best conditions; but most ABE programs we saw meet once or twice a week, for perhaps 3 hours a session. At this rate it might take three to six years to advance to realistic levels of proficiency, but few adults seem to persist that long in adult programs. The continuity of programs is another problem, as is the mobility and changing conditions of adult lives. In practice, then, very few adults seem to make much progress in ABE. (There are, as far as we could tell, no data documenting the progress of individuals in such literacy programs.) There are no provisions for more intense literacy efforts — for example, where adults are provided employment leaves to study on a more intensive basis. At this rate, it is difficult to see how Canada will overcome the low levels of literacy about which the country complains so much.

Furthermore, the country has not, with some important exceptions, grappled with the kind of ABE that might be most effective. There are very few studies of the effectiveness of ABE — no matter how effectiveness is measured. Even simple measures — like the extent and duration of participation in individual programs, or learning gains or pre-test/post-test results, or measures of satisfaction or interviews with ABE students, or measures of progress into subsequent programs or in employment — are missing. The evaluation of results is one of the most difficult issues in adult education, and potentially a subject of great controversy, but even better profiles of participants and program characteristics would help. This subject is further analysed in Section 5.2.

There are markedly different approaches to ABE. In some provinces — Quebec is a good example — ABE is largely provided in community-based organizations, even though curricula and syllabuses are being developed within formal educational institutions. The advantages of these programs is that they exist in the communities where their students live, and instructors can come to know their students well. They are definitively not "school-like" or bureaucratic, and so they may be more welcoming to individuals who lack a history of success in school; and they provide a variety of social and moral supports, and sometimes help with other services (housing or health, for example), in addition to literacy instruction. Community-based programs are also committed to "wholistic" approaches including

citizenship and community education, whereas government programs are often criticised for becoming too utilitarian and job-oriented. The proponents of community-based approaches are zealous in their devotion to this form of ABE, and several literacy councils — for example, the Canadian Institute of Adult Education — are committed to this model. But in these warm and supportive environments there appears to be less structure, and less pressure for progress; individuals can spend years and years in such programs without moving to higher levels of literacy, and there is not much evidence that people move into the mainstream programs of community colleges.[17] If adults want a warm and supportive environment with little pressure for advancement, these community-based approaches are fine; but if individuals want to make progress in order to enter an education or training program to advance in employment, they are not always adequate.

There are, however, different approaches to these issues. Within the community of adult education, some programs are apparently adamant about not working with government, in order to remain advocates and to reach the "hard kernel" of individuals who are almost completely non-literate and who will never be served by government programs. In some provinces we saw different approaches to ABE, though the community-based model still retains much of its appeal. In New Brunswick, for example, literacy coordinators are on the staff of community colleges; but another government agency in partnership with the private sector allocates funding to community-based literacy centers. These centers use curriculum materials developed by the community colleges,[18] and designed to create a smooth transition between the community-based ABE programs (at less than the 10th grade level) and college programs (providing programs at the 10th – 12th grade equivalent levels). Therefore those individuals who want only a warm environment can have that, but those who want to advance to college can do that also. (Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this link is unclear.[19]) In Saskatchewan ABE (called Adult 1 – 10) is located within postsecondary education, not in K-12; officials claim that 45% - 50% of those in Adult 1-10 transfer into Adult 12 programs run by SIAST and regional colleges. Similarly, many colleges in British Columbia operate ABE programs, or create articulation mechanisms with ABE; the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (see Box 5) publishes an "Articulation Handbook" to facilitate the transfer of students among high school and college ABE programs, and from ABE to regular programs. As an example, Malaspina University College itself operates ABE programs, located in the community in facilities that are not "school-like" in order to take advantage of the strengths of the community-based model; but these programs again articulate with programs at the college so that individuals can, if they want, move into the educational mainstream. Even though there is little information at the rate at which individuals in these programs move from ABE programs into regular college programs, these hybrid or transitional programs seem to have much more promise than unstructured community-based approaches.

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17. For example, one program we visited said that they had enrolled perhaps 500 people over 10 years, and that only one or two of these had ever enrolled in a community college.

18. Because of the press of time we were unable to investigate pedagogical issues in any detail. However, most of the ABE materials we saw — including those developed in New Brunswick — were conventional drill and practice materials. Although a great deal of lip service is paid to using different pedagogies — many ABE directors claim to follow the student-centered and constructivist practices of "andragogy" associated with Knowles (1984), for example — we suspect that the materials used and the limited preparation of adult education instructors often lead to conventional teaching methods.

19. The community college system in New Brunswick reports that relatively few students come from community-based literacy programs since they are not academically-oriented and the students "aren't ready for academics". However, the colleges have started a pilot project to encourage more of these students to make the transition. Apparently there used to be real hostility between community college and literacy programs, fostered by a former prime minister who took literacy funds away from community colleges. Now there is more openness to connections between the two. The lesson from these developments is that government policies can either split or unify the various providers of adult education, though transitions among programs are possible only with good working relations.

There's no question that the issues of low literacy are among the most difficult in all of education. The levels of low literacy have been especially vexing to Canadians, who have been somewhat ashamed to find themselves with such high numbers of adults without adequate command of reading, writing, mathematics, and other basic competencies — particularly for such a developed country. But these issues will not be resolved, we think, until there is greater attention to the overall level of funding and provision, the intensity of ABE programs, the approaches to providing ABE and its articulation with other education programs, and its pedagogy.

b. Programs for Aboriginal Peoples

As in other advanced countries with large Aboriginal populations (like the United States and Australia), the condition of Aboriginal groups in Canada is a subject of great concern.[20] Aboriginal people in Canada have the lowest incomes, the highest rates of poverty, the highest rates of dropping out of formal schools (starting around grades 4 and 5), the lowest overall education attainments, and the worst health indicators of any group in Canada. When federal and provincial officials discuss the most challenging problems they face, the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples are among the first they mention. As in the U.S. and Australia, Aboriginal issues have shifted in a relatively short period of time — three or four decades — from being utterly dismissed to being a great source of shame.

However, here too there has been little *sustained* effort to grapple with the magnitude of the underlying problem.[21] Again, one of the most obvious indicators is the simple lack of programs: we heard over and over that programs are lacking on the reserves, and that Aboriginal youth and adults are unable to gain access to mainstream programs away from reserves. Part of the problem is, once again, the federal-provincial split. The federal government is responsible for Aboriginal education and training on the reserves, but provincial governments are generally responsible for education off the reserves. The two kinds of programs are not coordinated with one another, and individuals who move back and forth between reserves and non-reserve areas — as many do — find themselves alternating between federal and provincial sponsorship, with different eligibility provisions and offerings. Aboriginal groups reportedly prefer negotiating with the federal government, but on some issues — provincial education programs, for example — their reluctance to negotiate with provincial governments may lead to under-representation of their interests. In some provinces like Saskatchewan, Aboriginal groups are apparently well-organised, and have been able to argue their cause forcefully; in other provinces including British Columbia, Aboriginal groups are not well organised. Under these conditions Aboriginal students are likely to fall between the cracks, and end up being unable to sustain an educational program. The results include high rates of non-completion, low rates of earning diplomas and university degrees, and overall low education and literacy

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20. Aboriginal groups in Canada include the Inuit living in the far north, formerly often called Eskimos; and various Aboriginal tribes in central and southern Canada. These groups are also referred to as "First Nations" people. In some areas, including Saskatchewan, there are also groups known as Métis, or mixed-blood people, who cannot claim to be fully Aboriginal but whose upbringing shares many of the social, economic, and cultural aspects of Aboriginal peoples. Because Canada is such a physically large country, there are many tribal groups and many languages, with different issues affecting different groups — including the removal of such groups from their historical lands to reserves during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore there is no single way to describe Aboriginal issues, and we cannot possibly do justice to the complexity of this variation in a brief Country Note.

21. There is, however, a plan that has been developed; see Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan, published in 1997. It's unclear to us how much progress has been made on this plan. Many recommendations in the plan are quite consistent with the points we make, like the need for Aboriginal self-government, the need to strengthen Aboriginal language heritage and culture, and the improvement of education, training, and skills development.

levels. First Nations people believe that their treaty rights should be portable, and that the federal government should provide funding for education whether it occurs on or off reservations.

In addition, there has been little pan-Canadian attention to the kinds of education that might be most appropriate for Aboriginal peoples, though there have been interesting efforts in a few provinces including Saskatchewan. Our best understanding of a highly complex issue is that there is no agreement among Aboriginal people themselves about how to live in society with bicultural possibilities: Some want to move into mainstream economic and cultural institutions and retain only a small affiliation with their Aboriginal background; others are extremely, even defiantly proud of their Aboriginal backgrounds and want to live in Aboriginal communities with little attachment to mainstream or "white" or "Western" ways; and some want to forge some kind of bicultural identity, maintaining their tribal identities and values as well as participating in some mainstream institutions, including modern occupations requiring formal schooling, access to Western medical care, and broad opportunities for their children. (Similarly, among Aboriginal educators, there a debate whether Aboriginal people should be educated in Aboriginal-run institutions, or whether they should be prepared to enter mainstream institutions; there is no consensus on the need to develop or attend distinctively Aboriginal institutions.) A liberal society like Canada would normally want to provide individuals with the choices to pursue different visions of how to live a life, and — in the absence of any clear decision among Aboriginal people of what course to pursue — should therefore extend such choice to all individuals, including Aboriginal youth.

The problem, however, is that many Aboriginal groups have been denied access to *both* Aboriginal culture *and* mainstream alternatives. A number of decisions have systematically undermined Aboriginal cultures, including the process of removing tribes to reserves, the prohibition against Aboriginal languages in schools, the impossibility of continuing traditional economies, the efforts to convert tribes to Christianity, and many other efforts to marginalise Aboriginal culture. Above all, from the 19th century until recently, generations of young people from the First Nations were forced into boarding schools, which not only alienated them from their native culture but also destroyed their family patterns and their own educational capacities. As a result of this policy, family patterns are still extremely vulnerable with parents separating, children getting uprooted and addicted to alcohol and drugs at very young ages, and students dropping out of primary school after just a few years of education.

Some First Nations individuals also argued that there is a deep cultural and epistemological conflict between Western and Aboriginal approaches to education and science. Western approaches (and institutions like the university) tend to emphasise the development of analytical, intellectual, and cognitive skills whereas Aboriginal people would rather seek a balance among intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development.[22] The Western model of education with its individual exams is intrinsically individualistic and competitive, with a student or researcher gradually increasing his social status through the acquisition of knowledge (though interest in cooperative education has moderated this somewhat). From a traditional indigenous perspective, this is almost tantamount to theft or at least disloyalty towards the community, since knowledge should be considered a public good and a value in itself rather than a source of individual power. Thus the basic assumptions about Western education are partly in conflict with Aboriginal culture.

At the same time, Aboriginal people have not been given the same opportunities to gain access to mainstream institutions: the decline of traditional economies has not been matched by opportunities in the mainstream economy, the reserves are often located far from employment options, the education and health care provided have been inferior, and Aboriginal groups have until recently been denied access to full citizenship and therefore participation in mainstream political life. A good example is the status of

22 Of course, there are many Western traditions that do stress wholistic approaches, especially early childhood education and perspectives favoring the development of multiple intelligences (Gardner,. 1983).

language: as staff of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) in Regina noted, many Aboriginal youth grow up with poor command of English since they are taught by non-native speakers (including their parents), but they also don't know their own language; they therefore need language instruction in both English and their Aboriginal language (something SIFC provides).

If this diagnosis - of many Aboriginal groups being denied access to both their own cultures and to mainstream culture - is correct, then the challenge is to restore to Aboriginal groups access *both* to their traditional cultures *and* to mainstream opportunities.[23] This is a tall order indeed, but we see little progress without grappling with the magnitude of the issue.

Within Canada, there are some promising efforts to strengthen Aboriginal cultures, including the restoration of historic languages. Within adult education, we were most impressed with efforts in Saskatchewan to create distinctly Aboriginal approaches to education — a policy consistent with a general Aboriginal desire to create their own institutions. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) is a good example (see Box 2). This institution is largely directed by tribal councils in the province, though it is ultimately funded by the province and federal governments. It provides a variety of programs focused on preparing individuals (largely Aboriginal themselves) to serve Aboriginal populations, either on or off reserves, with a combination of traditional and Western approaches; examples include programs in social work focused on Aboriginal reserves, Aboriginal fine arts, and science emphasising First Nations health issues. At the same time, the College and other Aboriginal groups have developed a relatively distinctive pedagogy:[24] It focuses more on aspects of tribal cultures, rather than treating occupations in the community as independent from other aspects of life; it embraces a language of "holistic" approaches to learning, rather than the fragmented and abstract approaches more typical of traditional schooling;[25] it incorporates traditional practices like the tribal circle and the value of elders in providing information and guidance; its governance by tribal councils is important both symbolically and as a way of strengthening tribal autonomy. Like some mainstream forms of adult education, SIFC provides occupational preparation, but it incorporates a great deal of education that has nothing to do with occupational preparation. In addition to SIFC, one regional college in Saskatchewan and one of the technical institutes are run by tribal councils. These provide other opportunities for Aboriginal youth and adults to learn about their own culture, to advance in conventional Western schooling, to transfer either to SIFC or to other community colleges, and therefore to pursue a number of options in both cultures. These institutions therefore provide a vision of what bicultural educational institutions might look like, and we can imagine expanding the network of such schools and colleges to create many more opportunities for what we might call bicultural adult education.

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23 Apparently the Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework in British Columbia is address precisely these issues, though we were unable to learn about this initiative.

24. For an overview of the effort to develop a distinctively Aboriginal pedagogy, see Stiffarm (1999). Many essays in this volume show an intense hostility toward the analytic tradition of the Western university and system of schooling generally. However, if biculturalism is to be a guide, then this hostility is misplaced; it would be important for Aboriginal individuals to have access both to the wholistic approach of Aboriginal pedagogy for some purposes and to analytic approaches for other purposes, including preparation for conventional Western occupations.

25. We note that there are various traditions within mainstream or Western education that also embrace "wholistic" approaches and the inclusion of multiple abilities, including early childhood education in many countries, schools following the approach of "multiple intelligences" (Gardner, 1983), and instructors in many settings following meaning-centered or constructivist pedagogies.

Box 2. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC)

The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), federated with the University of Regina, has a special status as an Aboriginal college, the first Aboriginal-run university college in the country.[26] SIFC is run by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, but funded by the province as well as the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The College offers university programs with degrees awarded by the University of Regina, as well as one- and two-year certificates. The programs they offer tend to focus on preparing individuals to work with Aboriginal populations and with issues on reserves; such areas include social work, public administration; Aboriginal studies; Aboriginal linguistics; Aboriginal Communication Arts, for journalists focused on Aboriginal issues; Aboriginal fine arts; teacher education; English; and science, focusing on First Nations health issues like alcoholism, depression, and nutrition. Most of the graduates work in some way on reserves. The staff is 75% First Nations or Métis; the students are about 75% First Nations, with most of the rest Métis.

The college has developed a distinctively "Aboriginal" pedagogy. On the first day of a class, for example, there would be a circle, an important Aboriginal practice, replacing the hierarchical teaching practices common to Western universities. Elders come in regularly to meet with students as well as staff, bringing traditional knowledge into the programs in an effort to develop equality between traditional and conventional university knowledge; instructors are evaluated partly on their work with elders. A "medicine wheel" divided into four quadrants — the intellectual, the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical — guides the curriculum, with instructors trying to incorporate all four elements, an outgrowth of an earlier vision among local elders of fostering an education that develops the whole person. This is not a devaluation of the analytic university tradition — indeed, most courses in the SIFC catalogue look like conventional courses in standard university disciplines — but an attempt to round out the curriculum since students need to "walk in both worlds".

SIFC illustrates the issue of Aboriginal education falling in the cracks between federal and provincial governments. Although Aboriginal education is a federal responsibility, SIFC also has provincial funding — but there's no clear provincial formula for Aboriginal institutions, with the result that funding per pupil is about 75% of other universities. There have also been constant problems in finding capital funds for a new building; the facilities of SIFC are now scattered in several different locations around Regina.

The other approaches in Canada appear to be a patchwork of efforts to incorporate Aboriginal individuals into conventional educational institutions. For example, community colleges offer many remedial courses, and these provide additional opportunities for Aboriginal students and others whose elementary and secondary schooling have been adequate; bridge programs are sometime developed to address the specific needs of Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, one advocate for Aboriginal groups claimed that these have been modified — that is, watered down — for Aboriginal students even though they need rigorous academic education to be successful in the mainstream economy. If the approach we have suggested of enhanced access to both Aboriginal and mainstream culture is the right one, then all of these educational opportunities need to be expanded and strengthened. It's possible that some of them would benefit from coordination with Aboriginal-run schools and colleges and with the efforts to develop an "Aboriginal" pedagogy, particularly in regions of the country where Aboriginal students are relatively numerous. And strengthening such opportunities (as well as creating more Aboriginal-run institutions) would require more cooperation between the federal government, nominally responsible for the education of Aboriginal groups, and provincial governments responsible for the provision of most education.

26. Saskatchewan also has a Saskatchewan Indian Technical Institute as part of SIAST and two regional colleges with large Aboriginal populations. However, these institutions seem not to be as focused on Aboriginal issues and pedagogy as SIFC. The greater organization of Aboriginal tribes in Saskatchewan compared to other provinces helps explain the presence of these institutions there.

We recognise what a large agenda we have outlined, and how long it might take to put such programs into place. (Indeed, one purpose of trying to articulate a distinctive adult education policy, as we suggest in Section 6.1 below, is to create a series of long-run goals to guide policy in adult education, rather than having a start-again/stop-again approach that makes it difficult to develop complex approaches.) But again, we return to the words of Canadians themselves, from all backgrounds, who constantly stressed to us how much still needs to be done to include Aboriginal people in the full set of opportunities that the country can provide. Making progress on this important agenda requires both adequate financial support, a vision of what forms Aboriginal education should take, and the consensus and cooperation necessary to develop this vision fully.

c. The Special Problems of the Working Poor

The working poor constitute a distinctive group of adults, who need access to certain forms of adult education but who often appear to lack access. They almost surely include a group of older workers who have been stuck in low-wage jobs, without opportunities for advancement. These individuals are less often mentioned by Canadians than individuals with low literacy levels or Aboriginal groups; they seem to constitute a nearly invisible problem within Canada. However, they constitute a major problem in Canada, where more than 20% of workers earn less than two-thirds of the median earnings. Only 5 other OECD countries — Ireland, Hungary, Korea and the United States — have higher proportions (OECD, 2001). In our visits, local officials and providers acknowledged that they constitute a significant group, especially in provinces like the Maritimes and the mid-west provinces where low-wage employment (farming, fishing, forestry) are common.

The need of the working poor for additional education or training is clear. These are individuals who, almost by definition, are stuck in low-skilled, low-wage jobs with few prospects for advancement simply with experience. Therefore they need to develop additional skills, or switch occupations, if they are to escape poverty.

The problem is that this group generally lacks access to the various forms of adult education that might help them improve their economic conditions. Because they are at relatively low levels in their employment, they are unlikely to receive the kinds of job-related training offered by employers, which usually goes to upper-level employees. They are also likely to work for small employers, who are unlikely to provide much formal training. The working poor are also likely to be self-employed, seasonal, or part-time workers — all of whom receive lower level of employer-sponsored training. Because Canada has no form of employment leave policy and because their aggregate incomes are low, they are unlikely to be able to take a leave from employment to attend a college or university. Because they are employed, they are ineligible for Employment Insurance benefits, including financial assistance for training under Skills Development. Finally, they are less likely to be eligible for student loans because they probably cannot attend education full time; the part-time student loan programs seem less accessible than those for full-time students.

The working poor can, of course, attend colleges and regional colleges at relatively low cost, and many colleges have evening and weekend programs specifically to meet the needs of working adults (see again Box 3 on Malaspina University College). However, these are students for whom multiple responsibilities — the need to continue working as full time as possible and often to participate in family responsibilities — make education difficult, and throughout Canada local programs admitted that such students had special problems completing programs. A few colleges have programs specifically aimed at supporting adults returning to the labor force; for example St. Thomas University in New Brunswick has a special admissions policy for older students, admitting them on a provisional basis based on their life experiences. However, these programs appear to be small — in the case of St. Thomas University, adults

are about 10% of the 2,600 students — and they cater largely to women returning to the labor force after raising their children. Thus the working poor have special difficulties accessing the education and training programs that might allow them to move up to better jobs and leave near-poverty status.

There are, of course, many potential solutions to the problem of providing education and training for the working poor. They could be provided greater access to existing loans, to Skills Development funds, or to special tax credits; there might be special incentives provided to employers to provide training or release time for their low-wage workers.[27] Our purpose here is not to recommend how support for the working poor be developed; instead, we highlight this issue as a specific problem of under-providing adult education to a group much in need of it.

3.4 Informal Learning and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

So far in this Note we have stressed different aspects of adult education in formally-organized programs, most of them sponsored by governments, employers, or community-based organizations. However, it is clear that informal learning for adults, in the course of their daily activities, is also important — perhaps even more important that formally-organized learning. The Country Report presents evidence that virtually all Canadians — 96.6% — participate in one kind of informal learning or another (Section 3.11, and Table 3.14). Even though we suspect that this high estimate is determined by the very broad definition of informal learning in the underlying survey,[28] the conclusions — that many adults learn a great deal informally, that informal learning is more equally distributed than are formal types of adult education, and that it is more likely than formal learning to be concerned with issues other than employment — are surely right.

The question is what to make of the extensive amount of informal learning. Perhaps we should all simply leave this issue alone, for fear that recognizing informal learning, organizing it, or rewarding it will simply turn everything into a variant of formal learning — the bureaucratization of everything. But in one area — the efforts to generate methods of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), which were mentioned in virtually every province and programs — Canada has already taken steps toward formal recognition of informal learning. In this sense the cat is already out of the bag.

PLAR systems assume that informal and formal learning may be substitutes for one another — rather than, for example, being complements, or simply independent of one another — and that at least some kinds of informal learning can transfer into other domains. The PLAR systems in Canada recognize both informal learning and prior formal schooling. In some cases (like St. Thomas University and the Université de Moncton, in New Brunswick) there are special admissions programs for older adults that recognize dimensions of experience. At St. Thomas, older students admitted on the basis of experience enrol provisionally as non-degree students, and are then admitted to degree programs only after successful completion of one 6-units course.

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27. However, we are concerned with the efficacy or target efficiency of tax credits to employers, since in other countries these have tended to benefit employers who provide training anyway. In addition, it's likely that only the largest employers would use such credits. Throughout Canada employers and their advocates expressed a desire for training-related tax credits for training, but we suspect they are both inequitable and inefficient, and need to be carefully studied before either a provincial or the federal government considers them seriously.

28. The questionnaire from which these results came started with the statement that "everybody does some informal learning outside of formal classes or organized programs", making it difficult for respondents to deny that they engaged in informal learning.

However, the most common form of PLAR recognizes prior formal schooling, rather than informal learning or experience. For example, universities usually allow credit for certain community colleges courses. In some cases there have been efforts to systematize PLAR. For example, British Columbia has developed guidelines in the Ministry of Education that cover PLAR within adult education; these guidelines are followed by individual colleges and institutes in their PLAR systems, and the Center for Curriculum Transfer and Technology carries out training modules, enhancement projects, publications and conferences about best practices, and other activities intended to promote PLAR (see Box 5).

In general, however, each institution has its own way of assessing prior learning; students usually accumulate portfolios describing what they have done, and faculty meet informally to decide how much credit to give.[29] In some cases there has been a great deal of effort expended with very few results; in one institution, for example, two pilot projects were undertaken in 1998 and 1999 to develop PLAR for 5 academic areas, in order to admit adult students with experience and create flexible pathways depending on what they had already accomplished. In practice, however, not much developed that could help the admissions process; a few students (perhaps 10% in one of the 5 areas) used PLAR to gain credit for outside activities (like a co-operative education option), but otherwise there was little to show for this pilot project. There's a great deal of local discretion in these approaches, as perhaps there should be, but no sense yet of a PLAR system in place. A debate about the obstacles and incentives for engaging in PLAR would be welcome. Presumably PLAR systems benefit students by allowing them to complete a program more quickly, and they benefit taxpayers for the same reason; but they may not benefit institutions that depend on enrolments for their survival, and they are often resisted by faculty wedded to conventional conceptions of schooling. Our perception is that the national and provincial rhetoric about the importance of PLAR has not been matched by a comparable level of institutional activity at the local level.

If Canadians continue to develop PLAR systems, there are several issues to raise. One is whether the assumption of substitutability underlying any given PLAR plan is right or not — whether the kinds of prior experiences recognized are in fact both substitutes for formal learning and transferable to other settings (rather than being very specific to the particular settings in which informal learning takes place). In theory this could be evaluated by examining the subsequent success of individuals admitted to institutions under PLAR, or given credit or advanced standing through PLAR, compared to those without PLAR. If the "substitutability hypothesis" is confirmed, it may imply that opportunities can be equalised more effectively partly by shifting public support from formal to informal learning, given the finding that participation in informal learning is more equally distributed across the adult population.

A second issue would be to examine what kinds of informal learning influence desirable outcomes — literacy, for example, or political participation, or employment. For example, it is well known that labor market experience enhances various dimensions of employment including earnings, and that more job-specific experience — experience with one's current employer — has a greater effect than more general experience (experience with prior employers); extending such research to areas other than employment might help understand the value and transferability of informal learning. Third, the efforts to systematize PLAR, as British Columbia has done, might be a subject for further examination, to see whether such efforts ought to be adopted in other provinces.

A third question is whether PLAR creates incentives for formal learning - that is, for individuals to return to adult education. In some cases - the program at St. Thomas described above, for example - it seems reasonable to think that some adults enrol only because of the special consideration offered by PLAR. In other cases, for example when students receive credit for community college courses, PLAR is simply a mechanism of articulating education institutions, and there's less reason to think that PLAR

29. See also the Canada Background Report, Appendix I, Section 8, indicating that most provinces lack any policy toward PLAR systems.

increases enrolments (though it may enhance completion by facilitating transfer from one institution to another).. But we were unable to learn much about the effects of PLAR on enrolment incentives, and some straightforward interviews with entering students might provide some new information about this issue.

Beyond PLAR, it might be useful to consider instances where informal learning and formal education are complements rather than substitutes — when certain types of informal learning are useful prerequisites to other types of adult education, or when adult education enhances subsequent informal learning. The former may happen when, for example, the efforts to help children with homework lead adults to enrol in literacy programs, a path that several literacy providers mentioned. Another example is that experience in the labor market — including unhappy experiences in dead-end jobs — may lead individuals to search out labor market information more systematically; internships and other job placements, with the informal learning they provide about the nature of work, may be more effective approaches than conventional counseling to providing certain kinds of information about job alternatives (see Section 4.3 below). And of course formal schooling may contribute to subsequent informal learning in many ways: those who have been through art courses may be more inquisitive (or acquisitive) about art, those who have taken political science courses may inform themselves more thoroughly about political developments, and so on. Indeed, one purpose of the general education tradition is to awaken through formal schooling those interests that individuals can pursue throughout their lifetimes informally.

The issue of informal learning, and its relation to formal schooling, is part of a lifelong learning perspective — the view that individuals do and should continue learning throughout their lifespans, both for instrumental purposes like employment as well as for a variety of political, intellectual, and avocational reasons. Creating a rich set of adult learning possibilities is presumably the goal of a broad adult education program that encompasses both formal schooling and training, and informal learning. The question for Canada, as for other countries, is whether and how to incorporate informal learning into the more conventional set of formal opportunities.

4. CREATING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE PROVISION OF AND PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING

This theme asks whether the adult education currently being provided to adults is integrated so that would-be participants can find the programs and services they need, and can transition among them as appropriate.

In Canada, as in some other developed countries, we found a large variety of public institutions providing adult education, as well as private schools and trainers — reflecting a relatively laissez-faire attitude of governments toward education and training providers, consistent with practices in other English-speaking countries. In some cases there are mechanisms to create coherent *systems* of learning opportunities despite this variety; we were particularly impressed with the efforts to create a systemic approach to postsecondary education in British Columbia (see Boxes 3 and 5). In addition, partnerships and cooperation among programs are important themes in recent Canadian policy, examined in Section 4.2; there are also numerous mechanisms of providing information to prospective students, reviewed in Section 4.3, intended to allow individual students to make sense of the opportunities they face. Thus the elements of creating integrated approaches to adult education can be seen in Canada, sponsored by both provincial and federal governments.

Box 3. The Community and University Colleges in British Columbia

British Columbia has both community colleges providing one- and two-year diplomas, and university colleges providing these diplomas as well as a limited number of university degrees. While we have some qualms about university colleges,[30] they have been a response to difficult spatial patterns where there has been no university in a large geographic region, and the upward expansion of the community college was the best feasible solution rather than creating a new university. Typically university college degrees are offered in a restricted range of occupational areas like education and nursing.

Adult students in British Columbia are well accommodated in community and university colleges because they have vast array of program options. They offer one-year certificate and two-year diploma programs in occupational areas; students can go on to university if they want, either through transfer agreements or through the university college option (something unavailable in most provinces); most colleges offer various forms of co-operative education combining working and learning, an attractive option for many adults; and all colleges offer ABE (though waiting lists are long). Colleges also tend to have special programs for specific groups, like social assistance recipients and Aboriginal students.

Some individual colleges provide an extraordinary array of programs, and thereby incorporate almost every form of adult education in their community. For example, Malaspina University College in Nanaimo offers a range of one- and two year certificate and diploma options including specialized programs in acquaculture, forestry, and heavy equipment operation. They offer baccalaureate degrees in education and nursing, which evolved from partnership degrees offered by the nearby University of Victoria. For the large number of students who come undecided about their occupational futures, they offer standard services in guidance and counseling that then lead into the college's programs; while prospective students could also get information at the local Assessment and Referral Center, they wouldn't be able to enter programs as easily. The college also offers some apprenticeship training; industry-based training integrated into existing courses; an employment readiness program for social assistance recipients, with additional student support; and adult basic education, offered both on the campus and in a downtown center, a "community place" that is not so institutional.

From the inception of community colleges 25 years ago, one overarching idea was to develop comprehensive institutions, and the colleges began working early on with universities in order to create a postsecondary system. The effects of this kind of systems thinking are apparent in many practices. Students can more readily drop in and out of colleges as their circumstances permit, since transferability agreements allow them to accumulate credits from several institutions; a process of "program laddering" helps students who leave to re-enter a college and continue up an educational "ladder". Transfer to universities is governed by a series of transfer agreements. The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer has the responsibility for setting up articulation and transfer agreements, and the Center for Curriculum Transfer and Technology manages curriculum projects for province-wide use and provides leadership on curriculum, so there is some consistency in courses taught across the province (see Box 5). The Center also coordinates PLAR activities province-wide, benefiting students in their efforts to re-enter postsecondary education. As a result the many connections in the system are developed province-wide, rather than being left to the initiatives of individual colleges.

However, the efforts to create integrated approaches are quite uneven. There is enormous variation among provinces, as we document in Section 4.1, and this variation is itself a source of some difficulty, particularly for individuals moving around the country and for firms operating in several provinces. The efforts to create comprehensive postsecondary opportunities in British Columbia have not

30. The emergence of university colleges is evidence of institutional "drift", also seen in the U.K. and the U.S., where institutions try to provide higher-level and higher-status credentials. We fear that this may lead them to neglect their original mission; for example, we heard some complaints that university colleges were placing greater emphasis on their university programs than on their one- and two-year occupational programs.

been replicated in all other provinces; the partnerships and information mechanisms are not always adequate to the magnitude of the task they face. The lack of coherent policies specifically for *adult* education, the subject of Section 4.1, makes the creation of integrated approaches much more difficult, as does the rift between federal and provincial governments (Section 4.2). There are, then, multiple issues in creating integrated approaches to adult education that Canada (and other countries like it) face, despite the presence of some exemplary practices.

4.1 The Existing Variation Among Provinces

We have already noted that Canada has not one but 13 adult education policies because of the variation among provinces and territories. The structure of decision-making for these programs varies: for example, in Saskatchewan most adult programs are concentrated in the Department of Postsecondary Education and Skills Training, while in New Brunswick there are separate departments for Education and for Training and Employment Development, reflecting a relatively common split between education and training. British Columbia apparently has 7 different ministries involved in education, though in practice that province makes extensive use of community colleges for adults, operated by the ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology. The participation rates vary among provinces, as we have mentioned, though some of this is planned; for example, Quebec has decided to offer programs of greater duration to fewer individuals, while others have concentrated on shorter (and potentially less effective) programs. In Quebec the role of employers (through Emploi Quebec) was ubiquitous, and the 1% tax on payrolls increased the visibility of employers, while their counterparts in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan were not particularly visible. Literacy programs in Quebec were generally based in community-based organizations, while in New Brunswick they are formally linked to coordinators hired by community colleges and in British Columbia they were largely provided by community colleges. Quebec has established "francisation" centers for new immigrants, to teach them French and move them into postsecondary education and the mainstream of the economy; we did not see parallel efforts in other provinces. As we have noted before, the structure of colleges themselves vary, with regional colleges only in Saskatchewan and university colleges only in British Columbia and a few other provinces. We could go on and on since the differences among provinces are so substantial — and we are sure that our brief visits to four provinces did not begin to uncover all the differences.[31]

In general, provincial officials and local providers of adult education are not especially knowledgeable about these differences. A few have come from other provinces and know practices there, and a few have had reason to work across several provinces, but overall we found very little understanding of what other provinces are doing.

In one sense, this is precisely what should happen in a federal system: different sub-federal governments should choose different amounts and types of adult education based on local preferences, employment conditions, and demographic patterns, and there's no reason to expect uniformity. However, we note that these variations create problems for firms who work in many different provinces, since they may have to develop different employment and training arrangements in different policies. It also creates difficulties for individuals moving from one region of Canada to another, since forms of schooling, training, and credentials from one province may not be recognized in another.

In addition, because of the lack of information among provinces, there is no possibility for the different provinces to serve as "laboratories of democracy" (Osbourne, 1988) — as places where different approaches can be tried and evaluated, from which promising or "best" practices can be spread from one

31. Again, see Appendix I of the Country Report, which describes the results of a survey of all provinces and territories.

province to another. Some of this now takes place through the Council of Ministers, Canada (CMEC) and through the Forum of Labor Market Ministers, but we suspect that this process requires a more structured and sustained approach than these councils can maintain. As we note in Section 4.2, this suggests a particular role for the national government to play.

4.2 Partnerships

There's a high level of rhetoric in Canada around partnerships. Consistently, federal officials stressed the role of the federal government in sustaining partnerships; the federal government has a strong Sectoral Partnership initiative. (Indeed, one way to understand the withdrawal of the federal government from education and training during the 1990s is that it substituted various partnerships, councils, and coordination mechanisms for direct spending.) Provincial efforts seem substantial; for example, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan have created industry councils (see Box 4); the regional colleges in Saskatchewan operate largely by brokering training arrangements rather than providing education and training directly (see Box 8); and British Columbia has institutionalized cooperation among education institutions (see Box 5). While we do not know what other provinces have accomplished, we infer that the level of activity around partnerships is relatively high throughout Canada.[32]

We were impressed with several of the partnership arrangements we saw. The 1% employer tax in Quebec has created councils of the social partners to discuss the training needs of individual firms (see Box 1), and union members in particular seem happy to play a greater role in such deliberations. Saskatchewan has created industry-education councils (see Box 4), and provides many examples where the brokering function of regional colleges creates programs that could not be developed without such cooperation (Box 8). The National Literacy Secretariat has developed productive partnerships with provinces to support research and information sharing. There are a number of education-community partnerships; for example, in New Brunswick ABE is organized through community colleges, which provides assistance in developing curriculum materials for transition into the college, while the ABE programs themselves are provided by community-based organizations. Throughout Canada there are many efforts to link educational institutions, particular through articulation and transfer agreements linking colleges and universities. British Columbia has taken this a step further in institutionalizing cooperation, as we describe in Box 5.

Box 4. Industry-Education Councils in Saskatchewan

Twenty-four councils were developed to engage in human resource planning, in sectors including health, export manufacturing, forestry, mining, and tourism. In addition to employers, they include the major education providers (SIAST and the regional colleges) and as well as important groups in the provinces like Aboriginal tribes. A primary focus has been to develop linkages with First Nations and Métis communities, and to include labor (both union and non-union) in long-run planning; where there are no unions in a sector, there is a requirement for employee participation.. Often these councils determine training needs; in the case of forestry, for example, the industry has turned over some of its training responsibilities to the planning council. The provincial government provided seed money for initial planning, hoping that they would continue on their own after government funding vanished. Perhaps 80% have continued to operate without provincial funding, with continuation usually dependent on industry commitments.

However, as a central element of any kind of policy, including adult education, partnerships have clear limitations. If adults need further education and training, then partnerships cannot create such training if the partners themselves have no resources. For example, the work that the National Literacy Secretariat

32. See also the Canada Background Report, Appendix I, Section 4, on the numerous coordination bodies in the provinces, and Appendix II, Section VI, on efforts to engage the private sector.

does to foster collaboration among interested groups was described as quite valuable, but the Secretariat no longer provides much funding for literacy programs; instead provinces with their varying resources must provide funding for ABE on their own. The provinces report substantial shortages as a result of the lack of federal funding; they need funding, not coordination. Many of the issues facing adult education in Canada, including the special problems of under-provision for specific populations we reviewed in Section 3.3, are related to the lack of basic resources for adult education. These problems cannot possibly be resolved merely through partnerships.

In addition, voluntary partnerships are likely to be incomplete. For example, in Quebec the industry councils cover only 27 industries, leaving a number without such councils. In Saskatchewan only three quarters of the original 20 boards continued after government funding disappeared. At the national level, the efforts in the early 1990s to establish Labor Force Development Boards — with both provincial and local boards that included business, labor, equity groups, and educational and training providers — essentially failed since provincial boards failed to materialize in most provinces and only a few local boards were established (Background Report, Appendix 2, section 4). To be sure, in a country without a long history of employer participation in education and training, one might expect such efforts to be incomplete, at least at first, and one might view these efforts as important steps toward a long-run objective. Nevertheless, we suspect that the sectors most in need of training are less likely to be represented in such councils. In New Brunswick the labor partners were rarely mentioned, perhaps because unions are relatively weak there; outside of Quebec, where Emploi Quebec is ubiquitous, industry partners were often missing from the discussions of providers. In terms of partnerships among educational providers, community colleges in New Brunswick reported that many local literacy programs were uninterested in cooperating; without resources or other incentives for forming partnerships, the two kinds of programs remained independent with no way to overcome the isolation of ABE programs that we reviewed in Section 3.3. Where partnerships are institutionalized, as in the British Columbia examples in Box 5, there is greater chance that those who are reluctant to cooperate with others can be drawn into partnerships; but few other provinces appear to have comparable mechanisms to establish cooperation among educational institutions. Thus a reliance on partnerships as a way of accomplishing policy goals is likely to operate unevenly.

Box 5. Educational Cooperation in British Columbia

From the inception of its community colleges, British Columbia seems to have tried to create a coherent *system* of postsecondary institutions, with complex agreements and cooperation among them. These kinds of province-wide partnerships have been institutionalized, by two organizations in particular. The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer has created a series of articulation committees, in virtually all program areas, that establishes the criteria for transferring courses and credits among institutions. It provides a great deal of information to students about admissions policies in all British Columbia postsecondary institutions, and about the conditions for transfer as well, making the system as a whole more transparent.

Second, the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer, and Technology, created in 1996 as a result of a province-wide plan for postsecondary education, carries out a number of activities designed to create a more coherent system. The Center has developed career pathways designed to articulate secondary programs with their post-secondary analogues, to smooth the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. It sponsors a variety of activities in curriculum development across institutions, both provincially-initiated and locally initiated, along with efforts to spread best practices. It supports activities related to learning outcomes and educational technology as well. Finally, it coordinates PLAR activities, supporting a network of PLAR coordinators in colleges and universities and facilitating a province-wide approach.

While partnerships can be powerful under the right circumstances, then, they suffer from some inherent limitations, and we suspect that they have substituted for more coherent policies in adult education. Particularly if Canada as a whole (or any of its provinces) begins a comprehensive review of

adult education policy, as we suggest in Section 4.1, the issue of partnerships merits more critical assessment, with clarification of where partnerships are effective by themselves, where additional resources are necessary to make partnerships effective, where incentives for participating are weak, and what steps can be taken to minimize the incompleteness of many types of partnerships.

4.3 Outreach and Information

In every country, a constant problem in adult education is that of providing adults with information about the programs and courses available to them. Unlike elementary-secondary education, which is compulsory and ubiquitous, the programs available for adults vary substantially from province to province and town to town. For adults with specific needs — training in a particularly occupational area, for example, or literacy education at a particular level — specific information may be harder to find than general information about the availability of local colleges and universities. Many providers of adult education are relatively small, and therefore less known. The adults most in need of certain forms of education — the training necessary to return to work after unemployment or raising children, or literacy education — may be isolated from sources of information and public institutions. In rural areas of Canada, distances among communities may make the problems of information greater. Finally, the information about the effectiveness of programs is often missing, as we point out in Section 5.1; for adults who are trying to decide among alternative institutions or paths, the information about which are the most effective choices is not always available. Of course, private sources of information are available, including various Web sites, but it isn't clear that they are uniformly accessible.

In many programs and provinces, various mechanisms of generating and providing information have been created. The Employment Insurance (EI) system has local employment counselors who can help those eligible to access training under Skills Development; social assistance programs have caseworkers who can provide the same kind of information. In order to encourage the use of ICT-based learning (the use of the Internet as well as e-learning), in individual as well as group sessions, the federal government through Industry Canada has funded 700 Community Access Program sites, designed to provide adults with access to the information available on the Web. While Industry Canada funded the infrastructure and equipment, local authorities are responsible for the operation of the centers and the engagement of educational staff. The center we visited in New Brunswick was particularly interesting because it provided training in how to use computers to search for information (see Box 6), rather than (as is often the case) providing access to computers and assuming that individuals are sophisticated in using them. Saskatchewan has created 20 Career and Employment Centers, which provide information about a variety of postsecondary options, local employment opportunities, and how to access sources of career-related information (see Box 7); in addition, the regional colleges offer information of a similar sort. The community colleges we visited also provide considerable information about their offerings, in conventional print forms (catalogues and course schedules, for example), in electronic forms, and in some outreach efforts. CanLearn Interactive is another valuable resource, organised by HRDC with support of a Provincial/Territorial Advisory Group (PTAG), and a non-governmental Organisation Advisory Group (NGOAG). It provides learning information and links to education services through the Internet and offers counselling with an interactive module specifically designed for adult learners (the Adult Learner Planner), although difficult to access to others than those with information skills, motivation and access.

Box 6. The McDonald Community Access Center, Moncton

The McDonald Community Access Center is one of New Brunswick's Connect New Brunswick branch centers, with both federal and provincial resources, intended to connect people to the Internet as a source of information. Within New Brunswick there are 230 centers, 150 of which are in schools with the remainder in community-based centers. This particular center is located within a housing facility for the disabled; it therefore serves disabled individuals living there, and has special software (e.g., voice-generating software for the blind), as well as serving other members of the town who find their way there.

The Center offers courses, usually with 4 - 5 students in how to use computers, how to access the Internet, how to use various Microsoft office applications — all aimed at learning about the computer as a source of information including job opportunities, as a way to access Internet-based courses, and as a way to develop certain job-related skills. This center also offers a high school equivalency program, preparing individuals to take the GED on-line. The Center therefore provides training about the use of computers, and specialized programs for the disabled, in addition to granting access to computers for those who don't have them.

A somewhat different approach to information is particularly evident in the community colleges and technical institutes of British Columbia. There, local officials acknowledge that many students enter undecided about what they want to do. While there are guidance centers available for such students, and Assessment and Referral Centers established by the provincial government, many such students simply take courses part-time to find out more about what they might want to do. Even an institution like the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), which is focused on occupational preparation in high-technology occupations, attracts a large number of undecided students; they come part-time at first, "to kick the tires" as one official described it, and they dabble in a variety of courses to determine where they might fit. Such part-time students are likely to be older than the full-time students, and many of them are adults changing their careers. BCIT has a specific conception of lifelong learning for such students: The institute first helps students chose among alternatives, then find a career, then maintain themselves in a career, and then advance — stages that may take place over a long period of time rather than in a conventional two-year period of full-time attendance. The idea of using part-time enrolment as a way of gathering information about education and employment alternatives is quite different from the conventional ways of providing information in free-standing employment centers. While it may be effective in some cases, it may also waste students time and educational resources.

Despite the variety of ways in which information has been made available, providers almost unanimously said students find them predominantly through word of mouth, particularly the recommendations of friends. This is, of course, a relatively inefficient, incomplete, and inequitable way of gaining information: The information available is likely to be incomplete (since a friend has usually attended a specific institution rather than learning about the variety of them), the recommendations may be colored positively or negatively by personal and idiosyncratic experience, and individuals who are not part of extensive social networks are unlikely to be able to get information at all.

Box 7. The Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Centers

The Canada-Saskatchewan Labor Market Development Agreement (1998) enabled the province to integrate program and service delivery related to training and employment services for Employment Insurance clients and Social Assistance recipients. In addition it provided the unique opportunity for the province to make career and labor market services available to all provincial residents. Twenty Centers throughout Saskatchewan provide various kinds of information related to finding or changing jobs and careers. Individuals who come for employment advice are first introduced to computer-based sources of information about career planning, resume preparation, and interviewing methods; the Centers have information about the courses and programs operated by the various universities, technical institutes, and regional colleges in the province. They give a series of 3 – 6 hour workshops on topics like methods of looking for work, interview techniques, electronic job searches, and exploring career options. There's a good deal of informal one-on-one advice, and individuals can also talk with employment counselors; there are special options for those income support. In these services the philosophy of the Centers are that "we provide advice and guidance", with the client taking the necessary initiative. In addition, Centers create partnerships with community-based organizations including those representing the disabled, immigrants, Aboriginal people, and the francophone community; and the Centers post jobs from employers through Saskatchewan Jobs — though there are relatively few of these job postings, and they are probably for low-quality jobs.

The Centers commingle provincial and federal funds, with perhaps 25% coming from the federal level. The federal funds are the result of the devolution of federal funds to provinces under Labor Market Development Agreements in the mid-1990s. In this case, however, the province wanted to located Career and Employment Centers in the regional colleges, which were already providing some counseling and information; but the federal government resisted because it didn't want their former employers to be regional college employees. The series of free-standing Centers was the result — an indication of how the federal government has continued to impose conditions as it devolves funding to the provinces.

Because there appear to be so many sources of information about adult programs, we do not think that efforts simply to expand the amount of information or the number of information centers are likely to be the right solution. Instead, we suspect that more effective outreach may be necessary — a more active effort to reach out to adults in the workplaces, churches, unions, and other public institutions where they now participate, and to provide them with more personal contact in sifting through alternatives and potential pathways and in creating life plans. This is a function that community-based organizations may be well-suited to carry out, for example, with such groups performing outreach, making available information and guidance, and providing some transitional programs (ABE, for example) and support (like tutoring); one can imagine a division of labor with private CBOs providing outreach and recruitment while public colleges provide the bulk of adult education. But whatever the solution, a tactic other than simply providing information is necessary to avoid the current situation where, providers report, their students come through word of mouth and many adults most in need of continuing education never come at all.

In addition, the provision of information under-estimates the difficulty of the task that many adults face, we think. In Great Britain, for example, where voucher-like mechanisms have been extensively tried, it has become clear that information may be necessary but not sufficient for individuals contemplating educational alternatives.[33] The process of using information to make decisions among alternatives and then to take steps to enrol in appropriate programs is itself a competence that must be developed, and is usually developed only slowly, over time, with a breadth of experience, some practice in making decisions, and reinforcement (through success rather than failure) of the decisions taken. More generally, individuals who have not developed clear preferences (about occupational alternatives, for

33. See, for example, Hodkinson, Sparkes, and Hodkinson (1996), especially Ch. 8 on technical versus pragmatic rationality; Willms and Echols (1992) on alert versus inert choosers; and Reay and Ball (1997) on the special difficulties working-class individuals may have in making rational decisions.

example), who have difficulty evaluating uncertain outcomes, who cannot connect current actions to future consequences and are therefore not planful, who have problems evaluating the validity of the information they are provided, and who cannot fully evaluate options beyond their experience will have difficulty in using information to make decisions that are considered rational. The solutions to this problem are not always clear; counseling in different forms, casework, internships to expand the range of experiences, and extended courses in career exploration available in some community colleges may be some alternatives. But as long as information is necessary but not sufficient, some activity beyond the simple provision of information must be found.

We note that, *if* Canada moves toward policies that emphasize individual initiative and choice — as might be possible as the result of the current federal deliberation over a skills and learning agenda — then the need to confront the availability and limits of information are all the more important. As is widely recognized, choice mechanisms including voucher-like approaches place a great deal of the responsibility for decision-making on the student-as-consumer. For well-informed, sophisticated, or "active" choosers this approach may be liberating, but for unsophisticated or "inert" consumers this approach is likely to create further inequities.

5 IMPROVING THE QUALITY, PEDAGOGY, AND VARIETY OF LEARNING PROVISION

This theme asks whether the content and pedagogy of various forms of adult education are appropriate to the needs of adults.

In general, we were unable to learn much about the ways curriculum and pedagogy in adult programs in Canada are shaped. We didn't have enough time in the programs we visited, and we were unable to observe classrooms and other learning environments — the only effective way to assess pedagogy. Issues of content and pedagogy are usually the responsibilities of instructors, not of the government officials and program administrators who were our principal informants. In this section, therefore, we comment only briefly on pedagogy and on arrangements for adult education. We then examine what is known about the effectiveness of adult education.

5.1 Innovations in Pedagogy and Educational Provision

Despite our overall lack of information, we did find some promising pedagogical approaches in adult education. Canada has a number of apprenticeship programs, in which learning takes place in workplaces as well as in classrooms, and these are usually interesting ways of combining practical and theoretical learning. A number of educational institutions have developed close working relationships with firms, so that the skills required in workplaces can be adequately embodied in the curriculum; for example, the British Columbia Institute of Technology has created a system of advisory committees and partnerships with employers to generate programs that are flexible in meeting the needs of employers, including a range of short-term and longer programs. The community-based ABE programs (and some provided by colleges that are modeled on them) have developed distinctive approaches to adults who have been alienated from the educational system. The efforts to create a distinctive Aboriginal pedagogy, particularly suited to the culture and future occupations of Aboriginal students, is a fascinating development, one that merits additional examination (see Section 3.3 and Box 2). Finally, throughout Canada providers of adult basic education claim to follow the precepts of "andragogy" articulated by Knowles (1984) and his disciples, an approach that draws on the experiences of adults and is based on constructivist conceptions of learning.

However, we suspect that innovations in content and pedagogy are relatively uneven. Enrolments in apprenticeship programs are always relatively small, and the incorporation of the insights about work-

based learning in other programs is difficult to achieve. Contacts with employers seem to vary a great deal; while the employer community was consistently mentioned in some places (like Quebec, with Emploi Quebec), it seemed missing in other provinces, and the industry-education partnerships that have been created are uneven in their coverage (see Section 4.2). The mentions of andragogy were often routine and formulaic; the curriculum materials we saw in many adult basic education programs were pedestrian and drill-oriented. The development of pedagogical innovations is one of the most difficult challenges in any educational system, particularly in remedial or basic education and in occupational education, where pedagogical issues have been badly neglected in the English-speaking countries (Achtenhagen and Grubb, 2001). While it would require a much more thorough examination of adult programs in Canada to be sure, we suspect that any coherent approach to adult education (the subject of Section 4.1) would need to pay more attention to improvement in content and pedagogy.

In addition to these innovative forms of pedagogy, it's clear that some institutions have developed ways of providing education that are consistent with the special conditions of adults. Many colleges and universities provide programs in the evenings and weekends, or on other non-traditional schedules. Many provide child care on-site, minimizing the problems that parents encounter. It is, of course, difficult to eliminate all the barriers that adults experience, and 41.3% of adults who wanted to enrol in adult education but did not gave inconvenient program times and locations as the reason (Background Report, Table 3.13).

5.2 The Effectiveness of Adult Education

Throughout Canada, there seems to be relatively little known about the effectiveness of adult education programs. The Country Report includes a chapter (Chapter IV) on assessing the effectiveness of adult training, but most of the chapter covers general methodological issues; the only real results cited in the chapter describe a small handful of evaluations of short-term job training programs, many of which indicate that such programs are ineffective and one of which — an evaluation of the Canadian Jobs Strategy — suggests that any positive benefits declined over time.[34] A review of adult education and training by Human Resources Development Canada (Baran et al., 2000) contains a brief section on effectiveness. It concludes that the training provided by firms for their own employees is generally associated with substantial benefits for both participants and firms, and benefits are much higher than those for public-sponsored training programs for the disadvantaged. (The low returns for public programs may reflect the lower skill levels of trainees in government programs and the weaker links to employers.) . However, the review draws largely on U.S. and European results, and there are few Canadian studies. From a federal perspective, there are more concise efforts on providing labour market information (LMI) for the design of different types of training programmes. They focus on the types of skills and levels of education or literacy found in the population. In fact, according to the Background Report, the Skills and Learning Agenda has made Labour Market Information an important component. Efforts up to now have focused on better labour market information such as data on wages, job openings, or a number of surveys such as the National Graduates Survey (NGS) the International Adult Literacy Survey or the Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS).

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34. Section IV.4 of the Background Report. The early results before 1985 were methodologically unsophisticated. The results between 1986 and 1994 include evaluations of the National Institutional Training Program, one of the Job Development Program, one of social assistance recipients in the Canadian Jobs Strategy, and brief references to the Skills Shortages Program and the Skill Investment program, without citations. Since 1995, most of the evaluations seem not to have had any outcome measures, though the Report cites evaluations of the Nova Scotia Compass and the Employability Improvement program. Most of this evaluation has therefore been of short-term job training, with a wider range of education, literacy, and other adult programs unexamined; and it's difficult to know exactly what has been learned from the evaluations that do exist.

At the local level, we repeatedly asked for evidence about dimensions of effectiveness, but were often unable to obtain any relevant information. The principal exception was community colleges, which often have systems of following up their graduates (but not non-graduates). For example, British Columbia has a system of following program completers, with relatively extensive measures available;[35] Quebec has a system of following graduates, with some statistics are reported in their annual *Education Indicators*; New Brunswick has been able to achieve a particularly high response rate (about 80%) in its follow-up system;[36] and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology also has a follow-up system.[37] Useful as these results are for detecting patterns among students, programs, and colleges, they are still incomplete partly because of low response rates, but also because comparisons are unclear: Without information about what happens to those who did not enrol in these institutions, or what happened to non-completers, it's difficult to assess the *improvement* in employment or satisfaction associated with postsecondary education.

Despite the lack of outcome data in many adult programs, we have no doubt that many are effective because their methods are sound, their students motivated, and their instructors committed. However, the evidence that would convince a sceptic, facilitate the improvement of programs, or enable program developers to choose among alternative approaches is generally missing. We were not necessarily looking for sophisticated measures of effectiveness, or outcome measures (like employment effects, literacy attained, or skills mastered); in many cases more informal evidence like duration in programs, completion of courses, receipts of credentials or licenses, or even informal assessments of progress from adult participants would have been welcome. With a few exceptions, then, we were unable to learn much about the effectiveness of adult education programs in Canada, either public or private.

There are many different ways to use information about effectiveness, and they require different kinds of information. One use is to judge the value of certain types of education and training, to learn whether they should be publicly or privately supported; for example, the consistent finding in many countries that short-term training for the disadvantaged is usually ineffective in increasing earnings or reducing welfare dependence suggests that either governments should not support such training, or they should radically change the format of such training. Typically, these kinds of evaluations use national-level data and relatively sophisticated evaluation methods, including random-assignment methods. A second use of evaluation is to determine which of several approaches to a particular type of education and training is

35. This follow-up system gathers information about graduates' employment and further education, their satisfaction with their educational program, the relationship between their educational program and their current employment, and other dimensions of their postsecondary experience. These results are available from the Center for Education Information at http://outcomes.ceiss.org. There are, of course, some problems with these data, principally because response rates hover around 50%, but they are clearly an important step in learning about outcomes. Because they are available for different programs it is possible to compare among programs and to identify relative strong and weak areas. Unfortunately, the published results do not seem to be available by age or other indicators of adult status, though we suspect such analyses could easily be done. The current step is to make data across institutions consistent with one another, through a Data Definitions and Standards Project

36. See Survey of 1999 New Brunswick Community College Graduates, Labor Market Analysis Branch, Department of Training and Employment Development, Province of New Brunswick, 2000. Like the other reports mentioned in this section, there are very few results reported specifically for adults. About 40% of these community colleges graduates are 25 and over.

37. See the 1999 SIAST Graduate Employment Statistics Report. The overall response rate was about 70%. Students reported on their opinions of their training, its relationship to their current employment, and their employment; these figures are available for specific areas of study. As for the British Columbia and New Brunswick results, very little information is published for adults of different age groups. However, the overall enrollments clarify that about 50% of all students, but about 78% percent of extension students, are 25 and older.

most effective; for example, this approach might test the effectiveness of community-based approaches to literacy vs. college-based methods, or the progress of Aboriginal students in Aboriginal colleges versus non-Aboriginal colleges. This use of evaluation is comparatively uncommon, partly since it requires evidence on different approaches. A third use of evaluation is to gather information that could help local programs detect problems and then work to improve them. Such an approach requires local rather than provincial or national data, and data that is comparatively recent. This approach to evaluation benefits from a variety of information including evidence on student progress, outcome measures like skills learned or credentials earned, and student and faculty perceptions of barriers to progress. In this case the evaluation methods may be more informal, without comparison groups or the statistical methods that are common in national-level evaluations. There are many other approaches to evaluation, to be sure, but these three illustrate the variety of use for better evaluation, and the different kinds of data necessary.[38]

In essence, we were unable to find evaluations of any of these types. Our recommendation here is obvious: at both the federal and the provincial levels, governments could start collecting the kinds of data necessary for different types of evaluation. In terms of information, as the Skills Agenda develops, efforts to develop new surveys from a Federal perspective could be more concerted with provinces so as to avoid duplication, and supplement the information produced. Such a step would be particularly appropriate as part of more general deliberations about a coherent adult education policy (in Section 6.1 below).

6. IMPROVING POLICY EFFECTIVENESS AND COHERENCE

This theme asks whether the creation of policies for adult education is coherent and systematic, as distinct from whether the programs offered to adults are coherent and integrated, the subject of the second theme in Section 4. The two are linked, of course; it's certainly possible for specific institutions, or programs in a limited region to be integrated without a coherent approach to policy, but it's hard to imagine that a large and complex country like Canada could develop integrated programs without coherent and effective policies.

As in other elements of adult education, we found certain policy-making practices that are both coherent and provide mechanisms for moving toward more effective programs. The postsecondary policies in British Columbia are exemplary in this regard: they have created a set of relatively consistent institutions throughout the province, mechanisms of cooperation and coordination among institutions, and information about effectiveness that is promising (if still incomplete) — the subjects of Boxs 3 and 5. Furthermore, the vision of creating a system has allowed postsecondary programs to make relatively consistent progress even through changes in government. The system of technical institutes and regional colleges in Saskatchewan is another example of a coherent system that responds to one of the greatest challenges in Canada — the need to provide a variety of services to sparsely-populated rural areas (see Box 8). There are various planning efforts now underway, in both some provinces and at the federal level, that offer the hope of making future policy even more effective.

However, a number of developments have hampered the development of coherent adult education policy in Canada. One that we highlight in this section is the lack of any policies focusing specifically on *adult* education, the subject of Section 6.1. Another that most Canadians would acknowledge is the rift between the provinces and the federal government, the subject of Section 6.2. In

38. One perspective in the evaluation community is that nothing can be learned without the most sophisticated, random-assignment evaluation methods. We reject this notion, partly because it is usually impossible, for reasons of cost as well as the impossibility of carrying out random assignment, to use such sophisticated methods. For the argument of using a variety of approaches for different purposes, understanding the limitations of each, see Grubb and Ryan (1999).

addition, the variety of practices among provinces, the subject of Section 4.1, may respond to local preferences and needs, but they also diminish the transparency of adult education and create variations that are difficult for both employers who operate nationally and for mobile individuals. The limited effectiveness of many partnerships (Section 4.2) and information mechanisms (Section 4.3) is anther problem. Finally, with a few notable exceptions we found relatively little evidence on the effectiveness of adult programs at the federal, the provincial, or the local levels (Section 5.1); without such information it's difficult to know how to improve policies and programs. Particularly in a large country like Canada, with a complex federal system of government, the challenges to creating coherent policies are formidable.

Box 8. The Saskatchewan Regional Colleges and Technical Institutes

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), provides one-year certificates and two-year diplomas at four campuses in the four largest urban centers in the province. In addition, nine regional colleges (one shared with Alberta) are responsible for brokering university and technical training, "bringing the campus to the student", in addition to providing adult basic education and locally-developed skill programs in outlying areas of the province. The regional colleges take courses developed in institutes and universities and use distance methods as well as face-to-face instruction to deliver them to local students. The regional colleges also provide job-specific training for economic development, particularly using instructors from industry to provide industry-based training. Apparently regional colleges also provide a good deal of job-related information and counseling, though they share these responsibilities with Career and Employment Centers (see Box 7). There are very few core faculty; instead faculty are hired as necessary, on short-term contracts, facilitating change as needs change; one official noted that up to 90% of programs in one year may not be there the next, so long-term connections of faculty are rare (except for ABE). The real advantage of the regional colleges is that they provide access to the early stages of postsecondary education at very low cost, in communities that could not otherwise afford a technical institute. (This is a particularly advantage for Aboriginal students who want to stay in their communities.) Students can then move to one of the four campuses of SIAST should they need to. Similarly, students can take the first year of university at a regional college, and then transfer to a university. A possible disadvantage is that the regional colleges and technical institutes have concentrated heavily on occupational programs, and the broader range of adult needs and interests has been under-served.

For example, the University of Regina has developed 15 certificate (one-year) programs delivered through SIAST and the regional colleges, using electronic methods (television, phone, e-mail) plus a local instructor, sometimes from Regina but more often hired from the local community, to create hybrid courses with both distance and face-to-face learning. The local colleges and institutes recruit students and provide space, but rely entirely on the University for the curriculum.

A good example of brokering came about when the mining industry in northern Saskatchewan expanded in the early 90s. The regional college helped the industry develop a long-term training strategy, along with local Aboriginal authorities, the provincial government, economic development agencies, and HRDC. Employers agree to hire local people (rather than brining in employees from outside); the regional college brokered for occupational education, developed a few specialized courses, customized other courses, and brought in a few providers from out of the province.

6.1 The Nature of Policy for Adult Education

As we have noted, relying on both the AETS and the IALS, the amount of adult education in Canada is substantial, even if it does not seem sufficient to some Canadians and even if it is not as high as in the Scandinavian countries. But the presence of adult education does not mean that there is a coherent policy specifically geared towards adult education — for adults who have or not completed their initial education, but are searching for additional education or training for some occupational or non-occupational reason. Canadian policies do reach large numbers of adults, but they are generally *postsecondary* education policies, developed at the provincial level, that enable some adults to attend postsecondary programs even though they are not focused on the special conditions of adults.

Of the provinces we visited, only in New Brunswick did we find a clear mission statement of the Department of Education relating to adult education. Seven key objectives have been advanced: (1) learners should be able to move freely between the labor force and the learning force throughout their lives; (2) learners should accumulate credit for acquired competencies throughout their lives, and acquired credit should count towards employment and further education; (3) education and training should be readily available as, when and where required; (4) access to appropriate learning activities should be equitable; (5) learners should be able to be confident that education and training provided by publicly-supported organizations are of high quality, and based on a clear statement of outcomes and competencies which they will have the opportunity to attain; (6) learning achievement and relevance should be maximized; and (7) value to the learner, in relation to both the time and money involved, should be maximized.[39] These statements of goals provide a framework for judging future developments in programs. In other provinces, however, such a clear articulation of the objectives of adult education are missing.

One tip-off to the lack of any consistent adult-related policy is the definition of who is considered adult varies considerably. Most provinces do not have an official definition of an adult learner. Four do (Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories), but these definitions are applied differently in different jurisdictions, ministries, and programs.[40] Officials in British Columbia also claimed to have a conception of "adult", but it has been quite flexible: it was first 25, then 21, then 18, and it now includes anyone one year or more out of high school. When we asked various federal and provincial officials, and local providers of education and training, to give us their conception of an adult learner, again the answers varied significantly, with many coming up with a definition on the spot because there was clearly no specified policy for adults; in other cases programs counted anyone over 21 as adult, whether they are returning students or students in their initial education. (The exceptions were some community-based literacy programs that enrol only older adults, where instructors know their students well and are quite knowledgeable about the conditions of their lives, as well as Royal Roads University in British Columbia that enrols only mid-career students.) The lack of any consistent definition is not, in our view, merely a technical detail. Instead, it signifies the lack of attention to the special needs and conditions of adults. Furthermore for programs that cobble together funding from several courses — as many colleges and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do — the lack of consistent definition often leads to inconsistent eligibility criteria that make managing different funds difficult.

In addition, many providers of education and training cannot say — cannot even guesstimate — how many adults they serve. Consistently, when we asked colleges, universities, and training programs what fraction of their students were adults — either under the OECD definition, or under some other provincial or local definition — they were unable to answer. Their data sometimes (but not always) include enrolments by age of students, which is certainly useful but which does not say how many of these are returning rather than initial students. There are, to be sure, inherent ambiguities in considering which students are in education for initial preparation rather than continuing education. One reason for the ambiguity is the custom among young people of leaving education after high school and returning to higher education after having spent several years in the labor market; it is unclear whether these are "initial" or "adult" students.

The inability even to estimate the numbers of adult students is, like the lack of a consistent definition, an indication that most programs are focused on providing forms of postsecondary education to which a variety of individuals come including adults, but they are not especially concerned with adults. For most educational institutions, including colleges and universities, traditional-age and full-time students completing their initial education are by far the majority of their enrolments, so it's obvious why this group

39. See New Brunswick Department of Education, A Vision for Adult Learners, undated.

40. See the Country Report, Section II.1 and Appendix I on the variation among provinces in Canada.

is their principal concern. But this means that older students, part-time students, and adults with specific needs are not necessarily prominent in their policies.

Even where there are programs specifically targeted to adults, it is often difficult to know how important they are relative to adult enrolments in "regular" programs not specifically targeted to adults. Throughout Canada, it has become common for certain institutions — particularly colleges — to operate several programs funded by independent revenue streams, with different groups of eligible students with different purposes. For example, the Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CÉGEP) in Quebec is typical: it enrols about 6,000 students in regular diploma programs, with a considerable range of ages and backgrounds, but also about 500 students funded by Emploi Quebec for short-term training and another 500 students in customized training for specific employers. Because adults appear in all three of these programs, it is awkward to disentangle adult education from "regular" education even though two of the three programs — short-term training and customized training — are focused on the special employment needs of adults. Similarly, many CBOs in Saskatchewan provide services to provincial students plus federal students funded through EI, with the former group including many adults while the latter group by definition includes adults trying to change occupation. It's therefore difficult to know, from these kinds of institutional data, how many adults are enroled in Canadian education.

In many places, adult students may not be able to follow non-standard patterns through postsecondary schooling, for example dropping in and out of educational institutions as their time and life circumstances permit. Although many colleges and universities have articulation agreements, to facilitate transfer from one to the other, it can be difficult to have credits in one college accepted in another, for example, or for short-term job training to count toward a college certificate. Part-time students are widely reported to experience problems making progress in college and university programs, particularly in high-demand programs with technical components like nursing, medical technology, and engineering-related programs. Similarly, patterns of progression in adult basic education (ABE) programs have not been developed in many areas (see Section 3.3). The dominant model of attendance is still the conventional pattern of full-time, continuous enrolment typical of traditional-age students, but much less appropriate for adult students.

At the federal level, again, there appears to be no policy focusing on adults specifically, though there are parts of policies that certainly include adults. For example, those who are unemployed and receiving Employment Insurance (EI) benefits can receive Skills, Loans, and Grants (SLG) funding for short-term job training; qualifying students (including adults) can get federal loans for postsecondary education; federal loans may be used for private owned schools as well as public colleges and universities, opening up greater choices to students; and the federal government provides some funding for institutional developments and innovations in literacy through the National Literacy Secretariat of HRDC. But these are policies that emerge from unemployment concerns, postsecondary policies, and literacy efforts respectively, located in different ministries with different priorities; some of this funding (particularly student loans) is difficult for adults to access. The federal government does not have readily-available figures on the amounts spent for the education of adults, or for programs in which sizeable numbers of adults participate, and our efforts to obtain such data have so far been unsuccessful. Of course, it's possible that the current federal discussions around a skills and training agenda (discussed briefly in Section 6.2) may generate a more coherent policy toward adult education, though we tend to doubt it;[41] in any event, one does not now exist.

41. From what little information we have, the skills and learning agenda is likely to be overly focused on employment-related skills to the neglect of broader forms of adult education, and federal-provincial conflicts are likely to limit any federal policy. See Section IV.2.

The lack of coherent adult education policies, at either the federal or provincial levels, does not mean that policies and programs for adults are lacking. We have been particularly impressed with the potential for community colleges to provide a variety of programs appropriate to returning adults, for both occupational and non-occupational purposes, and these policies seem particularly well-developed in British Columbia and Saskatchewan; we profile the Saskatchewan technical institutes and regional colleges in Box 8, and the multi-purpose community colleges and university colleges of British Columbia in Box 3. But we note again that these are the result of developing postsecondary policies, not adult education policies.

In addition, a large number of adults are served by private providers of occupational education, though their numbers are unclear. Overall, the AETS indicates that only 9.7% of adult enrolment in *programs* leading to credentials were in private training providers, while 20% of adult *courses* were provided by such commercial schools (Canada Background Report, Table 3.10). However, in some cases the private sector may rival or even outstrip the public sector. In British Columbia, with a relatively larger private sector than other provinces, one estimate is that in short-term programs of one year or less private providers serve 150,000 students, compared to 50,000 students in public colleges and institutes. The existence of a large private sector in adult education raises the question of why students would enrol in higher-cost private programs rather than public programs, and suggests either that private programs are of higher quality (as they like to claim), or that there are shortages of public programs, or that there are public subsidies or loans that make even mediocre private programs attractive (and result in high default rates), or that there are some occupational areas which the public sector has decided to leave to private providers.[42] But there is little information that we could find about the relative roles of public and private providers, little discussion of the conditions under which public subsidies to private providers are justified, and little movement toward a coherent view of public and private responsibilities. Once again, an implicit adult education policy has developed, but without much systematic thought.

There are at least three consequences to the lack of policies specifically focused on adults. One, and perhaps the most important, is that the special needs of adults are generally neglected. To be sure, most providers and officials can describe what these needs are, since these are the same nearly everywhere: compared to traditional-age full-time students, adults are often working and need either release time from their employment, financial support to cover living expenses, or both. Adult students with busy schedules usually need more flexible schedules, or courses available in the evenings, on weekends, or other non-standard times. Adult students are likely to attend part-time rather than full-time; adult students who have been out of school for a period may have difficulty transitioning back into schooling, and may need more tutoring, remedial education, moral support, or counseling. Many adults have families, and child care may be a problem; in some cases resistance from a spouse is a serious issue. In some parts of Canada, attending a college or university requires relocation, and this is particularly difficult for adults, and often insurmountable (except through distance methods). But the lack of policies aimed specifically at adults means that the level of such support is variable and often inadequate; the combination and coordination of these various support services, which is necessary for adults who have multiple needs, is often missing. Many colleges and universities have barriers to full-time attendance (including the unavailability of federal loans) and offer few courses at non-standard times. The institutional barriers to participating in adult education, mentioned by 71.4% of students who wanted to take a specific course of training in the AETS, as well as the barriers related to both employment and family responsibilities mentioned by 64.3% (Country Report, Table 3.13), are conditions that are much more prevalent among adults than among non-traditional students, and remain unaddressed in postsecondary policies.

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42. British Columbia has a Private Postsecondary Education Commission that seems more active in regulating private providers than is true in most provinces. But even here a discussion about a coherent public/private system of education is only barely underway, though a recent report (Charting a Change) envisions transfers agreements between public and private institutions as a way of developing some relationships among them.

A second consequence of the lack of an adult education policy is that there is no sense of a coherent *system* of adult education.[43] There, to be sure, many institutions that provide education and training to adults, including colleges and universities, private training providers, NGOs and community groups, employers and equipment suppliers, unions, and others, but they exist in different government jurisdictions and often have little relation to one another. The paths among them are often unclear so that, for example, someone in a community-based literacy program or short-term job training program may not be able to move readily into a college. Eligibility for different kinds of adult education is uneven: someone on Employment Insurance may be eligible for a short-term SLG program while an individual who has never worked long enough to qualify will not be, even though the need for training may be greater. The access of students to different kinds of institutions is also uneven: adults may be able to afford a public college but not a private training provider, or may have access to a community-based literacy program but not one connected to a college and the educational mainstream.

Finally, we note that the lack of any carefully-articulated policy has made adult education vulnerable to instability in government. There have been many changes over the last ten years in the government in Ottawa, and they have often been accompanied by changes in federal policy — for example, from the direct purchase of services to the recent devolution to provinces, from a funding role to more of a coordinating role, and from institutional support to an emphasis on individual initiative.[44] Similarly in New Brunswick, frequent changes in government have led to periodic reorganization of adult programs: sometimes they have been included with postsecondary education, and sometimes with employment and training. (One official noted that "a lot of this is restructuring for the sake of making a quick impact", rather than being about substantive improvement.) Under these conditions, it becomes difficult to articulate goals for adult education and to move steadily toward them; instead plans underway are undone by the next government. A partial exception is the postsecondary education system in British Columbia, which seems to have developed steadily through several substantial changes in government by adhering to a systemic vision of colleges and universities (see Box 3). Thus the development of some clear guidelines for adult education — for a *system* of adult education — might make it possible for these programs to continue to develop through the shifts and changes of governments.

What might it mean for all of Canada, or an individual province, to develop a coherent system of adult education? While this subject is well beyond the scope of this Country Note, a few elements are obvious. A coherent policy for adult education might mean, for example, deciding on priorities among the many different kinds of adult education, with greater public funding for those of the greatest importance and little or no funding for lower priorities. It would surely include special provisions, including funding and other support services, for population groups with special needs — like Aboriginal people, the disabled, the long-term unemployed or working poor. It might mean deciding on the kinds of institutions to provide different forms of adult education, taking steps to ensure the quality of these institutions, and then assuring linkages among these institutions so that individuals completing one course or program can move to another in a sequence, as their goals and life circumstances permit them. A balanced policy might consider the relative roles of institution-oriented policies — the policies that the provinces now pursue, for example, in developing and improving their public education institutions — and individual-focused initiatives such as the federal government seems now to be contemplating; some balance between the two might be appropriate. A coherent system would start to develop measures of effectiveness — both measures of institutional characteristics and outcome measures — to provide ways of both monitoring and improving quality. In areas of adult education where there are private as well as public providers — like literary programs, occupational education, and upgrade training for incumbent workers — the quality of private as well as public providers would be examined, and the relative roles of public and private

43. See also the Canada Background Report, SectionV.1, on the lack of cohesion and coordination in Canada.

44. More generally, see Giddings (2001), which documents the extreme number of changes in federal job training programs since the 1960s.

providers would be decided on the basis of a coherent policy rather than being the result of policies decided for other purposes.[45]

Some of these conversations are starting to take place. In addition to its coherent policy for postsecondary education, British Columbia is starting to discuss the relationships between the public and private sector. Saskatchewan is in the midst of reviewing its basic education, and may release a plan for the further development of basic education later this year. New Brunswick has developed a framework of seven principles to guide adult education, as we noted above. And perhaps the current discussions within HRDC about a skills and training agenda will address these policy issues. But we note that such discussions are only barely underway, at both the federal and provincial levels. Until they develop principles that are widely accepted, a coherent policy toward adult education will remain elusive.

6.2 Federal-Provincial Relationships: Moving Toward a Constructive Federalism

There is no subject more contentious that the relationship between the federal government and the provinces. We were reminded, more times than we needed to hear, that education (including adult education) is a provincial responsibility, not a federal responsibility, and that there is no federal Ministry of Education. Nonetheless, in the realm of adult education, there are a number of clear federal roles. The federal government began some activities in adult education and training during the 1960s, when it instituted short-term job training programs. Currently, the federal government provides loans for postsecondary education; the Employment Insurance (EI) system is federal, with its support for short-term training; the National Literacy Secretariat provides some incentives and coordination for local literacy programs, as well as pilot projects; the federal government is responsible for Aboriginal people living on reserves, and therefore for education there; and there are various other federal programs for high-need individuals including recipients of social assistance and the disabled. One common observation is that the provinces provide *education* while the federal government provides *training*; but not only is the division between education and training unclear (Grubb, 1996), but such a division does not accurately describe what the federal government now does. Another observation is that a great deal of the federal role focuses on the unemployed, since the federal government provides the Employment Insurance (EI) system including grants for retraining; but this is, of course, a limited role since it keeps the federal government out of programs for those who have not been employed.

The federal government has been criticised for often engaging in program planning before (or without) consulting the provinces. Efforts to address this issue have taken place, although the results are difficult to gage. An example of this pattern could be the skills and learning agenda that was in the process of development during the time of our visit. Although we have been informed that the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) met to discuss the agenda at different meetings and participated in its development together in consultation with HRDC, most provincial officials were not informed about this initiative. They complained that the formal process of consultation with the provinces was to begin only

45. The relation between the public and the private sector in adult education is a neglected subject in virtually all countries, not just Canada. There are many elements to this issue including the problems of appropriate vs. inappropriate public subsidy for private training; the relative efficiency and effectiveness of public and private providers, the extent of public regulation of private training; the appropriateness of creating a market for upgrade training and retraining, especially given the likelihood of market failures with unsophisticated consumers and many weak providers. We saw relatively few private providers during our stay in Canada; they stressed their higher quality as a result of being closer to the employment community and their flexibility in changing in response to employer needs. However, we suspect that we visited some exemplary providers, and that the low-quality private training schools that contribute to high default rates are quite different. Our point is not to point to any particular resolution of these issues, but simply to point out that some resolution is necessary as part of a coherent adult education policy.

after HRDC had formulated its own policy[46]. So there are complaints on both sides: federal officials dislike the provincial resistance to any federal role, while the provinces dislike the formulation of policy without their participation.

In the area of adult education, the federal government seems to have reduced its support during the 1990s, partly because of funding crises in health care and international and domestic pressures to reduce the deficit. It has been difficult to find the data to confirm the extent of this withdrawal[47]; It is possible that the apparent decline in adult participation during the 1990s — from 30.3% of the adult population participating in 1993 to 27.7% in 1997 — reflects the withdrawal of federal support, though we are unsure whether these data are accurate enough for such differences to be significant. The withdrawal of funding has taken several forms: the Canada Health and Social Transfer plan, which provided federal revenues to provinces for health and social programs including education, was cut; the Consolidated Revenue Funds to provinces were also cut; and federal support of literacy programs was cut and replaced with a program of pilot projects plus a coordinating role through the National Literacy Secretariat. Up until 1995, the federal government directly purchased places in training programs for those eligible for Employment Insurance; since then funding was consolidated and cut, and the federal government has devolved these resources to provinces through Labor Market Development Agreements with either provincial management or co-management with both provincial and federal roles. From one perspective these changes reflect merely a decentralization of federal resources and decision-making to the provinces, but in most cases decentralization has been accompanied by reductions in funding. The reductions after 1995 put great stress on the delivery of social programs, and caused increases in tuition and then in student debt; there is some evidence that access to postsecondary education was reduced for low-income students. Since then funds have been added back to the CHST, though it appears that the damage to postsecondary education will be difficult to overcome.

While the nature of the skills and learning agenda proposed at the time of the OECD team visit was unclear to us, it seemed to be a policy approach that would provide resources directly to individuals through voucher-like mechanisms like tax credits, individual training accounts, and tax breaks for employers[48], thereby bypassing the provinces.[49] (One federal official suggested that the development of a policy focused on individuals, rather than institutions, was the only possible course since the provinces are opposed to federal meddling with provincially-supported institutions.) Aside from the serious inefficiencies and inequities of tax expenditures,[50] we have reservations about the workability of market-

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46 In point of fact these fears proved unfounded as the skills and learning paper "Knowledge Matters" was released on Feb 12 2002 as a discussion paper and as the starting point in a series on consultations with provinces and stakeholders around the development of a policy agenda

47. But see Giddings (2001), a supplement to the Background Report that is the basis for statements in this paragraph. One of the serious problems in documenting the federal participation levels is that there have been so many changes in programs over the years that it is virtually impossible to track federal funding levels over time.

48 The Skills and Learning agenda, released in February 2002 contained no specific programme or policy proposals as anticipated at the time of the OECD team visit. The document does not contain any discussion of voucher like mechanisms. It does however discuss the role of part time loans and grants to individuals and the creation of financial incentives for individuals and firms to increase their training investments.

49. The January 2001 Speech from the Throne promised individual learning accounts for adults and improving access to loans for part-time students, and it may be that the HRDC skills and learning agenda will develop these two mechanisms. See also the Country Report, Section II.2, indicating that HRDC has shifted from institutional to individual support, and that HRDC expects the client "to play a more direct and active role".

50. That is, tax expenditures often support individuals or corporations who would have bought the good in question — in this case, various forms of adult education — anyway, and therefore may not increase

like and voucher-like mechanisms, particularly in an arena like adult education where many of the "consumers" are relatively uninformed about their options and relatively unsophisticated in getting and making use of information, and where some of the providers (including some CBOs, private training programs, and employers) may not merit public subsidy. But the most serious drawback to such a policy — where provinces determine which educational institutions are available and the levels of institutional subsidy, while the federal government provides additional support driven by individual decisions — is that there would be few ways to coordinate the two kinds of subsidies, and little incentive or support for provinces (or the federal government) to move toward the coherent system of adult education we suggested in Section 6.1. Adult education policy would then be driven by two independent and inconsistent agendas, caused in part by the inability of the federal and provincial governments to work with one another.

In every country with a federalist system (including, in this review of adult education, Switzerland and the United States), the challenge is to forge a constructive federalism in which the national and the sub-national governments can work together, on the basis of their own strengths, allowing legitimate differences among sub-national governments while making progress in forging coherent policies — for example, in developing the kind of coherent adult education policies that we outlined briefly in Section 6.1. It is not, of course, for us to tell Canada how to manage its intergovernmental relations, but we point out that, in the absence of a pan-Canada policy in which the provinces and federal government agree, a number of issues cannot be resolved:

- The variation from province to province in levels of spending for and participation in postsecondary and adult education will continue to be substantial in the absence of a federal role to equalize these opportunities.

- Provincial policies will continue to vary widely, hampering the abilities of national employers to work in different provinces and the abilities of individuals to develop portable credentials as they move around Canada. Overall, the transparency of adult education in Canada is compromised by the substantial variation among provinces.

- Certain populations concentrated in specific provinces are unlikely to be well served. This is surely the case now for Aboriginal populations, for example. In addition, workers displaced from employment because of occupational shifts tend to be concentrated in certain provinces — e.g., fishermen in the Maritimes, those in the timber industry in British Columbia and Alberta — and again are likely to be underserved. In addition, counter-cyclical policies like retraining during recessions cannot be carried out because provincial resources decline then, and redistributive policies (e.g., the training of the working poor) is likely to be less generous at the provincial level.

- The withdrawal of the federal government from funding ABE has caused these programs to decline as provinces have evidently been unable or unwilling to make up the difference in revenues. This has created a real disjunction between the rhetoric about the importance of remedying low levels of literacy, and the lack of enough places in literacy programs (see also Section 3.3).

- Research and evaluation on adult programs is likely to suffer because of the diseconomies of small size when evaluation is left to provinces.

- Good practice cannot be readily evaluated or spread among provinces unless a pan-Canadian group can carry out this role. While the Council of Ministers of Education and the Council of

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overall spending on the good. Tax credits and deductions often benefit only high-income taxpayers, creating inequities as well as inefficiencies.

Labor Market Ministers do some of this, such a role could also be played by an agency of the federal government jointly with the provinces.

There is much lost, therefore, when sub-federal governments and the federal government cannot agree on a coordinated policy, and we suggest the development of such a policy would be helpful to adult education in Canada.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final session, we raise some issues that we perceive will be increasingly important in the near future for adult programs in Canada. Finally, we draw together the various recommendations we have made throughout this Note.

7.2 Issues for the Near Future

We highlight three issues that will surely affect developments in adult education. We hesitate to speak of these as future issues, since their effects are already visible. But they received relatively little attention in our talks with provincial and federal officials and local providers of adult education, and so we think they merit more sustained attention lest their further development cause more serious problems in the future.

a. The Coming Recession

At the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, talk of an impending recession started to become more prominent, both in Canada and in the U.S., to which Canada is tightly connected. Normally, in a recession, government revenues decrease; we would therefore anticipate that provincial support for adult education will decline when the (inevitable) recession comes. In Canada, because of the provincial responsibility for education and the hostile relations between the federal and provincial governments, the federal government cannot increase its revenues for education in a recession. In addition, employer support for their own training tends to be reduced in a recession. Therefore, just at the moment when adults may be most able to enter adult education (because their employment is less pressing) and when they might want to upgrade their skills in anticipation of better times later, they will be less able to do so.

A rational policy for adult education might therefore try to prevent the collapse of programs (both public and private) during a recession. At the moment we see no feasible way of doing this because of the apparent reductions in federal funding of adult education. However, this could be an element in any discussion about the federal/provincial role.

b. Electronic Learning

In Canada, as in other OECD countries, there has been an upsurge of interest in electronic learning, via e-mail or the Web. Of course, distance learning with various technologies (including the mail) has been around for a long time, and Canadian educational institutions seem to have made good use of distance methods to reach far-flung populations in rural areas. But e-learning is a new development, with private providers rushing to offer more and more programs. The question is how such developments might affect other adult education programs, especially public programs.

In many ways, governments in Canada have been quite successful in promoting e-learning in various forms. The Community Access Centers funded partly through Industry Canada provide one example (see Box 6). In New Brunswick, there has been a government campaign to wire the province for electronic technologies; this has not only helped educational institutions gain access to e-learning, but has also promoted a number of businesses dependent on electronic technologies (like call and service centers operating through telephone and the Web). A number of Canadian e-learning companies have become leaders in the world market.

It's unclear whether the new providers of e-learning are directly competing with public education providers. Some of them are developing niches in the adult education "market" for individuals not now served — for example, mid-career working adults. Others are selling their services to employers, rather than appealing to individuals; it's unclear whether they are substituting for other conventional modes of providing firm-sponsored training, or whether they are adding to the amount of firm-sponsored training through promises of reduced costs and greater flexibility. What is clear is that private providers of e-learning are driven entirely by the profit motive, rather than by any larger set of educational or social goals. They are unconcerned about underprepared learners, or those who need special assistance; they often sell their services to employers and seem uninterested in serving individuals with idiosyncratic needs. Therefore there's a potential problem if private e-learning providers "cream" the best students and take advantage of certain economies of scale, and leave the public sector with the least desirable programs, the hardest-to-educate students, and the smallest-scale and therefore most costly programs.

It's unclear what the policy alternatives are because it's not clear precisely what is taking place. In the absence of coherent provincial or federal policies, individual institutions seem to be taking very different courses: some are trying to compete with private providers by providing e-learning on their own, some are joining networks of other institutions to offer e-learning collectively, and still others are hanging back, waiting to see what transpires. Given the costs of developing many forms of e-learning, it's unclear which of these initiatives can be profitable; the hopes for large electronic enrolments, to offset development costs, may not be justified. And the pedagogy of e-learning is rarely discussed, even though many providers of adult education (particularly community-based literacy efforts) insist that their students need face-to-face interaction and small-scale learning communities rather than impersonal e-learning.

These are issue that merit systematic inquiry, but that individual institutions should not have to examine on their own. This is an issue that is appropriate for federal and provincial governments together to examine in greater detail, to determine whether e-learning is the threat to public programs that some perceive it to be, whether it will co-exist with existing programs without much competition, or whether some hybrid system is likely to emerge.

c. The continued urbanization of the Canadian population

In many provinces, certainly including Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and British Columbia, the steady decline in the population employed in extractive sectors and agriculture has led to people leaving rural areas and moving to towns and cities. This kind of migration poses obvious problems for adult education. It means that increasing proportions of adults are in places where they can find ready access to adult programs, but it also leaves a dwindling population in rural areas where it becomes more and more difficult and costly to serve them. Of course, this is hardly a new issue in Canada's history, and educational programs have developed many ways to serve rural populations — including distance learning, the Saskatchewan regional college system, the community access centers to provide information about labor market opportunities and access to the Web. These methods will be increasingly under pressure, we suspect, as rural-to-urban migration continues.

This provides an excellent example where sharing experiences across provinces is perhaps the only way to evaluate and then spread effective approaches (see Section 4.1 above). While there may be some lessons from other countries (e.g., from the OECD 10-country study), we suspect that the conditions in Canada are sufficiently unique that learning within Canada is the most effective approach. This will require, as we have stressed earlier, a more active role of the federal government in carrying out trans-provincial research.

7.2 Recommendations

Throughout this Country Note, we have made a series of observations and recommendations, and we restate them in this section. While they are aimed at the specific conditions in Canada, we are also relatively sure that the issues in Canada are relevant in many other countries, and so these recommendations are likely to be useful for the 10-country review of adult education as well.

1. Because it is unclear whether, in Canada's own terms, the current level of participation in adult education is too high or too low, we perceive a need for Canada to create a forum in which adult education, its appropriate level, and its composition are the subjects of discussion, in which all Canadians can participate. As part of any discussion about the overall levels of adult education, the *forms* of adult education should be discussed as well: Whether there is sufficient access to basic literacy, citizenship, community-based, and personal interest courses and to employment-oriented forms that now dominate adult education; whether there may be underinvestment by employers and what kind of options might be considered to improve the situation. .

2. The high levels of concern in Canada with literacy, and the large fractions of Canadians at Levels 1 and 2, indicate that there should be greater attention to the overall level of funding for Adult Basic Education, the intensity of ABE programs, the approaches to providing ABE, its articulation with other education programs, and its pedagogy.

3. While postsecondary policies have created opportunities for adult education, particularly in some provinces with relatively systemic efforts, there is little evidence of policies specifically designed for *adult* education. While the elements of a coherent adult education policy are multiple and complex, we recommend that both federal and provincial governments begin to consider the elements of policies focused on adult learning.

4. A coherent policy might include, for example, decisions about priorities among different kinds of adult education; special provisions for groups with particular needs, like Aboriginal people, the disabled, those without basic literacy, the long-term unemployed, or working poor including older workers; decisions about the kinds of institutions to provide different forms of adult education, including a rational division of labor between public and private providers; steps to ensure the quality of these institutions, including developing measures of effectiveness to provide ways of both monitoring and improving quality; assuring linkages among programs so that individuals completing one course or program can move to another. A balanced policy might also consider a balance between institution-oriented policies and individual-focused initiatives such as the federal government seems now to be contemplating.

5. As in all countries with a federal structure, Canada has experienced a number of tensions between the provinces and its federal government, especially in the area of education. Because there are many problems that cannot be resolved without cooperative relationships, we recommend that provinces and the federal government should cease defending their

prerogatives so fiercely, and instead work toward a more constructive federalism that would benefit all participants in adult education.

6. We have suggested that a "bicultural" approach may be a way to address the issue of Aboriginal education, by enhancing access to both Aboriginal and mainstream cultures. If this is the right path, then it will entail creating more Aboriginal-run schools and colleges, including efforts to develop an "Aboriginal" pedagogy (particularly in regions of the country where Aboriginal students are relatively numerous), as well as strengthening the current efforts to incorporate Aboriginal students in conventional education institutions.

7. The working poor are often denied access to adult education because of the special circumstances of their lives or because they fail to meet conditions of eligibility. We suggest that all provincial and federal programs consider whether they operate to undermine access to this group — perhaps as part of an overall review of policies for adult education.

8. Existing PLAR mechanisms in Canada could benefit from more systematic approaches, since many of them are limited or institution-specific. In addition, the area of informal learning merits greater attention, to understand its influences on other outcomes and to understand better the relationships of substitutability or complementary with formal schooling.

9. The substantial variation among provinces could be a source of greater information about promising practices, if the federal government or other national groups took a structured and sustained approach to evaluating and promoting the innovations in different provinces. In addition, the inequities among provinces might be the target of federal efforts at equalization, perhaps as part of an overall effort to develop a coherent adult policy.

10. While partnerships can be powerful under the right circumstances, they suffer from some inherent limitations, and we suspect that they have substituted for more coherent policies in adult education. Particularly if Canada as a whole (or any of its provinces) begins a comprehensive review of adult education policy, the issue of partnerships merits more critical assessment, with clarification of where partnerships are effective by themselves, where additional resources are necessary to make them effective, where incentives for participating are weak, and what steps can be taken to minimize the incompleteness of many types of partnerships.

11. Despite the variety of ways in which information has been made available, providers almost unanimously reported that most students find them through word of mouth. Because there appear to be so many sources of information about adult programs, we do not think that efforts simply to expand the amount of information or the number of information centers are likely to be the right solution. Instead, we suspect that more effective outreach may be necessary, as well as consideration of the conditions under which information is necessary but not sufficient for rational decision-making. These steps are particularly important if Canada moves toward policies that emphasize individual initiative and choice. We are aware that labour market information is an important component of the Skills agenda and hope that there are concerted efforts to improve the availability of information.

12. Because of the lack of information about the effectiveness of adult education, at both the federal and the provincial levels, governments could start collecting the kinds of data necessary for different types of evaluation. Such a step would be particularly appropriate as part of more general deliberations about a coherent adult education policy.

Without considering such issues, we fear that the recent Speech from the Throne, calling for "expanding Canadians' access to knowledge and skills" and extending "our abilities to think, innovate and create in a world transformed by information and technology", will be difficult to implement.

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