



Education and Training Policy in Canada: Key Issues

*Based on a Presentation to
Canadian Alliance of Education and Training Organizations*

By Ron Saunders, Director, Work Network, CPRN

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Outline

- About CPRN
- Strengths of the Canadian lifelong learning 'system'
- Gaps/weaknesses
- Whither the Canadian Learning Institute?
- Conclusion



About CPRN

- An independent policy research think tank
- Mission: “to create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to Canadians”
- 4 Networks: family, health, work, public involvement
- In-house research as well as collaboration with academics
- Accessible research outputs: seeks to engage people in policy debates



Strengths of the Canadian Lifelong Learning 'System'

- K-12 schools generating high achievement on international tests:
 - Canada second (of 32 countries) in scores for 15-year-olds on *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) reading test in 2000.
 - In 1999, Canada's performance on the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) test of grade 8 students was also strong. Only 5 of 38 countries had significantly higher scores in math, only 6 in science.



Strengths (cont'd)

- High rate of participation in post-secondary education.
 - Canada a leader among OECD countries in rate of completion of PSE.
- Extensive array of post-secondary providers (universities, colleges, private career schools, community organizations, apprenticeship programs)
- Better bridging among PSE institutions beginning to emerge?



Gaps/weaknesses

- Poor availability of early childhood education and parenting supports
 - Yet studies by Mustard and McCain, Carneiro and Heckman, and others point to importance of early years.
- Limited access to vocational pathways in secondary school
- High school dropout rates have declined but are still sizeable (9% for girls, 15% for boys in 1999).



Gaps/weaknesses (cont'd)

- Signs of a capacity squeeze in universities as participation promoted but funding cut:
 - Rising tuition costs, rising concerns about affordability and equity of access
 - Crowded classrooms, declining infrastructure



Gaps/weaknesses (cont'd)

- Relatively high level of illiteracy, yet poor access to adult basic education
 - International Adult Literacy Survey data show that in 1994-95, 42% of Canadians aged 16-65 were at lowest 2 levels (of 5) of the prose literacy scale.
 - Federal support for ABE now largely limited to special projects; employer support very fragmented.



Gaps/weaknesses (cont'd)

- Inadequate access to learning opportunities for the working poor.
 - Unlikely to receive employer-sponsored training
 - Ineligible for EI-supported training while employed
 - Hard for adults to get student loans for part-time programs; part-time programs not widely available



Gaps/weaknesses (cont'd)

- Despite Labour Market Development Agreements, lack of coordination across jurisdictions in some areas (youth programming, occupational standards, labour market information)
 - This was noted as a concern in the Feb 2 Speech from the Throne.
- Lack of a national forum for comprehensive discussion of learning issues
- Lack of a learning culture



Whither the Canadian Learning Institute?

- Looks like it will go ahead in some form.
- Purpose (as stated by HRDC, Aug. 2003): to promote and support evidence-based decision-making in all areas of lifelong learning by:
 - Informing Canadians regularly on Canada's progress on learning outcomes
 - Promoting knowledge and information exchange among learning partners (Signals are that this will be the focus.)



Canadian Learning Institute (cont'd)

- May be called “Canadian Council on Learning.”
- Expected to be an independent, arm’s length, not-for-profit corporation.
- Board to represent governments, business, labour, learning and education organizations.
- Partnering with existing “nodes of expertise”
- An interim board has been appointed.



Conclusion

- Lots of programs, but serious problems remain in two areas:
 - Integration across providers, and
 - Access for disadvantaged groups.
- Gaps need to be addressed or too many people will be left behind at a time when Canada needs to foster a knowledge-based society.
- Throne Speech indicates an intent by federal government to address some of these gaps.





For additional information:

<http://www.cprn.org>

e-mail: work@cprn.org

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