Time for a National Co-ordinated Plan for Learning

June 21, 2001 – Everybody's talking about it, and everyone may be doing something about it, but not necessarily together.

It has become commonplace to speak of the importance of learning and skills development to success in today's global economy. But the number of interested actors, the diversity of needs of groups as different as pre-school children and ageing veterans of the labour force, not to mention jurisdictional and constitutional divisions of roles and responsibilities, have hampered development of a national learning agenda.

Last March, CPRN brought together 45 participants from a wide range of organizations and backgrounds in a National Roundtable on Learning. The Roundtable was one of three on learning and skills issues sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada. The purpose of the CPRN roundtable was to tackle three major themes:

- assessing learning and skill needs
- removing barriers and accessing opportunities, and
- identifying learning outcomes

There was a surprising degree of consensus. While thorny issues like the appropriate role of the private sector in the educational system, the best ways to improve access to post-secondary education, the right balance between individual and social responsibility for learning, and who should take the leadership role on a national agenda were unresolved, participants agreed on a "Vision for Learning" that addressed their concern that Canada is not moving fast enough to remove barriers to, and to increase opportunities for, learning.

The "Vision" has four priorities:

1) Support for universal early childhood education
2) High quality, universal, publicly delivered primary and secondary education
3) Excellence, equitable access and program diversity within Canada's higher education system with a balance between the humanities and science and technology
4) Enabling all adults to have on-going opportunities to maintain and enhance literacy and learning skills

Graham Lowe, Director of CPRN's Work Network prepared both the Background Paper for the Roundtable, "Learning in the 21st Century: Key Issues and Questions", and the report on its deliberations, "Report on the National Learning Roundtable". You can learn much more about this important event and its conclusions reading them.

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