The core of the “Working Connections” pan-Canadian Symposium is to strengthen the contributions of career development to lifelong learning and workforce development goals. This paper explores the contributions of career development to a coherent and successful lifelong learning system.
Produced by

Canadian Career Development Foundation
119 Ross Avenue, Suite 202
Ottawa, Ontario   K1Y 0N6

For
Working Connection
The Pan-Canadian Symposium On Career Development, Lifelong-Learning and Workforce Development

November 17-18, 2003

Available on the website:
www.crccanada.org/symposium
Connecting Career Development and Lifelong Learning:
A Background Paper on The Contribution of Career Development to a Productive Learning and Working Force

Lynne Bezanson
Canadian Career Development Foundation

Lifelong Learning Defined

There is much public discussion of lifelong learning. It is visible in many government strategic planning documents as one of the keys to economic growth, both in Canada and abroad. Despite this emphasis however, a clear understanding of lifelong learning remains obscure. What would an active and effective lifelong learning system in Canada actually look like? How would it function for all citizens?

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning published by the Commission of the European Communities (EU) defines lifelong learning as:

“All purposeful learning activity undertaken in an ongoing way with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence.”

The Memorandum further describes the aims of lifelong learning as “promoting active citizenship and employability” and suggests that a comprehensive strategy is needed for implementing lifelong learning at both the individual and institutional levels. It emphasises the critical need to operationalize lifelong learning into coherent systems for learners and notes that this has not yet been accomplished in any EU country.

Lifelong learning is much more that upskilling and schooling; it is about “purpose” in people’s learning and its goals are both social and economic – citizenship and employability. And it is not easily achieved!

What are the elements of a comprehensive strategy for implementing lifelong learning? How close are we in Canada to having a coherent system for learners? How do career development services fit into this system?

Consider the following as benchmarks of a coherent lifelong learning system:

- Different kinds of education and training are interconnected (primary, secondary, post-secondary education; classroom, workplace and web-based learning); learners are able to move between and among these; learning providers work in collaborative and cooperative ways so that ease of movement for learners is enhanced;

- Life and work goals are both served through education and training; education for life and education for work are compatible and connected rather than competitive and disconnected; for the learner the connections between learning for life and learning for work are clear

- Individuals with weak attachments to the labour force and in lower-paying jobs in the economy have a means to plan for and reconnect to continuous learning; community based learning for adults is available; outreach to promote and encourage learning is evident;
Processes to recognize the credentials of immigrants are in place; this includes means of challenging courses and routes to meet specific requirements.

Learning is clearly situated in a career development process for all citizens; students who complete high school and post-secondary education have basic employability and career management skills, knowledge of career options and a career direction; adults who require it can access career guidance services which assist them to make successful transitions, take considered upskilling and work decisions, and move toward their career goals strategically.

Career Development Defined

Career development is also not generally well understood in terms of the contributions it can make to a lifelong learning and skills development strategy. Consider this definition of Career Development:

"Career Development is the lifelong process of managing learning, work and transition in order to move towards personally determined and evolving preferred futures”.

It is the "in order to" which is of particular relevance in a discussion on lifelong learning in that it begins to address “purpose” (in the EU definition), that is “why we choose to engage in learning”. Bill Law, a U.K. career guidance researcher and author describes learning as- "an investment of energy that helps us to know what to do in order to get what we need or want" (Law, 2001). It is likely that very few people undertake learning projects for the sheer pleasure of learning. Most look to their learning to provide useable and useful ways of relating to their world and moving toward their own “preferred future”. When learning is not connected to some aspect of building the future we need or want we tend to lose interest in this learning and look elsewhere for something more connected to “there is something in this for me!”

Connecting Lifelong Learning and Career Development:

How does career development contribute practically and concretely to participation in lifelong learning?

The overarching purpose of Career Development Services is to assist people to define a career direction which is meaningful to them, and to provide them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage their learning, work and transitions in self-directed ways over their lifespans.

In general these services fit “broadly” into:

- Information-Based Services which provide current information related to learning and work. Information is a necessary basis for research, exploration and career decision-making.

- Identity-Based Services emphasise the importance of self-awareness and understanding (What do I care about? In what directions do I want to develop? How do I want to contribute?) as a basis for making learning and work decisions and discovering purposeful and meaningful ways to contribute over the lifespan.

- Skills-Based Services which include information, but focus on learning to research, apply and evaluate information in personally relevant ways (i.e. what does this mean
to me and my future?) and developing basic career management skills needed to successfully navigate learning, working and transitions over the lifespan.

- Change-Based Services include a problem solving focus on resolving issues/barriers, either personal or systemic, which are interfering with an individual or group’s capacity to effectively and optimally participate in learning and work over the lifespan. These services are extremely important in order to help individuals and groups who have been excluded from opportunities to access learning and work in order to build a better life.  

Consider the contributions of career development to lifelong learning and skill development to include at least the following:

- **Access** to quality information on learning, training and employment opportunity is fundamental to good decision-making with respect to learning and work. Quality information is a cornerstone of career development services;

- **Motivation** to learn is not a “given”. People engage in learning when they have a sense of why they are learning and foresee a benefit to themselves and their families. Career development outcomes include a personal career direction and worker identity, both of which provide a purpose for learning, increase motivation and result in increased productivity;

- **Basic career management skills** are acquired as a result of quality career development programs and services. These include the ability to use information resources wisely, make best use of information technology, acquire and apply social, work search and work maintenance skills, make work and learning transitions and navigate one’s own career path. Career management skills are the literacy skills of career development;

- **Access to Opportunities** for learning and quality work are often available to mainly the more privileged in any society. For those who have been marginalized by socio-economic, geographic or any other factors which create unequal opportunity and social exclusion, the optimism and hope needed to work toward building worthwhile futures through learning and work participation are often lacking. Career development outcomes include expanding opportunity prospects and working to alter defeating conditions which preclude full participation in the learning and working force.

Some career development specialists will also argue that quality career development outcomes also include outcomes indirectly related to good citizenship and community and social contributions. While these may be difficult outcomes to quantify and "prove" empirically, these claims do make logical sense. Individuals who are personally engaged in and motivated by their learning and work tend to be productive, optimistic and energetic. These qualities most frequently find expression at the family and community level in ways which make positive social contributions. The flipside is equally logical. Individuals who are experiencing frustration and failure in their career development are likely to engage in destructive behaviours such as violence and vandalism. Disengaged individuals often pose significant threats and result in high costs to communities and society as a whole.

---

1 Note that these descriptors are highly compatible with the Employability Dimensions Framework in Norm Amundson’s Document 1. Note also that not all people need these services – some are, by nature or good fortune or a combination, self-directed in their learning and career decisions; many others need one or more of the above services at strategic points throughout their working and learning lives.
Towards a Lifelong Learning System supported by Career Development Programs and Services – Coherent Strategies and Practical Measures

Lifelong learning and career development are very closely connected. Career information, advice and support are pivotal to ensuring that the right educational, training, work alternatives, and lifestyle choices ("purposeful learning activities" in the EU definition) are made and that the social and economic costs of failure are minimised.

In most countries however, the contributions which career development can make to lifelong learning and skills development have not been maximised, nor even well understood. The career development profession, its research and practice, have in fact "come of age" in the past twenty years. During this time, career development has evolved from a relatively straightforward matching of people's abilities with an abundant labour market to a much more dynamic and holistic approach to helping people manage productive and purposeful working and learning lives in a very complex and often limited labour market.

Connecting career development and employability with lifelong learning in more direct and transparent ways is a strategic direction to consider in building a coherent lifelong learning system for both the learner and worker. It has been stressed by several analysts that career development education, programs and services offer the potential for a very significant productivity gain for a relatively small investment. It is timely that a closer examination of this potential be included as part of evolving a lifelong learning system for Canadians.

To what extent are the conditions supporting a coherent lifelong learning system already implemented in Canada? Some examples which merit further consideration are:

1. With respect to interconnections which make access to different kinds of education and training both accessible and easy to navigate, it would appear that Canadians who are in transition between learning and work are most at risk of falling between the cracks of learning, work and career development services. Practical measures are needed which focus on assisting school-to-work bound youth; underemployed adults; suddenly unemployed workers; out-of-school youth and young adults to access the career and learning information, tools and support services needed to find a career direction and reconnect quickly to learning or work. The costs of not doing so are enormous. A flexible and responsive learning system, which invites ready entrance to learning and upskilling opportunities and is supported with career information and support, is also essential. Each province/territory needs to assess the degree to which their learning system is experienced by learners as flexible and responsive and the extent to which career development services are an integral component of the system.

2. Having life and work goals served through education and training suggests a strong role for employers in education and training and further suggests a requirement for education services to be more strongly connected to the world of employment. The relatively small percentage of Canadian youth who participate in formal work experience and in cooperative education programs as part of their education and training bears examination. Incentives to support employers, especially small employers, in providing access to learning opportunities for their employees also require examination. Access to learning opportunities, formal and informal, must be accessible across the spectrum for workers at all skill and wage levels of the economy. The extent to which learning opportunities are accessible across the skill and wage spectrum warrants scrutiny.
3. Measures to assist those with weak attachments to the labour market to become active learners requires more than information services. For those in marginal work, promoting the benefits of learning is very challenging. Many of those who are marginalized have already had less than positive experiences with the formal learning system. For many adult learners, it recalls failure. In addition, many socially excluded individuals suffer from reduced aspirations and a very limited scope of possibilities. The working poor can frequently imagine nothing better. Career development services strongly linked to adult learning opportunities can provide practical measures to begin to address the social exclusion issues, which are becoming one of the highest priorities in many post-industrial countries. This was clearly identified by Maxwell and Saunders in Document 3 on Key Challenges facing Canada.

4. Processes to recognize the credentials of immigrants who are being called the “skill full” workforce are becoming high priorities as the Canadian workforce faces critical skill shortages. The availability of PLAR processes and procedures which are recognized by institutions of learning are critical components in a lifelong learning system. The inclusion of PLAR and other forms of credential recognition within a career development delivery system is still in very early stages. Each province/territory needs to assess the degree to which their learning system includes PLAR capability and access as well as the extent to which this is integrated into career services that support establishing new career and learning directions when necessary.

5. Situating lifelong learning in a career development process is addressing not only making a variety of learning opportunities available but addressing the core issue of purpose and motivation to learn. Contemporary conditions require timely access to career development supports at transition points for many workers and learners. Practical measures which make best use of technology, include other forms of advice and support and are affordable and effective need to be addressed. The issue of "universal access" is important, especially perhaps for secondary and post-secondary youth and young adults. It is very counter productive and very expensive to allow youth to exit the school system with no comprehensive career planning and preparation. The cost-benefit of some level of "universal access" for adults also merits study.

**Conclusion**

This exploratory paper is intended to provide a context for beginning to consider the issues to be included in a dialogue on the contributions of career development to a coherent and accessible lifelong learning system. The issues identified above are by no means exhaustive and invite identification of additional issues and perspectives.

The EU stated aim of lifelong learning is "to promote active citizenship and to promote employability". This paper invites reflection on the contribution of career development in supporting the achievement of these aims. A lifelong learning strategy is much deeper and broader than increased employability whereby citizens are actively engaged in finding and keeping or creating paid work. This is the "working force" component. Citizenship includes the requirement to actively participate in society in ways which contribute to strong self-reliant and healthy communities. These contributions occur through a range of paid and unpaid work and can be considered to be the active "learning force".
A pan-Canadian vision for an effective Lifelong Learning and Career Development Strategy needs to be articulated and debated. Does Canada embrace the EU definition and aims? Are there Canadian differences in philosophy, approach and practice? What are the areas where the Canadian learning and career development systems are already strong? What are the most important priority areas which need attention and collaboration between policy makers, learning providers, employers and the career development community?

This paper is intended to be a catalyst for further discussion, debate and definition of the issues.

**References**


