

Ottawa Carleton Training Board
Education and Training Reference Group

Why Have an Education and Training Reference Group?

by

Philémon Paquette
E/T Representative on the Ottawa Carleton Training Board

Note to the reader: I have written this short note to provide some food for thought on what role we in the education and training sectors of the community can play in the Ottawa Carleton Training Board, and why we should work together in supporting the work of the Ottawa Carleton Training Board.

One of the reasons I stepped forward as a candidate to represent the Education and Training Reference Group on the Ottawa Carleton Training Board was that I believed, and do believe, that there is a greater potential for the education and training sector working together than there is with each of our sub-sectors working on their own. What is the Education and Training Reference Group? It is the representatives of the five sub-sectors of training and education active in the community, in the economy of Ottawa Carleton. That is, it is the collection of:

1. Universities,
2. Community Colleges,
3. School Boards,
4. Community Based Trainers, and
5. Private Trainers.

The Education and Training Reference Group (ETRG) was created to nominate two people to the Ottawa Carleton Training Board, but if that is the only purpose of the ETRG, then Human Resources Development Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training are both wasting their money on pushing to have us as members of the OCTB, and we are wasting our time going through the effort of electing representatives. Why? Because representatives without purpose, represent nothing.

However, bringing the five sub-sectors of the Education and Training sector together, to find ways and means to both render the education and training process more efficient for the person seeking training, and for the person or organization footing the bill, while at the same time improving the financial position of each of the five sub-sectors, now there is a reason to come together.

The OCTB is essentially supposed to bring all the various stakeholders of a community together to identify the short term, medium term, and longer term training and education needs of that community and develop a plan of action for addressing those needs in their various time-frames. That is one of the purposes of the OCTB, but another, perhaps more important purpose, is that in

the various stakeholders coming together to identify these needs and to develop a plan of action for addressing them, the stakeholders have the opportunity to identify how they can work together.

There are at least three ways in which the Education and Training Reference Group can be involved in the OCTB and its activities.

1. One way is to have its representatives find out what the OCTB identifies as needs, and then the ETRG can show how these needs can be met given current resources and offerings of each of the five sub-sectors.
2. One way is to take a closer look at the education and training needs of the community, and develop a coordinated plan of action, where each of the five sub-sectors will have its offerings incorporated, and present this plan of action to the OCTB.
3. One way is to go beyond these inputs to the OCTB process, and look at the education and training system and see how it can be integrated and streamlined to minimize the cost to the student (or the student's sponsor), and maximize the throughput of the system.

Personally I favour the third option. It is the most ambitious, but it is also the one with the greatest potential impact on education and training.

Why this third option: why integrate and streamline?

We have moved into an era of change in the economy not seen since prior to World War II. We are moving into an era where the small company's flexibility can outmanoeuvre larger companies with much more resources. We are also moving into an era where new large companies are built and expanded through the absorption of smaller companies. None of this may be new to you as a reader of current events, and current business. But what must be remembered is that all of this spells the end of the concept of having a career for life, rather, as some of the pundits of lifelong learning have said, we are entering into the era of a life long building of a career.

We are also entering into an era where there is a relatively smaller group of young people entering the labour market, and labour shortages are already showing up in a number of areas. The way companies and industries are addressing these labour shortages is to rob from each other, and the slowest, or the cheapest firm, is the firm which will not succeed.

However, rather than simply recruiting people from the firm across the street, or across the country, today's recruiting is global. The firms in the United States entice Canadians to go there to work. Canadian firms entice skilled workers from India to come here.

Add these three trends up and what you get is the fact that people will be recycling, that is changing careers, much more than in the past. As they seek to change their careers, they are going to need retraining, more education. As people seek further training and education at

different points in their working lives, they are less and less inclined for either financial reasons (they must keep working to earn a living), or for social reasons (they really don't want to spend a lot of time with student much younger than they are who may not be as serious as they are about getting the learning done) to want to spend full days on a university or college campus.

As we know from the andragogists led by Malcolm Knowles and others, adults want a focus on learning, they want to get results in the shortest time possible. They will take a training from a private trainer who can provide them with the knowledge or skills they need to get and be effective on a job, and will avoid a university or college who insist on spending a fixed number of hours in their system until they prove they are worthy. They will do what they did prior to World War II.

Let's take a look at what other organizations are doing to make learning easier, to make getting credentials easier.

The State of New Hampshire in the United States, a state with a population of about a million people integrated their technical colleges, their state teachers colleges, and their public university into one institution. A student can take a course at any of the institutions and have it recognized by all others. This does not mean that all courses are transferable, but it does mean that for many programs, the student can start at one institution, and finish at another, or can take courses at the institution most convenient regardless of where the degree is to come from.

Granted, that is a small jurisdiction, about the size of Ottawa Carleton.

The state of California in the United States, a state with a population of some 31 million – slightly larger than Canada integrated all of its public education institutions so that once a student has been accepted by a university, that university provides counselling on what courses the student can take at the community colleges that will be transferable. Also, a student is permitted to take a significant percentage (I believe 30%) of their courses through television, handing in papers as required, and showing up to write the exam. One point, with most university programs, the student can take up to the first two years of studies through the community colleges at a cost to them of a maximum of \$50.00 per semester. Also in California, university courses are offered at 7:00 am as well as 9:00 pm to permit those who work nights to take courses in the morning. Flexibility is the word.

The state of California has another initiative which permits a student over sixteen years of age to enrol in a mature student program. This permits the student to meet with her or his teachers early in the semester, work out what material has to be covered in a course, what papers have to be written, and what exams have to be taken, and then the student is on his or her own to do the work in their own time. They can consult with the teacher as needed. This is a program which works for many students who would otherwise drop out.

These are initiatives which introduce greater flexibility into the system, but there are more which are needed. We need flexible ways of assessing the knowledge and skills of individuals so that we (by we I mean either the employer or the educator/trainer) can identify what knowledge or

skills are missing for a person to qualify for a job. What is missing in the individual's competencies to get the job s/he is looking for.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition was the subject of a national conference sponsored by HRDC in 1997, and has been the pipe dream of a growing number of people. In fact it is in use in some of our colleges here in Ontario, and in some of our school boards, but it is not widespread – and the principle barrier to its being widespread is that person staring back at you when you look in the mirror.

We need to find a way to permit an individual to take courses from a community trainer, from a private trainer, from a secondary school, from a college or from a university and have it be credentialed by all. We must find a way or ways to define:

1. What constitutes a course in a given field (what should it cover, what should a student learn)
2. What credentials are required to deliver components or the totality of a course in a given field
3. What facilities are required to deliver components or the totality of a course in a given field
4. What evidence is required to demonstrate that the student has learned components of or the totality of a course in a given field
5. Who is credentialed to provide the evidence which will be acceptable to all.
6. Repeat the above for diploma and degree programs

If we do this in collaboration with employers, we can produce a system where a student of any age could theoretically test out of a course, or components of a course. And that student could be someone from a foreign country who had foreign credentials, or it could be someone who was simply self-taught.

If we do this in cooperation with each other, we can see where the strengths of each of the five sub-sectors of the education and training sector are, and can see how learning can be done far more economically, and with greater flexibility, and speed, than our existing stove-pipe approach to education and training currently permits.

I believe we need to work together to make education and training in Ontario, and in Canada for that matter, a tool accessible to the student of any age, at any stage of their work life, with the least barriers to entry. I also believe we have to make education and training available to the student of any age at the lowest cost possible.

Continuing education can no longer be a secondary activity of educational institutions, offered on a non-credit basis. It has to become a primary activity of a system geared to assisting people learn throughout their lives whenever they need to learn something new. This new approach to continuing education has to be on an inter-institutionally recognized credit basis of some kind so that the next educator/trainer who works with the student knows what they already have, and can assist them with the next step, rather than wasting the student's time and money.

This also means that we have to look at our own credentials in a meaningful way. Institutions are made up of people, and it is the people who have the knowledge to transmit to the student. So how do we establish some way, without prejudice, to determine who is qualified to teach what whether that is in a community training centre, a college, a private training company, a secondary school, or a university. Each institution may have its own objectives, its own vision of what it exists for, but to the adult student, the only objective that matters is assisting them learn at the pace they can learn, for the reasons they want to learn, in the time they must learn if they are to be successful.

I used to head a company whose motto was “Creating a World Where Everyone Wins.” I no longer head that company, but I firmly believe this is what the Education and Training Reference Group can go a long way to contributing to the work of the Ottawa Carleton Training Board, to other ETRGs, and other local training boards across Ontario.

Ottawa Carleton
August 23, 1999