



Articulating Workplace Education Literature Review

Robin Millar
Centre for Education and Work
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Background

The workplace is increasingly recognizing the need to up-skill its workforce and to participate in workplace education training and re-training. In the global economy Canadian industry must not only recruit workers but also develop approaches to retain those workers. Research in training indicates that workers who receive support for training and education from their workplaces are more likely to stay with those companies (Jacobson, 1998). Workplaces are increasingly developing strategies for retaining their workforces. For example Palliser Furniture in Winnipeg is now exploring a range of options to retain its skilled workforce including assistance towards gaining recognition of credentials for immigrants.

Research Methodology

For the purposes of this research I visited the Department of Education Websites in all provinces and territories of Canada and also the following States: New York Massachusetts, Florida, Wisconsin, Iowa, California, Kentucky, Minnesota. I contacted through e-mail a number of departments to verify their process for high school accreditation of adults.

I searched the Eric databases and also did an independent web-based search including relevant literacy, workplace education, and adult basic education.

I conducted telephone interviews with representatives of Departments of Education in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Relevant sources are listed in Appendix A.

Workplace Education Programs

In the past ten to fifteen years the development and documentation of both community-based and workplace education programs in Canadian has grown considerably. A perusal of the NALD web site and ERIC documents substantiates that hundreds of workplace education projects demonstrate learning and progress on behalf of learners. For example a search ERIC document shows 1449 documents of reports on workplace literacy programs from 1995-2001.

Workplace education programs in both the United States and Canada indicate successful outcomes for individual learners and employers alike (Nova Scotia, 2001; Taylor, 1995) Most workplace programming is a combination of negotiated curriculum outcomes based on a combination of learner personal goals (“I want to read to my kids.”) and workplace desired goals (“Our workers must read and

follow the WHMIS requirements.”) Achieved goals are dependent upon the time, energy, and definitive outcomes of individual programs (Mikulecky, 1996).

A typical evaluation report from a workplace basic education program concludes, “ The onsite programs were credited with boosting employees' skills, self-esteem, confidence, job/career advancement, and rates of enrollment in continuing education and/or technical training. Thanks to their association with USM, participating businesses developed a more productive work force and a better understanding of how adult learning models can be integrated into company operations” (Casco Bay Partnership, 1998).

Articulation of Workplace Education Programs

Outcomes of the workplace education programs are rarely articulated with formal education. Training programs or industry workplace education programs must develop individual links with local technical colleges to gain credit for workplace training. Many colleges in the United States and Canada do have programs which recognize industry-based training for credit in their college certificate, diploma or degree programs. In these cases, the industry (or individual company) negotiates a system of credit transfer with the local college or post-secondary provider. Examples of these include the Learning Centre program at Rockwell Industries in Wisconsin who partnered with Madison Technical College, a number industries in Ohio who partnered with Sinclair College in Dayton, Ohio, and Bristol Aerospace in Manitoba who partnered with Red River College. The literature abounds with examples of documentation of prior learning assessment (PLA) and post-secondary education. (Aarts, et al, 1999; Zucker, et al, 2000)

However, articulation of workplace education and secondary school remains fragmentary and under-developed. Vanstone (1999) notes only one source for prior learning assessment (PLA) and secondary school. In her article, she refers to the New York External Diploma program formerly administered by American Council on Education. (See more on the NEP program below.) Occasionally, credit is given from workplace programs. For example, Casco Bay workplace literacy programs negotiated with the local school board to enable students to get credit towards their adult education certificate programs. (E-mail to the author) These occasions are rare however and very little evidence occurs in the literature for credit transfer towards adult secondary school completion.

In Prince Edward Island, some articulation between workplace education and the Department of Education occurs. Prior learning assessment towards the Adult Education Certificate for Mature Students is applied on a case-by-case basis. Adults may gain some credits if they have documentation which supports their learning.

Credit towards Adult Secondary Education

The alternatives for recognition of learning towards formal secondary education are murky at best. The most common options for adults to gain recognition equivalent to high school diploma are through the GED (General Education Diploma) tests, an adult high school diploma, high school correspondence courses, regular high school, or in some states in the United States: the External Diploma Program.

A visit to provincial and/or state Department of Education web sites does not make it clear which route is adult learner friendly and what are the different options for the adult learner.

Regular high school

All provinces enable any adult to return to take courses in the regular high school (or lower grades if necessary.) Obviously, this is not a consideration for most adults returning to school. However, for those under 21, this is often an option, especially when only a few courses towards graduation are required. In Manitoba, individuals over the age of 21 seeking to complete their high school would need to get the agreement of the local school board to exercise this option.

GED

The GED is a series of standardized tests, which assess reading and math skills, and to a lesser degree writing skills. Many community-based and workplace literacy program offer "GED Preparation" courses to enable students to prepare for the GED tests. Some provinces and states recognize the GED as equivalent to a high school diploma. For example, the State of Minnesota contends,

The GED credential in Minnesota is titled "State of Minnesota GED Diploma" and is recognized by all of the postsecondary educational institutions in the State as meeting the admissions requirement relative to having a high school diploma. Most employers also recognize the GED Diploma as an equivalency credential for hiring and promotional purposes. (E-mail to the author, 2001).

However, in Manitoba not all employers recognize it as comparable to a high school diploma and not all post-secondary institutions recognize for entry into their programs. Even so, many students enroll in GED preparation courses and literacy programs as a first step towards getting their high school diploma (Millar, 1999). The GED does not offer any prior learning assessment routes.

Until recently the Province of Manitoba allowed students to apply their GED course completion towards the Mature Student's Diploma. However, this option

will no longer be available due to licensing agreements with the GED companies. In any case, only two students in the Province applied for credit towards their high school in the past two years using the GED option.

Adult high School diploma

A few provinces offer alternatives to gaining 'regular' high school credits. As far as I have been able to ascertain, these include British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. All other provinces have the same requirements for adult learners for graduation as they do for sequential students. In some cases, a fully separate Adult Diploma exists with reduced course requirements (e.g. in Manitoba students are required to take 8 credits for graduation versus 28 for the sequential students.)

Manitoba

Adults in Manitoba can gain a Mature Student's Diploma which is offered through Adult Learning Centres or regular high school programs. Graduation requirements include a minimum of 8 credits four of which must be at Senior 4 (or Grade 12) level. Schools may apply to the Department of Education in order to offer new or different courses. These School Initiated Courses (SICs) allow programs to respond flexibly to their community needs and learner interests. The province is unique in that it is the first to appoint a dedicated staff person to the development of PLA for the Mature Student's Diploma. Although no workplace education credit has yet been given, the potential is now in place for a range of assessment alternatives for the adult learner.

British Columbia

British Columbia has a new (1999) Adult Diploma which is articulated between school divisions and community colleges. Student graduating with the Adult Diploma must obtain a total of 20 credits. Students may take the required courses through either institution (or combination of institutions). Prior learning can be assessed towards all or portions of the Adult Diploma. Information on PLA must be accessed by the learner through individual schools or colleges.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan permits adults (over 21) to obtain an Adult 12 Program diploma by amassing seven credits at the Grade 12 (Senior 4) level. Sequential students are expected to amass 24 credits for graduation. Pre-requisites for the adult may be waived for courses below Grade 12. Prior Learning assessment can be applied to one credit of the seven required. Non-credit courses (e.g. literacy or ABE courses) may also be considered for this PLA credit.¹ Candidates who

¹ More information on Saskatchewan credits may be obtained from Saskatchewan Education (306-787-6086)

have been working can also apply for credit for work experience towards graduation. Adult learners must fill out an application for one of these credits towards their high school completion.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia offers the GED and correspondence and is piloting the new Adult Diploma in the fall of 2001. The diploma can be delivered in either community-based programs or through colleges. Although the same credit hours are required for adult learners and sequential students for graduation, the curriculum has been revised so that it is considered equivalent to that of a 'regular' high school diploma. Collaboration between the Department of Education, community colleges and school boards enabled this articulation of program credits.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island (PEI) offers an Adult High School Diploma delivered through Holland College and/or Community Learning Centres. This diploma requires 12 credits at Grade 11 or 12; at least 5 of those credits must be Grade 12. The graduation requirements for the sequential student are 24 credits cumulated from Grad 10-12. According to the Department of Education, the mature student can accomplish the Adult High School Diploma only if they have already achieved Grade 10 credits from previous schooling or current ABE programs. The Department offers an individualized PLA process which is assessor led. Up to four elective credits may be gained through the PLA process.

High School Correspondence

Adults can take high school correspondence courses to complete their high school graduation requirements. Some students with only one or two courses prefer this route. Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba offer support to adults who are using this route to completion. The correspondence courses follow the Manitoba curriculum, give credits upon completion, and are recognized towards the Mature Student's Diploma. No credit for prior learning is currently given towards Correspondence Courses.

Credit Systems outside of Canada

External Diploma (United States)

The External Diploma originally administered through American Council on Education (ACE) is now administered through Madison Technical College (www.nedp.org). The External Diploma Program allows the candidate to work through a guided portfolio. The adult learner to develop a combination of prior learning

evidence and current learning to be assessed for a high school diploma (issued by the local high school or state department of education.)

Twelve states now offer this possibility for adults seeking their high school accreditation. EDP sites may include workplace education centres as well as traditional school boards

Some states also offer prior learning assessment towards the high school diploma. The State of Vermont uses a portfolio approach to grant credits. Most States, however, grant equivalency for the GED or offer the standard sequential curriculum for the adult learner.

Australia has perhaps the most integrated system of recognition for the adult student. Adults can gain recognition towards a national qualification either through local schools, workplaces, or further education colleges. This means that the adult returning to school can access prior learning assessment in a range of potential learning situations. See web site (www.aqf.edu.au) for more on Australian Qualifications Framework.

Curriculum Development

There is now considerable curriculum developed for adult basic education and literacy development. Virtually all states and provinces have some versions and varieties of expectations for program development, program evaluation, statistical surveys on learner progress, and appropriate teaching activities. These, however, are generally useful only for the student operating on a pre-high school (or pre Stage 3 in Essential Skills or IALS survey parlance.)

Logan (1997) notes "adult education is the "missing link" of educational reform"(p. 1). Problematically, adult high schools almost universally use the schools-based curriculum. They are allowed the freedom to introduce adult learning activities. However, the curriculum outcomes and standards are not different (even if equivalent) to those expected of sequential students. For example, most high school curricula now have a school-to-work or work preparation outcome. There are no standards which recognize workplace learning and culture for adults with workforce experience.

The National Institute for Literacy in the United States is developing some promising new standards and curricula for adult educators (www.nifl.gov). In their new initiative entitled Equipped for the Future, NIFL is attempting to develop outcomes, standards, and performance assessment protocols for adult education programs. The global categories for standards include communication skills, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and life-long learning skills. A guide for adult educators defines "how instructors can support adult learners through performance-based assessment " (Ananda, 2000).

The state of Kentucky has also developed different expectations for graduation based on competencies (Logan, 1997). The new curriculum model integrates workplace readiness (SCANS) skills, the K-12 curriculum in order to develop a new set of competencies. Rather than achieving grade levels, adults are expected to achieve outcomes as delineated within a competency framework. This allows the Department of Education to put a greater emphasis on the life-long learning skills and competencies needed in the 21st century.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this research would indicate the following:

Provinces in Canada and individual States within the United States are moving towards an awareness that adults need secondary recognition in order to remain employable.

In recent years, both the literacy movement and adult educators involved in life-long learning, have begun to emphasize the need for constant up-grading and up-skilling of the workforce. No longer can individuals who dropped out in Grade 10 expect to be continuously employable without new training or gaining of some credentials.

As I conducted the research for this project, I encountered policies and practices which indicate that adult educators realize the need for re-vamping and re-thinking how their models of recognition of learning must be re-evaluated for legitimacy in the new 'knowledge economy.' However, awareness is only the first step to making substantial changes in how our society views acceptance of the adult learner. At the same time, our educational institutions must recognize that learning equivalent to academic learning does occur outside of those institutions. Too often, the knowledge, skills and judgments that adult bring to the formal learning experiences are ignored or dismissed.

Adults need alternative routes to recognition other than 'regular' high school education.

The development of Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba involves the recognition that adults learn in substantially different ways than teenagers (or younger for that matter). The new Mature Student's Diploma demonstrates a commitment to the development of alternative but equivalent exit points for the adult learner. In

many ways, Manitoba is forging new ground towards the development of adult, competency-based outcomes.

Many other provinces and states realize that alternative routes are needed, but not all are useful or substantial enough for the learner.

The GED is not a sufficient end result for most individuals wishing to continue in post-secondary education.

Although the GED is a useful end outcome for some students, for many it is not. For individuals wishing to continue in further training or post-secondary education, the GED preparation is not sufficient for the rigor expected of the student in colleges and university programs. However, it is a system of recognition for many who left school without qualifications. Until flexible recognition systems are in place for the adult learner, the GED will continue to play a part in their credentialing options.

New adult education outcomes, standards, and curriculum are desperately needed.

The extensive research on state and provincial web sites conducted for this project reveals that the gap between adult literacy curricula and post-secondary programs is considerable. Very little is extant which is translated into graduation outcomes which are equivalent but different to those for sequential students. Standards and expectations remain the same for the teenaged sequential learners and the mature student. Although all the literature in life-long learning suggests we need alternative outcomes and standards, these are only now being piloted in a small number of programs.

Little curricula or learning activities which assist the teacher of adults in high school exists. Clearly, the need is great to develop a range of supports for the teacher in adult education settings. Essential Skills have not been integrated into curricula or outcomes.

Prior learning assessment for secondary credit is in its infancy.

While there are now many examples of credit systems in the post-secondary education system, little credit exists for the adult learner. The efforts of the Adult Learning and Literacy branch to articulate the literacy Stages of Learning will be helpful in linking learning options and routes for the adult learner.

Currently, the adult learner does not know what the outcomes and graduation standards are, so meeting criteria through prior learning assessment is difficult. High school teachers are minimally trained in teaching adults. Even fewer of those teachers understand the principles and practices of prior learning assessment.

Finally, the workplace and all of its learning is undervalued by the secondary system. No credit transfer systems exist for Essential Skills programs and the secondary school curriculum. Rarely, is informal learning in the workplaces assessed. Little attention is paid to how to use the tacit knowledge acquired in the workplace towards academic outcomes.

Appendix A: Bibliography

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