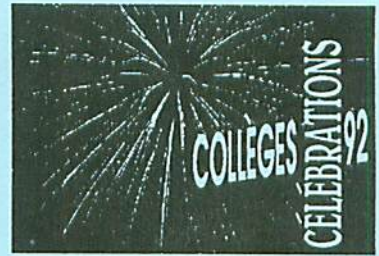


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**Re Thinking the Public Role in Training :
A.B.C. College's Response**

par

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RE THINKING THE PUBLIC SECTOR ROLE IN TRAINING: A B.C. COLLEGE'S RESPONSE

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HISTORY

The Federal Government has had a long and varied history of involvement in labour force training programs in Canada. The first vocational training act in Canada dates back to 1913 with the Agricultural Instruction Act.

It was not until 1960 and the passage of the Technical and Vocational Training Act that the federal government made a quantum leap and assumed a major role in occupational training. The Adult Occupational Training Act of 1967 initiated the federal government's interest in purchasing occupational training programs from the provincially funded educational institutions. This Canada Manpower Training Program in it's prime funded adults in a multitude of language, vocational, basic education and bridging programs.

With each successive piece of federal legislation, up to the National Training Act (NTA) of 1982, the federal government pushed it's way into controlling the responsibility for the provision of occupational training programs for adults.

A new era in federal labour market development began in 1985 with the announcement of the Canada Job Strategy (CJS). CJS represented a dramatic departure from previous training acts, as it explicitly promoted training by the private and voluntary sector. A year after CJS was introduced the federal government announced reductions in the institutional training program (Canada Manpower Training Program). This program allowed for the purchase of "training seats" in vocational programs in public educational institutions, under terms of federal-provincial training agreements. By 1991 colleges in Canada had experienced more than a 50% decline in direct federal purchase of training since 1986. The number of Canadians enrolled in federal government sponsored training programs fell dramatically the year the Canada Job Strategy was introduced.

The following table clearly indicates this consistent decline over the six years between 1984 and 1990.

1984/85	236,000	participants
1985/86	201,000	"
1986/87	143,000	"
1987/88	133,000	"
1988/89	126,000	"
1989/90	101,000	"

A review of several important federal government policy documents (1982-1987) gives a fairly consistent rationale as to why the federal government reduced its commitment to the institutional training program, and thus its support of the provinces main infrastructure that implemented occupational training programs. The rationale behind the federal government reduction of support to the province's infrastructure, namely colleges and institutes were:

- * provincial education systems were not responsive to changes in Canada's job market and the programs they funded were not connected to actual workplace skills.
- * the institutional training program was becoming too rigid and inflexible especially for training programs in the services sector, where job growth was the greatest.
- * the federal government wanted to shift its policy to include the private sector as a new training partner so as to introduce an element of competition for the public provincial sector. The federal government thought the provincial public educational institutions were becoming "hidebound and inflexible" and were not responding to the needs of the marketplace.

LABOUR FORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PRIVATISES TRAINING

Prior to the introduction of CJS in 1985, federal training support to the provinces was overwhelmingly concentrated in the "direct" purchase of seats in the community colleges (institutional training program). An explicit goal under the LFD strategy has been to designate a greater proportion of federal training funds to the "private sector" and less to the public colleges and institutes directly. This shift from direct purchase to indirect purchase where the federal government contracts with a private training school, private contractor, community group or business, has radically changed the roles that colleges play in providing training for the communities they serve. Community colleges were destabilized, particularly the first few years after CJS was introduced (1986-1988) due to the rapid shift away from direct purchase of training.

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL TRAINING AGREEMENTS INFLUENCE COLLEGE PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

The Federal/Provincial Training Agreements signed between the provincial/territorial/federal government's every three to five years attempt to resolve some of the ambiguities and contentious issues between the two levels of government. For example, a number of the provinces have been concerned that certain trends which have characterized federal policy in the last few years, such as an erosion to the established public training infrastructure will, if continued, disrupt the provinces efforts to build a quality training system.

The 1985 and 1991 federal/provincial training agreements have given more latitude to the federal government, for utilizing non public training institutions. The agreements clearly spell out the federal governments reduction to purchasing training in the public training institutions.

First, let us look at the changes that have occurred over the last five years in direct and indirect purchase of training by the federal government in one province, British Columbia.

Significant shifts have allowed the private sector a greater role in the provision of training for employed and unemployed Canadians. While third-party sponsors may themselves buy training at the colleges, the "indirect" purchases have not made up for the decline in direct purchases, with the total amount of federal funds received by the colleges well below pre-CJS levels.

Under the new Federal Provincial agreement on Labour Force Development 1991/92 to 1993/94 direct purchase's are to be reduced a further \$8.8m or 28% from the base year 1990/91.

All the above changes in federal government legislation (National Training Act, Canadian Jobs Strategy, Labour Force Development Strategy, Agreement on Labour Force Development with the Provinces) influence the federal policies and priorities for training. This in turn influences the practice of adult education in Canada. The following grid overviews the legislation/policy/practice connection.

A B.C. COLLEGE RESPONSE TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CHANGING POLICY

Prior to 1985 the colleges relied heavily on institutional seat purchases (direct funding) to support ongoing vocational programs, as well to a lesser extent to implement new training programs. At our institution, Fraser Valley College in British Columbia federal seat purchases prior to 1985, were considered "sacred and secure" in automotive parts, electronics, welding, carpentry, drafting, office careers, adult basic education, english language training, homemaker/long term care, dental assistant, and early childhood education. With the introduction of CJS many of the traditional "sacred" seat purchases were reduced in favour of indirect purchase from the private sector. B.C.'s largest community college, Vancouver

Community College saw a reduction in federally sponsored vocational programs from 60% of total programs in 1981, to 12% of total programs in 1991.

To keep our college responsive to the needs of the community it serves, our Continuing Education Department has had to re-think it's approach to accessing indirect funding. Some of the initiatives that we have taken during the last three years have put us in a better position in terms of our working relationships with our "training partners", namely businesses, voluntary organizations, private trainers and employment and immigration. What then are some of the initiatives we have taken to reposition ourselves to access indirect federal funding?

- * trying to diversify in the type of training that we are contracted to provide, so as to access more "third party contracts" from the private sector.
- * bidding in partnership with private trainers or voluntary organizations.
- * work with college career, technical and vocational departments to introduce some flexibility in the delivery options of short term training contracts so as faculty and facilities can be utilized more effectively.
- * start small, take on all types of contracts even \$500.00 ones and cultivate these small contracts. We have found that voluntary organizations and small businesses that access federal funding through indirect purchase do come back to us for additional third party contracts.
- * promote the importance of accessing "third party" contracts with the private sector, so as to keep the college close to the business community, and it's changing training needs.
- * keep current with changing federal initiatives (Canadian Labour Force Development Board initiatives) as changing federal priorities will have impact on the type of training and clients you should target, e.g., older workers, unemployment insurance beneficiaries, language instruction for new Canadian's.

SHIFTS IN FEDERAL TRAINING POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

- * continued reductions in federal seat purchases in colleges
- * employers to assume a greater role in training
- * greater shift to indirect funding through local training boards and private sector groups.
- * priority for public post secondary sector will be to form new training partnerships with the private sector which includes opening ourselves up to community based partnerships.
- * relationships with private training institutions needs to be improved. Public colleges are still seen as "monopolized systems that avoid competition" by the private colleges, and public colleges still view private colleges with scorn and resentment as they represent " profit motivated education".
- * introduction of a competitive marketplace in training.
- * colleges in delivering training must be responsive, flexible, competitive, open to partnerships, be open to competitive bidding and understand the implications of federal legislation/policy.

CONCLUSION

The sacred "institutional training program " that public colleges depended on for years to financially secure their bread and butter vocational training programs, has been significantly altered in its delivery and funding infrastructure. In its place, we have seen evolve, a delivery system with more flexibility, but at the same time a system that introduces greater possibility for training duplication between the federal and provincial governments. Many educators do not agree with this federal policy change and have continued to advocate that this change has deprived, betrayed and devalued the public post secondary vocational education system. This is made clear in the May 1991 occasional paper published by the B.C Vocational Instructors Association "A Betrayal of Faith: The Transformation of the British Columbia College System".

My sense of the direction in which public colleges need to focus, is to "buy in" to the new way the federal government wants to work with trainers. Public colleges can no longer assume a monopoly on training. We can no longer feel resentful about the preference of the federal government to contract with the private sector. What we have to do is learn to work with the private colleges, private trainers and voluntary organizations as training partners.

Many of us have seen the benefits of indirect or third party contracts. These contracts have helped us move closer to business, industry and community based voluntary groups, that so many colleges had distanced themselves from in recent years. But work still has to be done with private trade schools and private training institutions in developing partnerships. We can't continue to be monopolized systems that avoid competition. This is where the federal government, and in particular Employment and Immigration, can help, in building better relations between the private and public colleges, just as it has already helped build a better synergistic relationship between business and labour.

Public colleges have an important role to play in promoting the "training culture" that is so desperately needed by the majority of Canadian employers. Public colleges cannot accomplish this advocacy for life long learning on their own. The public post-secondary system must work in partnership with private and voluntary groups who also subscribe to this training ethic. Those colleges who choose to work alone in a training solitude will be the "losers"; those colleges that let go of some of the tradition and historical baggage and work in partnership with the private sector will be the "winners".

The need and demand for more and improved educational opportunity will continue to increase. There will continue to be major roles for providers of education, training, and retraining in the public sector, voluntary sector, and private sector. I am hearing and reading that the federal government and our B.C. provincial government see the core of the training strategy for Canadians to be a strong public sector, complemented by private and voluntary providers. For many of us working in the public sector post-secondary education field, a federal reaffirmation that public training institutions are important providers of training and have a major role in equipping Canada's labour force to meet the competitive challenge is needed and should be articulated.

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