

## Introduction

The title of this book, *Training the Excluded for Work*, refers to people who are routinely marginalized from employment training and who are members of groups that are chronically disadvantaged in the workplace. The connection between the two – insufficient training and poor employment prospects – resonates with people who are unemployed or who are in low-paying and dead-end jobs. For all of the groups in this volume, receiving employment training that leads to decent jobs has been a struggle of sometimes epic proportions.

Employers in Canada are notoriously remiss in providing adequate job training even for people who are considered to be “core” workers.<sup>1</sup> And despite the general recognition of the significance of training in the new “knowledge-based” economy, the participation rates in employer-sponsored training dropped considerably during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The usual reasons employers cite for not developing more training programs is that extensive training is expensive and that it is a cost that cannot be recouped if workers decide to switch jobs. As a consequence of this individuals are often left to seek out and pay for job training themselves, or governments are left to provide job training through funding specific training programs in both the public and private sectors and through community-based training.

The relationship between good, relevant training and employability is easy to understand, at least when specific individuals are concerned. But how this is achieved takes very different policy directions, depending on the general ideological and economic approaches of governments – approaches that bring about very different kinds of labour market policies. Getting a job at all depends a great deal on the willingness of governments to tolerate high levels of unemployment. While Canada has never pursued the full-employment objectives of many other industrialized countries in the post-Second World War era, its tolerance for high levels of unemployment has grown substantially: the last two decades of the twentieth

century saw a consolidation of a dramatic shift towards a neoliberal economic model, where alleviating unemployment was low on the list of government priorities.<sup>3</sup>

The wisdom of the new economic policy directions in the neoliberal vein is that unemployment is the result of the wrong signals being sent to the labour market, which then leads to wages that are too high in some sectors. This thinking sees a variety of government programs, such as unemployment insurance, minimum wage, and social assistance as creating wage floors that price workers with low productivity out of a job. The solutions, according to this type of analysis, are to remove these so-called "barriers" to employment and to let wages fall to levels that reflect the productivity of workers in each sector. According to this theory, a sufficiently low real wage rate will generate employment for all workers. Fortunately, this theory has been too brutal to be fully put into practice, although governments throughout Canada have been progressively dismantling the income protections that were instituted during the Keynesian era. This has included a massive change in unemployment protection in Canada, the lowering of minimum wages for certain classes of workers, and arbitrary and wholesale reductions in the numbers on social assistance.<sup>4</sup>

Where does job training fit in this picture? If low wages are understood to be related to low productivity, as the neoliberal economists assert, then the best way for an individual to improve her or his employment circumstances would be to acquire more "human capital." The rush to prove that unemployment was something that was not the fault of government policy (a policy that was basically ignoring the issue) brought to the fore the oft-heard assertion that people were not trained adequately for the kinds of jobs that would be needed in a new economy – an economy that would focus on highly skilled and highly technical production.<sup>5</sup> As individuals each acquired better skills, they would become employable in jobs that were better paying and less precarious. The fault implicitly, then, lay less with the system for not creating enough jobs, less with the employers for paying workers too little, and more with the people themselves for failing to make themselves attractive as workers.

The focus on training as the solution to labour market problems greatly appealed to employer groups who stressed their need for people who were trained for specific jobs. This rhetoric about the significance of training supported very significant changes in social policy. Most notable was reducing the income protection the unemployed could receive through Unemployment Insurance, as funds that were normally paid out to the unemployed themselves were diverted into training programs. While the federal government was directly involved in training programs, those disadvantaged workers with a more tenuous attachment to the labour force had some opportunities to participate in creative training programs.

But in 1996 a major shift in the nature of government-sponsored training occurred – a shift that moved the responsibility for training from the federal government to the provinces. This was a radical change, and it has had significant implications for the people who are the subject of this book, particularly in those provinces that pursued a neoliberal economic agenda.<sup>6</sup>

### **Overview**

In Chapter 1 Ursule Critoph documents the changes in the federal government's policy on training and its general implications for women. She shows that, under the new system, a bias has been created in favour of those who are easiest to serve in the new Employment Insurance rules and that the cost and responsibility of training has been downloaded to individuals. This has resulted in profound changes for women's training, mainly because it has effectively dismantled the apparatus that supported the training initiatives of women-only organizations. This chapter sets the background for understanding the context of training for workers with special training needs – those who face barriers to employment that are distinct and who cannot be adequately served without taking these into account.

Two other chapters focus directly on the implications of the removal of the federal government from training programs: Joan McFarland (Chapter 11) documents the effects of the changes in training programs for women in New Brunswick. While access to training for women has always been variable, some programs were successful, particularly those that involved the direct government sponsorship of places for women in women-only training programs. However, since the changes initiated in 1996, training has increasingly become the realm of the private sector, and the women-only programs have been eliminated. Karen Lior and Susan Wismer (Chapter 12) examine the bewildering context of training programs in the post-1996 period as individuals are required to "shop" for the training they need. The results are not encouraging and, as the authors show, seem to be particularly unhelpful for the most disadvantaged in the labour market.

Through examining programs that were designed specifically for workers with special needs – women, immigrants, First Nations, youth, and people with low incomes – this book intends to try to understand what works and what does not work in equity training programs. In analyzing these programs it attempts to distinguish between short-term, one-off training programs and those that provide training that is either both more sustained and long-term or that can be used as a model for other programs.

The programs cover provinces across the country and include very different types of work, ranging from clerical work to construction work. Some of the programs that are analyzed were spectacularly successful, such

as the training associated with immigrant women in Toronto (Manery and Cohen), the training for women and First Nations on the Vancouver Island Highway Project (Cohen and Braid), the training for youth at risk in Quebec (Bourdon and Deschenaux), and the training for Aboriginal and low-income women in Saskatchewan (Little). The one feature that these programs have in common is that they were initiated either by or in close consultation with the communities they served. Other training projects were abject failures – most notably the training for women that occurred on the Hibernia Construction Project (Hart and Shrimpton) and the “low road” approach to youth training in British Columbia (Wong and McBride). Unfortunately, success has not guaranteed that innovative programs are replicated, and failure has not guaranteed that poorly designed and indifferently implemented programs are not replicated.

The chapters in this book focus on specific groups but examine them by taking into account a wide variety of issues. Kate Braid (Chapter 5), for example, looks at the culture of construction and what women need to learn as part of their training not only to cope and to survive in a virtually all-male workforce but also to change the culture itself. Her advice, which is offered after years of working as a carpenter, is funny and subversive, but it points to one of the most difficult issues in integrating the construction workplace – keeping women who receive training from leaving the industry. Margaret Little (Chapter 6) focuses on the barriers women with low incomes face when they try to break gender divides in construction work. In the training program she examined in Saskatchewan two-thirds of the participants were Aboriginal women. As she shows, with long-term training (this one lasted five years), and ancillary programs to deal with the specific conditions that they faced, these women were able to realize their dream of becoming carpenters. Shauna Butterwick (Chapter 9) examines the much-debated training initiatives known as “life skills” training. “Life skills” involve a set of skills that is supposed to aid workers who do not “fit” the prescribed workplace by showing them how they can change their behaviour in order to conform to expectations of employers and co-workers. Her examination shows both the negative aspects of these programs and their liberatory potential, which is revealed when they give people tools that enable them to function in a “risk society.” Margaret Manery and Marjorie Griffin Cohen (Chapter 8) analyze the successes of two training programs in Toronto that were established and run by immigrant women for immigrant women. These programs were successful because they met the needs of these people by integrating language, job skills, and employment preparation, and they were supported by federal funding. However, the changes that have occurred in federal government support have considerably stressed these programs, forcing the women who run them to constantly shape them to fit funders’ needs. This often

means that the women who would most benefit from the programs no longer have access to them.

Two chapters look specifically at programs designed for youth. Linda Wong and Stephen McBride (Chapter 13) examine the implications for youth of two diverse training approaches – one that focuses on highly skilled occupations leading to good jobs and one that focuses on occupations requiring low levels of skills and that channels youth into jobs with harsh workplace conditions. They show how the youth of British Columbia are channelled into these polarized groups through the training process with virtually no vertical movement from one group to the other over time. This means that training programs are doing little to change the existing hierarchies in the labour force and that increasing numbers are channelled into low-waged employment. The other chapter dealing with youth training looks at an innovative training program designed for youth at risk in Montreal. Sylvain Bourdon and Frédéric Deschenaux (Chapter 14) analyze the unique features that make this program work; namely, its highly media-friendly character and its focus on recycling computers. However, they do not see the success of this program as easily replicated, mainly because it requires significant amounts of working capital, something few politicians are willing to commit on a large scale.

Two of the chapters deal specifically with training programs for women and/or First Nations associated with large construction projects. They look at what can make these projects succeed and what can make them fail. The construction trades are notorious for the closed nature of the workforces, and repeated efforts to change the colour and gender of the people in the workplace have been exceptionally unsuccessful. Susan Hart and Mark Shrimpton (Chapter 4), in their examination of equity initiatives on the Hibernia construction project, show that, while requirements for equity hires may give the appearance of access to jobs, without workable implementation plans that are closely monitored and given high priority women will not be integrated into the workforce. They recount the experiences of the women who undertook training on Hibernia and show that only with very specific and proactive work on the part of government will the barriers women face in the construction industry be overcome. This unsuccessful training program stands in stark contrast to the innovative and highly successful program that was carried out for women and First Nations on the Vancouver Island Highway Project. Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Kate Braid (Chapter 3) show that the equity initiatives worked well only because the government of British Columbia made equity hires a condition of employment on the project and ensured that they were implemented. In other words, successfully integrating equity hires in the workplace required some measure of coercion on the part of the government. But, most significantly, both First Nations and women's groups

involved in the skills trades were actively involved in an ongoing way in the planning and oversight of the training program. This meant that women and First Nations were not only hired and trained but were also given the support necessary to stay on the job.

The changing nature of the workforce that has accompanied the restructuring of the economy has raised important questions about the nature of training in jobs and sectors of the economy that have experienced substantial changes. Alice de Wolff and Maureen Hynes (Chapter 2) are interested in the wide variety of approaches to training for clerical workers, and they assess the proposals for occupational and training standards for this type of work. While creating a universal set of standards is sometimes thought to put workers in a position to gain some bargaining power with employers, the authors suggest that these standards are more likely to be set by employers. They suggest that worker-focused organizing could better protect workers' rights.

The restructuring of the health care sector presents several alternatives for training health care aides. Larry Haiven and Liz Quinlan (Chapter 7) examine the tension that restructuring creates for the continued survival of health care training in public institutions in Saskatchewan. The peaceful coexistence that has historically existed between public and private trainers has changed as public institutions are increasingly deprived of their needed funding and the private sector is increasingly laying claims on the public purse. They show how the government is torn between a traditional devotion to public initiatives and the enormous pressure from the private sector to shift its support towards more private training.

### **Training Policy**

The overriding theme of this book is that training for people who are either marginalized or at risk in the labour market can be highly successful if undertaken with their needs in focus. Too often the design in public training policy has a plethora of objectives and serving the specific needs of individual groups is an afterthought that is tacked on to programs whose main function serves some other aim. In Canada, active labour market measures (commonly referred to as ALMM) in the post-Keynesian era have focused on issues that are concerned with reshaping the labour market to become more competitive and reshaping social policy to reduce government expenditures. The attempt to redesign programs to make labour markets more "flexible" has been a high priority.<sup>7</sup> This pursuit of "flexibility" is in response to a sense that, as a result of a variety of public policy measures that have not allowed labour markets to work properly, labour productivity in Canada has fallen behind that of its main competitors. Related to this has been a growing emphasis on "moving people from welfare to work."<sup>8</sup>



The notion behind these two prongs of ALMM is that there is some problem either with the incentive systems or with the quality of the supply of labour that either makes Canadian workers less productive than their counterparts elsewhere or encourages too many workers to stay out of the labour force. The redesign of the federal government's training policy gives considerable lip service to meeting the needs of people who require training, but the latent objectives of the major changes that occurred were considerably less lofty. The shift from active federal government involvement in training programs to a series of labour market development agreements (LMDA) with individual provinces had very little to do with attempts to improve either training programs or labour market outcomes; rather, it was a direct result of interprovincial politics. As Harvey Lazar has convincingly argued, the desire to remove active labour market measures that were "an irritant in federal-Quebec relations drove the federal government's agenda."<sup>9</sup> In granting autonomy to Quebec, the way was paved for other provinces to argue for similar control over funds associated with training and other employment benefits previously controlled by the federal government.

While government officials tend to applaud the result of the changes because of the improvement in federal-provincial relations, the evidence indicates that the new system poses greater challenges for those marginalized in the labour force. As Gerry Boychuk pointed out in a presentation to a conference designed to review the experiences of the LMDAs, the combination of a shift in responsibility for training to the provinces, along with tighter eligibility requirements for both Employment Insurance (EI) and Social Assistance (SA), makes it harder to even identify the people who need training most.<sup>10</sup> This is because as, for a variety of reasons, people are eliminated from these programs, they cannot qualify for the training that is sponsored for those on EI and SA.

Understanding the nature of the barriers to training that specific categories of workers face is crucial to designing training programs to meet their needs. Too often the identification of barriers does not distinguish between different groups of workers in different circumstances. So, for example, in attempting to understand why an increasingly smaller proportion of the working population is involved in training, a large survey such as the Adult Education and Training Survey distinguishes the major reasons according to individuals' location, education, sex, age, and occupation.<sup>11</sup> However, it does not distinguish according to ethnicity, race, income, or whether one is an immigrant. The findings of this survey identified key barriers to training as being "too busy at work," "too expensive," "inconvenient time/location," "course or program not offered," "lack of employer support," and "family responsibilities." Having this kind of information could lead to significant policy changes, such as those that

encouraged employers to lessen workloads, greater efforts to subsidize the cost of training, and shifts in the location and timing of training in order to make it more accessible. But it is unlikely to lead to changes in policies that get at the heart of some of the issues that exclude some classes of people from specific types of training. Discrimination in labour markets, for example, has an enormous impact on specific groups of people who are routinely excluded from access to training. This is a serious issue that needs to be identified in both designing training programs and in designing support programs for those who have been trained. As several chapters in this book have shown (Chapters 3 and 4), the culture of an industry or occupation frequently inhibits both the hiring and the retention of even those who receive adequate training. Similarly, the barriers that low-income people face require considerably more diverse programs to support the training initiatives (Chapter 6). Issues such as discrimination and poverty are the kinds of systemic issues that are hard to see through surveys but that are knowable through careful examination of the programs themselves and the populations they are designed to serve.

Too often the training programs that target designated groups considered to be more difficult to serve are minimal, tend to be remedial, and are not followed up with specific action to ensure that the trained receive long-term employment: it is the best educated workers who tend to get the most training.<sup>12</sup> One reason for this is that employee-sponsored programs focus on already employed workers with considerable background experience. But even in publicly sponsored programs, the better educated trainees result in "outcomes" that more neatly conform to the success criteria demanded of the programs. Measuring the success of training programs needs to be considerably expanded. The current discussion on measuring success tends to discount the value of government programs aimed at moving people from welfare to work and increasing employability and earnings. It is an issue that has captured the attention of policy makers in all countries that have substantial welfare roles and, perhaps a little too conveniently, seem to find that, overall, the programs are very ineffective.<sup>13</sup> This is not surprising, although not for the reasons usually given – that these people are hard cases that require too much in the way of public resources. When they are ineffective it is usually either because they were poorly designed or because their effectiveness could not be captured by the existing success criteria. Sometimes it is a combination of both. The primary indicators for evaluating the success of LMDA programs are (1) the number of claimants served, (2) the return to employment of claimants, and (3) savings to the EI account.<sup>14</sup> The limits of these indicators are considerable, and, for programs that need to show results in order to continue receiving funding, this greatly affects both the nature of the program and the selection of people who will be trained: the focus will be



on short-term programs and people who are already relatively job ready. Measuring the success of programs is crucial because understanding what works and what does not work matters greatly to those who receive training. But the design of the measures and what constitutes success itself requires considerably more consultation with the communities and groups that are the subject of this book. The primary indicators currently being used inhibit the development of programs that best serve those who need them most.

The chapters in this book show that there is no magic formula for designing training that will best serve the needs of those who have been marginalized in labour market policies. Each group brings specific requirements that are best identified through their own communities: as the experiences of the successful programs examined in this book indicate, it is obvious that these communities have been remarkably adept in identifying both their training needs and how best to deliver the programs.

The significance of decent work to individuals' lives is a consistent theme in the international literature on training: "Decent work underpins individuals' independence, self-respect and well-being, and is therefore key to their overall quality of life."<sup>15</sup> Designing training programs that challenge existing hierarchies in the workplace is critical to meeting the objectives of decent work. As long as training programs merely replicate the existing hierarchies, youth will be segregated by class, immigrants will continue to underperform in relation to their potential, and women will continue to be segregated in areas requiring different skills from men.

A great deal is demanded of training programs, and the expectations for their success, in relation to the expectations about the future quality of the labour supply, are high. The potential exists for Canada's training schemes to truly serve the ambitions of those who place training high on the agenda for solutions to social and economic problems. But this potential will not be realized unless considerably more resources are put into these programs, governments actively ensure that issues of equality are an integral part of the programs, and affected communities are involved in their design from the outset.

### **Conclusions**

The chapters in this book show that good training programs are highly effective with regard to providing workers who are disadvantaged in the labour market with the tools they need to acquire more secure and well-paying jobs. The multiple barriers that disadvantaged workers face require training programs that focus not only on providing skills but also on addressing other issues that inhibit their success in the labour market. The shift in recent years towards private and market-based training schemes has undermined the successes of training that focused on the "excluded."

While good training programs still exist, they struggle in the face of drastic funding changes and tend to shift their focus more to meet the directives of funding agencies than the needs of the communities they serve. Training matters a great deal, as does the nature of the training programs. Those that focus on the needs of the people being trained tend to be much more successful than do those that focus on the needs of their employers. But whatever the training regime, it is clear that training alone will not guarantee work: a great deal depends on the availability of jobs and the policies that governments pursue in order to ensure full employment. In a climate inspired by neoliberal ideology, training in Canada is moving in a direction that will see fewer and fewer of those who require training receiving it. If this continues, then those who have been excluded will remain excluded. This trajectory is not immutable. As this book shows, it is possible to understand, through the careful examination of specific cases, what mistakes have been made and can be avoided, and what policies deserve to be replicated. By recognizing what makes successful programs work well, future policy initiatives could be more focused on meeting the needs of those who are too easily excluded.

#### Notes

- 1 There is some debate in the literature regarding how far behind Canadian employers are in training. While, for example, Canadian employers train considerably fewer employees and offer fewer training hours than do American employers, their performance is not too different from that found in many other countries. See Constantine Kapsalis, *Employee Training: An International Perspective* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1997).
- 2 André Léonard, *Why Did the Participation Rate in Job-Related Training Decline during the 1990s in Canada?* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada, October 2001).
- 3 Stephen McBride, *Paradigm Shift: Globalization and the Canadian State* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2001).
- 4 The massive negative changes that occurred in unemployment insurance in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s reduced the numbers and classes of people eligible to collect benefits when unemployed, reduced the amount of the benefits available, and shifted large amounts of insurance funds from direct payment to the unemployed to occupational training programs. See Human Resources Development Canada, *Employment Insurance: 2001 Monitoring and Assessment Report* (Ottawa: HRDC, 2002), Annex 1. Throughout Canada the minimum wage has not kept pace with the cost of living; however, in some provinces even its monetary rate has been reduced for some classes of workers. In British Columbia, for example, a "training wage" that is considerably less than the minimum wage was introduced in 2001 for new entrants into the workforce.
- 5 Gordon Betcherman, Kathryn McMullen, and Katie Davidman, *Training for the New Economy* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1998); Government of Canada, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians* (Ottawa: HRDC, 2002).
- 6 For a discussion of the effects of these changes, see Harvey Lazar, *Shifting Roles: Active Labour Market Policy in Canada under the Labour Market Development Agreements* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2002).
- 7 Ibid., pt. 3.
- 8 William P. Warburton and Rebecca N. Warburton, "Measuring the Performance of Government Training Programs," *C.D. Howe Institute Commentary*, No. 165, June 2002.
- 9 Lazar, *Shifting Roles*, 6.

- 10 Gerry Boychuk, presentation given in February 2002 in Edmonton, Alberta. Cited in Lazar, *Shifting Roles*, pt. 6.
- 11 Deborah Sussman, "Barriers to Job-Related Training," *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 14, 2 (Summer 2002): 25-32.
- 12 Ibid., 26.
- 13 Warburn and Warburn, "Measuring the Performance," 1.
- 14 Yvonne McFadzen and Jim Blain, presentation given in February 2002 in Edmonton, Alberta. Cited in Lazar, *Shifting Roles*, pt. 7.
- 15 ILO, *Learning and Training for Work in the Knowledge Society*, Report 4 (1) (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2002), 5.