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Book

Canada's labour market training system

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Canada's Labour Market Training System

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Canada's Labour Market Training System

Bob Barnettson



**Athabasca
University**

Canada's Labour Market Training System

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Abbreviations

ALL	Adult Literacy and Lifeskills
ALMPs	Active labour-market policies
ASETS	Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy
AWHC	Alberta Workers' Health Centre
CJFA	Canada Job Funding Agreement
CJG	Canada Job Grant
CJS	Canada Jobs Strategy
CLLN	Canadian Literacy and Learning Network
EAL	English as an additional language
EI	Employment Insurance
ESL	English as a second language
GDP	Gross domestic product
IMP	International Mobility Programs
KSA	Knowledge, skills, and abilities
LBS	Literacy and Basic Skills
LFDS	Labour Force Development Strategy
LIC	Live-in caregiver
LLP	Lifelong Learning Plan
LMA	Labour Market Agreement
LMAPD	Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities
LMIA	Labour Market Impact Assessment
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreements
LMO	Labour Market Opinion
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PLE	Public legal education
PLEA	Public Legal Education Association
PRO	Professional regulatory organization
PSE	Post-secondary education
PTs	Provinces and territories
ROI	Return on investment
SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
TFW	Temporary foreign worker
TFWP	Temporary Foreign Worker Program
TIOW	Targeted Initiative for Older Workers
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers
UI	Unemployment Insurance
WDA	Workforce Development Agreement

Acknowledgements

This book seeks to introduce readers to the Canadian labour-market training system—what it is, how it works, and why it works that way. It builds upon much prior research and course-development work done by current and former colleagues at Athabasca University. Thanks are due to Steve Boddington, Derek Briton, Ursule Critophe, Winston Gereluk, Tara Gibb, Cal Hauserman, Patricia Hughes-Fuller, Jenna Kelland, Ingo Schmidt, Bruce Spencer, Jeff Taylor, Michael Welton, and Theresia Williams. Particular thanks are due to my friend and research partner, Jason Foster, for patiently listening to me work out what I actually thought; making uncountable helpful suggestions; and being an able stats-monkey.

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Preface

It is difficult to explain how the Canadian labour-market training system is structured or operates. It isn't a system in the conventional sense of the term. It doesn't have components that all work together to achieve a clear goal—such as producing an adequate number of appropriately trained workers.

Rather, the training system is a political system, wherein groups of stakeholders—employers, workers, and governments—seek to advance their interests. Conflicts among stakeholders' interests are resolved by stakeholders exercising whatever power they can muster to achieve their goals. The result is a fragmented and ever-shifting system that is riven with conflict and compromise. In this way, the training system operates similarly to the industrial-relations system. Broadly speaking, employers seek to maximize their profitability by externalizing training costs onto workers and the state and advocating for an oversupply of trained workers (in order to reduce wage levels). By contrast, workers want training that helps them maximize their wages and ability to find work. And the state seeks to manage conflict in a way that ensures both the production and social-reproduction processes tick along.

I've chosen to explain Canada's labour-market training system through a political lens for two reasons. First, in providing a coherent explanatory framework, this approach helps readers understand both how the system operates and why it operates in that way. Seemingly inefficient or otherwise defective training structures and processes are the outcome of the interplay of interests and power, rather than otherwise inexplicable mistakes that are amenable to simple fixes.

Second, this approach is likely to make readers uncomfortable. The key audience for this book is undergraduate students. In my experience, presenting students with controversial arguments, for example, that employers misrepresent skills shortages or that governments collude with employers to the detriment of vulnerable Canadians, motivates them to critically evaluate the evidence presented (or marshal their own), improves understanding, and leads to a deeper knowledge of the subject (even if they disagree with the conclusions).

The risk of this approach is that other readers may be tempted to dismiss the analyses as a polemic or merely ideological. This book is polemical, in that it makes a controversial argument that refutes many common-sense views about labour-market training (e.g., that there are widespread skills shortages). And it is also ideological, in that it is premised upon an integrated set of assertions, theories, and beliefs (i.e., a loosely Marxist analysis of employment and education).

That does not, however, mean the arguments contained in the book are mistaken—although that is usually the rhetorical intent of calling something polemical or ideological. Rather, this approach is an effort to undertake an engaging and insightful analysis that helps us better appreciate how and why our training system operates as it does.

The evidence I've marshalled in support of the arguments relies heavily on peer-reviewed academic research and statistics generated by governments or international bodies. One of the challenges of writing a contrarian account is that an author often must fill in the gaps in the literature (which tends to echo the traditional views) through logic, argument, and inference as well as by using credible studies published by reputable think tanks. I've attempted to write my account with a consistency befitting a rigorous polemic, which aims to provide students with the facts about the Canadian training system, as seen within the space of political and social contestation.

CHAPTER ONE

Canada's Training System in Outline

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define labour-market training and explain why it occurs.
- Identify how the interests of training stakeholders converge and conflict.
- Define access to, control of, and benefit from training and explain why these dimensions are analytically important.



Fear of the economic consequences of a skill and labour shortage is a recurring theme in Canadian newspapers and television reports. For example, a 2016 report by the Information and Communication Technology Council warned, “If Canada does not address the talent and skills gap, it could cost the economy billions of dollars in lost productivity, tax revenues, and gross domestic product.”¹ The remedies proposed by this industry lobby group are typical and include mandatory computer science classes for school children, the reduction of barriers to labour force entry for women and other traditionally excluded workers, and tax breaks to encourage employer-sponsored training.²

That same year, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council predicted a shortfall of 17,000 farm workers in the prairie grain-and-oilseed industry by 2025. This projected labour shortage could lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in lost product sales, opined the industry lobby group. Its proposed solution to the aging farm labour force was to allow prairie farmers better access to temporary foreign workers.³ Neither report engaged with the rather obvious possibility that employers providing better wages and working conditions might help attract workers to these industries and thereby reduce or avoid the projected shortages.

Many commentators question the accuracy of employer claims about skill and labour shortages, noting that they are often self-serving and based on poor evidence.⁴ But, faced with seemingly endless corporate hand-wringing, the media tends to focus on laying blame for these shortages. Governments and educational institutions are characterized as out of touch with the needs of employers. And students and workers are said to be too ill-informed, naïve, or lazy to get the training they need to be

competitive in the labour market. Mostly ignored in this discourse is the low and continually declining level of employer-sponsored training.

The overall impression left by these discussions is that the Canadian labour-market training system is broken because it is unable to supply an adequate pool of appropriately skilled workers to industry.⁵ This book examines the key forms of labour-market training in Canada and asks whether this criticism of the system is warranted and true. A good place to start is asking whether a coherent and functional training system is a reasonable expectation for anyone to have.

Systems and Metaphors

We often reflexively consider a system as a collection of parts that operate together to achieve a goal. For example, a car's subsystems—the engine, transmission, and steering—all work together so we can get where we want to go. If we examine the four main components of Canada's training system—post-secondary education (PSE), government training and immigration policies, workplace training, and community education—through the lens of this **mechanical metaphor**, we'll see that Canada does not have an integrated training system. Rather, Canada's training "system" is a collection of mismatched parts that are constantly changing and often working towards different (and sometimes conflicting) goals. Not surprisingly, this training "system" seems to fall short of its putative goal of an adequately trained workforce.

So, does that mean Canada's labour-market training system is broken? Maybe. But it might also mean that thinking about the Canadian training system as a machine is wrong-headed. There are many other metaphors for systems besides the organization as machine. For example, we might think about organizations as biological organisms, which have needs and imperatives of their own. Or we might view organizations as cultures, which have developed specific ways of seeing the world and of behaving within it. In short, the lens through which we choose to view the world affects what we see, what we don't, and what behaviour and outcomes we expect and desire.⁶

This book uses a **political metaphor** to understand the Canadian labour-market training system. A political system is one wherein groups of

actors seek to advance their interests. These interests sometimes converge and sometimes conflict. Where there is conflict, different groups will seek to exert power in order to achieve their goals (often at the expense of other groups). Considering how power and differing interests shape labour-market training in Canada reveals that there is an underlying logic to the existing training system. Over the six chapters of this book, we'll see that Canada's seemingly ad hoc and dysfunctional training "system" serves to stabilize and replicate a class-stratified social and economic system.

Stabilization and replication of a system riven with conflict can occur in a number of ways. Sometimes a government will intervene with legislation or money in order to prevent conflict or disruption. Other times, actors may use rhetorical strategies to manage discontent. For example, employers may assert that workers can better their lives by undertaking training. This draws attention away from other ways workers could improve their lives, such as by seeking social, economic, or political change. Prioritizing social stability and replication may sometimes interfere with the training system's ability to ensure there is an adequately trained labour force. For example, allowing students to choose the post-secondary program they want to enroll in (a reasonable expectation by students in a democratic society) may result in skill mismatches. The training system's components and how they interact with one another reflect that training—like most other aspects of employment in Canada—is contested terrain.

Training, Education, and Learning

Training is the process of intentionally acquiring, modifying, or reinforcing knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) as well as values and preferences. The intentionality of training distinguishes it from the broader process of learning. That is to say, we undertake training with the explicit goal of learning something and, thereby, becoming more capable. Of course, the world isn't as neat and tidy as that. For example, we may go seek out information about how to paint a landscape and practise doing so. During this training, we may also learn other things unintentionally (or even unconsciously), such as how the colour of objects appears to become lighter as the distance to them increases.

The terms “training” and “education” are often used interchangeably. Both training and education entail acquiring, modifying, or reinforcing KSAs. So is there a difference? Perhaps not. Yet, imagine how your expectations might differ between two classes, one advertised as “sex education” and the other as “sex training.” Clearly, there is some sort of widely held qualitative difference between training and education.⁷ This difference centres on the tendency of training to develop KSAs for immediate use and perhaps with a greater vocational (or performance) focus. This stands in contrast with the longer-term, intellectual, and perhaps intrinsic-reward focus of education. That said, the dividing line between training and education is unclear, and the terms are often used interchangeably.

There are many forms of training. We may take a class, watch an online video, or do hands-on work with tools or machinery. We might also practise what we have learned, either on our own or with others. Indeed, training often entails cycling back and forth between learning something new and incorporating that learning into our daily practice. Training is also often framed as something that is done to others. For example, an employer may train a worker in the correct operation of a cash register. But we can also train ourselves. For example, confronted with a flat tire, we may figure out how to put the spare tire on. In doing so, we have (quite intentionally) learned a new skill. This example also reveals that training doesn’t just occur in formal situations, such as a classroom or training program with formal learning objectives and curriculum. In fact, training can occur almost anywhere—the key characteristics of training are (1) an intentional effort to (2) improve our (or others’) capabilities (3) through learning.

The analysis in this book looks at Canada’s overall labour-market training system. Labour-market training is often defined fairly narrowly. For example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines labour-market training as follows: “Labour market training measures are those undertaken for reasons of labour market policy, other than special programmes for youth and the disabled. Expenditures include both course costs and subsistence allowances to trainees, when such are paid. Subsidies to employers for enterprise training are also included, but not employer’s own expenses.”⁸

The OECD's definition focuses on programming provided by the government (or "the **state**") to operationalize labour-market policy. In this definition, apprenticeship programming is labour-market training because the state funds training at colleges and technical institutes as well as financially supports apprentices during training through the Employment Insurance (EI) system. Yet training offered by employers, trade unions, or professional regulatory bodies would be excluded from consideration.

Looking at the entire **Canadian labour-market training system**—including post-secondary education, government training and immigration policy, employer workplace training, and community-based education—provides a broader picture that allows us to better understand the interrelationships in the system. For example, as we saw in the opening vignette of this chapter, employer groups often seek to address skill and worker shortages via changes in immigration policy, rather than by offering training or improving the terms and conditions of work. For this reason, this book broadly defines **labour-market training** as policies, programs, and activities intended to result in an adequate number of appropriately trained workers.

Training, Employment, and the Labour Market

In considering the operation of the Canadian training system, it is important to have a basic understanding of Canadian employment relationships and the labour market. Employment—hiring a worker to do a job—is one way for employers to get work done. There are other ways to accomplish work. The use of slaves was common in the United States until only 150 years ago, for example, and Indigenous peoples in Canada have often been compelled by the federal government to work in order to receive income support.⁹ Employers might also use volunteers or a group of workers might get together to form a co-operative. And many employers now contract work out in order to avoid the obligations and costs of direct employment.¹⁰ But most work is still done by workers in an employment relationship.

An **employment relationship** is an economic relationship, wherein workers trade their time and skills to their employer in exchange for wages.

Workers selling their capacity to work to an employer in the marketplace is sometimes called the commodification of labour. Routinely selling one's labour as a commodity to others is a recent phenomenon and reflects that other pathways to accessing the necessities of life (e.g., agricultural work) have becoming largely inaccessible to most workers. In Canada, this exchange of labour for wages occurs in the context of a capitalist economy. A **capitalist economy** is system of production and exchange characterized by the private ownership of **capital** (i.e., money, land, equipment, and tools). Capitalists combine their capital with the efforts of workers (sometimes called "**labour**") in order to produce goods and services that are sold in a marketplace in order to generate a profit.¹¹

Box 1.1 unpacks the complexities of social class in capitalist economies. The notion that labour and capital have differing interests reflects a class-based analysis of society. In this approach, class refers to a group of individuals who share similar social, economic, educational, cultural and/or political characteristics. Such efforts to categorize individuals is always to some degree a subjective process (e.g., who really is a member of the middle class?) and can obscure intra-group differences. That said, grouping individuals together on the basis of certain characteristics (such as their respective roles in the production process) can often help us identify broad patterns and common interests that are otherwise somewhat hard to see. Box 1.1 presents a more nuanced examination of the capitalist class structure in Canada.

Box 1.1 The Complexities of Class

It is often convenient to think about only two types (or classes) of participants in the labour market: capitalists and labourers. This simple typology is based upon ownership of the means of production and belies the complexity of **class structure**. Considering ownership, specialized knowledge, and delegated authority suggests there are nine classes in contemporary Canada. (Delegated authority exists when a worker exercises managerial power on behalf of the actual owners of the company.)

Capitalists can be usefully divided into the self-employed, small employers, and large employers. The self-employed sell their labour but own their own businesses. Small employers typically have a small

number of employees with the owner(s) actively managing the business (and perhaps working alongside their workers). Large employers possess or direct significant amounts of capital, often acting through intermediaries (such as managers and supervisors) and employing significant numbers of workers.

There are also three categories of workers. Industrial workers produce material goods, such as machinery and foodstuffs, and have relatively little autonomy or discretion in their work. Service workers provide a wide range of services but also lack autonomy. Some industrial or service workers may have significant specialized knowledge but lack discretion in its use. Finally, there are workers who, by choice or circumstances, are unemployed.

In between capitalists and labourers reside the intermediaries described above: managers, supervisors, and professionals. **Professionals** have specialized knowledge, which grants them significant discretion over how they do their work. That said, unless they are also employers or are self-employed, they remain subordinate to employers. Employers also hire supervisors and, to manage them, managers. Both of these groups ensure that workers meet employers' goals.¹²

In an employment relationship, capitalists (or the managers they hire to run their businesses) have significant power to direct how work is performed. This power stems from the legal rules that have developed around employment. The common law of employment requires employees to be obedient or risk summary dismissal. Employers' legal power is buttressed by their **labour-market power**. Basically, there are usually more workers than there are jobs, so workers always face the prospect of being replaced—thereby losing their ability to feed, clothe, and shelter their families—if they don't follow their employers' directions.

Various government programs developed in the middle of the twentieth century—such as Unemployment Insurance (renamed Employment Insurance in 1996), and other income support programs—allowed workers to (at least partially) resist this whip of hunger. Such alternate sources of income reduced employers' labour-market power and increased their labour costs. Since the late 1970s, Canadian governments have moved to reduce access to social benefits, although this trend has occurred in fits

and starts. Declining levels of income support have, in turn, pressured workers to sell their capacity to work on whatever terms employers are prepared to offer.¹³ As we'll see in Chapter 2, these reductions in government spending have made it more difficult for workers to access some forms of labour-market training, given the rise in the costs associated with post-secondary education.

The relative ability of workers to resist employers' demands is important because the interests of workers and employers often differ. In a capitalist economy, employers must profit or they will go out of business. This **profit imperative** pressures employers to minimize costs. Labour is expensive and employers often seek to intensify work—getting workers to complete more work per hour—in order to minimize labour costs. Such management efforts can run contrary to workers' interests. Workers typically want to maximize their wages as well as control how and how hard they work—the opposite of what most employers want. Employers' greater legal and labour-market power means that employers' interests tend to prevail. What this tells us is that employment is not only an economic relationship but also a social one. By accepting employment, workers accept the employer's authority and agree (however grudgingly) to do as they are told—even when doing so runs contrary to their own interests.¹⁴

Employment relationships are formed in a **labour market**. Historically, labour markets were physical places where employers sized up potential workers, sometimes by physically poking and prodding them. Employers and workers would then negotiate wages. Wage rates were determined by the supply of and demand for workers. Modern-day labour markets are more often imaginary places where employers find workers to perform jobs, screening potential workers based on their education, experience, and the results of standardized tests.

Yet, there remain striking similarities between historical and contemporary labour markets. Employers and workers each try to achieve the best bargain that they can, and the price of work is greatly influenced by supply and demand (see Box 1.2 for an explanation of how labour markets operate). When the demand for workers outstrips the supply, wage rates typically rise (this is often called a tight labour market). And when the supply of workers exceeds demand, wages normally fall (this is called a

loose labour market). There are, however, a number of constraints on wages. For example, employment contracts, collective agreements, and legislation may fix wage rates and thereby shape the wage rate independently of supply and demand.¹⁵

Box 1.2 How Labour Markets Work

A labour market is a place where employers and workers negotiate the price of labour. The price of labour (or wage rate) is determined by the interaction of the demand for labour and the available supply. While real-world labour markets are much more complex than the examples below, the examples are useful because they help us understand why certain training stakeholders act in the ways they do.

Broadly speaking, **demand** is the number of workers wanted by employers. More specifically, demand is the number of hours of work that employers want to purchase at a certain wage rate. Typically, as the wage rate goes up, employers' demand for work(ers) goes down. This reflects that higher wages may make some work unprofitable (or cheaper to have done by machinery) and, thus, employers' need for workers is reduced. Conversely, as the wage rate goes down, demand for workers may well go up. The demand relationship is presented in figure 1.1. The line (D for demand) represents demand for full-time workers (let's say truck drivers in Alberta). Notice how employers' demand for workers decreases as wages increase.

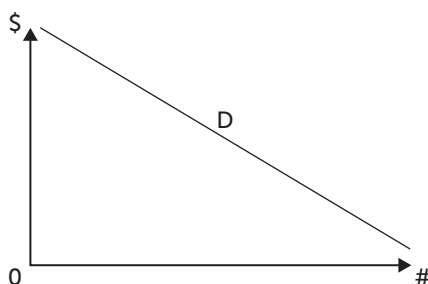


Figure 1.1 Demand relationship.

Supply is the number of hours of work that workers are prepared to provide at a given wage rate. As wages go up, workers who previously opted out of work may choose to become available, and workers in

other jurisdictions may migrate to take high-wage jobs, so the supply increases. Similarly, as wages go down, the number of workers available typically declines. This supply relationship is presented in figure 1.2. The line (S for supply) represents the supply of workers and the supply increases as wages increase.

Figure 1.3 places the supply of and demand for workers on a single chart. The point where the two lines intersect (point A) is known as the **equilibrium point**. Here, the supply of workers equals the demand. The wage rate at this point is approximately the “going” wage rate for this occupation in this locality. If something changes that affects the supply of or demand for labour, in theory the wage rate will change.

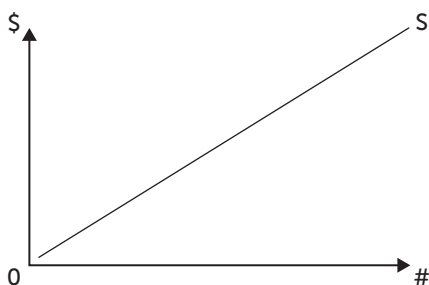


Figure 1.2 Supply relationship.

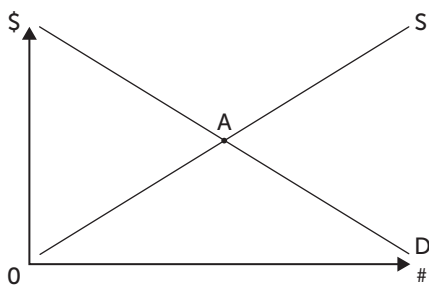


Figure 1.3 Labour supply and demand.

For example, imagine an economy where the supply of and demand for truck drivers is at equilibrium (point A on figure 1.4). One day, the price of oil goes up and employers want to hire more truck drivers as part of their efforts to produce and sell more oil (the desired number

of truck drivers is point B). Looking at the supply line (line S), though, we see that the demand for truck drivers will outstrip the supply at the current wage rate. In order to get enough truck drivers, employers' only option (in the short term) is to increase wages (to point C). This shifts the demand line to the right (from D₁ to D₂), reflecting that employers are prepared to pay more for a fixed amount of labour.

Given the profit imperative, employers may be reluctant to pay higher wages in the long term. In order to reduce the wage rate in figure 1.5 from the new equilibrium (point C) to the wage rate that they desire (point D), employers need to somehow increase the supply of workers prepared to work for the desired wage rate.

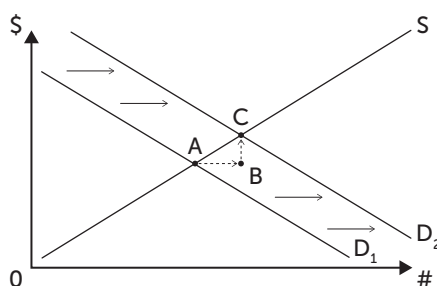


Figure 1.4 Supply and demand when labour demand increases.

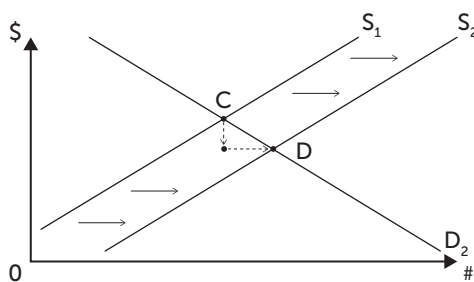


Figure 1.5 Supply, demand, and wage suppression.

This shift of the supply line (from S₁ to S₂) might be achieved through training more workers to drive trucks or accessing qualified workers from other countries. We'll explore some of these strategies in Chapter 3.

While we often talk about “the labour market,” there are actually many labour markets in Canada. Most labour markets have a geographical element to them. For example, the potential pool of workers for low-paying retail jobs may be limited to those workers who live within reasonable commuting distance of a specific workplace. Other labour markets may centre on specific qualifications or skills, such as holding the professional designation required to be nurse or being able to operate a crane. Geographical proximity may be less important in these labour markets. The relative scarcity of such workers may cause employers to look further afield to hire. And the higher wages associated with such jobs may mean workers are prepared to relocate to take a job.

Workers may also commute significant distances to take such jobs. Canadians often commute between municipalities and sometimes provinces. Workers travelling to undertake employment are engaged in **employment-related geographic mobility**. The propensity for long-distance commuting is higher among men, younger workers, workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, and workers in specific industries, such as mining or the oil and gas industry.¹⁶ These trends are evident in Fort McMurray, Alberta. Local employers, who were operating in a boom-and-bust economy based on extracting bitumen oil, met their seemingly insatiable demand for skilled workers during the first decade of this century by using **fly-in-fly-out workers**. These workers would commute from distant homes (often in Atlantic Canada) for two- or three-week stretches of work (often living in employer-operated work camps) before returning home.

As noted in Box 1.2, the supply of workers in the labour market is not fixed. Workers, employers, and the government respond to signals from the labour market. Imagine an occupation with unmet demand that results in wage increases. Trained workers may return to the labour force or geographically migrate to take such high-wage jobs. Untrained workers may also seek to become qualified for such jobs. Indeed, employers may offer to train workers (or pressure governments to do so) in the hope that an increase in the number of trained workers will reduce their wage costs. Employers may also consider substituting capital (e.g., machinery) for workers to reduce demand for workers. This tells us that, for employers, the goal of the labour-market training system is having

available an adequate number of appropriately trained workers at the lowest possible cost.

Alternately, employers may redesign jobs to require less skill, in the expectation that this will increase the pool of potential workers. Consider how the job of a cashier has changed over time, as scanners and electronic tills have reduced the memory and computation skills required of workers. Deskilling work is not the only reason stores have implemented scanner systems. These systems also speed up cashiers' work, facilitate better inventory control, and allow just-in-time ordering that reduce on-site storage space requirements. But reducing wages through deskilling has played a role.¹⁷

Employers may also lobby governments to increase the ease with which employers can bring appropriately skilled immigrant or temporary foreign workers into the country. Accessing migrant workers can loosen a tight labour market. Foreign workers may also be more productive than domestic workers, reflecting that they are often younger, highly motivated to work long hours, and less able to resist work intensification by employers.¹⁸ For their parts, governments often intervene to address shortages of trained workers. Historically, governments have funded a variety of training schemes, such as post-secondary institutions and apprenticeship training systems. Governments can also adjust labour-market policy to provide training and motivate workers to take it.

While workers often participate in training for vocational reasons, this is not necessarily their only or most important motive. Cyril Houle's examination of the reasons adults participate in education revealed three underlying motivational factors. Goal-oriented learners saw education as a means to achieve an end, be it in their work or personal lives. Activity-oriented learners saw education as a social activity. And learning-oriented workers were seeking knowledge for its own sake. Learners may, of course, have multiple reasons for undertaking training. A worker may hope that training will qualify her for a better job but may also enjoy that training provides a break from her everyday routine and a chance to socialize with her co-workers.¹⁹

Similarly, training providers may have motives beyond developing workers' skills. Community groups, such as unions, may provide health-and-safety training because they have a moral commitment to

undertake such work. They may also view such work as a way to build member interest and loyalty as well as possibly political support for legislative change or workplace action. Governments may seek to develop citizens' basic literacy, numeracy, and computer skills (all of which have utility in the labour market) because individuals need such skills to successfully manage their day-to-day lives—an outcome that also enhances social stability and the legitimacy of a government.

Government Regulation of the Labour Market

It is also necessary to understand how government works in order to grasp why governments intervene in the labour market and in the training system as they do. While we often refer to a generalized “government” or “government policy,” neither is monolithic. In Canada, there are different orders (or levels) of government. In terms of labour-market training, the two most important orders of government are (1) the federal government and (2) the provincial and territorial governments.

The authority granted each order of government by the constitution shapes how these governments intervene in matters of labour-market training. Canada's constitution grants different orders of government control over different fields of policy that are related to the labour market and training. On some issues, the federal government is predominant while, on others, provincial and territorial governments are predominant. And, in some cases, there is shared or parallel authority. These different arrangements are summarized in Table 1.1.

In practice, the provinces and territories (the PTs) deliver most labour-market training. Provinces and territories have virtually total control over the operation of their post-secondary systems (which fall within their jurisdiction). Much of the non-PSE labour-market training that the PTs deliver is shaped by agreements with the federal government, in part because much of the funding for this work comes from the federal government. Specific funding arrangements are discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Both federal government funding and its control over the Employment Insurance system has resulted in the development of broadly similar training regimes across the country. Governments have also created various mechanisms for intergovernmental coordination, such as the

Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM), but the effectiveness of such efforts has been limited.²⁰ A key source of diversity among the PTs is the unique history of and political arrangements in Québec.²¹ A second source of diversity is economic differences among the PTs (e.g., the decline of the fisheries and coal mining in Atlantic Canada and manufacturing in Ontario, the boom-and-bust nature of Alberta’s petroleum-based economy) that create pressure for different kinds of labour-market training interventions.

Table 1.1 Jurisdiction of labour-market policy

Arrangement	Policy field
Federal role only (or federal paramount)	Employment insurance Immigration
Provincial/Territorial role only (or paramount)	Workers’ compensation Social assistance K-12 and post-secondary education
Federal-provincial/ territorial overlap	Active labour market measures Labour-market training
Federal-provincial/ territorial parallelism	Employment and labour law

Source: Adapted from Haddow, R. and Klassen, T. *Partisanship, Globalization and Canadian Labour Market Policy*.

As we examine the responses of PTs to these sorts of pressures, it is important to be cognizant that PTs are also not monolithic. Within each provincial and territorial government, there are different departments (e.g., post-secondary education, social assistance) that may have different training stakeholders, objectives, and mechanisms that can spark policy diversity and even intragovernmental conflict. It is also important to be mindful of the differing interests of politicians (who set policy and come and go with the electoral cycle) and public servants (who enact policy and often have lengthy tenures). Differing perspectives and priorities can often result in discrepancies between the policies that are set and the programs that are delivered.

Finally, it is important to note that government policy is not necessarily stable over time. Some changes reflect broad policy shifts, such as the move from Keynesian to neoliberal economic policies detailed in Box 1.3. Other changes reflect short-term policy changes following the election of a new government or shifting priorities. Chapter 3 examines some of the more recent changes in government training and immigration policy.

Box 1.3 Shifting Emphases in Labour-Market Training

Since about 1975, Canada has moved away from Keynesian economics and towards neoliberalism. Policies advocating full employment gave way to policies designed to control inflation, and then to reduce government expenditures. This, in turn, resulted in changes in labour-market training policy. A useful way to think about changing training policy is as a tension between developing the labour force on one hand and making the labour market function effectively on the other.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, government intervention in labour-market training increased with an eye to improving worker skills. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, there were efforts to reshape this system to better match training to the needs of capital. Since the mid-1990s, the federal government has increasingly off-loaded responsibility for training on the PTs, which have, in turn, focused on reducing the cost of training (in part by reducing duration) and more closely linking training to address so-called skills shortages.²²

One way to make this high-level narrative more concrete is to simply examine the names given to the government department primarily responsible for labour-market training over time. The list below reflects the names used by Alberta from 1971 to present and is typical of other provinces and territories:

- 1971 Manpower
- 1986 Career Development and Employment
- 1992 Advanced Education and Career Development
- 1996 Human Resources and Employment
- 2006 Employment, Immigration and Industry
- 2008 Employment and Immigration
- 2011 Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
- 2015 Labour²³

What we see in this list is an early commitment to development of the labour force and the labour market (e.g., developing “manpower” and creating jobs). In the mid-1980s, there is a shift towards improving the skills and labour-market attachment of individual workers through career development. And, by the mid-1990s, there is a clear move towards governments ensuring that the labour market functions properly, by developing human resources and aligning immigration policy to the needs of the labour market.

Stakeholders and Their Interests

The Canadian training system has three main stakeholder groups: workers, employers, and the state. At a high level, all three groups benefit from labour-market training, which is one component of the reproduction of labour power. The **reproduction of labour power** refers to the various tasks that must be accomplished in order to maintain a class of workers. These activities include the very obviously reproductive activity of bearing and raising children. For example, someone (usually women) must perform (usually for free) the day-to-day tasks associated with keeping house and home, such as cooking, cleaning, and providing child care and eldercare. And, of course, a working class needs to have an adequate repertoire of KSAs in order to perform work, which requires education and training. Less obviously, workers must also accept the inequities of capitalism and their place within it.

Employers require a certain number of appropriately trained workers in order to get work done. Consistent with the profit imperative, employers benefit when the cost of training is borne by someone else, such as workers, the state, or even other employers. Employers also benefit when the supply of qualified workers exceeds their needs because this tends to depress wages (thereby lowering labour costs). This, in turn, suggests that it is in employers’ economic interests to claim there is a **skills shortage**. This self-interest should make us cautious about employer claims about skills shortages. For example, rather than making jobs more attractive or increasing their training efforts, employers have systematically restructured work to make it more precarious.

Precarious work is “paid work characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages and high risks of ill health.”²⁴ Precarious work directly benefits employers by reducing their upfront labour costs (or, rather, transferring these costs to the workers in the form of greater insecurity) and has increased significantly over the past twenty years.²⁵ The long-term economic and health consequences of precarious employment for workers (which PSE can help workers to avoid) make post-secondary education desirable. Training can also be a means of career advancement for workers and can increase their job security and control over their work. In this way, precarious work can also indirectly reduce employers’ costs by externalizing the cost of training on workers.

The state has two main (and sometimes competing) interests in capitalist societies: maintaining the processes of production and social reproduction. Production is the process by which we make stuff (including profit). **Social reproduction** is the process that perpetuates the social arrangements necessary for economic production. This includes ensuring there are workers and consumers. It also means ensuring workers accept being subordinate to employers in the production process.²⁶ Training is one way the state maintains the social-reproduction process. Developing workers’ KSAs contributes to the reproduction of labour power, which is a necessary condition for the perpetuation of production. The notion that workers can, through the acquisition of KSAs, improve their positions in society helps to frame worker dissatisfaction with their place in the production system as remediable via self-improvement (rather than political, social, or economic reform).

Training providers—such as private companies, post-secondary institutions, and not-for-profit organizations—are also stakeholder groups in the training system. Training providers typically have less ability to influence the shape of the training system than do governments and employers. Indeed, they are frequently clients of, or otherwise dependent upon, the state or employers. In this way, they tend to be minor actors in shaping the training system. For these reasons, the interests of training providers are dealt with in more detail in the chapters that follow.

The potentially conflicting interests of key stakeholders suggest there is more to training than it simply being one way that individuals can improve their skills, thereby advancing themselves and society as a whole. The

position taken by this book is that training may be more usefully understood as part of a system designed to maintain the status quo. The KSAs, values, and preferences that are conveyed in training typically seek to reinforce the operation of organizations and, more broadly, society: there is no profit in training workers to be critical of the system or to act disruptively. The fact that training does allow (some) workers to improve their life circumstances legitimizes existing social, economic, and political arrangements. But this process of individual advancement and selection also serves as a means of selecting out disruptive workers.²⁷ In this way, non-participation may reflect more than just the barriers workers face to accessing training—non-participation may also be an act of intentional resistance by workers.²⁸

Conflicts among the interests of labour, capital, and the state are most visible in three areas of training:

1. Who determines which workers can access training and how?
2. Who controls the content of training and how?
3. Who benefits from the training and how?

How these conflicts emerge and are managed in PSE, training and immigration policy, workplace training, and community education are addressed in the respective chapters that follow; however, a brief examination of each issue is useful.

Access to Training

One of three recurring questions in this book is, Who determines which workers access training and how do they do so? This question matters because training is unequally and inequitably distributed along several different dimensions. For example, while men and women undertake formal studies or training at similar rates (36.2 per cent and 35.9 per cent respectively), men are more likely to receive employer support for doing so (54.6 per cent versus 48.0 per cent for women).²⁹ This gender difference becomes even starker when we look at employer-supported training for low-wage workers and less-educated workers. Gendered access to training reflects broader patterns of gender-based discrimination in the labour force, such as the persistent wage gap between men and women who perform similar work.³⁰

Gender is not, of course, the only identity factor that affects access to training. Workers with university degrees typically participate in subsequent formal work-related training at three times the rate of workers without high school diplomas. Unionized workers are also 50 per cent more likely to participate in workplace learning than non-unionized workers.³¹ Similar differences can be discerned on the basis of age, language, location (e.g., urban versus rural), heritage (which is sometimes called culture, ethnicity, or race), and income. We will pay specific attention to the experiences of Indigenous workers throughout this book.

The complex interaction of these identity factors causes overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage, a phenomenon that is referred to as **intersectionality**. Being aware of the cumulative effect of each person's various social identities allows us to better understand the sometimes nuanced effect of intersecting identity factors. For example, the labour-market and training experiences of rural and urban women or the experiences of workers from the same cultural group—one with secure employment and one employed precariously—may be quite different.

The differing levels of access to training experienced by workers based upon their identities also suggest that training serves to reproduce a particular pattern of advantage and disadvantage. This is easiest to see if we look at the tendency of university-educated workers (who often already earn higher incomes and have more stable employment) to command the greatest access to additional training. Essentially, the allocation of training opportunities (through whatever means) helps the already well off in society to maintain their position of privilege. If we add in another personal characteristic (such as gender), we find that the difference in access experienced by university-educated and non-university-educated workers grows—to the advantage of university-educated men and to the disadvantage of non-university-educated women.

Access to training is often examined in terms of the barriers that workers face. For example, a 2003 Canadian study found the main worker-reported barriers to accessing job-related training were cost (45 per cent) and time. Regarding time, 35 per cent of workers indicated they were too busy at work, 27 per cent cited family responsibilities, and 27 per cent identified conflicts between work and training schedules.³² As noted in the earlier discussion of social reproduction, gender often shapes the

barriers workers face, with men in this study being more likely to report that work demands are a barrier to training while women are more likely to cite family responsibilities.³³

Yet, it is also useful to think about the various structural mechanisms that have an impact on access to training. As we'll see in Chapter 2, access to PSE is controlled in several ways—such as entry requirements, enrollment caps, and tuition fees—and the policy decisions underlying them often reflect complex tradeoffs among the interests of stakeholder groups. Location can also be an issue, with rural and northern students having fewer locally available PSE options than urban and southern students. Access to training provided as part of government labour-market programs is generally controlled by governments via criteria such as EI eligibility. Such programs can also simply grant employers the power to determine who receives training, as in the case of the Canada Job Grant and the Québec training levy that we'll examine in Chapter 3.

Employer control over access is clearest in workplace training. Chapter 4 looks at the various ways that employers may determine who gets what kind of training. Key trends in workplace training are declining employer support for training and a shift towards leadership training. We'll conclude our look at access in Chapter 5 when we consider various forms of community education. Some forms of community education require membership—such as in a union. Other forms may have some form of participation fee (often cost recovery) or otherwise restrict access to specific categories of individuals, such as the unemployed or immigrants.

Control of Training

The second recurring question is, Who determines what training is available, and how do they do so? The question matters because stakeholders who control the content of training can (and do) use this control to advance their interests at the expense of the interests of other stakeholders. For example, an employer's interest in minimizing costs and the risk of other employers poaching its staff may cause that employer to favour extremely employer-specific (i.e., non-portable) training. The employees, who likely view training as a way to get ahead, will likely want broader training so their skills are more transferrable to other jobs

and employers. If the employer decides the content of the training, it will likely be short, narrowly focused, and designed to improve the employer's bottom line. Chapter 4 highlights this trend in the form of declining employer investments in workplace training.

Of course, who controls the content of training and how they do so varies across the components of the training system. In PSE, governments may exert control by limiting which programs of study are offered and where. Governments can also shape enrollment in each program via operational and infrastructure funding. Institutions can broadly control the content of programs through regulations, while instructors can control the content of specific courses through pedagogical and course material decisions. Employer input varies depending upon the nature of the post-secondary education. In vocational training (such as the apprenticeship system), employers determine what is taught on the job and also shape classroom curriculum. Students have relatively little input into these PSE curricular decisions and may be reduced to voting with their feet.

Governments control the training provided through labour-market policy. As we saw above, policymakers' decision-making is influenced by the sometimes competing demands of production and social reproduction. Literacy education offers an interesting example of how this plays out. Historically, improving literacy levels was viewed as a way to improve the social, political, and economic lives of Canadians. Programming was often provided at, or in association with, workplaces as well as through non-workplace, adult education programs.³⁴ This broad framing of literacy work reflected the fact that federal and provincial literacy policy served multiple purposes that met the vocational and non-vocational needs of workers and employers. As we'll see in Chapter 5, since the 1980s, literacy has increasingly been framed as a means to economic growth. This has profoundly reshaped what kind of and how literacy is taught in government-funded programs, which increasingly frame literacy as an individual responsibility and make funding conditional on a program's return on investment.³⁵

The content of community education is usually shaped by the values and goals of the group providing the education. Yet, the programs for which funding can be found and the outcomes required by funders place important constraints on what training is available. For example,

the Alberta Workers' Health Centre (which we'll read about in Chapter 5) is a not-for-profit organization that uses theatre to educate teenagers about workplace dangers and rights. Students whose employers steal their wages or expose them to hazards can respond in a variety of ways, such as taking no action, quitting, complaining to the government, or organizing their fellow workers to take direct action against the employer. Some funders will be more comfortable than others with training that discusses direct-action options. This (dis)comfort may, in turn, constrain the content of the offered training. Overall, we see the importance of the golden rule (they who hold the gold make the rules) in the scope of training available to Canadians.

Benefits of Training

The final recurring question this book will examine is, Who benefits from training, and how do they do so? At a high level, the answers are obvious: workers get the KSAs required for jobs, employers get trained employees, and governments get social, economic, and political stability. Nevertheless, when we look deeper, we see that the return-on-investment logic that permeates discussions of training often focuses on shifting the cost of training from one group of stakeholders to another. Interestingly, these discussions often frame training in two competing and contradictory ways. **Framing** is the process of shaping public discourse through the selection, interpretation, and presentation of information. Sometimes the beneficiary of training is said to be individuals, and other times the beneficiary is said to be the public.

Framing the beneficiary of training as individual students and workers implies that training yields economic benefits primarily to workers. As Box 1.4 reveals, additional formal education clearly benefits workers. We're less able to accurately identify and allocate the financial benefits of other forms of labour-market training among workers, employers, the state, or society. Nevertheless, framing individuals as the primary beneficiaries of training justifies off-loading training costs onto workers, by such means as increasing post-secondary tuition or reducing the availability of state-funded skills training for the unemployed. It also excuses employers' declining investment in workplace training. Interestingly, while workers

may be “consumers” of training, they have limited ability to influence what training is available: they can only opt in (if they can afford it) or opt out of whatever training is offered.

Box 1.4 Return on Investment from Training

Growing interest in the **return on investment** (ROI) from training is shaping what training occurs and who benefits. This trend warrants discussion because what we know about who receives what kind of benefit from training is fairly limited. It is useful to break down the ROI research into benefits for individuals, firms, and society.

- **Individual ROI:** Researchers have repeatedly found additional years of full-time study result in higher individual incomes. This effect varies by field and appears to be more pronounced for women than for men. There is also evidence that employer-paid training positively affects income. That said, it is often difficult to determine the net effect of training other than formal PSE. The impact of training appears to deteriorate over time.³⁶
- **Firm ROI:** Employers rarely measure their ROI on training, likely due to the complexity and cost of such measures.³⁷ The few firm-level studies that exist are beset by methodological problems, such as incomplete data and various forms of bias and error, and thus don’t provide any good basis from which to generalize.³⁸ A 2013 Canadian study that examined training ROI at the industry level found that twelve out of fourteen industries saw training yield increases in productivity. Yet, at the same time, only four of those industries saw a positive financial ROI for training expenditures.³⁹ What this finding highlights is that increasing a firm’s productivity does not necessarily increase the firm’s profitability. It may be that the direct and indirect costs of training exceed the increased value generated by the training.
- **Societal ROI:** Training may benefit society as a whole by generating a social return. A social return is a gain experienced by the whole economy. Measuring such returns is difficult. Again, there is consensus that increasing the average initial level of schooling yields a positive social return, but the social return on other forms of training is uncertain.⁴⁰

Overall, it is very unclear what the ROI of training is. It is important to note that training provides many different kinds of benefits, not all of which have an easily quantifiable monetary dimension. Training can positively affect employees' attitudes, morale, and motivation. Training may also increase organizational adaptability and employee retention, and improve an organization's reputation

Finally, training may positively affect society via a spillover effect. For example, literacy training enables workers to participate in the democratic process. And workers with skills that have clear vocational application—such as spreadsheeting—may also employ those skills in the management of their own lives.⁴¹

By contrast, framing the beneficiary of training as the broader public assumes that training contributes to the economic growth of the nation through the development of human capital. **Human capital** is said to be the cumulative stock of KSAs, intelligence, experience, and judgment of an individual or a population. Human capital theory asserts that human capital comprises a key input into the production process and that its utility can be maintained or increased through education and training. We'll look more at this theory in Chapters 2 and 4.

If the beneficiaries of training are all Canadians, then the cost of training should be borne by public funding. But where does public funding come from? Public spending is mostly funded from various forms of taxes.⁴² Most tax revenue comes from personal income tax (49 per cent) and consumption taxes and duties (17 per cent). By contrast, corporate taxes comprise about 14 per cent of tax revenue.⁴³ In effect, this “public good” framing of training facilitates and legitimizes the reduction in training costs paid directly by employers and capitalists, shifting it onto individuals through income and consumption taxes.

The transfer of production costs from employers to other groups (often called “externalizing cost”) is widespread. For example, the workers' compensation system in each province and territory was created in order to provide stable, predictable, and immediate wage-loss benefits to injured workers. Employers pay insurance premiums to fund the cost of this system. There are good reasons to believe that, over time, employers

have shifted the cost of workers' compensation onto workers in the form of foregone wage increases.⁴⁴ Other examples of employers externalizing production costs onto the public include polluting the environment (instead of employers remediating or eliminating pollution) and benefiting from publicly funded health care.

It is interesting to note (as we'll see in Chapter 4) the wide agreement that Canadian employers spend little on training (compared to other countries) and that this spending is declining over time. Yet there is little public demand for, or government effort to require, greater employer spending on training. Giving employers a "pass" on providing adequate training may reflect the widespread adoption of a neoliberal view of society. **Neoliberalism** is a set of political and economic prescriptions that centre on minimizing government regulations, programs, and expenditures. In the resulting laissez-faire economy, the role of the state is to maintain order and provide infrastructure and services only when the market cannot. Workers are expected to earn their crust by finding work, and income support is reduced. As the primary beneficiary of training, workers are also expected to bear the cost of it.⁴⁵

As we'll see in Chapter 3, Canadian government training policies have increasingly become focused on **supply-side measures**, wherein the state seeks to fast-track workers into jobs through short-term training. This approach sits in contrast with previous **demand-side measures**, such as job-creation and economic-development programs. The shift towards supply-side solutions (and neoliberalism more generally) has coincided with an increasing concentration of income, education, and opportunities among the wealthiest group of citizens. This, in turn, suggests that externalizing the cost of training onto individuals reinforces and intensifies the existing class structure. This growing inequality in opportunities and outcomes is justified by framing greater employer provision of training as unrealistic because doing so would purportedly reduce employer competitiveness.

According to this view, the remedy prescribed for so-called skills shortages—as evident in the vignette that opened this chapter—includes the further vocationalization of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education; unspecified efforts to reduce barriers to workers joining the labour market; tax breaks for employers that provide training (i.e., publicly

subsidized workplace training); and increasing access to hyper-exploitable foreign workers. Again, the costs of training are externalized onto workers and taxpayers.

Conclusion

So what are we to make of widespread employer claims of skills and labour shortages? Employers may well be facing difficulty hiring an adequate number of appropriately trained staff. But why is that? Is it that workers don't want to, or can't, get training in the occupations or skills employers demand? Blaming workers for workplace problems is a recurring theme in Canada—consider the welfare bum or the workers' compensation malingerer (who is too lazy to work) or the careless worker (who caused his or her own injury)—but not a particularly helpful one. As we'll see in Chapter 2, access to post-secondary education and apprenticeship training is often constrained—both by what opportunities are available and by the cost of PSE. Of particular interest is that the lack of skilled trades workers may be caused by employers failing to offer an adequate number of apprenticeships.

As we'll see in Chapter 3, labour shortages do occur in Canada, but they tend to be geographically isolated and occupation specific. This reality sits uneasily with media coverage of skills shortages. In addition to overstating the degree of labour shortage that exists, media coverage often fails to differentiate between absolute shortages (a situation where there are no qualified potential workers available) or relative shortages (a situation where there are no qualified workers prepared to work for the wages and working conditions on offer). Employers improving workers' wages and working conditions can remedy relative labour shortages. But such changes are contrary to employers' economic interests. Consequently, we see (as in the opening of this chapter) employers seeking greater public funding and policy changes in order to externalize costs.

The notion that there are conflicting interests helps us to understand why the training system appears fragmented and clumsy. As workers and employers jostle in pursuit of their own interests, the state tries to ensure both production and social reproduction. While this tension exists throughout the training system, it is perhaps easiest to grasp in the context

of training that occurs in specific workplaces. The implementation of fads like learning organizations and/or the meaning of terms like “skill” and “competency” provide concrete examples of conflicting interests, as we’ll see in Chapter 4. There is also conflict within groups. For example, professional regulatory organizations constrain which workers may practise in some occupations.

The role of professional regulatory organizations in controlling both workplace training and entry to the professions is picked up in Chapter 5, which examines community-based training, such as literacy training, settlement services for immigrants, and union-sponsored training. While this training can have labour market benefits, the training often stands at some remove from the labour market. Further, community education often develops skills and knowledge that allow workers to engage in political activity, which may be disruptive to capital’s interests. This discussion of the emancipatory tradition of adult education helps bring out the differing interests of training stakeholders.

This book concludes in Chapter 6, which identifies clear patterns in training (around access, control, and benefit) and the conflicted and sometimes dysfunctional nature of the so-called training system. This final chapter then considers the degree to which the seemingly ad hoc nature of the training system can be understood as the product of different stakeholders seeking to advance their (often competing) interests. Of specific interest is the role that training plays in the reproduction of labour power as well as in stabilizing and replicating Canada’s class-based social and economic system.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Tencer, “Tech Jobs Will Boom in Canada.”
- 2 Information and Communications Technology Council, *Digital Talent*.
- 3 Arnason, “Farm Labour Shortfall Expected to Soar.”
- 4 Sears, *Retooling the Mind Factory*.
- 5 Grant, “Aligning Skills Development.”
- 6 Morgan, *Images of Organization*.
- 7 I was deeply pleased when I thought up this comparison. Sadly, it was not an original thought, having been previously published in Cross, “Training vs. Education.”

- 8 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Labour Market Training," Glossary of Statistical Terms.
- 9 Laliberte, "The 'Grab-a-Hoe' Indians."
- 10 Vosko, "Precarious Employment."
- 11 Yates, *Naming the System*.
- 12 Livingstone, "Starting with the Education-Jobs Gap."
- 13 Broad and Hunter, "Work, Welfare, and the New Economy."
- 14 Godard, *Industrial Relations, the Economy and Society*.
- 15 Drost and Hird, *Introduction to the Canadian Labour Market*.
- 16 Haan, Walsh, and Neis, "At the Crossroads."
- 17 Basker, "Change at the Checkout."
- 18 Preibisch, "BC-Grown."
- 19 Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood*.
- 20 Wood, "Comparing Intergovernmental Institutions in Human Capital Development."
- 21 Haddow and Klassen, *Partisanship, Globalization, and Canadian Labour Market Policy*.
- 22 McBride, *Working? Employment Policy in Canada*.
- 23 "List of Alberta Provincial Ministers," Wikipedia.
- 24 Vosko, "Precarious Employment," 4.
- 25 Lewchuk et al., *It's More than Poverty*.
- 26 Mandel, *Power and Money*; Picchio, *Social Reproduction*.
- 27 Jarvis, *The Sociology of Adult & Continuing Education*.
- 28 Crowther, "Participation in Adult and Community Education."
- 29 Canadian Council on Learning, *Securing Prosperity through Canada's Human Infrastructure*.
- 30 Turcotte, *Women and Education*; Cooke, Zeytinoglu, and Chowhan, "Barriers to Training Access"; Status of Women Canada, *Women in Canada at a Glance*.
- 31 Canadian Council on Learning, *Securing Prosperity through Canada's Human Infrastructure*.
- 32 Peters, *Results of the 2003 Adult Education and Training Survey*.
- 33 Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood*.
- 34 Morrison, *Camps and Classrooms*.
- 35 Smythe, "Ten Years of Adult Literacy Policy and Practice."
- 36 Blundell et al., "Human Capital Investment."
- 37 Bartel, "Measuring the Employer's Return on Investments in Training."
- 38 Tharenou, Saks, and Moore, "A Review and Critique of Research."

- 39 Percival, Cozzarin, and Formanek, “Return on Investment for Workplace Training.”
- 40 Blundell et al., “Human Capital Investment.”
- 41 Aguinis and Kraiger, “Benefits of Training and Development.”
- 42 An exception to this rule is training funded through Part 2 benefits under Employment Insurance. This training is funded by Employment Insurance premiums, which are jointly paid by employers and workers. That said, the majority of training funding is ultimately derived from federal taxation.
- 43 Department of Finance Canada, “Annual Financial Report.”
- 44 Barnettson, *The Political Economy of Workplace Injury in Canada*.
- 45 Sears, *Retooling the Mind Factory*.

CHAPTER TWO

Post-Secondary Education and the Apprenticeship Training System

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain the role of post-secondary education and apprenticeship training in the Canadian training system.
- Describe how funding and governance arrangements affect access to, control of, and benefit from training.
- Identify the hidden curriculum in K-12 and post-secondary education.



As we saw in Chapter 1, many stakeholders criticize the Canadian training system for providing too few workers with the skills that employers require. This critique is most often levelled at the post-secondary education system. For example, workers may be termed “overeducated but underqualified,” thereby suggesting that there is a gap between formal education and the skills required by work. Business leaders often use this critique to advocate for greater business involvement in or control over PSE. For example, according to Tom Jenkins, chair of OpenText Corporation and co-chair of the Business Council of Canada’s Business/Higher Education Roundtable,

New technologies, disruptive innovation, demographic shifts and intense global competition for talent are quickly raising skill requirements and changing expectations for new graduates. To ensure our next generation can compete and succeed in the 21st century knowledge economy, we must take concrete steps towards a system in which Canadian companies and institutions are more efficiently and effectively connected.¹

Proposals for improving PSE graduates’ ability to “compete and succeed” include mandatory work-experience programs for all college and university students to “bridge the gap between the skills industries need and what the workforce offers.”² These recommendations frame PSE as primarily labour-market training, thereby marginalizing its social and cultural contributions. Government programs often reinforce this framing of PSE. For example, British Columbia’s EducationPlannerBC is an online tool aimed at high school students. It integrates career planning,

labour-market information, and the PSE application process and thereby constructs PSE mainly as a pathway to employment.³

Employer assertions that PSE fails to provide students with useful vocational skills helps reinforce the belief that there is a skills shortage among Canadian workers. Although the notion that there is a significant and persistent skills shortage is widely promoted by employers, this narrative is demonstrably false. While acknowledging that there are periodic mismatches between the demand for and supply of workers with specific skill sets (such as in the skilled trades), David Livingstone and his colleagues demonstrate that the employment-related knowledge and skills of Canada's labour force exceeds the capacity of employers to provide jobs needing those skills.⁴ This phenomenon of **underemployment**—wherein the KSAs of workers are underutilized in their jobs—reveals a skills surplus. Underemployment is particularly pronounced for recent immigrants, people of colour, and persons with disabilities.

There are several explanations for underemployment. On the supply side, the number and proportion of workers with PSE has risen significantly over time. Worker participation in ongoing, informal education is also high, although, as noted in Chapter 1, it is uneven. On the demand side, employers have deskilled some jobs, including, for instance, by reducing workers' opportunity to make decisions about what to do and how to do it. Not surprisingly, underemployment is less common among corporate executives, professionals, and managers and more common among industrial and service workers. Employers' tendency to use credentials as selection tools for jobs (even though jobs may not require workers to utilize all of the skills developed during PSE) may further contribute to underemployment.⁵

As we consider questions of access, control, and benefit in post-secondary education, it is important to keep in mind that the continued currency of the “overeducated but underqualified” narrative serves the interests of employers in two ways. First, it suggests that the declining economic fortunes of workers can be remedied through skill training. Essentially, this narrative shifts blame for dissatisfying and precarious work onto workers and absolves employers of responsibility for the consequences of their job-design decisions. This false attribution of responsibility is a part of a broader “**blame the worker**” narrative that

appears in other contexts, such as workplace injury prevention. Second, the skills-shortage narrative suggests that workers and taxpayers should pay for additional training, because they will be the primary beneficiaries of it. In reality, the employer's prescription of "more training" will further flood an already loose labour market, thereby allowing employers to decrease the wages of skilled workers.

This chapter begins with a brief examination of the role of primary and secondary education in setting the stage for labour-market training. We then turn our attention to the PSE system in Canada. Post-secondary education is the largest component of the Canadian training system, with approximately 2 million students enrolled annually. Among the most interesting trends evident in PSE is the continued influence of gender-based occupational segregation on who takes which programs. A similar pattern is evident in the Canadian apprenticeship system, which provides workplace training in skilled trades and occupations.

Primary and Secondary Education in Canada

Primary and secondary education (hereafter the "K-12 system") is not normally discussed as part of the Canadian training system. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, employers often seek to influence the K-12 curriculum (such as by demanding that computer training begin in kindergarten). One government response to these kinds of demands is the introduction of work-experience and apprenticeship programs that connect (usually high school) students with the labour market. For example, apprenticeship programs—such as the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program—make it possible for students to complete high school while simultaneously working towards a trade certification.⁶

These programs aside, the K-12 system makes two main contributions to labour-market training. First, and most obviously, schools teach (most) students basic reading, writing, and computational skills. These skills are required for most jobs, and most subsequent labour-market training programs assume basic numeracy and literacy. Second, and less obviously, schools instill into students attitudes, ideas, habits, and expectations that employers find useful. This latter contribution to the training system is often referred to as the **hidden curriculum** of schooling. The term "hidden" can be a bit misleading. This process is not hidden in the

sense that it is a secret conspiracy. Rather, this curriculum is hidden in plain sight because it the accepted norm.⁷

Think back to your own K-12 experience. It likely entailed attending a school five days per week for seven hours a day. In the classroom, the teacher determined what happened, for how long, and what behaviour was acceptable. Students were rewarded for carefully following directions and were punished for disrupting the work of others. Punishment was applied via an amalgam of social pressure, loss of privileges, suspensions, and expulsion. Your performance was periodically assessed using assignments and tests, although you may have noticed that some students—perhaps those who were deemed “good” (by virtue of their behaviour or because they belonged to a particular identity group)—often received better grades than students who were “bad,” regardless of their actual respective performances.

These structures and processes closely mirror those of a traditional workplace. In this way, the school system teaches future workers that their role is to be punctual, obedient, and diligent—characteristics that most employers desire in workers. The K-12 system also teaches students to expect limited discretion in what they do during the day and when and how they do it. Students learn that deviations from “the rules” will result in punishment. Students also learn that who they are can affect how they are treated and that their gender, heritage, and class can affect what they can expect in life.⁸ The lengthy process of **acculturation** that students face normalizes employers’ authority in the workplace, including employers’ “right” to determine what training is required, who should receive it, and how it should be delivered.

Post-Secondary Education in Canada

As noted in Chapter 1, Canada’s constitution vests authority over education in provincial and territorial governments. Each Canadian province and territory operates a publicly funded **post-secondary education system**. These public PSE institutions include colleges, universities, and technical institutes as well as various specialized institutes, such as colleges of art and design. Most provinces and territories also allow for (and in some cases regulate) private PSE institutions. Some private institutions

are for-profit institutions that provide career training. Other private institutions have a religious or cultural focus. Study at these institutions typically results in the awarding of a credential. Box 2.1 outlines the most commonly available PSE credentials.

Box 2.1 Post-Secondary Credentials

In English-speaking provinces and territories, students are able to obtain a variety of PSE credentials. Although there is significant diversity among the provinces and territories, the following credentials are commonly available:

- **Certificates and Diplomas:** These credentials normally require one and two years (respectively) of full-time study to obtain, and typically provide a basic understanding of a field or discipline, often with a vocational focus.
- **Baccalaureate (or bachelor's) degrees:** These "undergraduate" degrees typically require four years to obtain, although three-year degrees are also available.
- **Master's degrees:** These "graduate" degrees typically require one to three years of additional years of study beyond the baccalaureate level to obtain.
- **Doctoral degrees:** These "postgraduate" degrees typically require three or more additional years of study beyond the master's level to obtain.

Most jurisdictions also offer apprenticeship training programs (see below). Québec's secondary and post-secondary system is significantly different from that of English Canada. Québec allows secondary students to earn a variety of vocational credentials for which there are no analogs in English Canada. Reflecting that secondary education is shorter in Québec, entrance to the university system is normally mediated through Québec's college system.

Public PSE institutions derive revenue from four main sources: operating and capital grants provided by their provincial or territorial government, student tuition and fees, research-related grants, and

various other income streams (including campus services and private philanthropy). While each province and territory runs its own system, the federal government provides a significant portion of funding through the Canada Social Transfer. Overall, Canadian governments spend more than \$12 billion on PSE each year. Public funding accounts for approximately 52 per cent of PSE revenue, a percentage that has been in long-term decline.⁹ This decline in funding has been offset mostly by increases in student tuition and fees.

While it can be difficult to make international comparisons due to differences in PSE arrangements and terminology, among the sixteen OECD countries to which Canada is most similar, Canada ranks second in terms of the percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP) spent on PSE institutions (behind only the United States). Canadian institutions receive approximately 1.5 per cent of GDP as transfers from governments and 1.0 per cent of GDP from private sources (such as tuition fees), although there are significant interprovincial differences in the proportion of public and private funding.¹⁰

Post-secondary education is often subject to the blanket criticism that it fails to provide training that leads to jobs (e.g., “If it is higher education, why can’t you get hired?”). Setting aside the multiple aims of PSE, many PSE credentials do have a strong labour-market orientation, specifically aiming at preparing students for occupations. That said, as we’ll see in Chapter 4, the right to practise some occupations is contingent upon securing a licence from a professional regulatory organization.

Historical Development of PSE

Until the late nineteenth century, Canada’s post-secondary system was dominated by private, church-sponsored colleges. Enrollments were small, universities focused on educating political elites, and the relationships between provincial governments and individual institutions were varied.¹¹ In 1906, Ontario’s Flavelle Commission recommended a **bicameral governance** system at the University of Toronto: the government would appoint a board of governors to manage the financial affairs of the university while an academic body (today variously called an academic senate or general faculties council) would set academic policy. This

bicameral model of institutional governance was replicated as other provinces established and expanded universities.¹²

Following the Second World War, there was a significant expansion of enrollments, fuelled first by returning veterans. During the 1960s, most jurisdictions created new universities, and some jurisdictions supplemented existing technical institutes with colleges. Ontario opened stand-alone colleges offering three-year technical programs, while Alberta and British Columbia opened colleges offering vocational training and university transfer programs.¹³ As part of the Quiet Revolution, Québec's unique system emerged, driven in part by a desire to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church over PSE. Colleges and technical institutes often operated with less autonomy than universities, although all PSE institutions were heavily dependent upon operating grants from their respective provincial or territorial governments. Over time, the distinctions between colleges and universities have started to blur in some jurisdictions.

In addition to its public colleges, universities, and technical institutes, Canada continues to have a variety of privately operated institutions. A small number of colleges and universities are affiliated with a religious denomination and may or may not receive public funding. There are also over 1,300 **regulated career colleges** that provide vocational training leading to a diploma or certificate to approximately 170,000 students per year. These institutions often charge significantly higher rates of tuition (due, in part, to the lack of public operating funds), offer compressed programs (when compared with public colleges), and have a lower rate of full-time employment among graduates.¹⁴ It is important to note that state regulation is focused on financially protecting students (should the institution suddenly close its doors) rather than on imposing any meaningful oversight over the quality, curriculum, or labour-market outcomes of these programs.

Cost and Access to PSE

In 2014–15, there were slightly more than 2 million Canadians enrolled in PSE (excluding apprentice programs). Many of these programs have clear linkages to the labour market (see Table 2.1). Students from families

with high **socio-economic status** (SES) are more likely to attend PSE (specifically university) than students from families with middle and low socio-economic status. The perceived cost of PSE appears to be a significant factor that limits some students' plans.¹⁵ This suggests that tuition and other costs are an important factor that controls access to PSE.

Table 2.1 PSE Students by Field of Study, 2014/15.

Field of study	Enrollment
Personal improvement and leisure	25,224
Education	99,474
Visual and performing arts, and communication technologies	82,389
Humanities	308,139
Social and behaviour sciences and law	276,213
Business, management and public administration	377,931
Physical and life sciences and technologies	133,062
Mathematics, computer and information sciences	66,207
Architecture, engineering and related technologies	216,066
Agriculture, natural resources and conservation	29,397
Health and related fields	251,874
Personal, protective and transportation services	42,900
Other instructional programs	146,061

Note. Approximately 56% of all PSE students were female. While gender distribution by program broadly follows this average, there are a number of notable exceptions as set out in Figure 2.1.

Source: Statistics Canada, “Post-Secondary Enrolments, by Program Type, Credential Type, Classification of Instructional Programs, Primary Grouping (CIP_PG), Registration Status and Sex.”

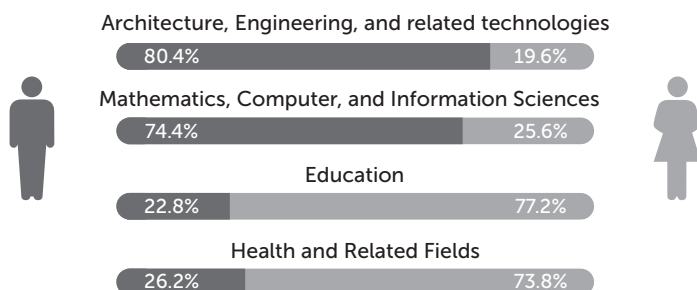


Figure 2.1 Highly gendered fields of study. (Data from Statistics Canada, “Post-Secondary Enrolments, by Program Type, Credential Type, Classification of Instructional Programs, Primary Grouping [CIP_PG], Registration Status and Sex.”)

These gendered patterns in PSE broadly mirror the gender distribution in occupations. Gender-based **occupational segregation** has proven surprisingly stable despite significant increases in female educational achievement. For example, between 1991 and 2011, the percentage of female university graduates (aged 24 to 35) working as nurses and teachers was stable at approximately 20 per cent. Occupational segregation also appears more pronounced for workers who do not possess a university degree.¹⁶ As Box 2.2 shows, ethnicity and geography also affect access to PSE.

Box 2.2 Indigenous Persons, PSE, and Geography

Indigenous peoples in Canada have faced a long history of systemic racism and segregation. As a result, their levels of educational participation and attainment have lagged behind those of non-Indigenous populations. Over time, PSE participation by people Indigenous to Canada has increased significantly. And a number of institutions explicitly focused on the needs of Indigenous populations have developed, including Saskatchewan’s First Nations University, the University of Northern British Columbia, Manitoba’s University College of the North, and Ontario’s Algoma College.¹⁷

The 2011 National Household Survey (which used the term “Aboriginal identity”) found that 48.4 per cent of Canadians who reported an Aboriginal identity also reported a PSE credential compared with 64.7 per cent of Canadians who self-reported as non-Aboriginal. The area of greatest divergence in attainment was among university graduates. Among those who identified as “Aboriginal,” 9.8 per cent held a university degree, while 26.5 per cent of non-“Aboriginal” Canadians reported holding a university degree.¹⁸ Preliminary data analysis of the 2016 National Household Survey found a similar pattern.¹⁹

Geographical location appears to be a factor in Indigenous educational achievement. The highest levels of PSE achievement among Indigenous people are reported among urban residents, then residents of towns, rural residents, and, finally, Indigenous persons resident on reserves.²⁰ (A similar pattern emerges for non-Indigenous students, with rural students being less likely than urban students to attend post-secondary education.) Indigenous persons located on reserves or in other isolated locations may have limited access to adequate high school preparation.

There are a number of explanations for this pattern. Securing adequate PSE preparation can entail leaving behind non-PSE-bound peers and even students’ communities. Indigenous peoples in Canada also face limited access to local PSE institutions, higher financial and social costs, and limited opportunity in such communities for employment in jobs requiring PSE (particularly university degrees). Further, Indigenous students may follow non-linear pathways through the education system, prioritizing family and community obligations over moving quickly from high school to PSE to a job.²¹

The cost of tuition, fees, and supplies affects who can access PSE. As noted in Box 2.2, students without a local PSE institution (or whose local institution does not offer the program they want) may also face costs associated with relocating. Over time, the cost of tuition in Canada has risen significantly. For example, students in degree programs in 2016–17 paid approximately 40 per cent more in tuition and compulsory fees than they would have ten years earlier.²² The rapid escalation of tuition fees began in the mid-1990s when the federal government reduced transfer payments to provincial governments. Provincial governments responded by reducing

institutional operating grants.²³ For example, Alberta reduced operating grants to public PSE institutions by 21 per cent between 1994 and 1997. Reducing public funding of PSE shifts the cost of the reproduction of labour power from employers and taxpayers to students and their families in the form of higher tuition fees.

Governments have sought to assist individuals to manage tuition costs in three main ways. Federal registered educational savings plans (RESPs) allow contributions made in the name of a minor to grow tax-deferred. The federal government also partially matches RESP contributions. Nevertheless, only about half of parents have opened RESPs, perhaps because many parents cannot afford to do so.²⁴ Combined with differences in participation rates by SES, the limited uptake on RESPs suggests that tuition reinforces the **intergenerational transfer of advantage** and disadvantage: future workers whose parents are better off are more likely to be able to access PSE, which, in turn, provides them with access to higher-paying and more stable jobs.

Federal and provincial governments also operate various loan, scholarship, and bursary programs. Loans are sometimes framed as a way for students to “invest” in themselves in order to achieve better occupational outcomes. Between 2009 and 2014, the total value of federal loans owed rose from \$12.3 billion to \$15.7 billion.²⁵ This data does not capture the value of loans provided by provincial or territorial governments or through private lenders. Students’ use of loans differ depending upon their SES. Both Canadian and US research suggests that students whose parents are in the highest income brackets are less likely than average to access loans, presumably drawing on family resources to defray tuition costs. Similarly, students whose parents are in the lowest income brackets are also less likely than average to access loans, perhaps suggesting debt aversion (at least for PSE costs). Middle-class students are the most likely to take on debt.²⁶

Workers can also temporarily withdraw money from their Registered Retirement Savings Plans to fund full-time post-secondary education for themselves or their spouse or partner through the Lifelong Learning Plan (LLP). Such withdrawals are not considered income for tax purposes so long as they are repaid over time.²⁷ The very small amount of research on LLP usage suggests very limited usage (<0.5 per cent of tax filers).²⁸ While

scholarships and bursaries are also a source of funding for post-secondary education, Canada ranks as one of the least generous OECD countries in terms of the overall dollar value of scholarships and bursaries available.²⁹

On the surface, RESPs, LLPs, and student loans appear to ameliorate an important barrier to PSE attendance by providing students from middle and lower SES backgrounds with the opportunity to attend PSE. In this way, RESPs, LLPs, and student loans seemingly legitimize the transfer of PSE costs from taxpayers to individual students by maintaining the perception that ability (and not SES) is the key factor that determines PSE participation. The notion that access to PSE is based on intellectual merit sits uneasily with the fact that, despite the availability of RESPs, LLPs, and student loans, students from lower SES backgrounds still attend university at only half the rate of students from the highest SES background. This pattern indicates that RESPs, LLPs, and student loans only partly address the cost barriers. Legitimizing high tuition costs serves to reinforce the intergenerational transfer of advantage and disadvantage.

Admission requirements also affect who can access post-secondary education. Most PSE institutions have admission requirements, such as completion of specific prerequisite courses. Some programs of study may also have non-academic prerequisites (e.g., successful interview, prior work experience, medical fitness, criminal record check). When there are more applicants than spaces, an institution may prioritize applicants based upon some criteria (such as prior grades). These criteria reinforce the notion that access to PSE is based upon merit. It is worth considering whether there are systemic factors (e.g., bias based on age, gender, ethnicity, and class) that might limit certain groups from obtaining required prerequisites or influence how candidates are rated in more subjective screening methods, such as interviews.

Curricular Control of PSE

Who controls what is taught in PSE is a complicated question because control is exercised at several levels. Government and institutions jointly determine the suite of courses and programs offered by a PSE institution. The criteria governments use when assessing institutional proposals vary, but they broadly mirror those set out by British Columbia, including

whether a proposed program “meets criteria related to the institution’s mandate and strategic plan, system consultation and coordination, labour market need and student demand.”³⁰

In some cases, governments have sought to influence the creation or expansion of programs, ostensibly to better align programming with labour market needs. For example, during the 1990s, Alberta made available additional funding to institutions, provided the funding was used to expand enrollment in fields with (putatively) high labour-market demand. Alberta also created a new credential (the applied bachelor’s degree), which included a year of work experience. And the government sought to increase industry input into program design and delivery, in part by ensuring that employers numerically dominated institutional boards of governors.³¹

The regulatory power of government gives it significant high-level control over what is taught in PSE, especially given that governments also appoint most of the members of institutional boards of governors. This is not say that PSEs have no ability to act independently or advocate for policies that are in their interests. Rather, it simply acknowledges that the power of PSEs is, at least partly, circumscribed by the operation of their governance structures and their reliance upon government largesse. As noted above, governments have often used this power to try to align PSE offerings with the needs of the labour market. Things are not entirely one-sided, however. Faculty members at institutions also have significant power to shape curriculum. As a group, faculty members tend to dominate academic decision-making (in academic senates or general faculties councils), which includes establishing the focus, curriculum, and admission requirements for programs. Faculty members also have significant individual control over what is taught in their classrooms. An important limitation on that freedom can come from professional organizations that regulate some occupations (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 Curricular Influence of Regulatory and Professional Associations

Some occupations, such as nursing, are regulated in order to protect the public. To practise, an individual must meet certain requirements

set out by government-established **Professional Regulatory Organizations** (PROs). Each province and territory has its own set of PROs, reflecting that regulation falls within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. PROs have many different names (e.g., the Law Society of Upper Canada, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta).

The requirements that must be met to practise in a profession vary and typically include a combination of education, experience, and passing of an examination. PROs also typically investigate complaints against registered professionals and may discipline members, including through prohibiting them from practising.

These organizations have a powerful influence on the content of training in some occupations. This influence stems from PROs' ability to require that graduates seeking to practise meet certain requirements (e.g., passing specific tests of knowledge). That instructors are (and often must be) members of the PRO in their field is another source of influence over curriculum.

Other occupations have professional associations that offer non-mandatory accreditation. For example, there are territorial and provincial associations that offer accreditation for human resource practitioners. The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (CPHR) designation is awarded to applicants who have a degree and adequate experience and who can pass an exam (with each phase of the accreditation process involving a hefty fee paid to the association).

Non-regulated professional associations can seek to influence curriculum in different ways than PROs. For example, most Canadian human resource associations will offer to waive the examination for graduates of degree programs who meet certain criteria. This benefit, coupled with the potential reputational risk of not being accredited by a human resource association, may pressure institutions to alter their curriculum.

An interesting question about non-regulated professional associations is what value they provide. While these associations often assert they are protecting the public interest, the reluctance of the government to make human resources a regulated profession suggests that there is little public risk associated with HR practices.

The designations offered by these associations may provide employers with a potentially useful applicant screening tool. Yet the costs associated with gaining accreditation constrain the labour

supply, thereby increasing wages. Whether employers will see this additional cost as beneficial is an open question.

The Benefits of Post-Secondary Education

The PSE system provides a number of benefits to different stakeholders. Workers with post-secondary education attain higher wages than those who do not complete PSE. Among PSE graduates, university graduates receive returns of 11.5 per cent (men) and 14.1 per cent (women) on every dollar they invest in PSE.³² Post-secondary graduates are also more likely to work full time and less likely to be unemployed, and these benefits increase as workers' level of PSE increases.³³ These effects vary by jurisdiction and other factors. For example, Indigenous people in Canada earn less than non-Indigenous people with the same qualifications.³⁴

Post-secondary education is also associated with better health outcomes, likely because level of education is highly correlated with other employment factors (e.g., income, employment security, and working conditions) that contribute to health.³⁵ Together, these positive outcomes of PSE bolster the narrative that training is workers' responsibility (because they are the main beneficiaries), thereby excusing employers' limited investment in training. Making individuals responsible for their own training is consistent with human capital theory as set out in Box 2.4.

Box 2.4 Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory asserts a relationship between labour-market training and national economic performance. Essentially, the KSAs of the workforce are said to represent a form of capital (human) that can be used by employers to create goods and services. Education and training increase the value that can be realized from this human capital.³⁶

The idea that increasing education levels will increase national economic performance is widely accepted. Yet it sits uneasily with the finding by Livingstone and his colleagues mentioned above. Specifically, if a significant portion of the workforce is already overqualified for the jobs that they hold, will additional education yield any benefit to them or the economy?

Paul Bouchard poses a number of difficult questions about human capital theory. For example, how can workers invest in education when businesses are unable to accurately predict skill demands or shortages? How will more training be useful in offsetting jobs lost to offshoring or automation? And, as we'll see below, what good is training if other factors, such as gender and racial discrimination, create insurmountable barriers to entry into the workforce for many workers?³⁷

Perhaps the key reason that human capital theory has found such a ready audience among employers and policy-makers is that it serves an important legitimization function. Specifically, human capital theory creates the perception (among workers) that prosperity is just around the corner (if people could only get "enough" of the "right" skills). A corollary of this view is that the responsibility for any failure to obtain prosperity lies with the individual workers.

Further, human capital theory creates an environment of competition over jobs in which individuals pay for the opportunity to become the most skilled and the most likely to be hired, even in the face of significant unemployment and underemployment among the highly skilled. This keeps skill levels high and wage levels comparatively low, a scenario that benefits employers, rather than workers.

The most obvious benefit of PSE for employers is that they have access to an educated workforce at relatively low cost (to the employers). Among similar OECD countries, Canada has the highest proportion of its labour force with a PSE credential, reflecting in part its extensive college system as well as its immigration policies.³⁸ A second benefit of PSE is the maintenance of an oversupply of highly skilled workers. As noted above, the high level of underemployment among Canadian workers suggests that employers are not using the KSAs of the workforce. In this situation, maintaining the number of PSE graduates sustains a loose labour market. As we saw in Chapter 1, this puts downward pressure on wages in oversupplied occupations.

The state benefits from PSE in a number of ways. Post-secondary education is politically beneficial because institutions are sources of both regional prestige and increased economic activity. For example, Canada's public colleges and universities reported total revenue of \$37.4 billion in

2009, most of which was spent locally on employee salaries.³⁹ The state also benefits from PSE because it contributes to production. Employers require a trained workforce in order to operate and, historically, the state has delivered much of that training through the K-12 and PSE systems.

Post-secondary education also contributes to social reproduction. For example, PSE reinforces the notion that jobs are allocated based upon candidates' specific credentials rather than immutable personal characteristics or personal connections. This belief reinforces the idea that Canadian society is a meritocracy. This belief often rubs up against reality. For example, the significant gender segregation evident in some fields seems to cry out for explanation. One possible (albeit incorrect) explanation is that women are bad at math and men are bad at caring for others, and thus gender segregation is the outcome of merit-based hiring. A more plausible explanation is that there is some other factor (such as gender-based socialization and discrimination) at play.

Box 2.5 Why Does PSE Get the Largest Portion of the Pie?

The \$12 billion that governments spend on post-secondary education each year represents Canada's single largest investment in labour-market training. There are a number of explanations for why PSE gets the largest portion of the labour-market training pie. Young adults transitioning from high school to the workforce represent the largest group in society in need of labour-market training. This creates significant demand for PSE, which governments have reinforced over time by increasing access to it.

Further, those students most likely to enroll in PSE typically come from economically better off (and thus politically more powerful) families. In this way, PSE replicates the existing class structure in a way that is comfortable to politicians (e.g., PSE instructors and students act and talk like politicians because they typically come from the same class of society). These factors (size and power) help explain why public spending on PSE is so relatively large.

The economic impact of PSE also helps to create a feedback loop to ensure PSE continues to receive the lion's share of labour-market training funds. As noted above, post-secondary institutions are often important employers in local communities. And some institutions go out of their way to publicize their role in ensuring that there is an

adequate supply of trained workers available. For example, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) brands itself as “Essential to Alberta,” noting that it is the largest apprenticeship trainer in Canada, 98 per cent of employers would hire a NAIT graduate again, and 90 per cent of NAIT graduates have jobs soon after they finish their exams.⁴⁰ Politicians, who are usually graduates of PSE, are predisposed to accepting this line of argument because it accords with their own experiences.

Post-secondary institutions are also easier for governments to hold to account for money granted to them than other training providers. Unlike grants to private employers (such as the Canada Job Grant that we’ll read about in Chapter 3), post-secondary funding can more easily be linked to achievement of certain outcomes—and when those outcomes are not met, sanctions can be imposed. This element of control is highly appealing to politicians who must navigate claims that public spending is wasteful. Together, these factors combine to make PSE an attractive way for governments to spend public labour-market training dollars.

The idea that society remains profoundly unjust for female workers is socially destabilizing: workers are less likely to support a system that distributes resources and rewards in a way that appears to be unfair. The idea that merit drives this distribution is more palatable than the notion that heritage, class, and gender do. Indeed, much of the structure of PSE—including admission criteria and competitive admission processes, the awarding and curving of grades, and high drop-out rates—reinforces the notion that PSE (and, more broadly, society) is a meritocracy. Reinforcing the view that society is a meritocracy may be the central lesson in the hidden curriculum of PSE.

The Apprenticeship System in Canada

Employers have routinely raised concerns about the availability of an adequate pool of skilled trades workers. Skilled trades workers (plumbers, chefs, electricians, etc.) are produced by Canada’s apprenticeship system. Historically, governments have also used immigration as a way to increase the supply of skilled tradespeople. This history of using immigration as a

substitute for labour-market training is examined in Box 2.5 below. Current approaches to labour migration are discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

An **apprenticeship** is a multi-year form of labour-market training that relies heavily on workplace training, supplemented by four to eight weeks of annual classroom instruction. An apprenticeship entails a fixed-term contract between an employer and an apprentice, wherein the employer provides wages and training in exchange for the apprentice's labour. At the end of an apprenticeship, a worker may choose to take exams for their **trade qualification** (TQ) and, if successful, is often referred to as a "**journeyperson**" (or, historically, a "journeyman").⁴¹

In keeping with the constitutional division of powers discussed in Chapter 1, each province and territory runs its own apprenticeship training system. Canada-wide, there are approximately 200 apprenticeable trades, although this number varies by jurisdiction. About three-quarters of these trades are found in the construction, manufacturing, and resource industries. Generally speaking, a government-appointed apprenticeship board provides advice to the government on apprenticeship matters. The apprenticeship board may also influence the membership of trade- or sector-specific advisory committees that help establish the curriculum of each trade or occupation.

As part of each provincial or territorial apprenticeship system, the government will designate certain trades and occupations as either compulsory or optional certification trades. **Compulsory trades or occupations** are those where employment is restricted to registered apprentices and journeypersons. By contrast, optional certification trades or occupations may be performed by anyone whom an employer deems to be competent to perform the work. Interprovincial labour mobility is aided by the **Red Seal program**, which allows qualified trades people in more than fifty trades to have their trade qualifications recognized in other provinces and territories, provided they pass examinations. Figure 2.2 illustrates the percentage of apprentices in each jurisdiction.

Apprenticeships are most common in the skilled trades (e.g., plumbing, electrical work) but also exist in food and service trades. In 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available), there were 453,543 registered apprentices in Canada. Table 2.2 outlines the distribution of apprentices by trade.

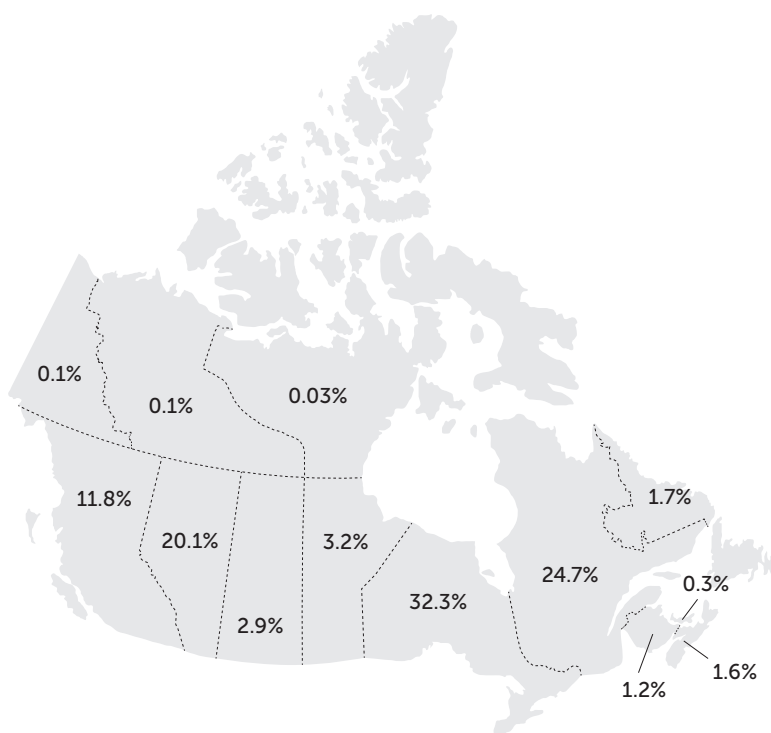


Figure 2.2 Percentage of apprentices by jurisdiction, 2015. (Data from Statistics Canada, "Registered Apprenticeship Training, by Sex and by Province and Territory.")

Table 2.2 Apprentices by trade, 2015.

Automotive service	43,194
Carpenters	45,276
Community and social service workers	3,543
Construction workers (other)	3,945
Early childhood educators and assistants	7,716
Electricians	72,912
Electronics and instrumentation	7,263
Exterior finishing	13,602

Food service	22,200
Hairstylists and estheticians	17,550
Heavy duty equipment mechanics	15,648
Heavy equipment and crane operators	14,337
Interior finishing	18,735
Landscape and horticulture technicians and specialists	4,938
Machinists	9,582
Metal workers (other)	12,777
Millwrights	13,035
Oil and gas well drillers, servicers, testers and related workers	3,681
Plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters	46,500
Refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics	8,862
Sheet metal workers	8,451
Stationary engineers and power plant operators	4,467
User support technicians	16,269
Welders	19,998
Other major trade groups	19,071

Source: Statistics Canada, “Registered Apprenticeship Training, Registrations, by Age Groups, Sex and Major Trade Groups.”

Approximately 46 per cent of apprentices were registered in only four trades, training as plumbers/pipefitters, electricians, carpenters, and automotive service technicians. Women represent 13.5 per cent of all registered apprentices. New apprenticeship registrations and completions generally rose between 2000 and 2013, although new registrations dropped slightly during the 2008 recession. Yet, over time, the number of completers who were issued trade qualifications remained static.⁴²

Box 2.6 Recruiting Skilled Workers through Immigration

Training is one way that Canada has met its need for workers with specific skills. A second strategy has been to seek out skilled workers in other countries. Until the 1930s, Canada’s immigration policy sought

to attract farmers, farm workers, and female domestic servants of European ancestry. As Canadian unemployment rose during the early 1930s, the federal government sharply curtailed immigration. After the Second World War, the government encouraged a resumption of immigration (mostly from Europe), with the intention of expanding the population and domestic economy.

A recurring tension in immigration policy has been between the government's use of immigration to generate short-term "fixes" to address specific labour-market shortages (historically, the goal of the Department of Labour) and the government's longer-term priorities, such as family reunification and the expansion of Canada's population (historically, the goal of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship).

These departments were amalgamated in 1966 and, in theory, addressing domestic labour-market pressures became the pre-eminent goal. Consequently, beginning in 1967, immigration decisions were based upon a "point" system that assessed individual's characteristics, such as age, language skills, education, and skill.⁴³ Despite this policy shift, recurring labour shortages continued.

As we'll see in Chapter 3, Canada also began recruiting seasonal migrant workers at this time. Migrant workers reside in Canada on a temporary basis in order to meet specific labour-market needs, although some migrant workers have been granted a pathway to become permanent residents. These programs (which initially focused on bringing in migrant agricultural workers from Mexico and Caribbean countries) were significantly expanded in the 1990s through the labour-mobility provisions of various free trade agreements as well as through policy change in the early 2000s.

Access to Apprenticeship

Employers exert almost complete control over access to the apprenticeship system. Would-be apprentices must secure a job with an employer who is prepared to both provide on-the-job training and release the apprentice for periodic classroom study. Apprenticeship enrollments rise and fall with the employment rate. During an economic boom, employers expand operations and will offer employment to apprentices. During a bust, apprentices may be unable to secure apprenticeships, resulting in high dropout rates. What this suggests is that the number of apprentices

and, ultimately, the number of trade qualification holders are largely determined by employers' (un)willingness to take on apprentices, rather than by the supply of potential apprentices.⁴⁴

This boom-and-bust cycle of apprenticeship opportunities also suggests that employers are directly responsible for any shortage of skilled trades people. Even during a boom, only about 19 per cent of employers that hire workers in designated trades and occupations bother to train apprentices.⁴⁵ That employers are responsible for the shortage of journeypersons and apprentices sits uneasily with the usual "skills shortage" recommendations of employers, who demand governments do more to channel young people into trades and, in the meantime, increase the supply of skilled foreign workers. No amount of recruiting among high school students will affect the supply of tradespeople if employers collectively offer too few apprenticeship opportunities.

Employers also constrain women's access to apprenticeship. As noted above, only 13.5 per cent of registered apprentices in Canada are female, ranging from 2 per cent in Nunavut to 24 per cent in Ontario. As illustrated in figure 2.3, there is significant occupational segregation by gender in the trades. While there are a number of potential explanations for low female participation and gender segmentation, the direct and indirect behaviour of employers appears to be key. Female apprentices are much more likely than male apprentices to report discrimination by employers when seeking out a sponsor for their apprenticeships. Among those who completed their apprenticeship, 13 per cent of women (versus 1.3 per cent of men) reported hiring discrimination. Among female apprentices who had decided not to complete their apprenticeship, reports of discrimination are almost double that number.⁴⁶

Female apprentices also report high levels of on-the-job harassment, a lack of facilities for women, and schedules and work practices that are more difficult for women to manage than for men—all factors that are within the control of employers.⁴⁷ While we'll return to the issue of gender-based discrimination in industries such as construction in Chapter 6, this evidence suggests that employer behaviours (and the behaviours that employers tolerate) profoundly shape women's access to apprenticeship training.

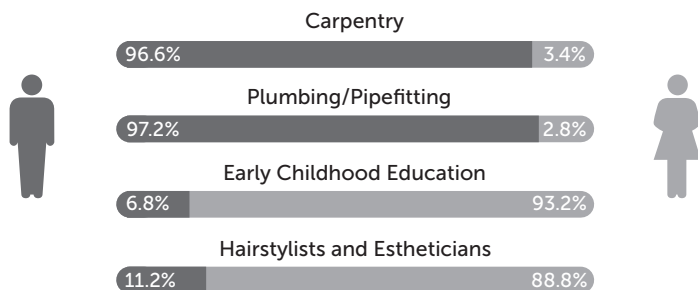


Figure 2.3 Occupational segregation by gender in the trades.
(Data from Statistics Canada, "Registered Apprenticeship Training, Registrations, by Age Groups, Sex and Major Trade Groups.")

Curriculum Control of and Benefit from Apprenticeship

Employers exercise significant curricular control in apprenticeship systems. Apprentices spend between 85 and 90 per cent of their time in the workplace, and employers largely determine what on-the-job training they receive. Employers also sit on various committees that provide advice about (or determine) skill and competency standards for certification, course outlines, and what training is recognized towards certification. While there are other stakeholders in the system, employers are generally the most numerous and, combined with delivering on-the-job training, the most influential. This influence may reflect the most significant direct investment made by employers who train apprentices.

Not surprisingly, employers are also the greatest beneficiaries of the apprenticeship system, which provides employers with workers who have the KSAs that employers deem to be important. The low apprenticeship participation rate among employers suggests that there is a significant free-rider problem, whereby only one-fifth of firms carry much of the cost of training the journeypersons that all employers eventually hire. Workers also benefit from the apprenticeship system, which typically yield reasonably well-paying jobs. That said, there is a significant gendered effect. Relatively few women enroll in and complete apprenticeships. Those women who do participate in the apprenticeship system are clustered in

the lowest-paid occupations and trades (e.g., hair styling, food services, child care).

Interestingly, older workers with prior labour-market experience are increasingly the beneficiaries of apprenticeships. In 2013, 53 per cent of new apprentices were over the age of 25, and the proportion of middle-aged apprentices is growing rapidly.⁴⁸ The tendency of workers to enroll as apprentices later in their careers suggests that employer efforts to attract younger apprentices through work-experience programs in the K-12 sector may not be effective. Given the high rate of injury to apprentices in K-12 apprenticeship programs, limited apprenticeship uptake among K-12 students may be a positive outcome.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Almost 2.5 million Canadians are enrolled in either a PSE program or an apprenticeship at any one time. For many of these learners, such a program will be the first and most significant instance of labour-market training in their working lives. The most obvious outcome of such training is an enhanced ability to secure well-paying and stable jobs (although that isn't the outcome for every PSE graduate or journey person). This benefit is often used to justify high and escalating tuition costs—a cost-shifting policy that benefits employers and the state.

An important consequence of high tuition costs is uneven access to PSE. Despite state efforts to help workers and their families afford PSE, workers from lower SES families are less likely to enroll in PSE. A second issue around access is gender segregation by programs, which appears to replicate the gendered occupational segregation in the workforce. This is particularly pronounced in apprenticeships, where there are few women overall and these women are clustered in the lowest-paid trades. While employers continue to bemoan the existence of a skills shortage (particularly in the skilled trades), it is important to recognize that this skills-shortage narrative is false in two ways. First, evidence of underemployment suggests that there is, in fact, a surplus of skills in the workforce. And the shortage is actually found in jobs that allow workers to use the skills they possess. Second, where there may be sector-specific shortages (e.g., in the apprenticeable trades), the shortages often are the result of employers failing to do their part in training (e.g., hire apprentices).

The PSE and apprenticeship systems play a key role in the reproduction of labour power. In addition to teaching KSAs, there is a hidden curriculum in education systems. At the K-12 level, the hidden curriculum centres on teaching workers to be docile, obedient, and punctual, deferring to authority in all things. In PSE and apprenticeship, the hidden curriculum centres on perpetuating the myth that society is a meritocracy, wherein skill and hard work determine reward. While skill and hard work certainly play a role, emphasizing merit ignores that identity factors (age, gender, heritage, socio-economic status) often shape the options workers have and their success in the workplace.

Notes

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- 5 Livingstone and Scholtz, "Contradictions of Labour Processes and Workers' Use of Skills in Advanced Capitalist Economies."
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- 8 Anyon, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work."
- 9 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2016*.
- 10 Lalonde and McKean, *Canada's Post-Secondary Education Performance*.
- 11 Neatby, "The Historical Perspective."
- 12 Jones, "An Introduction to Higher Education in Canada."
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CHAPTER THREE

**Government Training and
Immigration Policy**

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify the main programs and policies that governments have enacted to ensure Canada has an adequately skilled labour force.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in terms of access to, control of, and benefit from training.
- Differentiate active and passive labour-market policies and describe the effects of active labour-market policies.



In addition to funding and operating the PSE and apprenticeship systems, Canadian governments also provide significant labour-market training aimed at the unemployed and underemployed through various labour-market policies and programs. In 2013, the federal government announced the **Canada Job Grant (CJG)**. The CJG allowed employers to apply for up to \$10,000 in government matching funds (at a 1:2 employer-to-government ratio) to help pay for labour-market training. The federal government covered its CJG costs by reducing other training funding that it provided to the provinces and territories. Then-employment minister Jason Kenney justified this very sudden change in funding by saying,

There are some good provincial programs, but there are also many that just don't lead to jobs. The whole point of the job grant is it will involve employers in selecting employees who they believe will have the propensity to work, getting them specific training, and the employers offer them a job at the end of it.¹

As we'll see below, the Canada Job Grant did give employers control over who got what kind of training. But it was completely unsuccessful in getting unemployed Canadians training to help them attach to the labour market. Instead, the CJG mostly funded training for men possessing PSE credentials who already had high-skill jobs. The CJG was the centrepiece of the Canada Job Fund (CJF), which was one of the three main federal funding streams for labour-market training. The other two funding streams focused on Employment Insurance recipients and Indigenous peoples. Provincial and territorial governments deliver most of the labour-market

training funded by these programs in addition to other provincially or territorially funded training.

As we'll see below, there has been a significant shift in labour-market training policy over time. This change flows from the pronounced shift in government labour-market policy that began in the 1980s. Following the Second World War, Western governments generally pursued a policy of full employment. To maintain full employment, governments utilized demand-side measures to stimulate employment, such as job-creation and economic-development initiatives and the expansion of statutory employment rights. By the 1980s, Canadian governments had largely abandoned the goal of full employment. Consequently, government labour-market policy has shifted from demand-side to supply-side measures.² Supply-side measures emphasize training to ensure there is an adequate supply of appropriately skilled workers available to employers.

This neoliberal policy shift is often discussed in terms of government deregulation. Yet what has actually happened is that governments have just changed the goal(s) of their regulatory activity. This process of re-regulation means that policies and programs that used to be designed to meet the needs of workers have given way to programs focused on meeting the needs of employers (or “the market”). For example, the goals of Alberta Works are to

- increase opportunities for Albertans to make successful transitions from school to work, unemployment to employment, and from one career path to another, and
- increase the capacity of Albertans to respond to changing skills, knowledge, and abilities required by the economy.³

Such programs are also designed to change the behaviour of workers in ways that align with the interests of employers. As noted in Chapter 1, the profit imperative of capitalism means that a key employer interest is minimizing labour costs. Government-funded training directly reduces employers' training costs. And income-replacement schemes (e.g., Employment Insurance, social assistance) that pressurize workers to take whatever job is available increase the supply of workers. A larger pool of workers reduces workers' labour-market power and, thereby, lowers wage costs.

The federal government also uses immigration and trade policy to influence the size and skill level of Canada's workforce. As noted in Chapter 2, Canada has a long tradition of seeking to meet employers' demands for workers through immigration and, more recently, temporary migrant workers. Migrant workers may enter Canada on work permits or under the labour-mobility provisions of various "free trade" agreements Canada has signed with other countries. Some critics contend that immigration policy is being used as a substitute to labour-market training and to flood the labour market to reduce wages. Others note that the mechanisms of these programs increasingly shift control over immigration to employers. Examining government training and immigration policy together provides an opportunity to better understand how the state manages the conflicting interests of labour and capital and the implications this has for access, control, and benefit.

Employment Insurance

The shared constitutional jurisdiction for labour-market training means that both the federal and provincial/territorial governments formulate labour-market training policy and deliver programs. The most significant federal intervention in labour-market policy prior to 1945 was the creation of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. UI (later renamed Employment Insurance) was designed to provide income support to families during unemployment and ensure that communities were not destroyed by job losses due to industrial change. It also sustained communities that were dependent upon seasonal employment (e.g., fishing, logging).⁴

At present, **Employment Insurance** (EI) is funded by mandatory contributions from both employers and workers. The EI system provides two main types of benefits. Most Canadians are familiar with "Part 1" EI benefits, which are financial payments to formerly employed workers who are without jobs. In 2016, financial support was calculated as 55 per cent of the first \$50,800 of an employee's prior insurable earnings. This yielded a maximum benefit of \$537 per week. The duration of benefits and the minimum numbers of weeks of employment required to qualify for benefits varies by region, based upon the unemployment rate.⁵

Relatively few Canadians are aware of “Part 2” EI benefits (called Employment Benefits and Support Measures), which include funding for training to enhance employability. Training funded under Part 2 benefits typically must have a clear link to increasing an EI claimant’s employability (i.e., training must yield job-specific skills that are in demand). Further, EI claims have a maximum duration of fifty-two weeks.⁶ These criteria generally preclude funding students to attend PSE programs, although there are exceptions—such as claimants who receive EI financial benefits while self-funding short PSE programs.

Provincial and territorial governments administer over \$2 billion in federal Part 2 training benefits under the authority of **Labour Market Development Agreements** (LMDAs).⁷ For example, Employment Ontario is a part of the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. It administered approximately \$1 billion in federal and provincial funding in 2014–15 to provide and/or fund services for 1 million Ontarians, including skills-training, career-planning, and job-search programs. Employment Ontario also administers the Canada-Ontario Job Grant (see below), which partly funds employer-driven training.

Canada’s current EI arrangement began to take shape in 1985. The federal Conservative government implemented the Canada Jobs Strategy (CJS), whereby funds (mostly in the form of a wage subsidy) were provided to employers that offered work experience with a training component (however limited). The key outcome of the CJS was cheap labour for employers.⁸ Overall, federal spending on training fell under the CJS, and the quality of training appeared to deteriorate. In 1989, the federal government implemented the Labour Force Development Strategy (LFDS). The LFDS made it harder for workers to access EI benefits and then used half of the savings to fund proactive training measures largely directed by business interests and intended to help the unemployed adapt to the jobs available to them.⁹

Canada’s current EI arrangement emerged in 1996. During this time, many OECD governments were shifting from so-called passive labour-market interventions to active labour-market policies. Passive labour-market interventions protect individuals, employers, and communities from the vagaries of the labour market, particularly unemployment, through income-replacement programs. Benefit entitlement is usually

based on current or past attachment to the labour market, and these programs make few demands upon recipients. By contrast, **active labour-market policies** (ALMPs) encourage or require action by individuals, employers, and communities, such as participation in training programs or job-search activities.¹⁰

In theory, ALMPs can focus on either demand side or supply side. Demand-side ALMPs seek to directly or indirectly create additional employment opportunities when the supply of labour exceeds the demand for labour. For example, a government may offer a wage subsidy (or other financial inducement) for employers that create new jobs. Supply-side ALMPs seek to increase the number of workers actively seeking employment and/or the quality of the existing supply of workers. For example, the government may require workers to demonstrate that they are taking specific actions towards finding a job. Most labour-market policies contain both active and passive elements. For example, EI has never been an exclusively passive program: recipients have always been required to be actively seeking employment or risk having their benefits terminated.

In 1994, the influential *OECD Jobs Study* was released. It encouraged the adoption of active labour-market policies, including the use of disincentives or penalties to pressure workers to stay in or return to the labour market, even if that meant lower wages and less favourable working conditions.¹¹ The *OECD Jobs Study* represented a profound shift in the emphasis of and rhetoric around labour-market policy. Gone was any discussion about the lack of jobs. In its place was a training-based diagnosis: the problem in the labour market and even the economy was that workers lacked the skills necessary to fill existing vacancies and to generate economic growth. The prescription to solve this problem was more education and training and a greater willingness on the part of workers to adapt their expectations to the so-called realities of the labour market.

ALMPs nicely fit with the ideology of neoliberalism, as they build on the notion that the best social program is gainful employment and that the best place for gaining skills and learning how to work is the workplace itself. Employers are invited to define the parameters for acceptable skills and reasonable work requirements. Largely gone is the notion that there is a balance to be achieved between the needs of labour and capital and between equity and the unfettered pursuit of economic growth. Especially

silenced are the voices of those who argue that some groups, such as women and racialized groups, should receive preferential treatment to redress the historical biases in the labour market. The effectiveness of ALMPs is discussed in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 Are Active Labour-Market Policies Effective?

Research on the effectiveness of ALMPs is inconclusive. Overall, the short-term impacts of ALMPs are not stellar, and the long-term ones are difficult to assess.¹² A meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies found that classroom and on-the-job training programs often have little short-term effect on employment but some positive effect after two years (although the cost effectiveness of training programs was not assessed).¹³ There are, of course, many different forms of ALMPs. For example, an analysis of the United Kingdom's ALMP concludes that its Work Programmes were designed to "facilitate the maintenance of a large pool of workers willing—or resigned—to working in relatively poor conditions" rather than address issues of inequality and under-employment.¹⁴

There is extensive research that suggests some segments of the population may benefit from ALMP and training more so than other segments. For example, older workers with long job tenure seem able to re-enter the job market with minimal support (although the kind of job they secure is unknown).¹⁵ The greatest effect of ALMP may be for those recipients who are already partially ready for the labour market and for women.¹⁶ Without solid evidence of overall employment growth as a result of ALMPs, the effect of ALMPs is at most positional. That is to say, it moves the recipient of the ALMP up the ranks of the unemployed. This upward movement comes at the expense of displacing someone else downward, perhaps someone who did not gain access to suitable interventions. This dynamic is quite evident in the discussion of the Canada Job Grant below.

Assessment of the effectiveness of ALMPs in Canada reveals uneven outcomes. A 2015 study found that federal reporting about the outcomes of Part 2 EI benefits was insufficiently detailed to assess whether ALMPs had any significant impact on workers' trajectory through the EI system. Provincial-level reporting does allow comparisons between workers who received Part 2 benefits and those who did

not in terms of earnings, hours worked, and weeks on EI. That said, the nature of the comparisons suggests the results should be used with caution.

The data suggests that, among workers who received Part 1 financial benefits and participated in Part 2 skills-development interventions, the broad trend was towards less time on EI and higher wages. By contrast, Part 1 claimants who participated in wage-subsidy interventions saw relatively little difference versus a matched set of non-participants. Interventions focused on self-employment show more variable but overall worse outcomes. Overall, there seem to be some positive effects of ALMPs.¹⁷

Canadian governments have (slowly and unevenly) adopted ALMPs. In 1996 (as part of its deficit-and-debt reduction efforts), the federal Liberal government implemented reforms to Employment Insurance that broadly followed the ALMP prescription. The federal government continued to deliver (largely passive) Part 1 financial benefits, but EI became more focused on returning workers to employment, in part by reducing income replacement and access to employment insurance to pressure workers to take whatever jobs were available.¹⁸ The federal government also began transferring responsibility for EI training benefits to the provinces and territories under LMDAs (in part to reduce friction with Québec in the wake of the 1995 sovereignty referendum), an uneven process that was completed only in 2010.¹⁹ Further changes to EI in 2012 intensified pressure on unemployed workers to take a wider variety of jobs at lower wages.²⁰

Over time, there has been a precipitous drop in the ratio of EI beneficiaries to the overall unemployed (the B/U ratio). In 1990, 84 per cent of unemployed Canadians received EI benefits. By 1998, the B/U ratio had fallen to 44 per cent, and it has stayed at approximately this level since then. This drop primarily reflects changes to EI rules as well as changing patterns in the labour market (e.g., more long-term unemployed).²¹ Women were particularly disadvantaged by tighter access rules, with only 32 per cent of unemployed women receiving EI benefits in 1999, down from 70 per cent in 1989.²² Since eligibility to receive Part 2 training benefits turns on eligibility for Part 1 financial benefits, this reduction in

female EI eligibility dramatically reduced women's access to training.²³ At the same time, there has been a shift in how training benefits are allocated. Funding for training comprises an amalgam of loans and grants. After 1996, jurisdictions have increasingly expected individuals to tap their own resources and/or take out loans before receiving training grants.²⁴

Overall, Part 2 EI benefits remain an important source of training for formerly employed workers. Access is limited by the federal government's rules around EI eligibility; thus, the training benefits only previously employed workers. New workers (or those who don't qualify for EI for some other reason) are not generally eligible for LMDA-funded training. That said, in practice, things are not so neat. A worker who is ineligible for LMDA-funded training but who is seeking to access a specific training program may well still receive the training, with the provincial or territorial government simply billing the costs to a different (non-LMDA) source of funding. Further, as of the summer of 2018, the federal government was negotiating amendments to existing LMDAs that would expand eligibility for Part 2 benefits to include some workers who are paying EI premiums but who would not normally qualify to receive Part 1 benefits. These workers may be eligible for Part 2 benefits.²⁵ This can be viewed as an effort by governments to address the training needs of both new workers and precariously employer workers.

Employers benefit from LMDA-funded training in two main ways. First, EI subsidizes training, because worker premiums pay for half of the costs of LMDA-funded training. Second, EI encourages workers to accept employment even if the worker doesn't particularly like the terms that are offered. As we saw in Chapter 1, EI has historically contributed to "decommodifying" labour by giving workers an alternate source of income with which to purchase the necessities of life. This serves the state's goal of social reproduction by reducing employers' ability to drive exploitative wage-rate bargains. The degree of decommodification created by EI turns on both how accessible EI is and the level and duration of benefit. Reducing the accessibility of EI increases the labour-market power of employers to drive extremely hard wage-rate bargains in loose labour markets. This, in turn, increases the potential for social instability caused by workers being forced to choose between exploitative jobs and poverty.

Labour Market and Workforce Development Agreements

In addition to revamping EI in 1996, the federal government also reduced funding to train individuals who were ineligible for EI Part 2 benefits from \$2 billion to approximately \$1 billion. This change left those Canadians most in need of employment services inadequately served. Combined with other policy changes during this period, women's access to employment supports were particularly hard hit.²⁶ In 2002, provincial and territorial governments asked the federal government for increased funding to meet the skills-development needs of Indigenous peoples, youth, older workers, social assistance recipients, and persons with disabilities.²⁷

The federal Conservative government's 2006 economic plan contained three key labour-market priorities that centred on meeting the demand for workers during the economic boom of the day. The federal government promised to increase the labour-market participation rate of traditionally under-represented groups (i.e., older Canadians, Indigenous people and Canadians with disabilities) as well as increase employer access to temporary foreign workers (see Immigration Policy and Foreign Workers below).²⁸ The government also promised to reduce employer taxes in order to increase the money that employers have available to invest in training as well as make training more available to all Canadians.

The federal government's 2008 announcement of six-year bilateral **Labour Market Agreements** with each provincial and territorial government was part of its efforts to increase the labour-market participation of traditionally under-represented groups (who typically could not access EI benefits). The federal government agreed to provide \$500 million per year on top of existing provincial and territorial expenditures on labour-market training. These LMA funds were intended to fund training for unemployed workers who did not qualify for Part 2 Employment Insurance benefits as well as low-skilled workers who were employed. An additional \$500 million was committed between 2009 and 2011 to address the needs of workers in communities particularly hard hit by the 2009 global economic downturn.²⁹

Provincial and territorial governments delivered (or provided via contractors) LMA-funded services to approximately 360,000 Canadians annually, from 2008–14. Training-specific interventions included

workplace skills development for workers requiring literacy or essential skills training, formal training or academic upgrading programs, and work-experience programs. The net effect of these interventions was to increase employment levels of participants from 44 per cent to 86 per cent. Some groups of workers continue to experience lower employment levels, including participants aged 55 to 64 (64 per cent), participants with disabilities (66 per cent), and Indigenous participants (68 per cent).³⁰

Canada Job Fund Agreements

Despite the success of LMA programming at increasing and improving employment, the federal government radically altered the LMAs during renegotiation in 2014. In this process, LMAs were renamed Canada Job Fund Agreements (except in Québec, which kept its LMA).³¹ The focus of the Canada Job Fund Agreements (CJFAs) were clearly driven by concerns about a skills shortage:

There are too many jobs that go unfilled in Canada because employers cannot find workers with the right skills. Meanwhile, there are still too many Canadians looking for work. Training in Canada is not sufficiently aligned to the skills employers need, or to the jobs that are actually available.³²

The flagship program of the CJFAs was the Canada Job Grant (CJG). Under the federal government's proposed CJG, employers could spend up to \$5,000 for training and seek matching funds at a 1:2 ratio (up to \$10,000) from the government to offset training costs. The \$300 million federal portion of the proposed CJG was to be funded by reallocating 60 per cent of former LMA funding to CJG. Practically speaking, this reallocation meant that provincial and territorial governments would lose \$300 million in federal funding, which they relied upon to provide skills-development training. Further, provincial and territorial governments would also be expected to come up with an additional \$300 million to fund their half of the matching grants. Whatever remained of the former LMA funding could be still be used by provinces and territories to fund employment services for those not covered by EI Part 2 benefits.

Provincial and territorial governments objected to this reallocation because it required them to either close or find new monies for existing LMA-funded training. Further, by linking funding to employer sponsorship, the expected (and, as illustrated in Box 3.2, the ultimate) effect of the CJG was to shift funding for training away from workers who were “far” from being labour-market ready and towards workers who were mostly likely already employed. This, in turn, would (and did) constrain the supply of skilled workers by focusing training funding on already trained workers.³³

Critics of the CJG noted that there was no evidence of significant skills shortages and, indeed, the federal government’s own research found skills shortages only in fields requiring years of study; thus, these shortages could not be remedied through the short-term training CJG funded. Further, employers’ historical reluctance to invest in training meant that the CJG was likely to function primarily as a means to subsidize (i.e., reduce) existing employer investments in training, not spark additional investment in training.³⁴

The CJG also represented a significant intrusion by the federal government into the realm of labour-market training after a lengthy transition towards provincial and territorial responsibility. Eventually, a six-year agreement was reached with each province and territory (except Québec) to implement CJG, after the federal government agreed to a gradual phase-in with matching dollars funded solely by federal money.³⁵

Box 3.2 Canada Job Grant Benefits Mostly Employed and Educated Men

The recent introduction of the CJG should make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about its outcomes. Unfortunately, initial evaluations of CJG raise profoundly troubling questions about the program. British Columbia reported that, after two years of operating the Canada-BC Job Grant, 99 per cent of participants were drawn from the ranks of the already employed. This finding reveals that the CJG is not meeting its goal of increasing labour-market attachment among unemployed British Columbians.

Additionally, the majority of participants already had some PSE and most saw no wage increase following the training. Less than 4 per cent of employer applications identified participants as youth, persons with a disability, Indigenous persons, or new immigrants. Only 30 per cent of participants were women. Finally, only a minority of employers used the CJG to pay for new or additional training. Most employers used CJG funding to offset existing training costs.³⁶

Alberta reported a very similar experience, noting that the Canada-Alberta Job Grant is being used mostly to train employed men with PSE in skilled management and non-management occupations. Manitoba concluded:

No evidence was found the Grant increased the supply of skilled labour, increased participation of underrepresented groups, or developed the long-term human resource capacity of employers. Over the short term, training did not increase labour market attachment, as very few participants obtained or retained jobs as a direct result of the training. The vast majority of training participants were employed before receiving training (99%).³⁷

The Northwest Territories was particularly critical of the impact of the CJG on existing labour-market training programs:

The cost sharing element of the Job Grant also negatively impacted funding for existing employment and training programs, particularly those targeted for unemployed, and under-employed individuals who do not have a job offer, and for individuals entering or re-entering the labour force. These impacts will increase as the Job Grant is fully phased in to reach 60% of the Job Fund.³⁸

While there are exceptions to this general pattern (as well as data gaps in the evaluations), the CJG appears to redirect federal training dollars towards already employed men in high-status and high-wage occupations. The CJG funding model also shifts federal funding away from assisting unemployed workers to become job ready. In these ways, the CJG replicates existing patterns of advantage (and disadvantage). As noted below, the replacement of the CJFAs with Workforce Development Agreements (WDA) may attenuate some of the worst consequences of the CJG.

In terms of access, control, and benefit, the CJG privileged the interests of employers. Employers determined which employees received what kind of training under the CJG, because employers made applications for the funding. Employers were the main beneficiaries of the CJG, receiving taxpayer-subsidized training for their employees. Workers may have benefitted from this training, if it led to more satisfying or remunerative work, with either their current employer or another employer in the future. The workers who received the most benefit from CJG were largely well-educated men who were already employed in skilled occupations and who didn't identify as Indigenous, immigrant, or disabled. This inequitable distribution of CJG training broadly mirrors the distribution of other forms of training. Further, the CJG focused training dollars on workers who are essentially job ready, thereby disadvantaging Canadians with little prospect of immediate labour-force attachment.

Provincial and territorial governments continue to operate programs historically funded by LMA (although perhaps on a lesser scale). This programming tends to primarily benefit individual workers (who become more employable) and the state (which sees workers move into employment). While the employment rates of older workers, Indigenous workers, and workers with disabilities continue to lag behind the average, historically, LMA-funded training appears to provide greater benefits to these groups of workers than does the CJG.

At the time of writing, the federal Liberal government is negotiating a replacement for the CJFAs, along with the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMA PD), and the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW). The new Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs) will provide approximately \$722 million in funding annually, plus an additional \$900 million (from 2017/18 to 2022/23) to PTs. (Currently, only Ontario has announced it has completed negotiations.) The WDAs are expected to allow provincial and territorial governments more flexibility in how funding is allocated by eliminating specific funding requirements associated with the Canada Job Grant and TIOW. Provinces and territories can continue to operate these programs or redeploy the funding associated with them in different ways.³⁹ By giving PTs more flexibility in how they spend WDA funding, the federal government has shifted any

political costs of program changes to the PTs. Some jurisdictions may, for example, desire to drop the Canada Job Grant program because, despite its popularity with employers, it does not help unemployed workers to attach to the labour market.

Training Programs for Indigenous Peoples in Canada

The federal government has long sought to increase employment levels among Indigenous peoples. This has included providing labour-market training and skills development. These training responsibilities were not devolved to provinces and territories subsequent to 1996 because the constitution allocates responsibility for “Indians and the lands reserved to Indians” to the federal government.⁴⁰ In 2010, the federal government launched a five-year Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) to provide \$210 million in support for skills development, training, and employment among Indigenous people. The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) followed SPF in 2011, essentially rebranding existing training programs. ASETS was designed to increase the employment of Indigenous people through the provision of skills development and training programs. ASETS-funded services are provided by 85 Indigenous-operated organizations across Canada. These programs are intended to target regional labour-market needs and are provided by or through Indigenous-operated organizations. Approximately \$1.7 billion in funding was provided by the federal government and various Indigenous-operated organizations over five years.⁴¹

A 2015 evaluation of these programs noted significant increases in participants’ earnings and probability of employment. That said, the assessment flagged a number of challenges to the effectiveness of training programs. The lack of employment opportunities near isolated communities posed a barrier for many participants who were reluctant to leave their communities. The generally lower level of educational attainment among Indigenous peoples in Canada meant the training offered was often inadequate to match employer demands. Employment also often required significant cultural adjustments on the part of workers, which extended the need for training beyond job-specific technical skills. Where there were local employment opportunities, they were often in a single sector subject to market and seasonal fluctuations. And employers often simply

declined to hire or provide work experience for Indigenous workers.⁴² Box 3.3 examines the effectiveness of short-term labour-market training for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Box 3.3 Is Short-Term Skills Training Effective for Indigenous Persons?

Supply-side labour-market policies emphasize matching workers with jobs as quickly as possible. This agenda is evident in LMDA and CJFA funding, which emphasizes short-term training to help workers (re)attach to the labour market. Recent research suggests that this approach is ineffective. The crux of the problem is that, on its own, job-specific skills training is often inadequate to remedy the legacy of colonialism.

Colonialism refers to the process by which European countries exerted political control over the rest of the world between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. For Indigenous peoples in Canada, colonialism has meant more than two centuries of forced assimilation and systemic racism. These policies have contributed to above-average rates of poverty and incarceration. These factors can create multiple barriers to labour-force attachment, including low levels of education, lack of access to a social network, and complex family responsibilities. Further, Indigenous peoples may be legitimately skeptical about the value of labour-market attachment because of discriminatory hiring and management practices.⁴³

The effects of the (often intergenerational) exclusion of Indigenous people from the labour market are difficult for training providers to address in the current policy environment. The neo-liberal training prescription prioritizes (re)attaching workers to the labour market as quickly as possible. This is evident in both LMDA and CJFA funding, where the aim is explicitly to move workers who are “close” to employable into employment. The cost and duration of training required to address low levels of education and multiple barriers is often too high. Yet, absent such a commitment, the effectiveness of such programs is likely to be low.

In 2018, the federal Liberal government announced that it would be replacing ASETS with the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training

program (ISET). As of the summer of 2018, the program was still being developed and included a \$2 billion commitment over five years. Key changes include the first increase in funding in 17 years to serve an additional 15,000 clients, longer-term agreements, and enhanced performance measurement. The program is also expected to better reflect the differing needs of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban/non-affiliated Indigenous peoples.⁴⁴

Provincial and Territorial Training Programs

As noted in Chapter 1, the constitution creates a shared responsibility for labour-market training policy. Federal jurisdiction is acknowledged in matters of the economy, including Employment Insurance. Education is an exclusively provincial preserve. While labour-market training likely falls outside of what framers of the British North America Act had in mind when they wrote about education, the Québec Court of Appeal has found it to be an area of provincial jurisdiction.⁴⁵ That said, the federal government continues to exercise significant influence through conditional financial transfers, such as the 2013 transition from LMAs to the Canada Job Fund Agreements.

All provinces and territories fund programming designed to address specific training needs. Such programming is delivered through a combination of provincial and territorial PSE systems (see Chapter 2), private providers, and government-operated programs. As with the discussion of eligibility around LMDA-funded training above, the boundaries between federally and provincially/territorially funded training are often blurry and more a matter of whether training costs are billed to the Workforce Development Agreement or a provincial/territorial funding source.

A key area of provincial/territorial labour market training includes literacy and adult basic education (which is discussed at length in Chapter 5). A second area is labour-market training provided to social assistance recipients (see Box 3.4). Governments may also provide training to address specific, localized issues such as industry closures (e.g., the loss of jobs in coal-fired electrical generating plants in rural communities) or labour shortages (for instance, a lack of qualified teachers in remote and northern communities).

Box 3.4 Labour-Market Training for Social Assistance Recipients

Beginning after the First World War, governments funded programming designed to alleviate poverty. Initially, such programs were directed at the “deserving poor,” such as mothers abandoned by husbands and the elderly. Over time, a broad system of social assistance (sometimes called welfare) developed, funded by both the federal and provincial/territorial governments. At present, social assistance programs offer a mixture of financial assistance and other benefits to the unemployed and unemployable.⁴⁶

Social assistance recipients are often stigmatized as lazy or irresponsible. Such accusations are often intermingled with racism and xenophobia, such as that directed at Indigenous peoples in Canada and immigrants (particularly refugee claimants who are visible minorities). These stereotypes of the so-called welfare bum often belie the complexity of social-assistance programming.⁴⁷ Access to benefits is typically based upon income and asset testing. Consequently, employed Canadians may be eligible for social assistance if their wages fall below certain thresholds. For example, a worker with numerous dependents who is employed part time at a minimum-wage job may be eligible for wage top-up or other benefits. Other recipients may be unemployed for various reasons, such as ill health, family circumstances, or disability.

Labour-market training is one of the benefits that social-assistance recipients may be able to access. For example, Ontario Works provides both financial and employment assistance to those in financial need. Employment assistance can include job counselling, job-specific training, workshops on resumé writing and interviewing, and access to academic upgrading and language training. Normally, receipt of financial assistance is conditional on participation in employment training (although this requirement can be waived in cases of illness or caregiving responsibilities).⁴⁸ There is a long history of provincial and territorial governments using social assistance to motivate workers to (re)attach to the labour market. This approach is consistent with ALMPs and is often expressed by former US President Ronald Reagan’s slogan “The best social program is a job.”⁴⁹

The province of Québec has a unique system of labour-market training. In 1997, Québec established the Commission des partenaires du marché

du travail (Labour Market Partners Board), which brings together representatives from the business, labour, education, and community sectors to advise the minister of employment and social solidarity about meeting labour-market training needs. In addition to LMDA-funded training, Québec administers a unique workforce **training levy** program.

This levy on employers was introduced in 1995 to address concerns that Québec employers provided much less labour-market training than employers in other provinces. Québec's levy requires all firms with payrolls in excess of \$1 million to spend at least 1 per cent of revenue on training or remit the difference to the province to fund training-related research and projects.⁵⁰ Training levies are designed to encourage employer investment in training at a low administrative cost to the state. France's long-term training levy, for example, has generated a number of effects. Fewer French employees receive training, but training is longer and addresses a wider range of skills, and the return on training is higher when compared to the levy-less United Kingdom.⁵¹

The evidence about the effectiveness of Québec's training levy is mixed. More than three-quarters of affected employers spend the required 1 per cent on training, although this varies by firm size. Some researchers report that job-related training rates rose after the levy was introduced, increasing from 20 per cent of workers in 1997 to 32 per cent in 2002 and thereby erasing the earlier interprovincial difference.⁵² Other research finds that Québec's rate of on-the-job training continues to lag behind that of other provinces, particularly in workplaces with fewer than 20 workers. Where on-the-job training occurs in Québec, it results in a larger wage premium than elsewhere. Finally, Québec firms are more likely to rely upon external trainers than firms in other provinces.⁵³

Québec's unique system of workforce training, combined with the Stephen Harper government's desire to make electoral headway in Québec, allowed Québec to opt out of the CJFA and instead receive a transfer of funds. This was justified because "the key principles behind the Canada Job Fund Agreements—greater employer involvement and employer investment in training—are already formally and legislatively entrenched in the Québec training system."⁵⁴ In terms of access, control, and benefit, Québec's training levy incentivizes large employers to increase access to labour-market training. Yet employers retain significant control over

which employees access training, and what training they take. As a result, employers are likely to be the primary beneficiary of this levy.

Immigration Policy and Foreign Workers

As we saw in Chapter 2, Canada has a long history of the federal government using immigration policy in order to increase the supply of workers with specific skills. During the mid- and late nineteenth century, the federal government facilitated the use of immigrant labourers for canal and railway construction.⁵⁵ Foreign workers were (and remain) an important source of live-in caregivers. Canada has also relied upon migrant workers in agriculture.⁵⁶ For example, Alberta continues to experience racialized waves of migrant agricultural workers that began in the late nineteenth century and has included migrant workers from Britain and central Canada, internees, prisoners of war, Polish veterans, Indigenous peoples, and Mexican Mennonites.

The federal Conservative government's 2006 economic plan promised to increase employer access to temporary foreign workers.

Our immigration policies should be more closely aligned with our labour market needs . . . Particular attention should be given to skilled temporary foreign workers with Canadian work experience and foreign graduates from Canadian colleges and universities, as these groups are well placed to adapt quickly to the Canadian economy.⁵⁷

As we saw in Chapter 1, expanding the supply of workers typically benefits employers by reducing labour costs. Canada currently operates three programs that bring temporary foreign workers to Canada:

1. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) brought approximately 14,000 temporary agricultural workers to Canada from Mexico and Caribbean countries in 2015.
2. The Caregiver Program allowed approximately 8,300 live-in caregivers to be resident in Canada in 2015. These workers provide full-time care to children, seniors, or persons with disabilities and may eventually be eligible for permanent residency.

3. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) saw 37,750 **temporary foreign workers** (TFWs) resident in Canada in 2015 (down from a high of nearly 80,000 in 2013). Employers can recruit TFWs if no qualified Canadian citizens are available to perform the work.⁵⁸

The TFWP is the largest of these programs. The explosive growth in the number of TFWs in Canada (shown in figure 3.1) is almost entirely due to changes in the TFWP. Until 2002, the TFWP was restricted to higher-skilled occupations. In 2002, the federal Liberal government extended the program to include lower-skilled workers. As set out in its 2006 economic plan, the federal Conservative government expanded the program by establishing a list of “occupations under pressure” for Alberta and British Columbia. This change made it easier for employers to acquire permission to hire TFWs, and TFW numbers rose rapidly thereafter.⁵⁹ Further changes in 2012 saw the federal government dramatically reduce processing times for labour market opinion (LMO) applications, allow employers to lower TFW wages, and waive the LMO (now called labour market impact assessments) process altogether for American TFWs in seven high-demand construction occupations.⁶⁰

There has been significant public concern about the exploitation of TFWs (see Boxes 3.5 and 6.1). These concerns as well as fear of job losses pressured then-employment minister Jason Kenney to radically alter his position on the TFWP.⁶¹ For example, in response to questions about why over 200 TFWs were hired by seafood processors in Prince Edward Island while hundreds of local fish plant workers were collecting EI (something the TFWP should prohibit), Kenney admitted employers often prefer TFWs because they increase employers’ profitability.

When people come in from abroad on a work permit, their immigration status is conditional on their work, so often those folks that come in, the managers know they’re going to show up every day for work so there’s a greater degree of reliability and in many respects, employers have begun to see it as a more efficient workforce, but that is not what it’s there for. It’s only there if it’s clear that no Canadians are available, and this evidence that we’ve released today demonstrates there are Canadians available in those jobs, in those regions.⁶²

After defending the program as necessary for nearly a decade, Kenney suggested that employers facing worker shortages should increase wages and benefits as well as improve working conditions. The 2014 changes to the program included looser rules regulating higher-skilled TFWs and greater restrictions on lower-skilled TFWs, including phased-in quotas for employers and a four-year residency limit for TFWs (this residency limit was revoked by the federal Liberal government in 2016).

Box 3.5 Exploitation and Vulnerability among Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in Canada often have both precarious employment and **precarious legal status**. Their employment is precarious because they often hold low-wage jobs with limited job security and access to social benefits. Their legal status is precarious because their right to reside in Canada is contingent upon their continued employment with a specific employer. Economic insecurity caused by precarious employment, coupled with the threat of deportation, acts as a barrier to exiting a job or asserting employment rights. Together, these factors make migrant workers' acutely vulnerable to wage theft, unsafe work, terrible housing conditions, and outright abuse by employers.⁶³

Employers understand these dynamics and often prefer foreign workers to citizens because such workers are more compliant with employer demands for increased productivity:

"We're also dealing with a workforce for supervisors that end up being malleable Because of the wage differences from India and the Philippines to Canada, they're very appreciative and prepared to work very hard to sustain their employment."⁶⁴

Employers also use TFWs to "motivate" Canadian workers through fear of replacement:

"Whereas before it was such an employee-driven workforce that they felt that, well we don't have to work hard . . . I think it's [TFW] really brought some competition back into the workforce, which is driving some good things."⁶⁵

Further, in some cases, such as the fruit and vegetable sector, migrant workers are appreciably younger than the existing Canadian agricultural workforce and are physically capable of much higher levels of productivity.⁶⁶

It is important to note that migrant workers have agency and often choose to work long hours and in difficult conditions because this advances their goal of maximizing their earnings while in Canada.⁶⁷ This choice, however, needs to be seen in its full context. The options that migrant workers are choosing among are constrained by government policies that make them vulnerable to employers exploiting them to maximize profitability.

In addition to the three streams of the TFWP, there are four other avenues by which foreign nationals can work in Canada:

1. The International Experience Canada program entails 32 reciprocal youth-mobility agreements that provide short-term work and travel permits to people aged 18 to 35.
2. The International Student Program provides foreign students and PSE graduates with work permits.
3. Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) vary by jurisdiction but provide a way for TFWs to become permanent residents.
4. Canada has signed forty-one “free trade” agreements with other governments that include reciprocal labour-mobility rights for certain classes of workers.

Collectively, these programs are called **international mobility programs** (IMPs). They differ from the various TFWP streams in that workers can receive open work permits with no assessment of the labour-market demand for their services or whether the jobs they hold are related to their qualifications. IMPs are also bilateral (or multilateral) agreements, the terms of which, unlike the TFWP, cannot be altered unilaterally by Canada.⁶⁸

As shown in figure 3.1, there has been a steady climb in the number of migrant workers entering Canada under the TFW and IMP programs. In 2015, there were 60,138 TFWs in Canada, down from a high of 104,125 in 2013. The number of TFW began increasing rapidly following the 2006 changes to the TFW program. The number of foreign workers in Canada as IMPs began a steady increase at about the same time, peaking at 259,339 in 2014. This pattern reflects, in part, the increasing number of bilateral trade

agreements signed by the Harper government beginning in 2006. Overall, there are approximately 354,000 migrant workers legally employed in Canada. There is no concrete data about the number of undocumented (non-status or illegal) foreign workers in Canada.⁶⁹

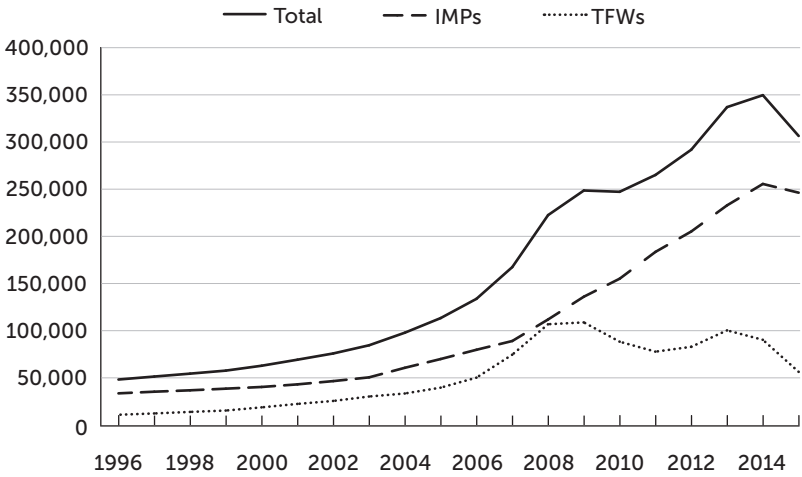


Figure 3.1 Migrant workers in Canada, 1996–2015. (Data from Government of Canada, “Facts and Figures 2015.”)

While the TFWP gets the lion’s share of media attention, there has been explosive growth in the numbers of workers entering Canada under IMPs. At present, TFWs account for only one-third of migrant foreign workers into Canada.⁷⁰ Governments have, in part, justified increasing employer access to employ foreign workers as a solution to a skills shortage.⁷¹ In this view, migrant worker policy acts as a substitute for labour-market training.

There is some question about whether migrant workers are necessary to address a skills shortage. Setting aside the question of whether specific labour shortages reflect an absolute shortage of workers (i.e., there are no workers available) or a relative shortage (i.e., there are no workers prepared to work for the offered terms and conditions of employment), the evidence suggests that most TFWs work in lower-skilled occupations. Table 3.1 groups 2015 migrant worker numbers by skill level to demonstrate that 61 per cent of TFWs are low-skill workers.⁷²

Table 3.1 Migrant workers by skill level, 2015.

Low-skill occupations	
Live-in caregivers	14,004
Seasonal agricultural workers	8,384
Low-skill TFWs	13,913
Total	36,301
High-skill occupations	
High-skill TFWs	23,458

Source: Government of Canada, “Facts and Figures 2015: Immigration Overview - Temporary Residents - Annual IRCC Updates.” Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2017.

Canada’s immigration policy is often used to supplement (or as a substitute for) labour-market training. Consequently, it is useful to consider how it affects issues of access and benefit. As with the Canada Job Grant, employers (through their hiring decisions) control which workers can access Canadian job opportunities. These opportunities have been unevenly distributed among workers. For example, while the majority of TFWs and IMPs are men, there are clearly female preserves (such as the Caregiver program) and male preserves (e.g., employment in the construction industry). Migrant workers also come from a small number of nations. More than half of IMPs are from India, the United States, China, France, and Australia, while more than one-third of TFWs are from the Philippines.⁷³

The growth in the number of TFWs is sometimes framed as a shift in Canada’s immigration policy, away from multicultural citizenship and towards partial citizenship. In partial citizenship, migrants are granted access to certain aspects of citizenship (e.g., partial access to the labour market) but excluded from other legal, political, and economic rights.⁷⁴ Other critics note that the TFW and IMP programs increasingly shift authority over migration from the state to employers. To be fair, employers’ exercise this power within a policy framework created by the federal government (TFW) or negotiated with other states (IMP).

The benefits of labour migration are uneven and hard to quantify. Migrant workers are obvious beneficiaries, through the provision of opportunities to work. But the structure of these opportunities often makes such workers vulnerable to exploitation. To the degree that employer access to migrant workers increases the supply of labour (thereby driving down wages and lessening workers' labour market power), employer use of migrant workers may disadvantage Canadian workers. Conversely, the availability of low-cost and compliant migrant workers advantages employers.

The state is placed in a conflicted position. To the degree that migrant worker programs address real labour shortages, they help the state to ensure the production process continues unimpeded. But, the threat (real or perceived) posed by migrant workers to the job security of Canadians, as well as the frequently poor treatment of these workers, undermines the legitimacy of the state when it operates such programs. In this way, migrant worker programs operate contrary to the goal of social reproduction. Maintaining legitimacy with the electorate is important and helps explain the 2014 about-face on the TFW program by the federal Conservative government. The Conservative government also simply stopped publishing information about the number of TFWs, perhaps as way to reduce public concern over their numbers.

Conclusion

While there are differences between (and within!) governments around labour-market training policy, several broad trends are evident. First, government policies and programs are increasingly focused on (re)attaching workers to the labour market as quickly as possible. To this end, Employment Insurance has been altered to reduce the proportion of unemployed workers who are eligible to receive financial support or training. Workers unable to access EI face significant pressure to take whatever jobs are available, regardless of whether they find the jobs desirable. Those workers who are eligible for EI benefits also face intensified pressure to take whatever jobs become available or risk having their benefits terminated. Funded training is short term and must clearly increase claimants' employability. Much like recent changes to Canada's immigration policies

that increase employers' access to foreign workers, these EI changes are designed to increase the labour supply. And, because workers are less able to negotiate wages and working condition improvements in loose labour markets, this policy tends benefit employers.

Second, government-funded labour-market training increasingly benefits workers who are already employed or are almost "job ready." LMDA-funded training is available only to those who have been recently employed. And most of the funding for the CJFAs has been directed to men who already have PSE credentials and who are employed in high-skill jobs. Employers trained (and subsequently hired) virtually no unemployed workers during the first two years of CJG funding, despite this being a key goal of the program. The funding for the CJG was secured by cannibalizing LMA-funded programs, which are aimed at providing training to workers who are further from the labour market, including Indigenous peoples, social assistance recipients, and persons with disabilities. This policy direction is consistent with (re)attaching workers to the labour market as quickly as possible. It also tends to reinforce existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage in the labour market.

Third, employers are being granted increasing control over who accesses what kind of government-funded training. This is most evident in the structure of the CJG, where employers select which workers undertake what kind of training. While governments establish broad criteria for matching grants, these criteria largely cede control to employers. Québec's training levy also leaves training decisions to employers. The rules around TFWs and IMPs allow employers to choose between training Canadian workers for jobs and seeking to hire migrant workers to do a job. As figure 3.1 indicates, employers are increasingly choosing to hire migrant workers. This trend externalizes training costs onto other jurisdictions.

These trends clearly indicate that Canadian governments—and particularly the federal government—have adopted a supply-side approach to labour-market training. Unemployed Canadians are pressured to return to (any) work as fast as possible, and training funding is allocated to workers in or close to the labour market. While there are rhetorical commitments to improving the labour-market prospects of workers who are further from employability, funding has been shifted away from programs that achieve this goal. (We'll explore basic skills training in Chapter 5.) Further,

federal immigration policy alleviates employers' need to train and hire these workers by making migrant workers available.

There is notably less federal commitment to the social-reproduction process. EI financial and training benefits buffer the effect of unemployment for some workers. The most significant federal efforts centre on framing training as a way for workers to improve their lot in life. This skills-shortage rhetoric shifts responsibility for unemployment away from employers and onto workers and obviates the need for political, social, or economic reform. Provincial and territorial governments—which are constitutionally responsible for social assistance and often bear the brunt of criticism about unemployment—have shown some willingness to resist this framing (e.g., pushing back against the CJFA) but must balance their greater interest in social reproduction against the allure of additional federal funding.

Notes

- 1 Mas, “Jason Kenney: Canada Job Grant Will Lead to Guaranteed Jobs.”
- 2 Albo, “What Comes Next?”
- 3 Alberta Works, “Employment and Training Programs and Services.”
- 4 Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*.
- 5 Employment and Social Development Canada, “EI Regular Benefits—Overview.”
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CHAPTER FOUR

Workplace Training and Learning

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify the three main perspectives on labour relations and explain how they affect workplace training and learning.
- Define and critically assess the concepts of human capital theory, learning organizations, and skills and competencies.
- Evaluate workplace training in terms of access to, control of, and benefit from training.



According to a report by job networking website LinkedIn, job-hopping by college-educated American millennials is on the rise.¹ The solution, says Professor Jason Wingard, dean of Columbia University’s School of Professional Studies, is training. “By investing in corporate learning, employers have the power to address millennial retention in three key areas: talent attraction; job readiness; and culture change.”² Before we buy into the “more training” mantra proposed by Wingard, it is worthwhile to tease apart whether these articles about workplace training are accurate.

Our first question should be whether the LinkedIn report’s conclusion about job-hopping is correct. The LinkedIn report sits at odds with a longitudinal study of job tenure by the US Department of Labor that suggests workers are, on average, staying with firms longer.³ To be fair, the danger of using national statistics is that they can wash out differences among subpopulations (e.g., the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada). Given this, it is possible that college-educated millennials (who graduated between 2001 and 2010) are job-hopping more than older workers did after they graduated.

Looking at the LinkedIn report itself reveals numerous methodological issues. The two most obvious problems are these:

1. The report’s dataset are jobs reported on LinkedIn profiles. This data is not necessarily valid. For example, older respondents (who are the comparator group) may have under-reported short-term jobs at the beginning of their careers due to memory decay, irrelevance, or a desire to make their careers appear focused and stable.

2. The dataset is not representative of the total population of college-educated workers. It includes only college-educated workers who use LinkedIn. So our ability to **generalize** the experiences of this sample to the overall population is limited.

The report acknowledges (and even tries to cope with) these issues in the methodological fine print at the end of the article. But these profound methodological problems don't temper the report's claims, and that should make us cautious about accepting them. Now let's consider Wingard's prescription of greater investment in corporate training: "Millennials want to know whether they will have the opportunity to develop a strong set of competencies and transferable skills that can not only be useful now, for their current employer, but in the future, as well, as their careers advance."⁴

This may well be true. But will it reduce the rate of job-hopping? The question that neither the LinkedIn report nor the Wingard article engages is whether job-hopping behaviour (which may or may not be increasing) is a worker choice or is driven by the greater job precarity facing millennials. If job-hopping is by choice, that behaviour may (or may not) be something that companies can influence by providing more training (assuming that a lack of training is driving the behaviour). If job-hopping reflects that many millennials are hired on short-term contracts, then the level of job-hopping has nothing to do with the level of training and won't be influenced by changes in it.

The value of the LinkedIn report and the Wingard article is that they are fairly representative of how workplace training and learning is usually presented to the public. The specific dynamic warranting our attention is (1) a weak (or false) claim that (2) hints at a problem for employers (3) stemming from undesirable worker behaviour that can (perhaps) be solved by (4) employers increasing spending on training for (5) an already privileged group of workers. The only clear beneficiaries of this questionable prescription are private training providers, who rely upon employers purchasing their products and services. This tendency of the discourse around workplace training to be focused on selling training services poses a profound challenge to a meaningful assessment of what training is in fact done in workplaces and what training ought to be done there. To

help sort the wheat from the chaff, it is necessary to recall from Chapter 1 that workplace training occurs in the context of a capitalist economy that subjects employers to the profit imperative. The profit imperative pressures employers to minimize labour costs in order to maximize overall profitability. Workplace training and learning are intended to support organizations in achieving this end. While maximizing profitability isn't the only reason that organizations provide training to workers, it is an overarching and powerful reason.

For that reason, this chapter begins by examining the differing perspectives that individuals have about employment and considering how these perspectives affect workplace training. With these differing perspectives in mind, we'll then critically examine important concepts, such as human capital theory, organizational learning and learning organizations, and skills and competencies. As noted in Box 4.1, it is also useful to distinguish between formal, non-formal, and informal learning—all of which are present in workplace learning. We'll then consider the various forms of workplace training in Canada before concluding with an examination of the role and impact of Professional Regulatory Organizations on workplace training.

Box 4.1 Formal, Non-formal, and Informal Learning

While we often speak of training and learning in broad terms, it is important to distinguish among them. As we saw in Chapter 1, training is the process of intentionally acquiring, modifying, or reinforcing KSAs as well as values and preferences. There are different ways to categorize training and a useful typology is based upon the degree of formality.

Formal learning entails stated objectives, an organized curriculum, and set requirements to demonstrate that skills and knowledge have been acquired. Credentials earned through formal training serve as evidence that the holder has certain skills and knowledge and can be relied upon to be able to use those skills and knowledge effectively. Formal learning encompasses K-12 education and PSE. Some forms of workplace training also meet these criteria.

That said, much workplace training comprises **non-formal learning** in that there is less structure and, if a credential is issued, it isn't

one that can be used as proof of a qualification or competency in a particular skill. Non-formal learning is valuable in that it imparts KSAs but often has limited portability because it is not directly linked with a credential or certification.⁵

Informal learning is learning that may (or may not) be planned. For example, watching how a co-worker tackles a job or uses a tool may help us develop work-related skills. Informal learning can be a very important way of developing new skills and competencies in the workplace. A distinguishing feature of informal learning is that it is not associated with any direct form of recognition of achievement or a credential. That said, some PSE institutions do attempt to give workers “credit” for informal learning through the process of **prior learning assessment**.⁶

Typically, all three forms of learning can be found in workplaces. For example, employees may be given a workplace orientation upon arrival (non-formal learning). They may then be required to take and pass a first-aid course (formal learning). Then they are assigned a mentor who will show them the ropes (informal learning). As we’ll see below, this informal learning can also be a source of important information about workplace norms and how work is actually done.

Perspectives on Employment and Training

How we view workplace training usually reflects the broader perspective we hold about employment relationships. As noted in Chapter 1, this book takes the position that labour and capital have both converging and diverging interests in the workplace. Not everyone shares that view. For example, as we’ll see below, proponents of learning organizations largely ignore the concept of class and conflicting interest in their prescription. This section sets out the three main perspectives on employment relationships in Canada and how they apply to labour-market training.

The most commonly held view of employment relationships—especially among employers—is unitarism. **Unitarism** is premised on the belief that an employee comes into the workplace to achieve the objectives of the employer. A corollary of this view is that work organizations are held together by common objectives that unite managers and workers (hence “unitarism”). Unitarists do not acknowledge any fundamental conflicts

between the interests of employers and employees.⁷ Consequently, unitarists believe that industrial relations are good when there is an absence of conflict.

A key problem for unitarists is that employer-worker conflict does occur, although this can sometimes occur in muted forms such as high turnover, absenteeism, theft, and sabotage. Unitarists explain both overt and covert conflict as rooted in the irrationality of workers, the interference of an outside party (e.g., a union), poor communication between management and labour, and a lack of leadership. There is little acceptance that employers and employees might have legitimately differing interests. Unitarism also assumes that workers will behave more rationally if they have more knowledge of management's need to (for example) improve efficiency.

Unitarism is evident in workplace training, which is most often organized by employers to enhance workplace productivity. The employer determines the content, delivery method, and timing of the training. While some employers might seek input (or feedback) from their workers on the training, the key decisions about what is taught to whom is made by the employer with the employer's economic interests top of mind. This view on organizational training may help explain who gets what kind of workplace training (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 Employer-Sponsored Training in Canada

For the most part, employers unilaterally determine who receives how much and what kind of workplace training. Presumably, this decision is driven by the expected benefit of training. Each year, only about one-third of Canadians aged 25 to 64 participate in any form of non-formal job-related education. While Canada's training rate is slightly higher than average among developed countries, looking at the training rate masks that Canadian workers who receive training receive fewer hours of training than workers in other countries. This, in turn, reflects that Canadian employers reduced their training expenditure per employee by 40 per cent between 1993 and 2013.⁸

It is unclear why employers have reduced their investment in training over the past 25 years. It seems unlikely employers are unaware of the claim that training yields economic benefits. Perhaps, though,

many employers don't believe these claims? Or perhaps these claims apply to only certain kinds of businesses. For example, employers that compete based on low labour costs (instead of competing based on innovation or productivity) might see little value in providing training. Employers might also be worried about competitors poaching trained employees. And, given the profit imperative, they may prefer to externalize the costs of training on workers themselves or the state.

While workplace-training rates among men and women were roughly equal in 2010 (31.2 per cent versus 30.1 per cent respectively), men were more likely to receive employer support than women (54.6 per cent versus 46.0 per cent).⁹ As we saw in Chapter 1, workplace training tends to be unevenly distributed, with workers who already hold PSE credentials capturing a disproportionately high portion of subsequent workplace training. Data on the precise kinds of workplace training being offered is elusive, but there is some suggestion that there is an increasing emphasis on leadership (i.e., management and self-management) skills and a corresponding decline in basic workplace skills training.

The idea that employers *should* determine what training is required and how it is provided in the workplace is the central premise in the hidden curriculum of workplace training. Essentially, training becomes an extension of management's right to organize and direct work. Employer-driven training often ignores the interests or goals of workers. As we saw in Chapter 1, workers may engage in learning to achieve a goal (e.g., career advancement), engage in an activity (e.g., social interaction), or simply to learn something new. Ignoring the legitimate interests of workers may reduce workers' engagement in and application of training.

Workers may be able to exert more control over training in unionized workplaces if their union negotiates training entitlements into a collective agreement. These entitlements may compel the employer to provide (or at least fund) certain kinds of training. Employers may also be compelled to provide (and perhaps fund) job-protected leave for workers undertaking training. Unions and collective bargaining are most often associated with the pluralist view of labour relations. **Pluralism** asserts that labour and capital have both converging and conflicting interests in the workplace.

One way to manage such conflict is through the negotiation of a **collective agreement** between a union and an employer.

The pluralist view of labour relations dominates public policy-making and is evident in laws that allow workers to unionize and that provide redress for unfair labour practices by employers. The term “pluralism” is borrowed from political science, where it refers to a system of power-sharing among a number of political parties. Not surprisingly, pluralist labour relations are often explained using political analogies. For example, a collective agreement might be likened to a constitution, which sets out the roles and powers of the government (or, in this analogy, the employer). The union operates as the “opposition party,” and its primary job is keep the “government” honest. This analogy tends to obscure the fact that employers are not elected, they govern in the interests of the employer (not the broader public interest), and unions are always cast in the role of the opposition.

While most Canadian employment laws are pluralist (in that they recognize the conflicting interests of labour and capital), the enforcement of these laws is often weak. This allows employers to exert their greater power in the workplace to advance their own interests. Essentially, the rules suggest a pluralist structure (wherein both sides have some power), but the operation of the rules favours employers (thus reinforcing a unitarist system). We saw echoes of this dynamic in the training system in Chapter 3’s discussion of the Canada Job Grant. Here, the federal government designed a funding system for labour-market training that should have benefitted both employers and unemployed Canadians. But the structure of the CJG allowed employers to appropriate this money and use it to offset training costs for already employed workers. The absence of any countervailing worker representation in the CJG meant that, in practice, the interests of unemployed workers were ignored and employers did whatever they wanted with the CJG funding.

The final perspective on labour relations is a critical one, inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx. Like pluralism, it views labour and capital as having conflicting interests in the workplace. Unlike pluralism, this critical perspective is deeply skeptical that these conflicts can be resolved through negotiations or regulation. Part of this skepticism stems from the tremendous structural advantage capitalists have and use to pursue their interests.

For example, this critical perspective suggests, in part, that trade unions are a means by which employers and the state manage conflict in the workplace. Specifically, the **incorporation thesis** asserts that management and unions have a symbiotic relationship that moderates the behaviour of unions. Management supports the union by agreeing to union-security provisions (e.g., an automatic dues check-off provision). In return, the union supports management by agreeing to a management's rights clause (thereby guaranteeing management control over production). In this arrangement, unions protect their members' interests (by grieving violations of the contract) but they also ensure their members heed their contractual obligations (by not striking during the term of the contract and thereby disrupting production). This dynamic is sometimes referred to as the **central paradox of trade unionism**: union power over its members is appropriated by management to serve management's goals.¹⁰

This critique does not mean that union officials are management apologists or are engaged in a conspiracy against workers. Rather, this critical perspective identifies a dilemma for union leaders. If the union collaborates too much with management, it risks rank-and-file revolt. Yet, if it is too vigorous in pressing its demands and fails to police its membership, it risks the loss of management and state support and/or legal penalties. This critique also helps temper the claim that the establishment of collective bargaining represents an unqualified victory for unions. This perspective on labour relations helps explain some unions' willingness to cede to employers significant control over what workplace training is provided to whom. Unions do so in acknowledgement that employers have a need to manage, even if that need is routinely operationalized in ways that monetarily disadvantage workers or important subgroups of workers. As we'll see in Chapter 5, some unions have responded by developing their own training infrastructure.

Understanding the differing perspectives on labour relations is important because it helps us to better understand why individuals and groups act the way they do. For example, an employer might announce mandatory staff training without consulting the workers who will receive the training. From the employer's (unitarist) perspective, it has bought the workers' time and can deploy those workers as it likes. Since the workers are ultimately employed to help the employer earn a profit (which also

benefits the workers), it makes sense for the employer to decide what training will occur, when, and how. But, from the (pluralist) perspective of the workers, you can see how such an announcement might be greeted with disfavour. Their interests in what training occurs, when, and how are being ignored. And the slogan that “people are our most valuable resources” sits uneasily (perhaps even gallingly) with unilateral employer decision-making around training.

Further, depending on the nature of the training involved, workers might well worry that the training will come with changes in job design that will make their jobs worse. For example, cross-training employees (so they can fill in for one another) is often the first step to eliminating some employees and assigning their tasks to the workers who remain behind. This additional work will often violate the implicit **psychological contract** (sometimes called the wage-effort bargain) that has developed over time about how and how hard employees will work for the wages that they are paid. More practically, it can also cut into rest periods available to workers under the current job design. These rest periods may be important in allowing workers to physically or mentally manage the work that they are required to do.

Box 4.3 Vocational Training for Injured Workers

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Canadians are injured on the job, often seriously. As we saw in Chapter 1, each province and territory has established a mandatory system of workers’ compensation that provides wage-loss and other benefits to workers who are injured on the job. As part of returning injured workers to employability, workers’ compensation boards (WCBs) may offer workers training. Much like the training provided to social assistance recipients (see Box 3.4), the purpose of this training is to reattach injured workers to the labour market.

When a worker is unemployed because of a workplace injury, the WCB may offer training focused on developing job-search and interview skills. When a worker has injury-related job restrictions due to a loss of ability or ongoing medical issues, the WCB may offer vocational training. This might include assisting the worker to develop KSAs that will allow them to do their date-of-injury job or occupation. When a worker’s job restrictions preclude re-employment in their

date-of-injury occupation, a WCB may fund retraining to return the worker to employability.

Injured workers' experiences of vocational rehabilitation and retraining tend to be mixed. Over time, some WCB's (such as Alberta and Ontario) have restructured their vocational rehabilitation with an eye to minimizing its costs. Reducing operating costs reduces the workers' compensation premiums that employers pay and reflects that employers have significant influence over WCB operations. One result is that vocational services have been constrained.¹¹ For example, workers often report receiving very cursory job-search assistance and then find themselves "deemed" to have acquired a job (even if they haven't or the job does not exist) and their wage-loss benefits reduced accordingly.¹²

Human Capital Theory

Employers often view workplace training and learning as a way to enhance an organization's competitive advantage. This same view—writ large—underlies human capital theory. As we saw in Chapter 1, human capital theory asserts that the cumulative stock of KSAs, intelligence, experience, and judgment of an individual or a population comprises a key input into the production process. Thus, human capital can be maintained or increased through education and training. More contentiously, some employers, politicians, and academics assert that both individual labour-market outcomes and collective economic growth turn upon and can be increased through additional education and training.

In this view, training is an investment by workers in their careers. This view justifies shifting the cost of formal training onto individuals as well as increasingly aligning formal education with the demands of the labour market. Chapter 2 revealed that these trends are evident in Canadian PSE. It is less clear whether or not training provides positive financial returns for employers.¹³ Society may also experience social returns—a gain experienced by the economy as a whole—from training. For example, a trained worker may be more likely to participate in society and may increase the productivity of other, less trained workers. The evidence of a social return is strongest for formal schooling, while the social return on subsequent workplace training is more ambiguous.¹⁴

The limited empirical support for human capital theory may reflect that the relationship between training and economic outcomes is complicated and may be mediated by a variety of factors. For example, an absence of good jobs will limit (in varying ways) the individual and employer returns available from almost any form of training.¹⁵ In this way, precarious work disincentivizes employer provision of training. Similarly, increasing workers' KSAs without allowing them access to tools or job designs that allow them to employ those skills to their best advantage can reduce or negate the value of the training. Employees may also not be motivated to apply training to its fullest extent because the outcome of doing so (layoffs, higher workloads) may be contrary to their interests. Such a nuanced view of human capital theory runs contrary to the interests of many training providers, whose own income depends upon selling employers and workers on the idea that training is a panacea for individual, employer, and social woes.

Human capital theory broadly supports the unitarist view of training. The purpose of training (in human capital theory) is to increase productivity. If employers are best situated to know what additional human capital will increase productivity, then it only makes sense that employers determine the content of training. But the complexity of work in large organizations undermines the assertion that employers know best in terms of what training is needed or how it will affect work. In many fields, workers will know better what training is necessary to improve performance or stay current in their fields. Further, workers may also have a better appreciation of the degree to which training will actually (rather than theoretically) increase productivity based upon an understanding of who the workers are and how their interests will affect the way in which training is operationalized.

Learning Organizations

One of the most durable training concepts (and some would say fads) to emerge in the late twentieth century is that of the learning organization. A **learning organization** is one focused on increasing the capacity of its employees through ongoing learning as a means by which to improve organizational performance. The problem that learning organizations

seek to solve is the tendency of organizations to become inflexible as they increase in size. Increasing employee skills is intended to make organizations more nimble and responsive to the needs of customers and clients and, thereby, provide a competitive advantage over other, more bureaucratic organizations. In this way, the discourse around learning organizations nicely aligns with human capital theory.¹⁶ As Box 4.4 suggests, learning organizations are related to, but distinct from, organizational learning.

Box 4.4 Organizational Learning

Organizational learning and learning organization are interrelated concepts that are often used interchangeably. **Organizational learning** usually refers to the way in which “organizations acquire, share, and use knowledge to succeed.”¹⁷ One way to think about organizational learning is as a set of behaviours undertaken by organizational actors. For example, a team may assess a project to identify what has gone well and what hasn’t in order to act differently in the future.

This approach is often associated with single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning sees an actor or organization reflect on a failure to achieve a goal and then change the behaviour that caused the failure. Double-loop learning entails an actor or organization rethinking their goal or beliefs about the situation before attempting to change its behaviour. Double-loop learning is a more sophisticated form of learning.¹⁸

Key barriers to single- and double-loop learning are the financial and political costs of changing behaviour. Financial costs include the staff and material costs associated with changing processes. The political costs of change are more varied. They can include loss of face and/or influence associated with acknowledging missteps. Depending upon the nature of the change required, **political costs** can also include resistance by stakeholders whose interests will be negatively affected. For example, the solution to productivity and morale declines due to a cumbersome new expense-claim system may be to abandon that system. But those who implemented the system may resist such an embarrassing reversal and instead recommend staff training as the solution.

Another way to think about organizational learning is as a process by which organizations attempt to codify organizational learning in the form of policies, procedures, and other less formal documents so that learning survives staff turnover. Large organizations with relatively stable operations—such as governments, fast-food franchises, and large manufacturers—still use these techniques. Over time, the accretion of these learnings is expected to make organizations more efficient and operations more profitable.

The challenge of this (somewhat traditional) approach of organizational learning is that the pace of change faced by many organizations suggests relying on past practice may have limited (or even negative) utility. The idea that organizations are constantly learning (and should be designed to) supports the notion of learning organizations. Yet not all organizations that learn do so in ways that meet the definition of a learning organization. Further, large and small organizations may undertake organizational learning quite differently, reflecting that small organizations may be less able to absorb the direct and indirect costs of formal training.¹⁹

In his 1990 book *The Fifth Discipline*, academic and management guru Peter Senge identifies five characteristics of learning organizations:

1. **Personal Development:** Organizations are collections of individuals. Learning occurs at an individual level first, although not every individual is necessarily interested in actively learning. Learning organizations both encourage individual learning and attempt to capture that learning in order to change and benefit the organization.
2. **Team Learning:** Capturing and sharing individual learning results in team learning. Team learning is facilitated by structures that encourage individuals to develop shared understandings. These knowledge-management structures can be physical things (for example, databases) or social things (e.g., a culture of ongoing formal and informal knowledge sharing).
3. **Testing and Changing Assumptions:** Individuals and organizations develop norms and beliefs about what behaviours are effective.

Sometimes, these norms and beliefs are untrue, or no longer true or effective. Learning organizations develop ways to identify, challenge, and replace such norms and beliefs.

4. **Shared Vision:** The development of a vision shared by all organizational members is expected to motivate and focus individual and organizational learning. Such efforts to create “bottom up” visioning seem to augur in favour of flat organizational structures where decision-making power is devolved to the lowest organizational level competent to make the decision.
5. **Systems Thinking:** Organizational components, processes, and outcomes need to be clearly and fully understood (often through the use of quantitative performance measures) in order for an organization to make meaningful changes.²⁰

While the idea of becoming a learning organization can generate broad support within an organization, actually doing so can be challenging. Some workers may be reluctant to engage in this process because they identify these principles and practices as threatening to their interests. For example, the move towards team learning can threaten workers’ ability to shape their working conditions through their greater knowledge of how work is done. As Box 4.5 suggests, employees have good reason to be skeptical when an employer starts asking after their knowledge of work.

Box 4.5 Appropriation of Workers’ Knowledge

While a detailed history of labour is beyond the scope of this book, it is worth noting the broad trend in the organization of work towards employers appropriating the knowledge and power of workers in order to increase profitability. For example, manufacturing and other forms of work were concentrated in factories during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are two competing explanations for the rise of factories:

1. **Technological:** Machinery was more efficient at producing goods but required greater volume of work and workspace than could be found in small workshops.

2. Control of the workforce: Factories were more efficient because employers could demand longer and harder work from their employees, who were economically dependent and could be closely supervised.

The evidence suggests that factories predated technological change. The reason for the creation of factories was increasing employer control over the production process and preventing embezzlement.²¹

This centralization of work facilitated **knowledge appropriation** whereby employers learned how work was done. Frederick Taylor's time-motion studies (sometimes called **scientific management** or Taylorism) gave employers a technology by which to understand how work was actually done. By taking jobs, breaking them down into component parts (which could be timed), and reconstructing the production process to maximize productivity, employers stripped workers of control over the content and pace of work. The development of rigid, highly efficient production processes also allowed employers to substitute cheaper, unskilled labour. The introduction of the moving assembly-line technology by Henry Ford further enhanced employers' abilities to increase profitability by increasing the pace of the line.²²

The profitability of **Fordist production** processes began to decline in the 1970s, largely due to external economic and political factors. While employers continued to maintain significant control over the structure of work and job design, they sought to use their workers' (often tacit) knowledge to find ways to maintain profitability. Various techniques—such as business process re-engineering and total quality management—have been used to mobilize workers' knowledge in service of the employer. As an added bonus, these techniques frame workers as part of a team, thereby helping to obscure the differing interests of workers and employers.

This analysis of workplace change is important because it highlights that job design and other management interventions in the workplace are not neutral technologies. Rather, they are tools employers use to increase profitability, often by intensifying work for employees. This analysis supports the pluralist and critical views of employment as a relationship underlain by conflicting interests. It also helps frame worker resistance to technologies (such as learning organizations) as rational and self-interested actions, rather than being driven by worker ignorance or laziness.

Developing shared values can also be a stumbling block to the implementation of learning organizations. The profit imperative tends to play a major role in the design of organizations and jobs. Individual workers or classes of workers may have goals (e.g., job stability and control) that run contrary to the profit imperative. Such class-based conflict tends to be ignored in discussions of learning organizations, even though it can be a major barrier for the development of a shared vision and the decentralization of power.

Organizational size can also pose a practical barrier to the development of a learning organization. Organizations with more than 150 employees tend to have greater internal task specialization and less cross-functional communication.²³ This dynamic poses a fundamental threat to developing a shared vision and systems thinking. The result is ironic. On the one hand, the putative purpose of learning organization is to increase the flexibility and responsiveness of large organizations. Yet, on the other hand, as organizations grow larger, the effectiveness of primary mechanisms of learning organizations (knowledge sharing) tends to diminish. While this tension does not preclude the development of learning organizations, it suggests that learning organizations are increasingly difficult to establish in the very organizations where they are supposedly most needed and effective.

A study of how the Swiss Postal Service attempted to become a learning organization suggests that attempting to transform an organization solely by altering its culture will be ineffective. This is because organizational structure and job design are powerful factors in how organizations operate and also tend to reflect environmental conditions and pressures, which can be difficult to alter. Basically, organizations operate the way they do, in part, for good reasons. This same study also suggests that it is important (but difficult) to connect individual and team learning with strategic organizational objectives.²⁴

A recent survey of academic studies of learning organizations revealed two of the largest knowledge gaps to be (1) what it means to be a learning organization, and (2) whether learning organizations are effective.²⁵ The limited research conducted on these topics suggests that we exert caution when confronted with claims that becoming a learning organization is a pathway to organizational success. Perhaps the most compelling critique

of learning organizations is that real-life examples are hard to find. This lack of examples does not necessarily invalidate the utility of the learning organization as a model. We rarely see, for example, labour markets that are perfect representations of the models outlined in Chapter 1. Yet that idealized model of how labour markets work still has practical value. That said, significant gaps between a model and reality suggest important limits to a model's utility.

Given the challenges associated with actually developing learning organizations, it is useful to ask why the concept of learning organizations retains currency some 30 years on. For organizational leaders, seeking to create a learning organization may provide them with political capital. The ill-defined but positive-sounding goal of creating a learning organization can be used to generate buy-in (or lower resistance) to whatever organizational changes the leader wants to make. In effect, the utility of learning organizations may be their use as a rhetorical strategy rather than any inherent value they generate. Management consultants who are seeking a steady supply of new clients may support such rhetorical efforts.

The concept of a learning organization also feeds into the quest of human resource (HR) practitioners for increased organizational salience. Historically, HR management has been viewed as comprising transactional personnel-management functions (hiring and firing, record-keeping, and payroll management). Such transactional work is easily outsourced. Many HR practitioners seek to elevate their organizational status and become “strategic partners” (which, in turn, makes it more difficult for the employer to contract out their jobs). There are two main impediments to efforts to make HR a strategic organizational partner. First, much HR work continues to be transactional personnel-management work. Second, other organizational actors may be reluctant to give up influence and control to HR. The work of implementing a learning organization often falls to HR, thereby creating an opportunity for HR shops to expand their organizational role and influence.

Skills, Competencies, and Knowledge

Workplace training is normally aimed at creating or improving workers' skills, knowledge, or competencies in order to increase an organization's

capacity (and, usually, profitability). Employers may also undertake training in order to comply with certain legal requirements, such as meeting their obligation to inform workers about the presence and safe handling of hazardous chemicals. Such training may increase workers' knowledge and skills, but that is not what motivates the employer to provide the training.

A **skill** is the ability to perform a task. Being able to accurately saw a board in half is a skill. Making change or reading a financial statement are also skills. The acquisition of a skill usually builds upon other skills a learner already possesses. As we'll see in Chapter 5, academics and governments often subdivide skills into different categories and rank them in order of complexity. For example, possessing basic skills (such as reading and writing) may be a prerequisite to developing general workplace skills (such as problem solving) that, in turn, are prerequisites to learning job-specific skills (such as operating the software an organization uses to track customer emails and phone calls).

The term "skill" is often used interchangeably with the term "competency." A **competency** is a collection of KSAs that allow someone to perform a task or a job. For example, assisting a customer to resolve a problem may require a worker to apply her knowledge of a product, her communication skills, and her ability to calm a frustrated customer. Again, there are numerous typologies of competencies. The key point is that competencies tend to refer to an amalgam of KSAs employed to complete more complex work.

"Knowledge" is also a term that is worthwhile unpacking. **Knowledge** is information (i.e., facts) combined with experience and values that we apply to situations and problems in our lives. Knowledge is often categorized as explicit and tacit knowledge. **Explicit knowledge** is fact-based and relatively easy to transfer to learners. For example, it is fairly easy to explain to someone how to operate a fire extinguisher. The steps are straightforward and easy to distill into writing: pull the pin, aim nozzle at base of fire, and squeeze trigger.

By contrast, **tacit knowledge** is more difficult to transfer. It encompasses knowledge that is often learned through experience and is very difficult to codify. Continuing with the fire extinguisher example, while it is easy to teach someone how to operate a fire extinguisher, it is harder

to teach to them when to use a fire extinguisher (versus evacuating the area) or how to most effectively employ the fire extinguisher in particular conditions (e.g., high winds, confined spaces). This kind of knowledge is often imparted through practice and experience, often guided by more experienced practitioners.²⁶

What counts as knowledge, skill, or ability is often mediated by personal characteristics, such as gender. For example, jobs traditionally held by men (e.g., construction worker, building superintendent) often explicitly identify lifting as a required ability. By contrast, jobs traditionally done by women (e.g., nursing, cleaning) often require lifting but this is rarely explicitly acknowledged in job descriptions. When employers make activity (such as lifting) invisible, workers—predominantly women—are denied compensation as well as adequate training and equipment to do the job safely.

Similarly, certain competencies are often ignored, even though they are a key requirement of the job. **Emotional labour**, for example, is often a component of female-dominated occupations. Emotional labour is an occupational requirement to manage one's feelings and to make occupationally appropriate emotional displays, regardless of one's internal feelings.²⁷ Servers and caregivers may be expected to act in ways that trigger positive feelings in others (e.g., exude warmth and compassion), and women typically dominate these roles. This key competency is rarely recognized or compensated, reflecting that emotional labour tends to be the (unpaid) province of women, and that it often occurs in the home (i.e., it is part of the social reproduction).

The pluralist perspective on labour relations helps us explain why employers and workers might disagree about what counts as knowledge or as a skill or competency. Employers seek to minimize their labour costs, in part by controlling the design of work. They have, historically, been better able to control the design of traditionally female work because women were less likely to overtly resist differential treatment. Over time, employers have shifted strategies from overt discrimination in female-dominated occupations (although this still happens) towards deskilling work, thereby allowing employers to increase a job's precarity. But not all work can be deskilled. Some occupations remain high-skill (and high-status and

high-wage) jobs. Many of these jobs require significant labour-market training to secure and maintain the right to practise.

Professional Regulatory Organizations

As noted in Chapter 2, in some occupations, workers must be licensed in order to legally practise. Examples include engineers, pharmacists, teachers, lawyers, and nurses. Such occupations are often referred to as regulated professions. In order to be licensed, an individual must meet certain requirements. This licensure requirement is intended to protect the public's health and safety or other interests, which might be compromised from receiving services from unqualified practitioners. That said, in some instances, jurisdictions have regulated professions where the risk associated with non-licensed practitioners is questionable. This suggests that the designation of which professionals are regulated is a political decision, rather than a purely technical one. Other professions may have voluntary certification.

Provincial and territorial governments often delegate responsibility for establishing and administering licensure requirements to Professional Regulatory Organizations (PROs). Each province has its own PRO for each occupation and these organizations go by many names. For example, the Law Society of Upper Canada regulates who can practise law in Ontario. It sets out minimum educational, employment, and character requirements as well as sets examinations that candidates must pass before being permitted to practise law. As we saw in Chapter 2, there are differences (by gender, heritage, and socio-economic status) in access to post-secondary education programs that are normally prerequisites to professional licensure. By requiring specific PSE training, professional licensure compounds patterns of advantage and disadvantage.

Some PROs also ensure that professionals meet other criteria, such as having adequate insurance coverage. Maintaining licensure may also entail undertaking periodic training (often called **professional development**, although this term is often used broadly to mean any ongoing training in non-regulated white-collar occupations). Meeting professional licensure requirements has given rise to a large body of private training providers that offer workshops and conferences (sometimes in exotic locations) to

help professionals meet their profession's requirement. Workers unable to achieve and maintain licensure are barred from practising the profession. This power makes workers with certification very leery of opposing or otherwise running afoul of their PRO.

In addition to regulating who may practise a profession in their province or territory, PROs also typically investigate complaints against registered professionals and may discipline members, including prohibiting them from practising. The disciplinary function of PROs is intended to protect the public from incompetent or unscrupulous conduct. The importance of conduct reflects that the public is often profoundly vulnerable when interacting with professionals and, absent a complaint process, would face significant barriers to successfully pursue remedy. Sometimes, a single organization will act as both a PRO and as a trade union (i.e., representing workers in collective bargaining with employers); an example would be the Alberta Teachers' Association.

PROs are normally self-governing organizations. This means that the PRO is created by an act of a provincial or territorial legislature. The PRO then establishes rules, regulations, and guidelines to govern its operation. Typically, a PRO will be governed by a board of directors (the precise name will vary). Members of the board may be elected by and from the membership of the profession, appointed by government, or chosen by some combination of processes and often include members of the public. The board then sets policy, which is carried out by staff members employed by the PRO.

As we saw in Chapter 3, some workers engage in employment-related geographic mobility. Historically, workers in some regulated professions faced difficulties becoming reaccredited when they changed jurisdictions. These difficulties are typically not as significant as those faced by foreign trained immigrants (as we'll see in Chapter 5). Over the past 10 years, many provinces have entered into internal trade agreements that include labour-mobility provisions. For example, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have signed the "New West Partnership Agreement." This agreement requires that PROs in each province recognize professional accreditation issued in any of the other three provinces.²⁸

There are many arguments for **professional self-regulation**. Members of a profession are more likely to understand the nature and complexities

of practice than might a government agency tasked with oversight. Self-regulation also creates a unique degree of normative (or peer) pressure to comply with regulations that may be less felt when dealing with government regulators. Self-regulation also shifts the cost of regulation to the professionals and (to some degree) insulates legislators from demands to intervene or otherwise take action on issues specific to the profession.

Concerns about self-regulation tend to centre on the potential for a conflict of interest. This might come in the form of a PRO protecting a member from a public complaint. There is little evidence that this is a widespread problem, in part reflecting that it is in the reputational interests of the PRO and its members to be seen to discipline and expel bad actors. A more difficult criticism to dismiss is that a PRO is essentially a cartel. A **cartel** is a group of producers that act in concert in ways that increase their profits. Cartels are most often associated with price fixing, but other cartel activity includes limiting the supply of a service available (thereby driving up its price). As we'll see in Chapter 5, many immigrants with professional qualifications from other countries face significant delays and other barriers to entry to a profession. Some suggest that this pattern (particularly since it appears to most significantly affect non-English speakers who are visible minorities) is intended to limit the supply of professionals, which economically advantages existing members.

Conclusion

Workplace training is driven by the belief that enhancing workers' KSAs will, in turn, enhance organizational performance and profitability in the private sector. The evidence for this relationship is uncertain, suggesting that not all training results in a return on investment. The potential for conflict between labour and capital may play an important role in explaining the uneven gains that come from training. Workers may, for example, choose not to use training if they feel it is going to be employed in a way that is contrary to their interests (or their co-workers' interests). Conversely, employers may arrange work such that workers have little ability to implement training. The only people unquestionably benefitting from workplace training are training providers!

One provocative way to think about workplace training is as a management technology that makes workers more governable.²⁹ Human capital theory is designed to lay responsibility for being adequately trained upon workers (who are the primary beneficiaries of training). What KSAs are needed are determined by employers through their hiring and training decisions, thereby making workers more subservient to employers. So-called revolutionary ideas (such as the learning organization) provide a pretext to submerge intra-organizational conflict in order to advance the interests of the employer. This includes developing a shared vision of organizational goals and codifying employee knowledge so that it can be appropriated by the employer to redesign work in more efficient ways.

Somewhere between 5 and 10 per cent of the workforce is employed in regulated professions. Such professions typically have high status and compensation, and maintaining the integrity of the profession (thereby protecting the public) is the official role of professional regulatory bodies. Yet there is another side to the role of PROs. By restricting access to the profession, the PROs operate as a cartel, inducing (however indirectly) a tighter supply of labour than would exist if there were no requirement for licensure. In this way, PROs act both for and against the interests of employers. Licensure allows employers to be confident employees are competent (and give them a way to discipline incompetent employees), but it also acts to drive up the price of labour. This tension plays out most clearly in the labour-market experiences of foreign-trained professionals, which we'll consider in Chapter 5.

Notes

- 1 Berger and Yang, "Millennials Job-Hop More Than Previous Generations."
- 2 Wingard, "Want Millennials to Stay?"
- 3 United States Department of Labor, "Employee Tenure News Release."
- 4 Wingard, "Want Millennials to Stay?"
- 5 Spencer, *The Purposes of Adult Education*.
- 6 Livingstone, "Exploring the Icebergs of Adult Learning."
- 7 Godard, *Industrial Relations, the Economy and Society*.
- 8 Munro, "Developing Skills."
- 9 Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*.
- 10 Hyman, *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations*.

- 11 Barnettson, *The Political Economy of Workplace Injury*.
- 12 Alberta Workers' Health Centre, *Injured Worker Case Study*.
- 13 Percival, Cozzarin, and Formanek, "Return on Investment for Workplace Training."
- 14 Blundell et al., "Human Capital Investment."
- 15 Margison, "Rethinking Education, Work and 'Employability.'"
- 16 Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.
- 17 McShane, *Organizational Behaviour*. 23.
- 18 Argyris and Schön, *Organizational Learning*.
- 19 Percival, Cozzarin, and Formanek. "Return on Investment for Workplace Training."
- 20 Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.
- 21 Marglin, "What Do Bosses Do?"
- 22 Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.
- 23 Serenko, Bontis, and Hardie, "Organizational Size and Knowledge Flow."
- 24 Finger and Brand, "The Concept of the 'Learning Organization.'"
- 25 Tuggle, "Gaps and Progress in our Knowledge of Learning Organizations."
- 26 Sanchez, "'Tacit Knowledge' versus 'Explicit Knowledge' Approaches."
- 27 James, "Emotional Labour."
- 28 Canada's New West Partnership, "New West Partnership Agreement."
- 29 Townley, *Reframing Human Resource Management*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Community-Based Education and Training

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify four forms of community-based education and training.
- Explain how government policy affects community-based education and training.
- Evaluate community education in terms of access to, control of, and benefit from training.



Joy Chukwura, a 37-year-old single mom and Nigerian refugee living in Vancouver, cleans hotel rooms to earn a living. She arrived in Canada nearly 10 years ago, unable to speak English or read and write in any language. Over several years, she took night classes at Vancouver Community College to bring her English proficiency up from a grade zero level to grade 4. In time, Chukwura hoped to earn a high school diploma and move into a better job.

BC fully funded adult basic education, high school, and language courses, beginning in 2008. The \$8 million cost was deemed too high in 2012, and the provincial Liberal government reduced the number of courses it would pay for.¹ In 2014, the federal Conservative government reduced funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and adult basic education. The federal government also reduced funding for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). One consequence of these changes is that Chukwura was forced to pay \$1,000 for three months of night classes—a cost she simply could not afford.

“If they ask us not to go to school because we are not able to pay the money, then how are we going to do more things in the future?” asks Chukwura.² While adults seeking to upgrade their education could apply for grants in BC, the income threshold of \$30,000 for a two-person family excluded many potential students (including Chukwura) from accessing funding. Grants were also available for only three years, which was often too little time for students to significantly benefit from the training. Enrollment dropped by 35 per cent in the wake of these cuts. The election of a New Democratic government in 2017 saw these cuts reversed, but whether capacity to deliver such programs can be recovered after years of staff layoffs and facility closures is unclear.³

Decreasing state support for literacy training has pushed many Canadians to seek help from the not-for-profit sector. Not-for-profit organizations already offer much of Canada's literacy education but have been beset by funding reductions. The near-universal requirement for literacy in employment means such programs are key to the reproduction of labour power for workers who do not follow a traditional pathway through the education system. This is particularly the case for Indigenous peoples, who often drop out of school.⁴

In addition to literacy work, community groups also provide immigrant settlement services and public legal education to Canadians. These programs contribute to social reproduction by allowing workers to interact with our complex society and, in some cases, aiding them in attaching to the labour market. Trade unions also provide education and training, for both their members and the broader public. While much union training is aimed at improving the contract negotiation and administration skills of activists, unions also offer issue-based education and, in some cases, vocational training.

While community-based education and training can have labour-market benefits, community education also helps workers develop skills that they can use to seek political, social, and economic reform. There is a long tradition of such emancipatory adult education in Canada. Helping Canadians to identify their interests (as distinct from the interests of the state and employers) has the potential to cause significant social disruption. The potential social instability that can (and has) come from community-based education may partly explain why state funding of community education and training is low, uneven, and often tightly controlled. Similar reasoning may explain employers' lack of financial support for community training. Employers may also see community education as a way to externalize training costs.

Literacy Education

Literacy is "the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts."⁵ Being literate allows us to participate in society, secure employment, and develop our KSAs. Individual literacy will vary from someone who is unable to decode basic words and sentences to someone

who can comprehend, interpret, and evaluate complex texts. Since literacy skills are used in specific contexts (e.g., following written instructions, filling out a form), it is important to acknowledge that our **functional literacy** (our ability to complete day-to-day tasks requiring literacy) may differ from how we score on a literacy test. This difference is taken up below in Box 5.2.

As we saw in Chapter 2, literacy is one of the key goals of the K-12 educational system. Despite these efforts, many adult Canadians seek to improve their literacy later in life. Literacy education for adults is delivered through an amalgam of formal educational institutions and community groups in arrangements that vary among the provinces and territories. **Adult basic education** (sometimes referred to as high school completion or academic upgrading) is usually offered through provincially or territorially funded school boards and colleges. Governments may also directly fund community-based literacy programs, often targeted at specific groups, such as immigrants or Indigenous peoples. One example is Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Program (outlined in Box 5.1), which targets unemployed Ontarians with low literacy and numeracy skills.

Box 5.1 Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Program

Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program provides free training to Ontarians whose reading, writing, and math skills are below the grade 12 level. The program focuses on assisting unemployed Ontarians, with specific attention to those on income support. The program is also available to employed Ontarians who need literacy or basic skills training to maintain or improve work skills.⁶

A high proportion of LBS participants are unemployed, have not completed high school, and have had an interrupted education. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development funds delivery of LBS through community agencies, colleges, and school boards at 274 sites across the province. In 2014–15, over 37,000 Ontarians received training in person, and over 5,500 participated in blended learning with an online component. These participants represent only 1 per cent of adult, working-age Ontarians whose literacy skills are typically viewed as inadequate.

One of the more interesting findings of the program is that the structure of the program applies significant financial pressure to service providers. Consequently, providers are often forced to look for ways to game the system in order to financially survive. This includes strategies such as teaching towards the test and structuring learner's experiences so they complete milestones in each of agencies' financial reporting periods.

A 2016 review of the system found that, while the system has been effective in providing learners with reading, writing, and math skills, declining funding levels (in real dollars) are placing significant strains on this system. And the government accountability and reporting requirements divert resources away from serving learners and into administrative work.

There are a number of reasons why governments use not-for-profit agencies to deliver this programming. Such agencies may have better connections to and more legitimacy with the group targeted by the program than the government does. This can aid in program design and uptake. Such agencies can also often deliver programming at a lower cost than is possible through direct government funding. Government employees are more likely to be unionized and have permanent jobs, while the not-for-profit sector is known for precarious staff employment conditions (often driven by short-term and low levels of government funding). This dynamic reveals that governments may use community education to meet the demands of production and social reproduction at the lowest possible cost. In doing so, they externalize some of the cost of training onto the very workers who are delivering it.

There is no coherent government policy guiding literacy programming, although there are clear trends if you follow the funding.⁷ In examining literacy funding, it is important to recognize that there is no legal obligation for governments to fund literacy work. The federal government originally began funding literacy work in the early 1960s in the hope of alleviating unemployment by increasing workers' skills. The structure of the program also administratively converted a number of unemployed into "trainees," thereby reducing the apparently level of unemployment. Limited success in converting literacy training into employment saw a decline in federal

interest in the 1970s, and responsibility slowly shifted to the provinces (who are mandated to deliver education). Renewed federal interest in the mid-1980s resulted in federal funding of literacy work.⁸

The 2013 introduction of the Canada Job Fund Agreements eliminated some federal funding for community literacy work. Subsequently, in 2014, the federal Conservative government eliminated funding for the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN) and a number of provincial literacy associations that same year. The result was that, by 2016, six of Canada's 15 literacy coalitions (which provided literacy training and coordination) had ceased operations.⁹ The National Adult Literacy Database—which provided new readers, libraries, and grassroots organizations with high-quality literacy materials—was also closed.¹⁰

According to a spokesperson for then-Minister of Employment and Social Development Jason Kenney, “Our government is committed to ensuring that federal funding for literacy is no longer spent on administration and countless research papers, but instead is invested in projects that result in Canadians receiving the literacy skills they need to obtain jobs.”¹¹ In effect, state-funded literacy education contracted and became more closely aligned with providing job-ready workers for employers. This broadly mirrors the trajectory of the other federal labour-market training policies we reviewed in Chapter 3.

Literacy and Basic Skills

Literacy is one component of **basic skills**. The other components include numeracy and the ability to learn. As noted in Chapter 4, these basic skills are the foundation of **workplace skills** that include generic technical skills, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills. Workers can carry both basic and workplace skills with them from job to job. Firm- and job-specific skills are built on top of basic and workplace skills and are not generally portable. This relationship is outlined in figure 5.1.

The federal government has adopted an **essential skills** model. This model asserts there are nine essential skills that “provide a foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better prepare for, get and keep a job, and adapt and succeed at work.”¹² This approach directly links skills and skill development with employment outcomes, again a

pattern consistent with the federal training policies reviewed in Chapter 3. In addition to literacy skills (reading, writing, and document use), Canada’s essential skills include numeracy, oral communications, thinking, digital skills, working with others, and the skills associated with continuous learning. Each skill can be performed at one of five levels (basic to advanced), and the federal government has developed skill profiles of over 350 occupations.

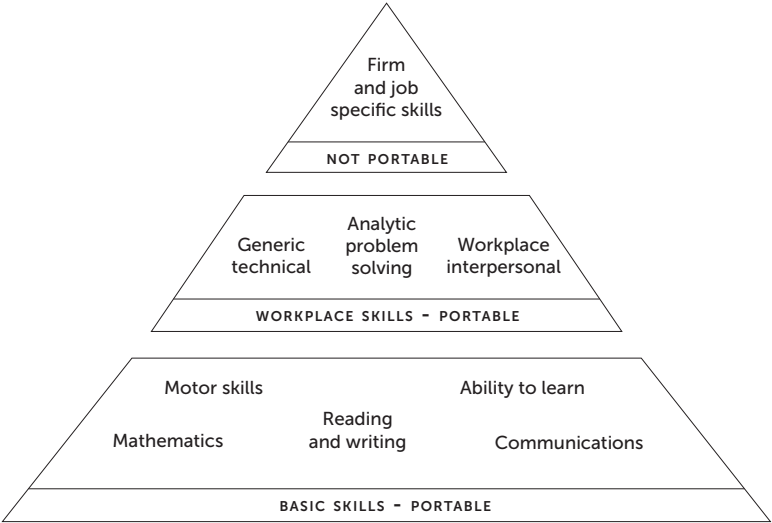


Figure 5.1 Skills pyramid. Adapted from Ontario Premier’s Council, *People and Skills in the New Global Economy*.

The belief underlying Canada’s essential skills model is that individuals can acquire generic, decontextualized skills. Constructing skills as discrete, observable, and individual performances or behaviours ignores the fact that skilled tasks are often jointly performed between two or more workers in specific work contexts, each drawing on multiple abilities that are used in unobservable ways. This suggests that efforts to develop generic skills outside of a specific context may fail to adequately engage with the difference between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (see Chapter 4). A second line of critique of essential skills is that the skills

tend to have a bias towards white-collar jobs in the so-called knowledge economy (which are a significant minority of all jobs).¹³

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) surveyed the skills of adults (aged 16 to 65) in 24 countries and regions in 2011–12. It found literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills were positively associated with access to basic services, employment and income levels, and opportunities to secure better jobs and additional training and education. Workers with lower levels of literacy also reported poorer health, a lower sense of political efficacy, less community involvement, and lower levels of trust in others.¹⁴ It is important to note that **association** (i.e., two things happening at the same time or in proximity to one another) does not necessarily mean there is **causation** (i.e., one thing causing another). Further, causation is not necessarily a one-way dynamic (e.g., A causes B). Complex phenomena may involve a **feedback loop** (A causes B, which intensifies A, which causes more of B) that we sometimes call virtuous and vicious cycles.

The 2011–12 OECD *Survey of Adult Skills* sorted respondents into five categories based upon their successful completion of a series of literacy-related tasks. Respondents were presented with several tasks at each level to determine their ability to work at that level. Examples of the tasks respondents had to complete at each level included the following:

- Level 1: Respondents were required to read a short newspaper article and answer a brief question requiring fact-finding and a simple inference.
- Level 2: Respondents were required to navigate a basic website and find contact information under the “Contact Us” page.
- Level 3: Respondents were required to look through a bibliography and identify the author of a specific book.
- Level 4: Respondents were required to search a bibliography and identify a book that made arguments for and against a proposition, based on the book’s title.¹⁵

Figure 5.2 presents Canada’s results, which were about average when compared to other OECD countries. Interestingly, Canada had higher-than-average percentages of its population at the highest and

lowest levels of literacy. Literacy is highest among those aged 25 to 34 and among workers in managerial or professional occupations.¹⁶

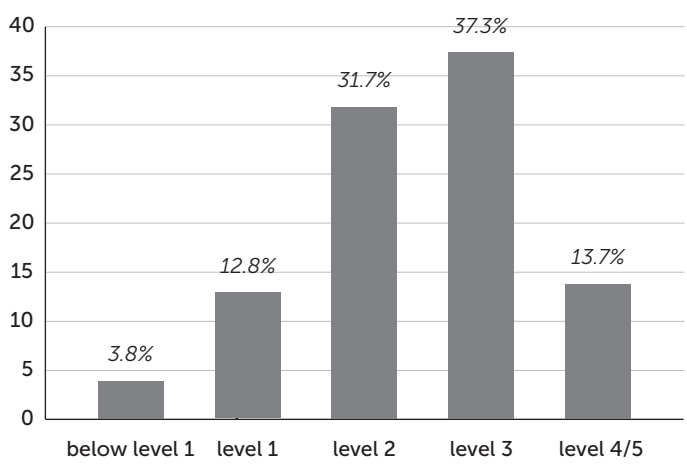


Figure 5.2 Literacy level in Canada, 2011–12. (Data from Statistics Canada, “Skills in Canada.”)

Off-reserve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples typically have lower literacy rates than non-Indigenous Canadians, with particularly pronounced differences in the Territories. One-third of off-reserve First Nations people had literacy scores at Level 3 or higher, versus 50 per cent of Métis and 57 per cent of non-Indigenous Canadians.¹⁷ These differences likely reflect opportunities to learn and apply literacy as well as the colonial legacy in Canada’s education and employment systems that were discussed in Chapter 3.

One of the challenges in discussing literacy education is the measure used. The percentage of Canadians that have attained each level of literacy in figure 5.2 look concrete and present a compelling case for funding additional literacy education. Yet, as we see in Box 5.2, many practitioners raise profound critiques of such measures and the purposes to which they are put.

Box 5.2 Are Literacy Measures Valid?

Literacy testing is subject to a number of criticisms. An important criticism is that literacy tests don't necessarily describe actual literacy as practised by adults: those who score poorly on tests might still function quite effectively in their lives and work.¹⁸ A second criticism is that literacy measures are often manipulated to drive specific policy agendas. For example, in 2005, the federal government combined the results of Levels 1 and 2 to conclude that 48 per cent of adult Canadians had lower-than-desired literacy levels. Business groups (such as the Conference Board of Canada) seized on this oversimplification to (incorrectly) pronounce, "Four out of ten Canadian adults have literacy skills too low to be fully competent in most jobs in our modern economy."¹⁹ This assertion sits uneasily with results from the same survey wherein many so-called illiterate people believe they have adequate literacy skills for their lives.

A more technical criticism of literacy measures is how they can be misused. The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey (from which this data was derived) was designed to describe the distribution of skills across the population (e.g., X per cent of the population reads at Level 3). It was not designed to diagnose individual literacy levels (for example, Kelly reads at Level 3). Over time, though, the ALLs results have been used to do just that. For example, Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills tutor manual describes so-called Level 1 learners as having "very poor literacy skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package."²⁰ Using broad categories to label individuals ignores significant variability in functional literacy.

These two practices are sometimes combined to shape policy decisions. For example, Level 3 has been arbitrarily selected as the desired level of competence. There is no evidence of a meaningful and hard cutoff at Level 3. Indeed, many workers with Level 2 are gainfully employed, especially given the propensity of employers to create low-skill jobs. Nevertheless, the Conference Board has used the Level 3 goal to argue that literacy training should be aimed at individuals in the upper range of Level 2 in order to make them employable, leaving individuals at Literacy Level 1 out in the cold.²¹

Government funding decisions have a profound impact on access to literacy education. As the opening vignette suggests, some Canadians who wish to access literacy education cannot afford literacy classes (which are increasingly being offered on a cost-recovery basis). Further, the least literate may require lengthy instruction that takes them far beyond the support offered by governments in the form of bursaries or other funding. That said, as shown by Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills program, some governments have made an effort to provide greater access to literacy training.

The Literacy and Basic Skills program is clearly linked to enhancing participant's employability. As we saw in Chapter 2, this trend to linking education and training to employment outcomes is also evident in the formal PSE system. An important impact of this trend is that not-for-profit organizations that continue to offer literacy education must often frame funding applications in ways that explicitly address labour-market outcomes (even if the link is weak or participants will struggle to achieve such outcomes). Box 5.3 considers the historic commitment of the adult educators to literacy as a path to social justice—a tradition that is being eroded by this focus on literacy for employability.

Box 5.3 Adult Education and Literacy

Canada has a long tradition of adult education initiatives that used literacy education as a way to improve worker's lives. For example, Frontier College began in 1899 as the Reading Tent Association. It provided literacy training to young men (often immigrants) working in isolated lumber camps in northern Ontario. Over time, it expanded its operations to include rail gangs and mining camps, with literacy education offered by fellow workers in the evenings.²² More recently, Frontier College has provided literacy education and services to migrant farm workers in southwestern Ontario and to Indigenous communities, where physical isolation limits access to literacy programming.

Many adult educators have believed that literacy is a foundational skill for individuals seeking greater control over their lives. In the early twentieth century, the **Antigonish movement** combined adult education with economic literacy to empower rural Maritimers (whose

economy was largely based on commodities such as seafood and coal) to resist exploitation by moneylenders and product marketers. Mass meetings raised the possibility of citizens taking greater control of their economic lives. These meetings led to study clubs wherein members identified factors keeping them poor, explored possible solutions, and considered how to bring those solutions about.²³

Worker-owned co-operatives were a frequent outcome of such meetings. A co-operative might operate a factory, store, or credit union for the benefit of the co-operative members (who were also key suppliers or customers). These arrangements saw workers realize a much greater share of the value that they produced fishing or farming or mining. Such co-operative arrangements persist today (such as Mountain Equipment Co-op or Desjardins, which offers banking and insurance services), offering an alternative to profit-driven organizations.

Many contemporary adult educators look to historical examples for inspiration and guidance when providing literacy education to individuals. One of the challenges this poses is that the emancipatory tradition of adult education often runs contrary to the economic interests of employers and the state's desire for social stability. Consequently, programs in such traditions can find it difficult to secure financial support, particularly in light of the declining public funding for literacy education and the tendency to frame such training as a pathway to employability.

Individuals are key beneficiaries of literacy education in terms of greater literacy and access to jobs, but these benefits may be spread less evenly than they previously have been. This employability framing of literacy emboldens employer-friendly groups (such as the Conference Board of Canada) to advocate for focusing literacy efforts on the “nearly employable” at the expense of those Canadians who will require greater investments to improve their literacy. This return-on-investment approach makes sense when training is viewed primarily as a way of maintaining the production process.

Employers benefit from a greater proportion of workers achieving Level 3 literacy because this increases the pool of potential workers with this skill. As we saw in Chapter 1, an increase in the numbers of workers

tends to drive down wages and allows employers to make previously “good” white-collar jobs more precarious. Greater literacy also benefits governments by providing workers greater access to (often poorer) jobs. Literacy training also legitimizes capitalist social formation because it creates pathways (however ephemeral) to employability. This shifts responsibility for unemployment and underemployment onto workers and away from employers and the state. To the degree that literacy allows workers to hold even poor jobs, literacy education also reduces pressure on state-funded income support systems.

Immigrant Settlement Services

In 2015, more than 270,000 persons were granted permanent-resident status in Canada. Almost 63 per cent of these immigrants are economic immigrants (i.e., being granted residency based upon their potential contribution to Canada). Roughly 24 per cent of immigrants arrived through the family-reunification stream, and 13 per cent were granted permission to enter the country on humanitarian grounds (including as refugees).²⁴ These immigrants are in addition to the migrant workers granted permission to work temporarily in Canada.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Canada has long used immigration to fill skill and labour shortages. While most immigrants have a working knowledge of English or French (or both), approximately 23 per cent of new permanent residents (mostly refugees and spouses and dependents of economic immigrants) know neither language. For these immigrants, **English as a Second Language** (ESL) or English as an Additional Language (EAL) instruction is an important component of settlement. Immigrants (even those with high degrees of fluency) may require other forms of settlement services.

Immigrant settlement services include information about accessing health, education, housing, and transportation resources; help in interacting with the state (e.g., assistance filling out forms); and document translation and job-search assistance. The federal government funds a network of immigrant-serving agencies (often not-for-profit organizations) to provide these kinds of support. Provincial and territorial governments may also fund immigrant settlement services. And informal (although

sometimes highly organized) community-specific services may also exist in locations where large communities of a specific culture or religion exist. The level of settlement services available in any given location is highly variable. Immigrants in large, urban centres generally have greater access to such programming than do immigrants in rural and northern locations.

Historically, immigrants had relatively little difficulty finding manual labour. The disappearance of many of such jobs means that newcomers to Canada today often face difficulty in attaching to the labour market.²⁵ While immigrants face a number of barriers to securing employment, an important issue related to labour-market training is **foreign credential recognition**. Credential recognition entails having educational qualifications above the high-school level that have been achieved in another country evaluated and granted a Canadian equivalency. Credential recognition is performed by many different organizations for different purposes (e.g., PSE institutions, provincial or territorial credential evaluation services, employers, and professional regulatory bodies) and can affect immigrants' access to education and jobs.

An interesting tension in Canada's immigration system is that the federal government selects workers on the basis of their educational and occupational characteristics, yet many immigrants find themselves unable to work in their profession upon arrival. As we saw in Chapter 4, entry to some occupations is restricted in the public interest (for instance, nursing, law, medicine, and engineering). In these regulated occupations, professional regulatory organizations (PROs) set certain criteria (including educational qualifications) that must be met before a worker is allowed to practise their profession. Immigrants may need to recertify in their profession, and this process can include having credentials evaluated, taking examinations, and obtaining Canadian experience.

There is significant evidence that immigrants struggle to have foreign credentials and work experience recognized in Canada. One effect of this dynamic is that it channels immigrants into jobs shunned by Canadian workers.²⁶ There is also evidence that workers whose ethnicity is readily visible (based on their skin colour or accent) have greater difficulty securing employment (particularly in their pre-immigration occupation). This difficulty, in turn, can further impede their efforts to secure the right to practise in their pre-immigration profession. Together, these preferences

(by employers, educators, and regulators) comprise **systemic racism**.²⁷ Systemic racism exists when policies and practices embedded in institutions result in differential treatment of specific groups. It is important to be mindful that there are programs designed to enable immigrants to utilize their credentials, such as the program described in Box 5.4.

Box 5.4 Bredin Centre of Learning

The Bredin Centre for Learning is a not-for-profit agency operating primarily in the Edmonton region of Alberta. It has historically provided programming, mostly funded by governments, designed to connect unemployed or underemployed Albertans to the labour market. Many of these programs focus on workers who have multiple barriers to employment, such as a skills deficiency or language barrier.²⁸

One of Bredin's main areas of programming is assisting internationally trained professionals to acquire professional certification in their field (or related work). The Centre for Skilled and Internationally Trained Professionals provides immigrants with information about professional licensure and accessing the Canadian labour market (including job search and interview coaching), and provides formalized on-the-job and internship training placements for those who lack Canadian experience.

Between 2011 and 2015, Bredin helped 811 internationally trained professionals find employment, of whom 739 remained employed six months later. The occupations with the largest number of employed professionals included engineers, doctors, and nurses. This work was funded primarily by Alberta's then-Department of Community and Social Services and served to help immigrants navigate the professional licensure process operated by PROs under the auspices of Alberta's then-Department of Jobs, Skills, Training, and Labour.

Bredin also delivers a tuition-based 41-week International Pharmacy Bridging program to help internationally trained pharmacists acquire an Alberta licence. The program includes seminars, workshops, and clinical role-play scenarios as well as 500 hours of structured practical training. Students may be able to access grants and/or loans to help defray the tuition cost. This arrangement is consistent with the move towards self-funded labour-market training outlined in Chapter 3.²⁹

Settlement services and credential recognition reveal that we can find conflicting interests between stakeholder groups and also within them. For example, the federal government selects immigrants based upon their ability to contribute to the economy and funds settlement services in order to socially and economically integrate new immigrants into Canadian society. Yet, highly skilled immigrants face discrimination that keeps them from employment in their profession. The key player keeping these immigrants out of the profession is PROs, which are creatures of statute created by provincial and territorial governments. Here we see different levels of government potentially working at cross purposes. The need (in Box 5.4) for one Government of Alberta department to help immigrants navigate a process overseen by another department suggests that, even at a single level, governments are not monolithic actors.

One factor contributing to PROs' reluctance to license some immigrants is concern about flooding the(ir) labour market. While limiting the ability of immigrants to practise is often couched as protecting the public interest (and sometimes the public interest is genuinely protected), keeping immigrants out of regulated occupations is also an instance of powerful (Canadian) workers limiting the job prospects of less powerful (immigrant) workers and thereby keeping the wages of the powerful higher than they otherwise would be.³⁰ Provincial and territorial governments happily allow PROs significant latitude in regulating their own profession because it insulates legislators from problems (such as allegations of systemic racism) and keeps powerful groups of workers happy (and reliant upon the government).

Most employers benefit from this arrangement because it makes available to them highly qualified workers forced to accept underemployment. Underemployed skilled workers can comprise a highly productive and profitable workforce. This arrangement does mean that those employers who truly need access to the skills that professionals have need to compete for credentialed workers via higher wages and/or seek out temporary migrant workers. The ability of immigrants to enter Canada and receive settlement services masks the systemic racism they face once here, thereby making immigrants' difficulty in the labour market appear to be the fault of immigrants themselves.

Public Legal Education

Canadian society is complex. Workers often have to navigate a variety of processes and institutions in order to address basic home-and-hearth issues, such as marriage and divorce as well as landlord-and-tenant disputes and other contractual matters. Workers may also need to act in their own interests in the realm of employment and labour law. The legal complexity of society generally benefits the powerful, who are more likely to have personal knowledge of such rules and systems (by way of their education and employment) and the resources necessary to hire competent advisors.

The term “legal education” most often refers to training provided to lawyers (or future lawyers) and other professional employees in order to develop and maintain their knowledge of the law. **Public legal education** (PLE) focuses on assisting individuals to develop legal knowledge and skills to manage and/or improve their lives. There are many forms of PLE. For example, a blog or poster about the degree to which individuals have to co-operate with police carding (i.e., a demand for identification unrelated to any specific crime) expands readers’ awareness of their rights. By contrast, a study group or conference may both develop participants’ skills and knowledge and generate new knowledge.

Public legal education is delivered by a number of groups, including non-profit agencies, governments and the courts, unions, the K-12 and PSE systems, and individual law firms and lawyers. For example, the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan (PLEA) provides general legal information (but not legal advice) about the laws of Canada and Saskatchewan and also provides law-related resources used in K-12 courses.³¹ Other not-for-profits have more specific foci. The Aspen Foundation for Labour Education provides instructional resources for teachers, addressing work and social justice issues tailored to fit in with Alberta’s K-12 curriculum.³² The Alberta Workers’ Health Centre provides theatre-based public legal education to junior and senior high school students (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5 AWHC Theatre-Based Workplace Rights Education

The Alberta Workers' Health Centre (AWHC) is a union-funded resource centre that provides a variety of services related to workplace health and safety and workplace injuries. The Work Plays Schools Program (WPSP) has been operating since 2003 and offers free theatre-based employment rights education to 10,000 junior and senior high school students in Alberta annually. The program is mostly funded by the Law Foundation of Alberta.

Two travelling productions are mounted each year, using professional actors and stage crews. Each 60-minute play dramatizes common workplace issues faced by students. At the end of the play, there is a facilitated discussion about the issues and solutions, and additional classroom materials are offered to teachers.

The play "Working It Out" is set in a restaurant and dramatizes the unsafe work, wage theft, and workplace harassment that many young people experience. The play is aimed at high school students and explores issues covered in Alberta Education's career-and-life-management and work-experience courses.

"Tackling issues through the medium of a play allows students to talk about things they otherwise would likely keep to themselves," says AWHC executive director Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull. Gina Puntil, WPSP Program Coordinator, adds, "The degree of unsafe and unfair work we hear about from teenagers while we're on the road is astounding."³³

Access to PLE is largely determined by the funding made available. Key funders of legal education include provincial and territorial law foundations, justice departments (either directly or through the redirection of fines), and trade unions. While the Internet has expanded the reach of PLE, most organizations offering it are based in large urban centres. This pattern in PLE replicates that of the availability of legal services and institutions, which are often difficult for rural and northern residents (including many Indigenous persons) to access.³⁴ The result is that northern and rural residents typically have a more difficult time managing the legal aspects of their lives than those in urban areas.

Even in urban areas, differences in individual financial resources may result in differential access to public legal education. The growth of online

information still requires that individuals have some way to access that information (e.g., a smartphone or other Internet connection). While public libraries normally offer free Internet access, access to libraries (with limited locations and hours) can itself pose a barrier.

Individual workers are the primary beneficiaries of PLE. The main benefits include a greater ability to make informed decisions and take actions at lower cost as they navigate the complex legal landscape of contemporary society. The state also benefits from PLE, because greater worker skill facilitates social reproduction (for example, in smoothing child-custody and financial-support arrangements following divorce). Making it easier for workers to enter into contracts benefits employers, as it facilitates workers acting as consumers.

Workers may also use what they learn in public legal education on the job. If workers use this information in carrying out their duties, this may benefit their employers. Workers may also employ their skills and knowledge in ways that are disruptive to the employer. For example, young workers who participated in the AWHCs Work Plays program (Box 5.5) may apply their new-found knowledge about the right to refuse unsafe work or to be free from sexual harassment in the workplace to improve their working conditions. Such efforts may entail greater costs to employers (assuming they decide to comply with their legal obligations). This cost may help to explain the limited participation of employers in public legal education.

Union Education

Since their inception, unions have offered education and training to their members.³⁵ Presently, some union training is narrowly vocational (skills development and safety courses) while other forms of union-sponsored education has broader application, such as literacy classes. Still other union training efforts are more overtly political. Courses that develop members' collective bargaining and grievance-handling skills (sometimes called **steward training** or "tools" courses) are both necessary for unions to operate and can help to alter the balance of power in a workplace. Providing members with an introduction to contemporary political and economic topics (e.g., international trade agreements and equity issues) may have a broader societal impact.

As noted in Chapter 4, some unions also negotiate specific training entitlements into their collective agreements. The form of such entitlements varies by industrial sector. Some training provisions may be related to job- or skill-ladders within operations. Other may be more open-ended “learning accounts” that employees can access to take training the workers want or job-protected leave allowing workers time off to undertake training. While these entitlements are undoubtedly of benefit to workers, a critical perspective on such entitlements is that they are evidence of the incorporation thesis.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the incorporation thesis asserts that union demands are shaped in ways that are acceptable (and sometimes useful) to employers. For example, unions know that they are unlikely to be successful seeking significant curtailment of managerial decision-making power in the workplace. Employers have historically been less likely to resist monetary demands by unions (e.g., higher pay and more benefits). This pattern pressures unions (which need to make gains to maintain member support) to **monetize** their member’s demands—converting demands for power into demands for money.³⁶ The incorporation thesis manifests itself in labour-market training as union demands for employer-sponsored training (or training funds). This demand is largely a monetary one (employers don’t lose any meaningful managerial authority), and a better-trained workforce has the potential to benefit the employer. If workers have traded potential wage increases for better training provisions, employers will have succeeded in externalizing production costs onto the workers.

Securing additional training entitlements for workers does benefit workers. It is, however, important to be mindful that such entitlements often leave the specifics of the training to the employer. And, thinking back to the different kinds of skills that workers can develop, as shown in figure 5.1, employers are most likely to provide firm- and job-specific skill training. Such training is beneficial to employers, both because it is specific to the employers’ needs and because it is less portable than other kinds of training (thus reducing the risk that trained workers will be poached by other employers).

Unions may also provide education to the members. Box 5.6 details the educational offerings that the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) provides to its members. Unions (or groups of unions) may also

offer **labour schools**, which are often intensive residential experiences designed to provide additional training to union activists. The hidden curriculum of much union training is simple but profoundly destabilizing: workers have the ability to seek accommodation of their interests by resisting employers' demands (including through withholding their labour).

Box 5.6 UFCW webCampus Courses

The United Food and Commercial Workers represents a quarter of a million Canadian workers. In addition to offering face-to-face training to its members, UFCW operates a webCampus. The webCampus provides over 150 online courses free of charge to UFCW members and their families.

webCampus includes traditional steward training and union tools courses, including an extensive collection of health and safety courses. These courses allow the union to provide basic training to both members and union activists. But the majority of webCampus courses are designed to improve job-related skills for UFCW members. These include a suite of courses aimed at developing computer skills as well as a cluster of job-specific skills modules in fields where UFCW represents members. These courses reflect that many UFCW members are often employed precariously and may need to retrain to find secure employment.

UFCW also offers personal development courses tailored to address the non-work roles that workers take on. These courses range from money management and retirement planning to media literacy and end-of-life planning. In the 2015–16 academic year, there were 7,979 registrations by UFCW members and family members in these courses. Women comprised 69 per cent of all course participants.³⁷

webCampus offers members five different non-credit certificates for the completion of particular groups of courses. UFCW has also entered into transfer credit arrangements with post-secondary institutions. Participants in webCampus can transfer some of their courses to Brock University, Athabasca University, and Conestoga College. UFCW's occupational health and safety courses also transfer to the Ontario Worker Health and Safety Centre, and workers can receive a training card.

Research demonstrates that unionized Canadian workers are more likely to participate in formal training than non-unionized workers. This advantage is seen in aggregate measures (32 per cent versus 25 per cent) as well as job-related courses (24 per cent versus 18 per cent) and in employer-sponsored training (27 per cent versus 20 per cent). This “union effect” differs by gender, with unionized women having much larger gains in participation than men. As we saw in Chapter 1, workers with more formal education are more likely to participate in formal workplace training. Although unionized workers are, on average, more educated than non-unionized workers, the beneficial impact of union membership on training participation holds true at all levels of formal education. Unionized workers are also more likely to participate in informal learning with co-workers, both around job-tasks and workplace rights issues.³⁸

A number of unions have developed partnerships with post-secondary institutions. These partnerships allow union members who have completed certain union education courses to receive academic credit for those courses. As we saw in Box 5.6, both Athabasca University and Brock University provide transfer credit to UFCW members who have completed union courses. Athabasca University also has a transfer arrangement with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to recognize the significant learning that goes on in union steward classes.

The amount of money spent by unions on providing training is normally determined by the union membership, either directly through a budget vote or indirectly through the election of union officers. What kind of training is offered tends to be a decision reserved to union officers and training staff. The most common kinds of training are steward or tools courses. These courses make a direct contribution to the operation of the union. Access to courses is controlled by unions by, for example, allocating training spots to union locals.

Conclusion

Community education is something of a grab bag, perhaps best reflecting how the conflicting interests in Canada’s training system play out in practice. Where governments directly fund community-based education (such as literacy training), there is a tendency for this training to be structured to meet the needs of production. Funding is increasingly targeted at the

“nearly employable,” a trend that is consistent with other government labour-market training that we read about in Chapter 3. Funding also tends to be finite and linked to outcomes measured. Where possible, the cost of training is externalized onto community groups that, in turn, pass these costs onto their workers in the form of precarious employment. This funding structure reflects that, while training providers are stakeholders in the training system, they typically lack the power to significantly influence policy direction. They may, however, have greater influence in program design and delivery.

Literacy training also advances the state’s goal of social reproduction. The complexity of modern society requires most individuals to be functionally literate in order to access basic services and support themselves—all necessary aspects of the reproduction of labour power. For workers, literacy is also a necessary precondition for advancing their own interests in society and in the workplace—whether those interests be simply getting ahead in their jobs or seeking fundamental social, political, and economic reform. That literacy education is so often linked to simply getting ahead constrains (but does not preclude) the more emancipatory agenda that many adult educators have advanced over the years.

Many of the settlement services offered to new immigrants are also delivered through community education. In addition to language instruction, settlement services tend to focus on helping new immigrants socially acclimatize and attach to the labour market. A recurring challenge for highly skilled immigrants is that foreign educational credentials are often devalued. This can result in dramatic underemployment by immigrants. This dynamic highlights intragroup conflict among stakeholders. For example, the federal government selects economic immigrants based upon their education. But provincially and territorially governed educational institutions and professional regulatory organizations may refuse to recognize these same credentials.

The difficulties common in foreign credential recognition reflect that recognizing foreign credentials expands the pool of licensed professionals and is, thus, contrary to the economic interests of existing professionals (who benefit from the labour shortage). Provincial and territorial governments may be reluctant to intervene in such decisions because of the potential political backlash they might experience from highly regarded

workers. The key point here is that stakeholder groups are not monolithic and that intragroup conflict must also be considered in any review of the Canadian training system.

The educational activities supported by unions are also characterized by mixed motives. Perhaps the most significant union intervention in the labour-market training system is securing training entitlements from individual employers to union members. These entitlements tend to be focused on developing workplace skills and are often associated with internal job- or skill-ladders. While these entitlements are undoubtedly of benefit to workers, a critical perspective on such entitlements is that they are evidence of the incorporation thesis, whereby workers' interests tend to be converted into forms that (1) don't fundamentally affect the power of employers, and (2) sometimes provide benefit to the employer as well as the workers. Unions also offer significant training around the negotiation and administration of collective agreements. Such training is necessary to maintain the operation of the unions themselves. Unions may also offer other forms of education and training, such as that which UFCW provides through its webCampus.

Notes

- 1 Hyslop, "NDP Government Restores Funding."
- 2 Culbert and Sherlock, "BC's Working Poor."
- 3 Hyslop, "NDP Government Restores Funding."
- 4 Taylor and Steinhauer, "Evolving Constraints and Life 'Choices.'"
- 5 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Survey of Adult Skills*, 2.
- 6 Cathexis Consulting, "Evaluation of the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBs) Program."
- 7 Smythe, "Ten Years of Adult Literacy Policy and Practice."
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- 34 Ally, Dewhurst, and Zariski, "Expanding Access to Legal Services."
- 35 Taylor, *Union Learning*.
- 36 Hyman, *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations*.
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- 38 Livingstone and Raykov, "Union Influence."

CHAPTER SIX

Reproducing Patterns of Advantage and Disadvantage through Training

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain the purposes that the Canadian training system serves.
- Identify patterns in terms of access to, control of, and benefits from training.
- Explain how and why the Canadian training system reproduces patterns of advantage and disadvantage.



Occupational segregation by gender means that women are often under-represented in occupations and industries such as construction. Nationally, women make up less than 5 per cent of workers in construction occupations.¹ Indigenous peoples in Canada and immigrants are also under-represented in the skilled trades.² Employers have periodically expressed interest in drawing workers from traditionally under-represented groups into the skilled trades to address worker shortages, but such efforts have not been particularly successful.

In 2007, only 8 per cent of Canada's female apprentices apprenticed in construction trades. While women comprised 3.7 per cent of all building-trades apprentices, those women who completed the apprenticeship represented only 1.8 per cent of all completions, suggesting disproportionately high attrition among female apprentices.³ The Alberta government developed a 2007 workforce strategy with Alberta's construction industry that emphasized increasing the participation of traditionally under-represented groups through promotional activities and training, and by altering workplaces to become more welcoming to such groups. This strategy also advocated increasing employer access to temporary foreign workers.⁴

One of the stakeholders involved in developing this strategy was the training provider Women Building Futures (WBF). This not-for-profit was established in 1998 to prepare women for employment in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as construction. In 2016, several hundred women took programs and/or courses through WBF (28 per cent being Indigenous women) with 93 per cent of graduates being employed in the construction industry within six months of graduation.⁵ According to WBF CEO Kathy Kimpton:

When we started, there were few women working in the trades. In those early years, employers were mainly looking to hire women to provide some diversity in their workplaces. Now, those same employers and more are hiring our graduates because they are well trained and prepared.⁶

While the training offered by WBF clearly helps individual women attach to the labour market, an interesting question is whether such programs meaningfully alter the overall composition of the workforce. Analysis of who is employed in Alberta construction occupations between 2003 and 2014 suggests the answer is no. Men remained the primary labour source for construction employers. While the overall number of workers employed in the industry went up during this time period, women, youth, Indigenous persons, and immigrants did not see their relative share of employment increase significantly.⁷

The finding of little change in the participation rates of women, youth, Indigenous persons, and immigrants in the construction sector over a 12-year period strongly suggests that the Alberta government's 10-year labour-force strategy and the efforts by construction industry partners to increase recruitment and retention for these groups were unsuccessful. An important question is, why did this plan yield no change in the gender composition of the workforce? There are likely two explanations.

First, employers continued to organize construction work in ways that pose barriers to women. Work continues to require long and unpredictable hours, often in remote locations. This arrangement maximizes employer profitability and negatively affects women's ability to manage social reproductive obligations. Second, construction employers tolerate a hyper-masculinized culture where women (and other non-traditional groups) face discrimination and harassment. This hyper-masculinization is also a result of employers seeking to maximize profitability. Construction employment is very precarious: jobs are often short term, with workers moving from employer to employer. This precarity pressures workers to constantly demonstrate their utility to the employer and also denigrate the work of others in order to demonstrate that they themselves should be kept on. Women and workers of colour are easy to "other" because of their physical differences and lack of social power in the predominantly

white and male workplace. Employers tolerate this discrimination because it is an acceptable cost of having a workforce that is highly motivated by its precarious employment.⁸

One result of these factors is that women typically experienced a last-hired–first-fired relationship with construction employers. When the labour supply tightens, women workers become relatively more attractive to employers, and their rate of employment increases. However, these gains are ephemeral, as their job losses are more severe when the labour market loosens and men are once again available. A part of the loosening of the labour market in Alberta was due to the federal government's efforts to increase the availability of temporary foreign workers (who, in construction, are mostly male). What these dynamics mean is that while training is likely helpful to individual female workers to develop skills (which may make them more marketable relative to other women), it is unlikely to change the overall rate of female employment in the construction industry, because a lack of training is not the only (or most significant) barrier to employment.

Emphasizing training makes it look like government and industry are taking action on this issue. Emphasizing training also frames women's occupational segregation as the result of skills deficiencies (i.e., the workers' fault) rather than as the result of systemic discrimination (i.e., the employers' fault). This framing perpetuates a structure that advantages employers, who minimize labour costs. It also advantages male workers, who keep a source of additional construction workers out of the labour pool (thereby potentially improving their own wages and job security). But there is not a perfect accord of interests between employers and male workers: employers have loosened the labour market by seeking access to temporary foreign workers, which has the effect of displacing male Canadian workers. What this example suggests is that the Canadian labour-market training system serves multiple functions and is riven by conflicting interests among stakeholder groups.

Functions of the Training System

The preceding chapters have shown that the Canadian training system serves three main functions:

it reproduces labour power,
it creates docile and obedient workers, and
it maintains and legitimizes capitalist social formation.

It is not surprising that one of the functions of the training system is to create, maintain, and improve workers' KSAs. As we've seen, the training system does such a good job of reproducing labour power that many Canadian workers find themselves overqualified for the jobs that they hold. This conclusion sits at odds with most media coverage of training. Media coverage typically emphasizes the presence and effect of (largely fictional) skills shortages. It would be more accurate and socially useful for the media to cover how the allocation of labour-market training is profoundly uneven. Specifically, workers' access to training is affected by their gender, heritage, socio-economic status, and geographic location. The result of discriminatory access to training is a replication of historic patterns of advantage and disadvantage in the Canadian labour market and, more broadly, society. But such coverage sits at odds with the interests of capitalists (i.e., the owners of media corporations) who use the skill-shortage narrative to help loosen the labour market via more government-subsidized training and greater access to foreign workers.

One of the less obvious effects of the training system is that it contributes to the creation and maintenance of certain values and preferences. Of particular interest is the way in which the training system contributes to creating and maintaining a docile and obedient workforce. The K-12 system inculcates rules and rule-following behaviour into future workers quite directly. Employers use the threat of unemployment as a stick to reinforce obedience and docility. But some also use training as a carrot—rewarding “good” employees with skills development. What skills and competencies are developed remains largely in the control of employers, which reinforces their existing legal and labour-market power (framed as “management rights”) in the workplace.

The prospect of obtaining a better job via training also helps maintain the legitimacy of capitalist social formation. It is easy to see that workers with training (especially formal training that leads to a credential) are more likely to secure high-paying jobs with good working conditions and more job security than workers without such training. The existence of

this (ever-lengthening) pathway to a good job incentivizes workers to seek training. It also subtly suggests that workers are to blame when they cannot secure good employment—a belief consistent with the notion that Canada is a meritocracy.

That access to training continues to be inequitably distributed is largely ignored. So too are employer efforts to make jobs increasingly precarious and ensure that the labour market is as loose as possible. Workers have little ability to alter the basic structure of capitalism, which ensures that (1) many workers will not have good jobs, no matter what they do, and, as a result, (2) employers will benefit at the expense of workers. The most sensible option for individual workers is to seek more training to secure one of the fewer and fewer good jobs that are available. Yet, in doing so, they are also helping to further loosen the labour market and drive down their own wages.

The broad stability of the Canadian training system over time reflects that it meets (in at least a minimal way) the needs of each of the major stakeholders. Employers get, for the most part, an adequate number of appropriately trained workers at low cost. Workers have a pathway to securing good jobs, although many will not be successful in navigating it. And government has a system that contributes to ensuring that both the production process and the social-reproduction process continue more or less uninterrupted. Yet the broad stability of the training system does not mean that there are no changes afoot.

Three important trends in the Canadian training system are:

1. Shifting training costs away from employers and onto workers,
2. giving employers greater power to determine what workers learn, and
3. advancing the economic interests of employers at the expense of workers.

Shifting Labour-Market Training Costs

The shifting of training costs onto workers is most evident in escalating PSE tuition costs. Rising tuition has the effect of making PSE (which is, in part, a form of labour-market training) less accessible to students, particularly those whose families have a lower socio-economic status.

Governments have also shifted costs of training onto (other) workers by increasingly relying upon community groups to provide some kinds of labour-market training. Employees in not-for-profit agencies often have low wages and/or high workloads. As discussed below, government is not monolithic and, thus, not every government policy pushes this agenda (e.g., Québec's training levy or Alberta's recent tuition freeze). But, overall, the broad and long-term trend is towards shifting training costs to workers.

Given that holding formal PSE credentials is positively associated with greater workplace training later in life, the rising cost of PSE is a significant contributor to the intergenerational transfer of advantage (and disadvantage). Those who can afford initial PSE also tend to receive the most subsequent workplace training. The idea that who you are (your socio-economic status) is a greater determinant of your success in life than is your effort to better yourself sits uneasily with the broadly held belief that Canada is (mostly) a meritocracy. Advancing policies that undermine the meritocracy narrative—and which demonstrate that training reproduces existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage—has the potential to profoundly damage the legitimacy of both government and capitalist social formation. Given this risk, why then would governments engage in such behaviour? There are several, interrelated explanations as to why governments support off-loading labour-market training costs onto workers.

First, the relationship between shifting the cost of labour-market training onto individuals and the hardening of class boundaries in Canada is difficult to see. The shifting of cost is immediate and visible. But the effect it has on individuals' life prospects takes years to unfold and occurs mostly in private. Further, the relationship between cost shifting and life outcomes is imperfect. There are many factors mediating labour-market success, and some people will succeed (or fail) regardless of their level of (dis)advantage. Anecdotal evidence of success in the face of adversity (e.g., one or two stories of people overcoming the odds) is a powerful rhetorical tool. It aligns with the broadly held belief that Canada is a meritocracy. And most people fail to grasp that anecdotal evidence emphasizes exceptions rather than the norm (because everyday happenings elicit little comment). As a result, anecdotal evidence is routinely given vastly more weight than it warrants. In short, the murky causality and long latency

periods between cost shifting and life outcomes, combined with efforts to obscure this relationship, dramatically reduce the risk to government (and to social stability) associated with such policies.

Second, there are significant political pressures on governments to minimize public spending. The neoliberal prescription of the 1980s and 1990s profoundly shaped public expectations around government spending and provision of services. Governments that increase taxes in order to maintain services are frequently assailed by employer lobby groups, right-wing think tanks and politicians, and the media. Faced with political consequences for raising taxes and the framing (in human capital theory) of labour-market training as primarily benefitting individuals, the path of least resistance for governments is to off-load training costs onto workers wherever possible. Such efforts avoid negative publicity and may even attract praise from politically powerful groups.

Where this shift creates (or reinforces) inequities, governments can sometimes manage the issue through rhetorical strategies. For example, the virtual absence of women in the skilled trades suggests that there is systemic sexism. As we saw in the opening vignette of this chapter, both the government and employers often make very public promises about remedying this issue. Task forces are struck, and the key players agree to plans to resolve matters. But such reports often fail to identify the real factors driving the problem, such as workplace culture and job design, that are barriers to greater female participation. Instead, attention is focused on educating workers about careers in the trades and developing their skills. These strategies suggest workers' ignorance or skill deficiencies are the root cause of low female participation. Providing career counselling and skill training then allows employers to blame workers for low participation rates. This, in turn, allows governments to justify policies (such as expanding the temporary foreign worker program) that serve to eliminate structural pressures on employers (i.e., a tight labour market) that might otherwise cause employers to make cultural and job design changes in the workplace that would attract more women.

The third explanation for governments off-loading labour-market training costs onto workers is that those who are opposed to such policies are less powerful than those supporting it. Consider PSE tuition increases. The largest opponents of tuition increases are students from middle and

lower socio-economic backgrounds. For them, tuition increases create a significant barrier to accessing labour-market training. These students have limited political power for several reasons. University students are viewed as a relatively privileged group (which, in aggregate, is probably correct); thus, they may have a hard time gaining the sympathy and support of other Canadians (many of whom will not have had PSE opportunities). Students are also most often speaking in their own interest, behaviour that, rightly or wrongly, tends to undermine the credibility of any claim. And even a small number of student voices supporting tuition increases further undermines the sense that students may be right about the effect or desirability of tuition increases.

A more compelling case against off-loading labour-market training costs might be made by those Canadians excluded from PSE (or other labour-market training) entirely. Such voices are rarely heard because there are few mechanisms by which such opinions can be aggregated and articulated. Further, such Canadians may have little time to engage in policy discussions (as they are most likely working). And they may be disinclined to undertake such advocacy work. This disinclination perhaps reflects their expectation that advocacy would yield little benefit to them and might entail some risk to their own employment. Further, the meritocracy narrative is a powerful one, and many Canadians may be convinced that their level of success is commensurate with their worth or effort.

Controlling Content of Training

Control over the content of Canadian labour-market training is shared among all stakeholders—except workers. Governments, PSE institutions, and faculty members shape the content of labour-market training offered by PSE institutions, with students having little curricular input. Governments also determine what kinds of state-funded labour-market training is available to workers, although the agencies responsible for delivering training may have some discretion over what specifically is taught and learned. Employers largely shape the content of apprenticeship training. And, except where constrained by a collective agreement, employers also control what workplace training occurs. Other than the few instances

where unions deliver training, workers have little official control over the content of training.

This lack of control over the content of labour-market training is not surprising. Training is a microcosm of capitalist employment relationships. Employers dominate the employment relationship, and their control over training content is just an extension of their so-called management rights. Even where governments mandate employer spending on training (e.g., Québec), they won't mandate employers sharing power over what kind of training is on offer. An exception to this general rule might be when governments require employers to provide training around hazardous materials and other workplace hazards.

In some cases, governments have ceded what little control they have over training to employers. The Canada Job Grant we read about in Chapter 3 saw the federal government shift funding from government-driven labour-market training to employer-directed training under the CJG. The result was almost complete employer control over how a significant portion of publicly funded labour-market training was spent. There was no compelling rationale for this decision; it was simply a sop given to employers by the federal Conservative government. The ceding of power to employers under the CJG broadly parallels the federal Liberal and Conservative governments' ceding of control over immigration to employers through expansion of the temporary foreign worker program. Not surprisingly, employers took advantage of inadequate federal screening to flood the labour market with TFWs, whom they often mistreated.

The willingness of governments to increase employers' already significant control over training suggests that governments (1) prioritize the needs of employers over those of the workers and (2) accommodate workers' needs only when absolutely necessary and to the minimum degree possible. What this, in turn, suggests is that the state is not a neutral referee in matters of labour and training. Rather, the state frequently acts as the handmaiden of capitalists—enabling them to maximize profit. Only when employers act in ways so egregious that the legitimacy of the government or capitalist social formation is at stake—such as the brazen exploitation of migrant workers—will the state usually act to contain employers' behaviour.

Box 6.1 New Rules for Migrant Agricultural Workers

A significant portion of Canada's agricultural workforce—particularly in labour intensive sectors such as fruit and vegetable production—is made up of migrant workers. As we saw in Chapter 3, migrant workers are often exploited and endangered by their employers. Over the past 10 years, reports of mistreatment of agricultural workers have become commonplace. For example, a 2016 article in the *Vancouver Sun* quotes Raul Gatica, executive director of the Migrant Workers' Dignity Association and author of a 40-page report on agricultural workers, who "shared a story of a farm worker in Surrey who nearly had his finger cut off in a machine that peels and grinds carrots. His employer's main concern was for the machine, said the farm worker, who was told to put a glove on and get back to work."

Gatica's report also includes quotes from a worker who said his employer sprayed pesticide while workers were out in the fields without providing them with safety gear, and another worker who recounted living in a small house with 40 other people.⁹

Slowly, the federal government has begun to tighten long-standing loopholes in the regulatory frameworks that cover migrant workers. Effective January 1, 2018, employers seeking to hire foreign agricultural workers will have to submit an inspection report for worker housing that proves it meets standards, such as weatherproofed walls and adequate shower and toilet facilities. While such improved standards are a good sign, they reflect that, left unchecked, employers have subjected foreign workers to atrocious living conditions.¹⁰

One explanation for the lengthy history of poor employment conditions for migrant workers is that governments can make errors when intervening in complex matters. It is possible that government policy-makers—many of whom lead relatively privileged lives—would never consider that employers might exploit migrant workers so ruthlessly. Yet the lengthy delay in meaningful government action on this issue also suggests that governments can be reluctant to intervene when doing so might cause political pushback from employers.

Workers' power over training also parallels workers' power in the broader field of labour relations. Workers can negotiate training content, funding, and job-protected leaves with their employer. Such negotiations tend to

be limited to unionized worksites. Workers can resist training they don't care for by not learning or practising what they have been taught. This response mirrors workers' abilities to resist other forms of management direction via absenteeism, presenteeism, sabotage, or theft. Basically, it constitutes direct action to resist employer directions—an approach that can result in workers being fired for insubordination. Workers can also seek out or organize their own training, assuming they have the resources required to do so.

Advancing Employers' Economic Interests

There is no doubt that labour-market training can (and often does) improve the lives of workers. Training is often the best pathway available to workers seeking higher wages, better working conditions, and greater job security. As we've seen in earlier chapters, workers' access to training appears to systematically differ, depending upon their gender, heritage, socio-economic status, and location. Further, the intersection of these characteristics often has a compounding and negative effect on workers' experiences. This dynamic is perhaps most clearly visible in the labour-market and training experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, which, while improving, remain markedly worse than average.

Society at large also benefits from labour-market training. There isn't much evidence that training directly results in economic growth. This may reflect that employers consistently fail to provide jobs that take advantage of the skills that Canadians already have. That said, labour-market training (particularly literacy, public legal education, and settlement services) may have positive social effects, because it allows workers to better manage their lives and interact with an increasingly complex society. There is a clear link between increasing levels of formal education and overall health, social engagement, and happiness.

The main beneficiary of labour-market training is, of course, employers. The Canadian training system generally provides employers with access to an appropriate number of adequately skilled workers at low cost. Most of the training required to develop these skills and competencies have been paid for directly by the worker or indirectly by the worker through the tax system. In this way, the training system represents

a significant business subsidy for employers. It is notable that employers rarely acknowledge this generous subsidy.

Instead, employers clamour for greater public funding of training and greater access to foreign workers while complaining of non-existent skills and worker shortages. It is important to recognize these claims as statements made by employers in their self-interest. Essentially, employers are seeking to further lower labour costs in order to increase their profitability. The resulting contradictions (e.g., employers demanding more training while reducing their own training expenditures) generally go unremarked and ignored. Given this, workers, policymakers, and academics should subject employer claims and demands around training to searching analysis before accepting them.

Conflict Among and Within Stakeholder Groups

The major site of conflict in capitalist economies is between the interests of labour and capital. While the state will sometimes step in to protect the interests of workers, this intervention tends to be restricted to instances where employer behaviour is so egregious that it threatens some aspect of production or social reproduction. And government intervention is often tempered by a desire to minimally impair employer latitude in organizing production in the way that is maximally profitable. Consequently, governments will often adopt strategies designed to deflect conflict into manageable dispute-resolution processes. In the opening vignette of this chapter, the government addressed the issue of women's inability to access jobs in the construction sector through a workforce plan that was non-binding, contained actions (increasing access to TFWs) that undermined other actions (hiring more women), and the success of which was never publicly evaluated.

Conflict can also emerge among stakeholders, reflecting that “workers” and “employers” are categories comprising many actors with differing interests. For example, a 50-year-old male psychologist might well view high licensing standards as in the interests of both himself and society at large. A 35-year-old female immigrant with a foreign credential might well agree that high licensing standards, which prohibit her from entering the profession, are in the interests of existing psychologists but not necessarily

society in general or herself in particular. Similarly, the training needs and approach of a very large and a very small employer will be different. In order to develop more nuanced understanding of the politics of the Canadian training system, it is important to acknowledge that intragroup conflict exists.

For example, “government” is not monolithic. Rather, there are multiple governments involved in labour-market training. The result is that there can be conflict between different orders of government (e.g., between the federal government and its provincial and territorial counterparts). A part of this conflict includes efforts to shift blame for problems to other orders of government. As we saw in Chapter 3, when the federal government announced the CJG in 2014, provinces and territories raised two main concerns:

1. The CJG shifted control over which workers could access what kind of labour-market training from governments to employers.
2. The CJG redirected existing LMA funding away from programs aimed at workers facing multiple barriers to labour-market attachment and towards workers who were job ready. Although the federal government made some compromises around CJG, these concerns went largely unaddressed. The result was that provinces and territories funded labour-market training for workers facing multiple barriers to employment themselves and/or curtailed such programming. Employers used the redirected federal funding to offset existing training costs, mostly to the benefit of already employed men in high-skill jobs and possessing PSE credentials.

There is also sometimes conflict (albeit muted and difficult to observe) within a specific government or between government policies. We saw this kind of conflict play out over foreign credential recognition and professional licensure in Chapters 4 and 5. Governments grant PROs authority to determine who can practise in some occupations. One outcome of this policy is that foreign-trained professionals often have great difficulty gaining licensure. Rather than addressing this systemic problem, a government will instead fund programming designed to help foreign-trained professionals navigate the (problematic) system.

Conclusion

So what, at the end of the day, can we conclude about Canada's labour-market training system? Well, first, we know that the major criticism of the training system (that it has resulted in skills shortages) is mostly untrue. Indeed, if there is a training problem, it is that employers are failing to fully utilize the existing skills of workers. There is also little evidence of worker shortages more generally. Employers that find themselves unable to hire may wish to consider whether improving the wages and working conditions on offer might attract more (or new) workers into their workplaces. This conclusion—that employers sometimes shade the truth in their own interest—should cause us to be skeptical of claims that training is a panacea for problems in a workplace or the workforce.

It is also true that Canada's training system is sprawling and uneven, often with limited connections between its major components. What is unclear is whether this is a problem or whether it is indicative of a system that responds to the (often conflicting) interests of various stakeholders. While a system that pushes individuals towards careers at an early age and presents a clear, step-by-step process to becoming qualified in a specific occupation may sound appealing on grounds of efficiency and simplicity, such a system is largely unworkable. Employers and governments are unable to accurately predict labour-force requirements in the future. And workers (quite understandably) might resist being pigeonholed into a career at a young age. Such a system (that is essentially one of central planning) also sits uneasily with the notion that Canada has a free-market economy, wherein individuals can make, remake, and accept responsibility for their occupational choices.

As suggested in the introduction, it is more useful to think of the training system as a political system (where conflicting and converging interests result in certain institutional forms and arrangements) than as a machine. For example, understanding that employers want trained workers at the lowest possible price helps us to understand why they minimize their own investments and push governments to socialize or externalize costs. The stability of such a system depends upon the relative power of the key stakeholders. If one stakeholder group becomes more powerful (or colludes with another stakeholder), then changes—perhaps large ones—may occur.

Absent changes in power, the system tends towards stability. A training system is based upon the existing power structure in society, and this reproduces not just labour power but also existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage. We see this in the differing levels of training access and labour-market success that specific worker groups have (resulting in the intergenerational transfer of advantage and disadvantage) as well as the training system's tendency to respond to employers' demands more than to workers' demands. Essentially, the training system is part of the broader system of labour relations that operates to keep those in control powerful and everyone else weak.

The fact that change tends to flow from (and reinforce) power shifts suggests that technocratic efforts to "fix" the training system will likely be unsuccessful unless they happen to align with existing interests and power distribution. Prescriptions such as starting computer training in kindergarten don't recognize the power that professionals (such as teachers) have to resist such bad and self-interested ideas. Similarly, fads like the learning organization tend to founder, because they ignore structural imperatives and political compromises within organizations (i.e., there are often practical reasons for why organizations are the way they are). As we read about at the beginning of this chapter, the failed strategy to increase women's participation in Alberta's construction industry can be seen as an effort to fix a problem without altering the political economy that gave rise to the problem. Not surprisingly, this approach was unsuccessful—although some individual workers may have benefitted from training investments—and was quietly swept under the rug.

Finally, we need to recognize that government intervention in labour-market training (and labour relations more broadly) is not necessarily benevolent. Governments often "play" for the employer's team because problems with the production process appear more quickly and generate more focused political pressure on governments than do issues around social reproduction. It is also important to be mindful that government interventions are not necessarily competent: the labour-market training system is complex, and governments may not fully appreciate the interplay of interests. Both the Canada Job Grant and the temporary foreign worker program demonstrate that the federal government routinely underestimates how far employers will go in order to maximize their

profitability. And the tepid and ineffective response by the government to both problems suggest that governments often find it politically difficult to extricate themselves from failing projects and policies.

Notes

- 1 Construction Sector Council, *State of Women in Construction*.
- 2 Ibid.; Yssaad, *Immigrant Labour Force Analysis Series*.
- 3 Construction Sector Council, *State of Women in Construction*.
- 4 Government of Alberta, "A Workforce Strategy."
- 5 Women Building Futures, "Report to the Community: 2015 & 2016."
- 6 Love, "Women Building Futures' Success."
- 7 Foster and Barnetson, "Who's on Secondary?"
- 8 Paap, *Working Construction*.
- 9 Chan, "Foreign Farm Workers in BC."
- 10 Stueck, "In British Columbia, Employers Brace for Changes."

Glossary

Acculturation: The process of modifying the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and values of individuals and groups.

Active labour-market policies: Government policies that encourage or require action by unemployed individuals, employers, and communities (such as participation in training programs or job-search activities) to address unemployment.

Adult basic education: Training aimed at adults and intended to develop literacy, numeracy, and other knowledge and skills to the high-school level.

Antigonish movement: An early twentieth-century movement that combined adult education with economic literacy to empower rural Maritime Canadians to resist exploitation by moneylenders and product marketers.

Apprenticeship: A multi-year form of labour-market training that relies heavily on workplace training, supplemented by four to eight weeks of annual classroom instruction, entailing a fixed-term contract between an employer and an apprentice, wherein the employer provides wages and training in exchange for the apprentice's labour.

Association: Two phenomena that typically happen at the same time or in proximity to one another.

Basic skills: Skills such as literacy, numeracy, and the ability to learn that form the foundation of workplace skills.

- Bicameral governance:** A system of post-secondary governance wherein decision-making is shared between a Board of Governors and General Faculties Council.
- Blame the worker:** Attributing responsibility for negative outcomes (usually incorrectly) to action or inaction by workers, while ignoring the contribution of other factors and actors.
- Canada Job Grant:** A federal labour-market training program, introduced in 2013, providing grants to employers who fund workplace training.
- Canadian labour-market training system:** A system that provides labour-market training to Canadians, comprising four main components: post-secondary education, government training and immigration policy, workplace training, and community-based education.
- Capital:** Resources such as money, land, equipment, and tools that can be deployed in order to produce goods and services. Also, sometimes a term used to refer to the group of people who own these resources.
- Capitalist economy:** A system of production and exchange characterized by the private ownership of capital.
- Cartel:** A group of independent producers who co-operate to increase their profits, such as by restricting the supply of labour.
- Causation:** A relationship between two phenomena wherein one causes the other.
- Central paradox of trade unionism:** The tendency of union power over its members to be appropriated by management to serve management's goals.
- Class structure:** A hierarchy of classes based upon their relationship to the production process.
- Collective agreement:** An employment contract negotiated by a union between an employer and a group of workers.

- Colonialism:** The process by which European countries exerted political control over the rest of the world between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. In Canada, this process has subjected Indigenous people to forced assimilation and systemic racism.
- Commodification of labour:** The process of rendering workers' labour as a commodity that can be bought and sold in a labour market.
- Competency:** A collection of knowledge, skills, and abilities that, when used together, allow a worker to perform a complex task or a job.
- Compulsory trades or occupations:** Occupations where employment is restricted to registered apprentices and journeypersons.
- Demand:** The number of hours of work that employers want to purchase at a certain wage rate.
- Demand-side measures:** Efforts (usually by the state) to alleviate unemployment by increasing the demand for workers by such means as job-creation and economic-development activities.
- Emotional labour:** An occupational requirement to manage one's feelings and to make occupationally appropriate emotional displays, regardless of one's internal feelings; emotional labour is most often performed by women.
- Employment Insurance:** A federal program providing income support and labour-market training to formerly employed Canadians.
- Employment relationship:** A relationship in which workers trade their time and skills to their employer in exchange for wages, whereby the employer is allowed to direct the work of employees.
- Employment-related geographic mobility:** Travel by workers related to employment, such as commuting between municipalities, provinces and territories, or countries.
- English as a Second Language (ESL):** Education designed to develop oral and written communication skills in English. Sometimes also called English as an Additional Language.
- Equilibrium point:** The wage rate at which the supply of workers equals the demand for workers.

Essential skills: Nine essential skills that the federal government asserts provide a foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better prepare for, get, and keep a job; and to adapt and succeed at work.

Explicit knowledge: Fact-based knowledge that is relatively easy to transfer to learners.

Feedback loop: A dynamic wherein one phenomenon causes another which then reinforces or intensifies the first phenomenon. Often called a virtuous or vicious cycle.

Fly-in-fly-out workers: Workers who periodically commute significant distances (often by plane) to work for significant stretches of time before returning home for a period of rest.

Foreign credential recognition: The process of having educational qualifications above the high-school level that have been achieved in another country evaluated and granted a Canadian equivalency.

Fordist production: Industrialized mass production processes based upon scientific management, most often associated with standardized components assembled by workers on a mechanized production line.

Formal learning: Learning that entails stated objectives, an organized curriculum, and set requirements to demonstrate that skills and knowledge have been acquired.

Framing: The process of shaping public discourse through the selection, interpretation, and presentation of information.

Functional literacy: The ability to complete day-to-day tasks requiring literacy.

Generalize: To draw broad inferences from specific observations.

Hidden curriculum: Widely held assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and values that are inculcated into the recipients of education and training.

Human capital: The cumulative stock of KSAs, intelligence, experience, and judgment of an individual or a population.

- Human capital theory:** A theory asserting a direct relationship between the levels of labour-market training and national economic performance.
- Immigrant settlement services:** Programming providing immigrants with information about and assistance in (1) accessing health, education, housing, and transportation resources, (2) interacting with the state (e.g., assistance filling out forms), and (3) document translation and job searches.
- Incorporation thesis:** A theory asserting that management and unions have a symbiotic relationship in the workplace and that this relationship moderates the behaviour of unions.
- Informal learning:** Uncredentialed learning that often occurs in the course of doing something (or observing it being done).
- Intergenerational transfer of (dis)advantage:** A process by which socio-economic status is carried forward from one generation to the next, often through inequitable access to education, labour-market training, and jobs based upon resources available to an individual's family of origin.
- International mobility programs (IMP):** Programs negotiated in free-trade agreements that permit various degrees of worker labour mobility between countries.
- Intersectionality:** The interaction of identity factors that can cause overlapping and interdependent systems of (dis)advantage for individual workers.
- Journey person:** A worker who has successfully completed an apprenticeship program and met the requirements to hold a trade qualification.
- Knowledge:** Information (i.e., facts) combined with experience and values that workers apply to situations and problems on the job or in everyday life.
- Knowledge appropriation:** Employer efforts to identify and codify worker knowledge about the process of work, usually in an effort to increase employer control and profitability.

Labour: A term referring to the group of people who must trade their effort for wages in order to purchase the necessities of life.

Labour market: The place where employers and workers negotiate the terms and conditions of employment.

Labour Market Agreements: Agreements between the federal government and provinces and territories whereby the federal government funded labour-market training offered by the provinces and territories and aimed at workers ineligible for training funded through Employment Insurance.

Labour Market Development Agreements: Agreements between the federal government and provinces and territories that devolve the delivery of Employment Insurance–funded training to the provinces and territories.

Labour-market power: A form of power for employers and workers derived from the relative scarcity of workers in an economy.

Labour-market training: Policies, programs, and activities intended to result in an adequate number of appropriately trained workers.

Labour schools: Intensive residential experiences designed to provide additional training to union activists.

Learning organization: An organization focused on increasing the capacity of its employees through ongoing learning as a means by which to improve organizational performance.

Literacy: The ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts.

Mechanical metaphor: A way of viewing an organization, in this case as a machine comprising interlinked parts that work together towards a common purpose.

Monetize: Process by which unions convert member demands for power into demands for money, often under pressure from employers.

- Neoliberalism:** A set of political and economic prescriptions that centre on minimizing government regulations, programs, and expenditures.
- Non-formal learning:** Learning where explicit objectives, set curriculum, and requirements to demonstrate skills and knowledge are modest or absent.
- Occupational segregation:** The tendency of occupations to be populated by particular kinds of workers, such as the tendency of construction workers to be male and child-care workers to be female.
- Organizational learning:** The way in which organizations acquire, share, and use knowledge to succeed.
- Pluralism:** A view of employment that asserts employers and workers have both converging and diverging interests in the workplace.
- Political costs:** Consequences that one actor can impose upon another when their interests are being ignored or harmed, such as passive forms of resistance.
- Political metaphor:** Viewing an organization as a political system wherein the components of the system reflect the interplay of actors, who use power to advance their interests.
- Post-secondary education:** A system of colleges, universities, and technical institutes as well as various specialized institutes, which provide formal training that usually leads to credentials.
- Precarious legal status:** A condition affecting workers whose right to reside in Canada is contingent upon their continued employment, which makes these workers vulnerable to employer exploitation.
- Precarious work:** Paid work characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill health.
- Prior learning assessment:** An effort to evaluate informal and non-formal learning in order to grant credit for such learning towards a formal educational credential.

- Professionals:** Workers who possess specialized knowledge that gives them significant discretion over how they do their work.
- Professional development:** Periodic training required of members of regulated professions. Also a common synonym for ongoing training in white-collar occupations.
- Professional regulatory organization:** A government-appointed body that regulates the right of workers to practise in certain occupations.
- Professional self-regulation:** The regulation of an occupation by members of that occupation, generally operationalized through a professional regulatory organization.
- Profit imperative:** The pressure that capitalists face to realize a profit from their businesses and that helps shape their decision-making.
- Psychological contract:** A set of worker expectations, which sits alongside formal employment contracts, about workload and treatment by the employer.
- Public legal education:** Training focused on assisting individuals to develop legal knowledge and skills to manage and/or improve their lives.
- Red Seal program:** A program of interprovincial recognition of trade qualifications designed to increase labour mobility among workers.
- Regulated career colleges:** Private vocational colleges regulated by governments to protect the financial interests of students.
- Reproduction of labour power:** The various tasks that must be accomplished in order to maintain a class of workers.
- Return on investment:** The (usually) economic gain caused by the expenditures of money.
- Scientific management:** An approach to workplace management that analyzes work processes and reorders them to maximize efficiency.
- Skill:** An ability to perform a task.
- Skills shortage:** The situation that exists when there is an inadequate number of workers who possess the knowledge, skills, or abilities

that employers require and who are willing to make themselves available to work given the prevailing wage and working conditions.

Social reproduction: The process of perpetuating the social arrangements necessary for economic production, including ensuring that there is an adequate number of appropriately trained workers who accept being subordinate to employers in the production process.

Socio-economic status: An individual's position within a social hierarchy based upon their education, occupation, income and wealth, and place of residence.

State: The supreme civil power within a country or subnational region.

Steward training: Union-sponsored training that develops members' collective bargaining and grievance-handling skills, sometimes also called "tools" courses.

Supply: The number of hours of work that workers are prepared to provide at a given wage rate.

Supply-side measures: Efforts (usually by the state) to alleviate unemployment by providing training to workers to help them attach to the labour market.

Systemic racism: Racism embedded in social institutions, structures, and social relations within our society that is often most visible in the inequitable outcomes faced by specific ethnic and cultural groups.

Tacit knowledge: Knowledge that is often learned through experience and is very difficult to codify.

Temporary foreign workers (TFWs): Non-citizens who are permitted to work in Canada for a fixed period of time and whose residency is contingent upon their employment.

Trade qualification: A formal educational credential denoting that the holder (often called a journey person) is qualified to practise a trade or occupation.

Training: The process of intentionally acquiring, modifying, or reinforcing knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as values and references.

Training levy: A compulsory level of training expenditures required of employers by the state and intended to increase workplace training.

Underemployment: A situation where a worker's KSAs are underutilized in a job.

Unitarism: A view of employment that asserts that common (and employer-determined) objectives unite the efforts of employers and workers in the workplace.

Workplace skills: Generic technical skills, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills that form the foundation of firm- or job-specific skill.

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