



The Conference Board  
of Canada

#### CASE STUDY 15

*A core product of the  
Employability Skills  
Forum, National  
Business and  
Education Centre*

**Program**  
*Partnership*

**Date Established**  
1994

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**Name of Program**  
*CAREERS: The Next  
Generation's Co-op  
PLUS Apprenticeship  
Programs*

**Skills Developed**

- Academic
- Personal Management
- Teamwork

Developing secondary school students' and recent graduates' employability skills

# CAREERS: THE NEXT GENERATION'S CO-OP PLUS APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

*Linking Workplace Training with  
Classroom Learning*

BY JAMES PRICE

August 1998

CAREERS: The Next Generation's Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs link workplace training with classroom learning to develop young people's employability skills and help communities meet their workforce needs.

#### Overview

CAREERS: The Next Generation's Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs, operating since 1994, help communities to meet their workforce needs and develop students' employability skills by linking workplace training with classroom learning (for more examples of how employability skills programs develop community capacity to enhance skills, see case studies 7 and 14).

CAREERS programs build on the provincial government's traditional Apprenticeship and Industry Training Program by:

- providing for a more rigorous selection process, pre-employment training, rotational work placements and regular evaluation,

- linking apprenticeship training with formal high school education, thus allowing young people to begin their apprenticeship training while still in school,
  - supplementing the traditional development of technical skills with the development and evaluation of transferable generic employability skills, and
  - providing a framework for community collaboration that meets the diverse needs of students, employers and schools.
- All CAREERS programs enhance classroom learning, develop students' employability skills and ease their transition from school to work while addressing the province's shortage of skilled tradespeople and technicians.

#### Objectives

- Introduce workforce development at an earlier age to ensure community self-sufficiency.
- Better prepare the 60 per cent of high school students who do not go directly to college or university for rewarding careers.

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- Develop tradespeople and technicians to ensure business and industry competitiveness.

**Groups Served**

- High school students and recent graduates, employers, educators, government and labour.

**Activities**

The programs operate on the co-op model of alternating periods of study and related work experience. They include:

**1. Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship**

Co-op PLUS is designed for secondary school graduates, 18 to 25 years old, interested in apprenticing in the trades.

Traditional apprenticeship training takes four years, combining eight weeks of technical training at college with 10 months of on-the-job experience per year. Upon completing their technical training and accumulating the required number of work experience hours, apprentices earn their "trades ticket" and become qualified journeypersons.

Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship builds on this system and places a heavy emphasis on recruiting good student apprentices, giving them good training and developing good journeypersons. This requires a significant commitment by student apprentices, employers and educators. In particular,

- students compete for positions; they must satisfy government apprenticeship criteria, pass an aptitude test, be successful at an interview, and participate in pre-employment training,
- employers create co-op positions that are distinct from regular workforce positions and make a four-year commitment to pay the government-regulated apprentice wage rate, and
- educators work with employers to co-ordinate the program, administering the student selection process and pre-employment training, and providing secretarial support to the community steering committee.

Students normally gain work experience with different employers, who act as mentors. Students earn their journeypersons' certification and develop employability skills, gaining a clearer understanding of the real life responsibilities, expectations and demands of the workplace.

**2. Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) PLUS**

RAP PLUS is an enhanced version of the Alberta government's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), which allows Alberta secondary school students to apprentice while still in school. Students become aware of the program in grade 10 through classroom presentations by CAREERS staff and industry secondees. Interested students then structure their final two years of secondary school so that they spend half of their time in class and the other half in the workplace, earning credits for both their first year apprenticeship hours and their high school diploma at the same time. Students must also:

- pass through a screening process that includes demonstrating high academic standing, good attendance and good citizenship,
- serve an unpaid probationary internship of 125 hours, usually during the summer prior to the start of the apprenticeship, and
- maintain their grades and graduate from high school.

For their part, CAREERS staff secure and support appropriate employers for the program.

In RAP PLUS, students are still considered full-time high school students and can earn about 40 per cent of their required credits for graduation while in the workplace. RAP PLUS emphasizes developing students' employability skills and engendering positive attitudes that will make them successful in the workplace.

**3. Career Plus**

Career Plus is a new initiative that expands the co-operative apprenticeship concept to occupations beyond the traditional trades. It

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We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

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is an applied learning program that links two years of high school with two years of postsecondary education, incorporating related work experience throughout. Using the provincial government's Career and Technology Studies curriculum as a base, it provides students with worksite learning opportunities in a variety of career pathways from agriculture and construction to tourism and financial management. Courses are organized into career clusters based on community and employer needs.

#### Resources Required

Resources are focused on establishing a critical mass of community commitment for long-term (five years plus) community change. CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs rely heavily on the initiative and intervention of CAREERS project directors and on government education and apprenticeship programs and curricula. Resources will vary significantly depending on the extent of local commitment. Key resources include:

- appropriate apprenticeship and workplace learning curricula,
- CAREERS project directors (staff and industry-sponsored secondees) focused on community mobilization, employer and student recruitment (one to two persons full-time per 100 students),
- school work experience co-ordinators (one-half to one person part-time per 100 students) devoting some of their time to CAREERS programs,
- marketing and communications materials for students and employers (\$2,000 to \$5,000 per 100 students),
- classrooms for student workshops and presentations, parent meetings and employer workshops, equipped with flip charts and overhead projectors (provided by schools), and
- administrative support for record keeping, communication and administration.

#### Achievements/Outcomes

CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs operate in 26 Alberta communities., with the following effects:

- younger people are undertaking apprenticeships: the average age of apprentices in the CAREERS program is 18 years versus 27 years in traditional apprenticeship programs,
- employers are investing more in the youth of their communities: more than 450 employers have invested \$10 million in aggregate to create 800 co-op education positions, and
- communities are becoming more focused on skill and education issues affecting their youth.

#### Benefits

CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs help employers, educators and communities focus their efforts on employability skills development and apprenticeship and education issues.

#### Students

- Benefit from enhanced classroom learning experiences.
- Develop their employability skills.
- Are exposed to alternative career options.
- Get help in making the transition from school to work.
- Have an incentive to finish school, particularly students not planning to go directly to college or university.

#### Employers

- Gain access to highly motivated potential employees with established roots in their communities.
- Have a hand in shaping school curricula to make it fit more closely with workplace expectations.
- Enjoy greater community economic stability and growth by developing a motivated and skilled workforce for the future.

#### Educators

- Work closely with employers and take a stronger more proactive, leadership role in the community.
- Gain access to excellent employers and business people willing to volunteer time and resources so students have more opportunities and options.

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**Innovation**

The innovativeness of CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs lies in the way they combine traditional apprenticeship training with co-operative education. In so doing, they promote apprenticeship as further education rather than mere industrial training. They also:

- integrate the development of employability skills with technical apprenticeship training, thus enabling students to gain a broader, more transferable set of skills and experiences rather than just those for a particular job,
- involve employers more closely in youth development by having them act as mentors to apprenticing students, deliver workplace curricula and evaluate students' progress,
- produce a complete articulation of programming from secondary to postsecondary education and the workplace, incorporating applied secondary school learning, significant workplace experience and postsecondary education, and providing many opportunities to enter, exit from or re-enter the system,
- create a situation whereby workplace instruction and evaluation reinforce the emphasis on producing learning outcomes in the formal educational system and vice versa, and
- enable communities to take ownership of the programs.

**Keys to Success**

CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs are highly partnership-intensive. The commitment of employers, educators, students and their parents is

central to the success of the programs. Other critical success factors include:

- significant systemic support by the provincial departments of education and advanced education in terms of the development and support of appropriate, flexible workplace learning curricula,
- industry leadership and employer involvement: community programs respond to the needs of employers and actively engage them in the design of the programs, workplace mentoring and student evaluation, and
- an emphasis on quality and excellence: the programs' rigorous selection and screening processes ensure high quality candidates, which is a crucial factor in attracting employers and creating student role models.

**Greatest Challenge**

The greatest challenge has been the difficulty in communicating the excellent career opportunities available in the skilled trades and technical fields to students, their parents and educators. This difficulty stems from an academic bias whereby parents regard a university education as the best option for their children. There is also a certain scepticism on the part of educators as to the motives of business in introducing apprenticeship training to secondary school students in a secondary school setting. Further, the limited allocation of resources to work experience in schools constrains the progress of CAREERS' Co-op PLUS Apprenticeship Programs.

**NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment**

*Employability Skills Profile*

*Science Literacy for the World of Work*

*Best Practices in Assessing and Developing Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)*

*The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.*

*Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.*

*Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.*

*1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook*

*1997 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook*

*1996 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook*