

MOVING FORWARD IN PRIOR LEARNING

A Report from the Gateways Project

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MOVING AHEAD IN PRIOR LEARNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learning originates from many sources. Some learning comes from formal education, some from experience, and some from revisiting values, skills, and knowledge gained previously. The recognition of learning from experience has the potential to fill gaps in knowledge and skills for adults who seek to further their education and advance their careers. Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) has provided a reliable method and a rigorous process for meeting this need. First, a few definitions to guide the reader.

Prior learning is previous learning that has occurred in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to, formal educational settings. *Assessment* is the method, process, and procedure for evaluating informal learning to give value to learning that has not previously been recognized. *Recognition* equates the assessment of learning to existing formal standards to determine its equivalence. For additional definitions, see the Glossary near the end of this document.

Much of the prior learning assessment that has occurred in Canada in the last decade has been based in college programs, professional association requirements, and technical skills, such as trades. In the context of academic programs offered by colleges and universities, the assessment of prior learning has most often been equated to the content of individual courses in college programs. The *Pan-Canadian Gateways Project: Accreditation and Recognition of Learning for Adult Practitioners* (the *Gateways* project) funded by the Learning Initiatives Program of Human Resources Development Canada (now Human Resources and Social Development – HRSD) introduces *program-based assessment* as a viable method of moving forward to make PLAR more accessible to more individuals than before. HRSD has funded research through its Learning Initiatives program to increase social capital through the mobilization of knowledge. The *Gateways* project uses *program-based* PLAR to demonstrate its potential to respond effectively to and meet the needs of adult learners, and to advance the educational goals and careers of PLAR participants by building capacity to do this important work based on a shared understanding of its value to individuals, employers, educational institutions, the economy, and society.

The *Gateways* project invited more than 100 individuals from across Canada to participate in prior learning assessment and recognition at the college or university level. A quarter of the participants have completed the process. The full results will be reported at the end of 2006. This report prepares the way for that study by explaining what PLAR is, the infrastructure needed for it to be effective, and solutions that have been developed to overcome barriers to the success of PLAR.

0.1 OVERVIEW

Moving Forward introduces a broad audience to the background and context of projects sponsored by Athabasca University and funded by contribution agreements with Human Resources Development Canada (now Human Resources and Social Development) that have prepared the ground for PLAR to be effective in human services, a large sector of the labour market in which women, minorities, recent immigrants, and other underserved groups find themselves unable to advance beyond front-line jobs because of perceived lack of skills combined with insufficient education. By reducing barriers to their advancement, individuals achieve their personal goals, employers retain better qualified employees, and educational institutions address knowledge gaps without providing redundant training and education.

For large numbers of people, PLAR is a new idea that first needs to be explained, even though it has been in use on a small scale in Canada and the United States for more than 30 years.

PLAR uses a “valid and reliable process” to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and values that have been learned through non-formal education, training and, or, experience to have qualified specialists determine the equivalency for academic credit at the post-secondary level. (Adapted from the British Columbia Council of Admissions and Transfer, 1994)

Three points need to be made at the outset. First, PLAR has been widely regarded as a “valid and reliable process” for more than three decades. This language has been inherited directly from a foundational study completed by Morris Keeton and Associates for an American organization, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in 1976. The validity and reliability of PLAR as a process has a well-established history as a legitimate method for the assessment of learning. That legitimacy provides the operating premise for this study.

Second, the *program-based* PLAR used here provides a more global approach to learning outcomes than can be achieved by course-based PLAR; that is, the demonstration of specific learnings from particular courses taught as part of programs of study. *Program-based* PLAR is especially relevant to programs, such as human services and human services-related programs delivered by the colleges, because some of the learning outcomes for these programs are *embedded* across courses through sequencing of course work in a semester-by-semester progression. The expectation in two-year diploma programs, for example, is that communications, which forms one of the learning areas, will be covered continually throughout the program, with the level of the learning increasing with each semester of study. Assessors of course-by-course challenges often experience frustration because these embedded learnings are not addressed in particular course challenges in the way that occurs in the program in its entirety. In addition, when only the courses in a program are evaluated for transfer credit to other institutions, especially, but by no means exclusively, to universities, learners generally receive less transfer credit on a course-by-course basis than they would if the program were evaluated as a whole, including the well-documented program outcomes.

Learnings can be *lost* in the course-by-course process, with the result that credential holders may receive less than the full amount of transfer credit that the academic worth of their learnings as a whole authentically represents based on the entire program content, its curriculum, and layout. Transfer of a block of credit for completion of a credential takes into account the under-reporting that is likely to occur when course-by-course counts supersede awards of block credit transfers. *Program-based* PLAR looks to the program learning outcomes required by the college, and as vetted by the program councils and government educational

authorities, for the baseline against which to assess competence as reflected in the award of transfer credit.

The third point is that PLAR often relies on a sole expert in making an academic determination, whereas the practice at Athabasca University, as well as in this study, is to have three qualified specialists evaluate every PLAR candidacy. The assessment jury is considered by many institutions to involve an unjustifiable expense, since, in most courses, the teaching as well as the evaluation is done by a single individual. However, *jury assessment* ensures fairness both to the learner and the assessor—ensures that the learning being presented meets a standard recognized academically and professionally as well as experientially. The jury method triangulates the learning from the vantage point of three kinds of subject-matter experts, making it less likely to be conducted in a cavalier or capricious manner. It is important for the assessment to be objective in the best sense of being disinterested, resistant to abuse and fraud as well as transparent. These qualities are more likely to be present when assessors share the responsibility collectively and know that they will be asked to explain the rationale for their scoring if the range in scores is wide.

These three-person panels of experts comprise the educational authority awarding the credit. Panel membership most often includes both academic experts and PhDs, members of related professional certification bodies, and members of the community or highly-qualified practitioners familiar with the field. For the purpose of this study, PLAR is understood to involve two elements: a valid and reliable process that implies academic, intellectual, and procedural rigour; and qualified specialists whose expertise is grounded in their academic credentials and experience in relevant fields, or a combination of them, in addition to familiarity with the principles and practice of PLAR in their field.

Two earlier projects, *Effective Practices* and *Pan-Canadian Pathways*, have already been completed. They have contributed to research and innovation, enhanced knowledge mobilization and labour force mobility, increased educational capacity and effectiveness, and met the needs of underserved adult learners.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

PROJECT TITLE	RESEARCH QUESTION
<i>Effective Practices</i> , 2000–2002	How do adult learners best retain knowledge and skills over time? • 13 college partners
<i>Pan-Canadian Pathways</i> , 2002–2003	How can block credit transfer and course transfers from college to university be used to enhance access to learners in the human services? • 37 college partners
<i>Pan-Canadian Gateways</i> , 2003–2006	How can prior learning assessment and recognition be used to effect fair, non-repetitive, and timely credential completion? • eleven college partners , two university partners , two other recognized institutions of post-secondary education , three employers , one association , and two government departments

FIRST PROJECT: EFFECTIVE LEARNING PRACTICES

The *Gateways* project is the third in a series of research projects that began with a study titled *Effective Practices*. This project identified best practices in the retention of knowledge, skills, and attitudes over time. Funded by Human Resource Development Canada in 2001–2003, 13 post-secondary institutions in Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta participated by identifying graduates whose learning of basic program outcomes in the field of early childhood education was retested after they had been employed for one to three years. The study showed that the primary variable that affected student performance when retested was the mode of instruction received in their college programs. Students who had experienced non-traditional delivery of program content retained their learning markedly better than those who had been taught exclusively through lecture-style content delivery in the classroom. This study identified a second primary issue, that is, the need for seamless, accessible learning opportunities at the post-secondary level for working adults (Crowther, 2002).

SECOND PROJECT: PAN-CANADIAN PATHWAYS

In 2002–2003, new funding through HRDC/HRSD investigated the validity of awarding junior-level university credit within college diplomas and investigated increasing the number of block credit transfers from college credentials toward university entry. Participation in the *Pan-Canadian Pathways Project* included the 13 initial partners from *Effective Practices* as well as 25 additional college partners from British Columbia, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan. Approximately 1700 individual course outlines were evaluated, some more than once. There were three general findings from the second project.

First, junior-level credit, as defined by Bloom's taxonomy and Knowles' hierarchy of learning, existed in all programs evaluated (Bloom, 1984; Knowles, 1975, 1978, 1980). Second, the academic content of the programs was very similar, and third, the packaging of programs differed widely from one jurisdiction to another (e.g., number of credit hours, number of hours per course, number of courses offered, and sequencing of learning).

THIRD PROJECT: THE GATEWAYS PROJECT

These activities led to a third research topic, that is, the analysis of recognition of non-credentialed learning, also called informal and non-formal learning. The concept can be explained in any number of ways; for example, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology Web site puts the matter as follows.

In the past, post-secondary educational institutions only gave credit for learning that occurred through formal instruction in their own classrooms. Even courses from similar post-secondary educational institutions often were not recognized. Prior Learning Assessment is changing this practice. (SIAST, 2006)

The benefits of the prior learning assessment process come to the fore in the *Gateways* project. The original partners from *Effective Practices* and *Pathways* continued to participate. Approximately 120 adult practitioners participated in a PLAR process directed toward diploma and degree completion. Drawing on the findings of the previous project, there was reason to

believe that students retained the learning from their credentials regardless of the passage of time, and regardless of the original mode of instruction (Crowther, 2003). The capacity to access learning at the level appropriate to their credentialed learning figures large in whether or not these adult learners would consider opportunities for further education to be viable.

GATEWAYS AND BEYOND: MOBILIZING THE KNOWLEDGE OF ADULT LEARNERS

These three research pieces may be used to build additional capacity and effectiveness at the post-secondary level of study. Remaining gaps in knowledge and skills can be filled through distance education, allowing working adults to complete their diplomas or undergraduate degrees in their communities.

The *Gateways* project, supported as a PLAR initiative under the Learning Initiatives Program funded by HRSD and sponsored by Athabasca University, explores future possible applications of PLAR. Initial results suggest that PLAR has great potential to meet the learning needs of many adults over the next decade as skill shortages intensify (Government of Alberta, 2006). Assessing and recognizing prior learning in both systematic and culturally appropriate ways has great potential for recruiting people excluded from the workforce, immigrants, persons living with disabilities, First Nations and Métis people, and people living in rural and remote locations. Athabasca University, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology already make use of functioning models of prior learning assessment. Provision of the infrastructure to fashion networks of PLAR providers to link and grow these islands of expertise looms as the next challenge.

The progress and setbacks described in this interim report can be overcome with continued commitment to the shared goals of access, participation, and equity. Once administrative glitches and growing pains have been sorted out, and once policy is established and finances are mobilized to facilitate achieving the full potential of the existing labour force, upscaling will be possible to address looming human resource shortfalls in other employment sectors as well.

Initial results from the *Gateways* project suggest that the recognition of prior learning is a valid and reliable process that can be used to mobilize knowledge by meeting the learning needs of many adults. In the next decade, as skills shortages increase, educators and employers who value and recognize what Canadians know, their values, and skills, will have access to more and better students and employees than those who do not. Mobilizing knowledge through the recognition of prior learning can produce significant brain gains. Individuals may receive a combination of better pay, benefits, and future prospects, as well as the enhanced quality of life that accompanies academic accomplishment. As well, communities are positioned to gain qualified individuals in the labour force where such individuals are in increasingly short supply. A more mobile workforce will demand opportunities for post-secondary education in their communities in the future. PLAR provides one method to address the demand side of post-secondary education.

0.2 POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF PLAR

1. QUALITY

- PLAR students attain similar or higher course grades than the average course grades of non-PLAR students in the same programs (Aarts et al., 1999, ix).
- A more qualified workforce becomes available without time away for education.
- Some employers prefer PLAR participants because they demonstrate independent learning and high levels of self-motivation.
- Some educational institutions also have admission requirements that embed opportunities for informal PLAR in their admission requirements, especially among graduate programs.
- Students who participate successfully in PLAR are more likely to achieve their educational goals than non-PLAR students.

2. ACCESSIBILITY

- Adult learners do not wish to repeat learning that they already have.
- Recognition of prior learning enhances motivation and is itself an incentive to continue studying.
- Career advancement often accompanies increased levels of education.
- Of the approximately 120 participants in the *Gateways* project, all are in low paying positions because many lack the ability to obtain appropriate opportunities and financial support to continue their studies:
 - more than 90 per cent are women,
 - some are aboriginal, and
 - others are recent immigrants.

3. AFFORDABILITY

- Recognition of prior learning is an important tool for the identification of knowledge gaps and can lead to remediation.
- PLAR participants complete their programs of study more quickly than non-PLAR students resulting in cost saving to students because of shortened study time remaining to completion.
- It is fiscally responsible because of reduced cost, shortened study time, tax and tuition dollars saved, and faster development of a qualified workforce.
- Institutions gain adult learners in senior years, who are not usually motivated to return to post secondary studies due to considerations of cost and time.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

- Participants demonstrate their skills and knowledge in relation to well-established program-based learning outcomes.
- Academic rigour is embedded in the PLAR process.
- Plans can be developed to fill gaps identified in education or qualifications.
- Citizen-participants retain control of next steps.

PLAR involves a process for demonstrating learning from a variety of sources. It can be adapted to meet the learning needs of any community and is sustainable over time. Gap analysis reduces the time and resources needed to boost educational levels in the workforce. Educational institutions are able to package learning that meets the needs of the community and its individual learners, which lead to greater sustainability for the workforce and the post-secondary educational institutions as well as the individuals engaged in the process.

SUMMARY

Over 90 per cent of participants in the *Gateways* project are women; 86 per cent of them are over age 35 and, of these, half are 45 or older. Many have experienced barriers to returning to post-secondary education due to combined factors of family obligations, full-time work, lack of college, university, or other suitable post-secondary institution in their community, and in many cases are the first person in their immediate family to progress toward the completion of a college or university degree. In these ways, PLAR participants appear to be similar to other students at partner colleges and at Athabasca University.

The recent experience in sponsoring a nationally-funded research project in prior learning builds effectively on the existing strengths of the partners in the previous projects involving Athabasca University. Athabasca University continues to be regarded as a leader in PLAR nationally and internationally.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Although formal and systematic Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) has been around for the past thirty years, it has not been sufficiently integrated into adult learning policy in ways that would assist large numbers of people. For that to happen, prior learning will first need to be better understood and must draw on diverse communities of practitioners to enable many more adults to participate in PLAR in their communities. The detailed report begins with a short explanation of what prior learning assessment involves. It then discusses adult learning policy in the context of policy issues identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2003 study, *Beyond Rhetoric*. Participation, access, and equity are the issues that figure large in the effectiveness of adult learning policy aimed at the mobilization of knowledge. The Government of Canada participated in this study and has taken some steps to nurture a federal adult learning policy in support of labour force mobilization and mobility, while education remains under the purview of sub-national governments. Other initiatives, such as an ongoing review of post-secondary education in Alberta, open up the prospect that prior learning may soon come to play a larger role in post-secondary education. PLAR, in the context of international initiatives in adult learning policy, national interest in achieving a more qualified workforce, and improved opportunities for education and training in Canadians' home communities, provides the broad background to the activities undertaken by the *Gateways* project.

In addition to the policy background at the international, national, and sub-national levels, previous research completed by the members of the research team also informs the current project. Dr. Crowther, in her analysis of the retention of learning, found that graduates of early childhood diploma programs recalled their learning significantly better when provided the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in ways other than through retaking tests of the sort they had completed in college. Providing ways for holders of college credentials to continue their education, and to use alternative methods of evaluation such as provided by PLAR, provided one policy implication of that research. The *Pan-Canadian Pathways* project undertaken in 2002–2003 evaluated one third of the human services education programs taught in English by recognized colleges across Canada and found them to be of *comparable academic rigour*. These research findings indicate that credentials in the human services should be *treated similarly* when graduates apply for admission to human services related degree completion programs, even though this often does not occur as yet. Moreover, sound practices in credit transfer would ensure that PLAR is *not* made to re-do the work that properly belongs to formal learning, that is, the recognition of credentials and other transfer credit rather than to the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

After summarizing the activities and findings of *Effective Practices* and *Pan-Canadian Pathways*, attention turns to *Pan-Canadian Gateways*, a project that is taking close to 120 learners through portfolio development with a view to awarding academic credit toward the completion of college credentials or university degree completion. Unique to this study are the number of participants, the underserved educational status of the participating human services practitioners, involvement of learners from across the country, and the effective partnering of colleges and universities.

Partners developed and adopted a shared understanding of PLAR, along with a shared methodology, training practices, mentoring, resources, and assessment practices. The balance of the report provides details about what has been achieved to the halfway point of the study, including the skill sets being used, the activities undertaken by three pilots, and some of the learning resources used to support the learners. *Moving Forward* concludes with a summary of what topics will be covered in the final report, to be produced at the end of 2006.



1.1 WHAT IS PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT?

Prior Learning Assessment is the name for the evaluation of experiential learning used by the Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA). In Europe this practice is referred to as the validation of informal and non-formal learning. Different organizations and jurisdictions use different names; so, for example, the province of Saskatchewan, like much of Europe, refers to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Quebec refers to the l'Apprentissage des Acquis, and PLA sometimes includes the 'R' for Recognition and sometimes not. The PLA Centre in Halifax leaves the recognition piece to the assessor as does the Belleville Portfolio Development Centre, but these assessments are not always, or not necessarily, equated with the award of academic credit, given that there are many reasons for choosing portfolio development, in addition to the receipt of academic credit emphasized by the *Gateways* project. In the United Kingdom, APEL is the acronym for the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning, and the OECD tends to use "prior learning" as an umbrella term for the range of descriptors in use there.

Most commonly, in Canadian colleges and universities, prior learning relies on *demonstrations of learning or learnings drawn from experience*. To put the point concisely, *experience is not deemed equivalent to formal learning; however, the learning that can be drawn out of experiences of various kinds may well be equivalent, and therefore merit academic credit, accreditation, or other official recognition*. Demonstrations can show the hands-on ability to use a skill safely and accurately or it can be demonstrating appropriate values and attitudes through simulated activities, such as role playing. Testing through challenge examinations is a further example of prior learning assessment. It can also refer to the waiving of prerequisites, exemptions, or other positioning toward advanced standing in a program of study or process of certification. The *Gateways* project used portfolio development and assessment as the demonstration activity to assess prior learning. According to Malcolm Day, "the portfolio [development] approach has proved to be the most comprehensive, systematic and productive" (2000, iv). The Glossary provides definitions of some of the terms used here. For our purposes, PLAR will not include transfer credit; rather, it refers specifically to the award of college and university credit based on the presentation of a portfolio, that is, a collection of documents designed and produced to show that particular learnings have occurred that merit academic credit, and that the individual applying for the credit does indeed have the learnings that are claimed. The learning may be applicable in more than one context, occur within an academic discipline or occupational field, and the evidence of learning must be verifiable.

WHY IS RECOGNITION CRUCIAL TO ITS SUCCESS?

Assessments may have different purposes. An assessment may be used to demonstrate equivalency for qualification for a particular job. Or, it may be used to demonstrate equivalency to a specific level of education or preparation to achieve certification in a profession. Recognition sometimes involves a third-party acknowledging the demonstration of learning. Equivalency results in the holders being treated in the same way as would individuals who hold the formal qualification. For example, the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) awards certification to foreign-trained child care professionals and others who lack recognized formal educational credentials following a demonstration that their education and training meets standards of practice in that province. Yukon College grants its Early Childhood Certificate and its Early Childhood Diploma to individuals who have used PLAR to demonstrate learnings equivalent to the program of instruction taught there. Recognition provides additional evidence that the equivalence is evaluated by specialists in a particular field. In the case of academic recognition, this is what occurs when credits are awarded on the basis of equivalence to learning in a particular program of study, such as nursing, business, or the arts. Without recognition, the individual is often asked to re-prove what they have already demonstrated they know, value, or can do in other contexts. Those who do not provide the additional evidence all too often find themselves excluded or otherwise marginalized. Lack of recognition places the burden of proof back on individuals to repeatedly document learning that has already been done, rather than being able to move on to more advanced education and occupational challenges. Educational institutions, professional associations, trades, employers, and governments all have roles to play as well as responsibilities to recognize appropriate prior learning in a system that has come to rely on the assessment of academics and on academic credentials as the “ticket” to upward mobility. The recognition of prior learning for everybody—students, members of professional associations, apprentices, employees, and citizens—holds out the prospect of making the best use of Canadian social capital through knowledge mobilization. Complaints to the effect that an excessive amount of importance is tied to credentialing should result, not in an end to credentialing, but in expediting much-needed transitions to the self-actualization of citizens and aspiring citizens. For members of disadvantaged groups too, the recognition of prior learning is a matter of social inclusion and entitlement related to citizenship on an equal footing with those who have had copious opportunities for further education, skill development, and career advancement.

INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF PRIOR LEARNING

Prior learning was used to assess individuals who sought instruction in the professions and other scholarly and technical pursuits as far back as 900 A.D. in Europe. In some cultures, the origins are much more remote. For example, in Nunavut, when PLAR has been described, a common reaction was that it had been the acknowledged way of doing things there: a practice that grew up with the culture. The formal interest in prior learning owes something as well to World War II veterans who wanted the learning they had gained in the military to be acknowledged when they returned to civilian life. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement demanded increased equality for the learnings that had been systematically discounted by racial discrimination. The women’s movement also supported learning from experience as a means to value work done by women and to have their practical knowledge and skills regarded as equivalent. They demanded recognition for relevant learning, and it resulted in better pay and a challenge to “pink collar ghettos.” Some colleges and universities in the United States

began introducing methods of assessing experiential learning, and it is from this source that prior learning first came to be discussed in post-secondary education, primarily in relation to adult education and continuing education (Collier 2005, 2006).

WHO ELSE IS DOING PLAR?

In Canada, interest in prior learning began in the mid-1970s, initiated at Loyalist College in Belleville Ontario, and further developed through the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, also in Ontario. FNTI offered assessment as a method for entering and completing the social services diploma it brokered from Loyalist College under the leadership of Paul Zakos and Ron Conlon. In the 1990s the practice of PLA in Canada both expanded and gathered momentum with the formation of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) in 1994. Over the past decade, the purposes for which PLAR has been used have become more flexible and diverse. They include academic and professional applications as well as employment and personal development. One of the distinguishing features of PLA practice in Canada is the flexibility of its uses to include technical as well as holistic approaches. In more recent years, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Canadian military have used prior learning to assess equivalencies in the trades and military training with good success.

Government-sponsored initiatives in Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Quebec generated interest for a time, however, few of these efforts have achieved their potential, in part because there has been no method to increase awareness and understanding of PLAR, develop a practitioner base, and establish community roots for it as has occurred in Belleville and, more recently, in Nova Scotia through the efforts of the Halifax Portfolio Centre.

A new initiative is underway in Nunavut to generate a PLAR model that will work for adult learners in its 23 communities.

Alberta's Minister of Advanced Education initiated a comprehensive review of the province's advanced education system. The initiative, called *A Learning Alberta*, has completed a province-wide consultation process and will identify a new vision as well as policy outcomes for the system. The consultations resulted in many suggestions for increasing accessibility for learners, including the need to assess and recognize all forms of prior learning.

Like FNTI, some colleges and universities have more than 30 years of experience in the preparation and assessment of experiential learning. CAEL produced a study in 1976 that demonstrated the validity and academic reliability of evaluating learning gained from work and life experiences for academic credit (Keeton). In the early 1970s, perhaps 40 institutions of higher learning in the United States practiced prior learning assessment and recognition. In 2005, more than 1,000 post-secondary institutions administered prior learning assessment for the award of academic credit. A focus group of experienced portfolio evaluators provide a continuous feedback loop, offering recommendations to improve and otherwise further refine tools and practices and submit them to policy committees in several communities of practice at the university level.

More recently, the United States has put a great deal of stock in electronic portfolios, or e-Portfolios. Displays of individuals' learning on-line can be used to showcase child

development, professional dossiers of accomplishments, or an upscale equivalent to a resumé. Prior learning is used by a few colleges and universities, such as Regents' University and James Madison University in Harrisonburg Virginia. James Madison reports that 40 per cent of its graduates in Individualized Studies (IS) have gone on to complete post-graduate studies successfully, including several who have completed doctorates. Approximately 60 per cent of James Madison's IS students who have graduated since 1990 had prior learning as part of the learning recorded on their transcripts with PLAR students receiving an average of 28.6 credits for their experiential learning.¹

1.1.1 SOME DEFINITIONS: PLAR AND PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

For the purposes of this report, definitions of PLAR, what a portfolio is, the steps taken to develop a portfolio, and the components that make up a portfolio appear below. Pages are reproduced here from two manuals, one at the diploma level and one at the degree level, that have been developed to assist participants in the *Gateways* project.

¹ From the James Madison University Web site: <http://edtech.jmu.edu/bis/homepage/PortfolioAssessment.htm>, accessed February 21, 2006

INTRODUCTION

PLAR SIMPLIFIED DEFINITION²

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) has various meanings according to the different organizations or associations that use it. One of the most frequently used definitions is, “What I value, what I know, and what I can do.” The *Gateways* project has designed a definition of PLAR that addresses the scope of activities that may be relevant as well as the diversity of sources that may produce demonstrations of learning.

Adults learn from a variety of experiences and sources outside the classroom.

PRIOR TO PRESENT

- Before formal study - childhood, adolescent, adult

LEARNING FROM LIFE

- from Elders, mentors, family members, and colleagues
 - from life experiences – challenges and opportunities
 - from leisure time activities and recreation
 - from self study
 - from raising families
 - from places of employment
 - from the world around us
 - from healing

ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

- need to value our beliefs, skills, and ways of knowing
 - evaluate our learning
 - show what we know
 - earn credit for our learning
 - demonstrate what we can do

RECOGNITION AND REWARD

- knowing what we know
 - informing others what we know
 - Awarded credit for what we know from institutions—secondary schools, colleges, universities, employers, and professional organizations

WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO?

A PORTFOLIO IS:

- a collection of materials that identify your learning obtained from a variety of sources such as work, workshops, conferences, research, and personal readings;
- a self-evaluation to demonstrate your understanding of learning;
- an analysis of your learning to demonstrate understanding of and competency as related to a specific skill set; and
- validation of your learning from external sources.

² This definition was developed at a focus group held in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, February 2005. Simplifying the definition of PLAR makes it accessible to a broader audience.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP A PORTFOLIO?

The process has five steps:

1. Read the skill set several times.
2. Collect materials such as reference letters, photographs, performance evaluations, certificates, newsletters, planning documents, or any other information to support the criteria listed in the skill set.
3. Analyze critically each of the outcomes in the skill set and document your learning to support the items in the skill set.
4. Organize your material to support your documentation of learning.
5. Request additional documentation to validate your learning.
6. Present copies of your portfolio to be evaluated.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A PORTFOLIO?

1. Cover letter - A letter that clearly indicates what credit you are applying for
2. Resumé - Current resumé that supports your claims in the portfolio
3. Chronological Record - Major educational milestones that you have achieved in both formal (college, university credits) and informal (on the job, through work related training or other educational or training opportunities) after graduation from high school or after the age of 17
4. Life History Paper - Preparation of a short paper that identifies what learning resulted from the major experiences in your life
5. Setting Goals - Goals help to set the direction of your portfolio. Goals will help direct the learning outcomes
6. Documentation of Skill Set Outcomes - Clear identification of how you have met the outcomes within each skill set
7. Validation - Support from external sources such as supervisors, instructors, performance evaluations, or examples to validate the authenticity of your work

WHAT DOES A PORTFOLIO LOOK LIKE?

A portfolio is usually presented in a binder with easily identifiable tabbed sections that correlate to the skill set and components of the portfolio. Although individual styles of portfolios will be quite different, there are some distinct similarities. These include:

- skill set format—three column form that indicates the specific outcome that is being addressed, the documentation of learning for that outcome and the location of any support documentation;
- cross referencing sections of support materials; and
- overall organization of the portfolio into a cohesive unit.

HOW WILL THIS PORTFOLIO BE USEFUL TO ME?

Having a portfolio may help me to:

1. apply for credit from post-secondary educational institutions,
2. produce a comprehensive resumé,

3. create a career plan,
4. identify the best fit for me within the organization, and
5. summarize personal strengths and additional training or educational needs.



1.1.2 POLICY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE OECD

The OECD has produced many studies comparing methods used in different countries to achieve international competitiveness. One such study, *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices*, compared nine countries, including Canada, in terms of their adult learning policies.

In order for adult learning policies to be effective, attention must first be directed to barriers that thwart *access, participation, and equity*. Barriers take many forms, including time, money, and non-recognition of earlier learning foremost among them. If individuals have little time available to fill knowledge and skills gaps, little money to invest in increasing their level of education attainment, and experience difficulty building on the learning they believe they have already completed successfully, the cumulative effect of these disadvantages frequently has a negative impact on self-esteem and motivation. For many prospective adult learners, overcoming so many barriers may seem insurmountable; for some it may be impossible, making even slight progress all the more remarkable. In *non-supportive settings* motivation lags, frustration mounts, and the results are not likely to produce a more educated citizenry. Anecdotally, this has been the experience of the researchers and staff on the *Gateways* and other projects. These findings are also supported in the international literature.

Beyond Rhetoric identified several barriers to success in addressing effectively the unmet needs of adult learners.

- The effectiveness of adult learning policies was diminished by barriers of access, participation, and equity.
- “Most adult learning has been supply-driven, with learning opportunities largely relying on replicating the formal education system used for young people to serve the needs of adults” (our emphasis, p.78).

Beyond Rhetoric indicates that countries have attempted to overcome barriers to access, participation, and equity in different ways. For example, Canada

- focused its domestic self-study on post-secondary policies, including adult education.
- identified Human Resources Development Canada, now Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, as the main institutional actor in policy design and implementation.
- produced initiatives to support adult learning that focused financial support primarily on individual initiative and choice mechanisms.
- emphasized delivery methods that involved public as well as private post-secondary institutions (i.e., community and university colleges).
- evaluated the success of various approaches to adult learning (p. 93).

Participating countries in the OECD study have attempted to remove barriers in different

ways. Most have a national adult learning policy. Canada has no federal adult learning policy but many sub-national policies are currently being studied by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

According to the same OECD study, adult learning opportunities often provide inequitable benefits in terms of access to educational opportunities, participation rates across the population, and underserved groups whose members gain little to nothing from the learning opportunities currently available.

- Access
 - Lower-wage earners participate at much lower rates than high-wage earners (OECD, 64).
 - Younger adults, those with higher educational attainment, those with jobs, or those employed in high-skilled occupations, take greater advantage of, or have greater access to, learning opportunities than others (8).
- Participation
 - Participation in adult learning varies considerably across countries.
 - Participation in adult learning is highly unequal among specific population subgroups.
 - Employer-based training tends to be concentrated on high-skilled occupations and well-educated employees (OECD, 64).
 - Low participation rates in adult learning appear to stem mainly from lack of time, financing, motivation, and systemic barriers (i.e., ineffective program delivery).
 - Participation rates appeared higher in countries where programs were adult-learner centred and where learners received support, primarily in time and money from employers.
 - Adopting an integrated approach to adult learning policies (e.g., flexibility in provision to suit adults' circumstances and schedules or outreach policies, including the recognition of prior learning) can address a diversity of issues concurrently.
- Equity
 - Training rates are higher for top wage earners, lower for low wage earners (Statistics Canada and HRDC, 2001, OECD, 2003).
 - Imbalances exist between programmes available in urban versus rural areas.

1.1.3 OTHER INITIATIVES

Other initiatives that touch on PLAR in the context of adult learning include a study being sponsored by CMEC, a review of education in Alberta sponsored by the Department of Advanced Education, and Athabasca University's response to that review.

Since 1967, CMEC has provided a forum for ministers of education to discuss matters related to education. Self-described as "the national voice for education in Canada," CMEC funded a study conducted by CAPLA on prior learning assessment and recognition that pulled together information from disparate sources that provided some needed first steps in producing a comprehensive picture of PLAR in Canada in recent years (Kennedy, 2003).

CMEC also sponsored a study of adult learning policies in Canada, completed by Roger Powley in 2005. For a national adult learning policy to come about, a Pan-Canadian approach would need to be adopted that would be committed to the removal of barriers to employability and portability, the study suggests (119).

In 2005, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer sponsored a study into best practices in PLAR in Alberta. Athabasca University was identified as an institutional leader in PLAR in *Best Practices in PLAR* (Barrington Research Group, 2005). The university has been active in this area since 1996. Among the post-secondary programs identified as using PLAR extensively, the two programs most often mentioned, Nursing and human services related programs, are consistent with the history and practice of PLAR elsewhere.

Thirty individuals knowledgeable about PLAR at their institutions of higher education were interviewed. Three of those were from Athabasca University, including Joan Fraser, who was the Director of the Centre for Learning Accreditation at the time, and was directly involved with *Gateways*. Another three people from other institutions who had direct involvement with prior learning in human services programs at colleges participated. To fulfill its purpose of identifying best practices, the consultant first surveyed PLA at post-secondary educational institutions. Among the programs identified as offering PLAR in Alberta, 20 per cent were in the human services area, the largest representation from any one academic area.

The close connection between human services education and prior learning assessment is not at all surprising. The history and practice of PLAR in Canada and elsewhere affirms the connection. For example, among the users of PLAR surveyed in *Slice of the Iceberg* (Aarts et al., 1999), many were human services students and graduates of early childhood programs. Among the seven participating colleges, PLAR in early childhood education was most common across the institutions, and assessments in related human services programs provided more than half the data from Fanshawe College, Conestoga College, Douglas College, College of the North Atlantic, and Red River College (32–33). Similarly the 2003 *Snapshot* (Kennedy) also had a preponderance of individuals educated in aspects of the human services among the users of PLAR described in that report. There is a natural fit, not the least of all because PLAR practitioners by and large are associated with human services programs at colleges that participated in the research studies sponsored by CAPLA since its inception.

At an Advisory Committee meeting held in Athabasca, on September 19 and 20, 2005, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer Chair, Lucille Walter, indicated that during the current review of postsecondary education in the province, many stakeholders expressed a strong interest in PLAR as a means of improving accessibility, in particular for adult learners.

Athabasca University has been familiar with the unmet needs of adult learners since its creation in 1970. As part of its internal renewal process and strategic planning, the university recommitted itself to its *mission*.

- “Athabasca University, Canada’s Open University, is dedicated to the removal of barriers that restrict access to, and success in, university-level studies and to increasing equality of educational opportunity for adult learners worldwide. We are committed to excellence in teaching, research and scholarship, and to being of service to the general public.” (May 1985 – Rededicated June, 2002) ³
- In a recent response to an Alberta Advanced Education initiative, *A Learning Alberta*, the university identified several foundational principles. Among them:
 - “No one should be denied a university education because of geographic location, culture, income, race, ethnicity, disability or educational background.”
 - “an uncompromising rigour as far as quality is concerned” (p. 1).

³ Athabasca University Mission Statement 2002, <http://www.athabascau.ca/aboutAU/mission.php>

In addition, on the important subject of *access* the university maintains

- “Athabasca University has developed approaches that mitigate many issues of accessibility, but funding issues continue to prevent the implementation of all solutions.”
- Moreover, “some disadvantaged sectors of Alberta (rural and Aboriginal Alberta) need support systems in place to ensure higher post-secondary student success rates.”

With regard to *participation*, the University notes the province of Alberta

- has “one of the lower post-secondary participation rates in Canada. We also do not encourage the participation of new immigrants. The situation is even grimmer in rural and Aboriginal Alberta.”

In the matter of *equity* the university repeatedly affirms the need to address effectively the unmet learning needs of individuals who are

- aboriginal.
- living in rural or urban areas.
- working adults.
- responsible for families.
- motivated to learn in and about their own communities.

The provision of greater accessibility than usually found in traditional post-secondary educational institutions includes:

- Education for adult learners who require flexibility
 - Admission open to all adults over the age of 18
 - Courses to bridge from one level to another such as from high school to university level
 - Multiple modes of delivery of courses and programs to individuals as well as groups and cohorts
- Enhanced access for underserved groups of adult learners
 - Award of transfer credit between post-secondary educational institutions
 - Assessment and recognition of prior learnings from informal as well as formal training and education
 - Adapt content and delivery to local needs
 - Savings in time, money, and resources to learners as well as to the system

A review of higher education completed for the Government of Ontario in 2005 recommended competition among distance and on-line education providers with a view to encouraging “best practices” and “practical ways to fund innovation and collaboration” (Rae, 2005, p. 17). Recommendations to make the Province of Ontario *A Leader in Learning* fits the view already taken by the CMEC to collaborate, with the assistance of the federal government to

- provide improved systems of transfer credit between post-secondary institutions and across jurisdictions.
- make increased use of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.
- empower the college system to do more to meet the changing needs for mobility in the labour force and to meet the increased needs over time for more highly trained populace.

The human services program at Athabasca University has responded to these trends by

- putting in place block credit transfer arrangements that had not existed before.
- comparing the results of students who received block credit transfer to results achieved by students who received course-by-course transfers.
- extending the block credit transfer model developed in one program area to most of the jurisdictions in English Canada.
- piloting opportunities for prior learning as an integral part of credentialing and effective partnering with colleges and other recognized post-secondary credential completion providers.
- collaborating, through partnerships, in the development and implementation of a shared understanding and recognition of partners' program learning outcomes, transfer credit arrangements, and prior learning opportunities.
- treating adult learners equitably.

When Alberta Learning, as Alberta Advanced Education was then called, approved the application from Athabasca University to introduce a human services program as a major of the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree, the evaluators of the program plan spoke highly of the capacity of this program to contribute to best practices. "We appreciate the university's strong commitment to offering a quality program to human services career practitioners who wish to pursue related undergraduate studies"⁴

In its first six years of offering the major, the program has lived up to the expectation of Alberta Learning regarding the university's strong commitment to underserved groups of learners. According to the approved program plan, the human services program would

- admit college graduates who had earned 2-year diplomas or equivalents in human services related fields.
- provide opportunities for individuals with other than 2-year diplomas in human services related fields, or with no credentials, to have the opportunity to gain entry to the program based on equivalency. (As with other programs at the university, equivalency would be assessed by academic experts.)
- provide opportunities for individuals to achieve entry to the program or receive advanced standing toward degree completion by means of a "rigorous method of prior learning assessment."
- collaborate with other post-secondary educational institutions to provide high-quality educational opportunities to underserved populations through partnering to achieve
 - block credit transfers,
 - articulations,
 - course transfers,
 - shared best practices in the assessment and recognition of prior learning,
 - more seamless opportunities for adult learners, and
 - coordination of training, education, credentialing, accreditation, certification, and professionalism.

Each of the best practices that has been developed to support human services education is limited in its scope and application. However, the cumulative effect of these best practices has been to point a direction in which the post-secondary system may choose to travel further in the future, if only to meet the needs of some Canadians who make use of distance and on-line education in their communities for lack of other viable options. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the developments described here have been grounded in research, the first of its kind in human services education.

⁴ Correspondence, Alberta Learning to Athabasca University, December 17, 1999.

The achievement demonstrates the commitment of this emerging network of innovative post-secondary institutions to evidence-based policy development in general. Athabasca University affirmed the same commitment on an institutional basis in its submission to gain Middle States Accreditation in the United States.

Because the human services major at Athabasca University is the first program by this name in Canada, a short history explaining the rationale for its development further contextualizes the current research.

1.2 PREVIOUS HUMAN SERVICES EDUCATION RESEARCH

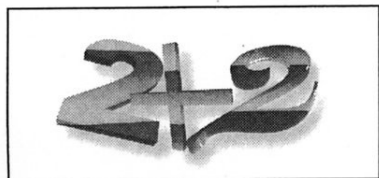
Human Services Program

Created in 1999, Athabasca University's Human Services major in the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree provides part-time and full-time study for practitioners with college credentials or equivalent demonstrated learning in:

- Early Childhood Development/Education
- Rehabilitation Services/Developmental Services Workers
- Child and Youth Workers
- Social Services/ Social Work
- Educational Assistants /Teachers Assistants
- Therapist Assistants
- Others including Community Wellness Counsellors, Home Support Workers, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Massage Therapists

The human services degree was designed on a *2-plus-2 model*: two years of college-level study in a human services related field plus two years of university study, primarily at the senior level, could be combined to earn individuals a four-year social sciences major in Human Services in the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree. Here “professional” indicates that a college credential or its equivalent is embedded in the degree. The human services major is multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary. Figure 1 is a flyer, produced *circa 1999*, that indicates the *2-plus-2* self-description of the human services program.

FIGURE 1: 2+2 BROCHURE



Human Services

Bachelor of Professional Arts

In the spring of 2000, Athabasca University plans to offer a new Bachelor of Professional Arts major in the Human Services. The BPA Human Services responds to the career and professional needs of career practitioners in Child and Youth Care, Rehabilitation Services, Early Childhood Education, and other closely related fields.

Who are Human Services professionals, and what do they do?

Human Services professionals work in a wide range of jobs that have many different job titles and duties. In general, they work collaboratively with clients to assist individuals, communities, and their members to live and function as effectively as possible. Human Services professionals promote high-quality service delivery that is accessible, accountable, and coordinated.

Receive Generous Transfer Credits

If you have a two-year community college diploma in a field related to Human Services, you may be able to transfer up to 60 of your credits directly into the BPA Human Services. Then, take an additional two years (60 credits) of university study to earn a four-year university degree. Advanced Standing may be awarded through Prior Learning Assessment.

Who Are You?

- Child and Youth Worker
- Day Care Provider
- Early Childhood Educator
- Addictions Counsellor
- Family Support Worker
- Native Counsellor
- Group Home Worker
- Crisis Intervention Counsellor
- Special Needs Consultant
- Gerontology Specialist
- Mental Health Support Worker
- Community Outreach Worker
- Corrections Worker
- Daycare Assistant
- Developmental Services Worker
- Child Advocate
- Halfway House Counsellor
- Rehabilitation Case Worker
- Residential Program Provider
- Social Service Worker
- Family Day Home Provider
- Life Skills Instructor
- Community Organizer
- Native Community Worker
- Career Development Counsellor
- Disability Advisor
- Intake Interviewer
- Home Support Worker
- Adult Day Care Worker
- Gerontology Aide
- Juvenile Court Liaison
- Counsellor/Advocate to Assaulted Women and Children
- Client Advocate
- Recreation Technologist
- Community Wellness Programmer
- Case Manager
- Northern Human Services Counsellor
- Human Services Worker

Athabasca University



Canada's  Open University™

FIGURE 1: 2+2 BROCHURE

The BPA-HS will be of interest if you would like to

- broaden your intellectual and professional understanding of the environment in which Human Services are delivered;
- build on the base of knowledge, expertise, and practical experience you already have from studying for your related diploma;
- be prepared to assume leadership positions, administrative responsibility, and coordination functions within organizations;
- balance theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and experience;
- become an even more well-rounded professional; and
- contribute positively to the future development of the Human Services sector.

The Program

The BPA-HS is for practitioners who have a two-year diploma and work experience in the Human Services.

The BPA-HS has a common core of Human Services courses and a broad range of Liberal Arts options in the areas of Leadership, Public Policy, and the Changing Social Environment.

Broadening practitioners' understanding of administrative practices and public policy processes in the political environment will prepare graduates for leadership positions and additional responsibilities in a variety of organizations.

Prior Learning Assessment

Students admitted to Athabasca University may submit a portfolio of evidence of prior learning from life experience, job training, workshops, seminars or other experience for the purpose of gaining university-level credit. PLAR contributes to full university degrees and college certificates and diplomas which open many doors to advancement.

For More Information

If you want to learn more about this educational opportunity, please contact us today. Or, pass along this information to someone you think might be interested in learning more

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website: www.athabascau.ca

e-mail: auiinfo@athabascau.ca

Or, please contact:

**Dr. Jane Arscott,
Program Coordinator**

e-mail: janea@athabascau.ca



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REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND PAN-CANADIAN PATHWAYS PROJECTS

The next two sections provide more specific details about the two previous projects to show how they fed into and informed the *Gateways* project.

1.2.1 EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN THE RETENTION OF LEARNING

In the *Effective Practices* project, sixty diploma graduates in early childhood programs were retested on the exit competencies required in their fields several years after completing their formal education. The project initially identified college partners, developed tools and resources, tested long-term retention of learning, and disseminated results. Each student was tested using traditional (paper and pencil examinations) as well as non-traditional methods involving varied demonstrations of learning as individuals and among peers. Non-traditional testing methods indicated that learning had been retained at a rate comparable to the grades the students had in college; traditional testing methods indicated that learning was less well retained. Students showed themselves to be capable of demonstrating their learning, but their results depended significantly on the methods used in making the assessments.

Since any learning cycle requires the collection, assimilation, application, reflection, and adaptation of knowledge, retention occurs best when the demonstration of learning occurs in situations that have been structured to simulate, as closely as possible, real life situations. *Effective Practices* demonstrated that early childhood educators retained learning best in settings that reflected these principles, were sensitive to cultural and local diversity, and were accessible to all.

The study, *You Bet I Care! Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres across Canada* (Goleman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000), had previously shown that the majority of early childhood education centres across Canada provided care that was of poor quality. One of the quality components of any program for young children is known to be the training of staff. Members of staff are already in a crucial position to initiate needed changes to improve quality. Resistance to change finds support in the retention of knowledge as nurtured in initial training programs. In the field of early childhood education it is well-known that students and graduates in early childhood education programs tend, for the most part, to be concrete operational learners and their learning styles minimize transfer of abstract knowledge to practical settings without additional supports for that transfer (Crowther, 1989).

Dr. Crowther hypothesized that graduates would have the best chance to demonstrate their learning in situations that allowed them to show what they knew in other than formal examination settings. The hypothesis drew on scholarly literature in the field of learning retention. According to Robinson (1994), 80 per cent of learning is retained when the learner is required to use the knowledge in applied practical situations. Students in traditional educational delivery systems, at best, successfully reproduce information in abstract formats that retain a maximum of 40 per cent of such information.

Students, as part of their training program, are required to complete placement assignments within early childhood settings. Many of these settings lack critical quality components (Goleman et al., 2000). Thus students are exposed to and required to demonstrate knowledge

within an environment that has the highest impact on learning yet does not necessarily demonstrate the highest quality.

The *Effective Practices* project solicited broad-based participation from college and university early childhood education training programs across Canada. Its objectives were to

1. identify traditional and non-traditional modes of delivery within the training programs, and identify graduates of the training programs who would be appropriate candidates for testing.
2. identify traditional and non-traditional training formats using a focus group to inform and recruit potential graduates to participate in the study and train staff in the use of evaluative measures.
3. develop tools to test long-term retention of critical theoretical components and practical applications in the training program and apply theoretical and practical components within the workplace.
4. disseminate information through virtual conferences and research publications; through existing provincial, territorial, and national networks; provincial, territorial, aboriginal and national associations; provincial, territorial, aboriginal and federal Web sites; and through the establishment of a Web site.

PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Significant outcomes of the research included:

- establishing criteria to give reliability and validity to program development for pre-services and in-service training programs,
- giving greater understanding of learning and retention of learning, and
- improving overall training practices.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Retention of learning is enhanced by non-traditional modes of delivery. Components of non-traditional modes of delivery may include learner involvement in the instructional process, especially in the planning for learning, assessment of unmet learning needs, creation of a collaborative climate of learning, goal setting, designing learning opportunities and activities, and involvement in the evaluation process. These components can be broadly applied in post secondary educational settings. Emphasizing learning retention contributes positively to the future capacity for lifelong learning.

The retention of learning of 60 college diploma graduates was evaluated using the mode of delivery (i.e., traditional and non-traditional) as the main variable. Traditional modes of delivery included: large class sizes, lecture type of instruction, memorization of knowledge, and passive student involvement.

Non traditional modes of instruction involved: smaller classes, a guided facilitator approach, formative evaluations, and active student involvement.

All participants completed a test similar in content to one that would have been given at the exit of an early childhood education program. All participants scored within acceptable ranges of program expectations. However, a significant drop in retention occurred over time among

individuals who had traditional training. Learning retention for those in non-traditional modes remained relatively stable. Contrasts between the differential impact of the two modes of delivery on learning retention suggested the policy implication that the retention of learning should be a criterion used in the future to develop higher quality post-secondary education and training.

Thirteen colleges across Canada participated, including nine in Ontario, three in Alberta, and one in Manitoba; eight of the settings were urban and five rural.

In all programs involved in the study, diploma completion would lead to certification in early childhood education as authorized by the credentialing body in the province. Certification also accompanies diploma completion in the human services-related fields of social services work, developmental services, and nursing. Diploma completion indicates the achievement of the academic knowledge base required to practice, and certification also implies the professional qualification to practice in the field. *Currency* is maintained in some jurisdictions through membership in the organization that provides certification. It is important to note that credentialing bodies deem as equivalent individuals whose educational qualifications were earned at a time in the past when the program of study may have differed in its presentation of the learning, the number of hours of instruction, and other formalities. *Currency*, in the context of professional accreditation in the field of early childhood education, means qualification to practice on the same footing as any other practitioner, regardless of where the original qualification was earned. The AECEO is an example of one association that specializes in making these determinations so as to protect the integrity of the professional designation and safeguard the reputations of practitioners. Others include the British Columbia Childcare Federation and the Classification of Childhood Educators Program Approval Committee (CCEPAC) in Manitoba.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS EXTRAPOLATED FROM THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES PROJECT

The *Effective Practices* project demonstrated a strong retention of learning over time, regardless of mode of delivery, with markedly higher retention among graduates of programs using non-traditional delivery modes—those that tended to involve the learner more directly in the learning process. Engaging learners actively in the learning process has some far-reaching implications for future educational strategies.

Because these learners retain much of the knowledge they learned over time, they should not be required to repeat this learning or go through the motions of re-learning it when they seek to advance their education. Requiring them to repeat learning about child development or interpersonal communications, for example, would be redundant. Yet, until very recently, that has been the practice when college graduates of early childhood programs submitted their transcripts for evaluation at the university level. They are required to start over, or have the value of their post-secondary study diminished to a quarter or half of the two years of study they have already completed. By permitting them instead to have the full value of their college credentials recognized, early childhood educators can progress more seamlessly to undergraduate degree completion.

This research raised additional questions for future research and activity.

- Were early childhood education graduates being treated unfairly due to the fact that their credentials received little to no transfer credit toward degree completion?
- How might course-by-course transfer facilitate college to university transfers?

- Should their credentials be awarded a block of transfer credit toward further post-secondary education?
- What might be the place of prior learning assessment in recognizing additional learning gained from experience in the workplace and other activities?
- How could early childhood education graduates be treated respectfully in a post-secondary education system genuinely committed to them as adult learners?

What follows are some of the principal investigator's tentative conclusions that suggest questions that might be answered through future research.

CREDENTIALS

When students learn something, they can recall what they learned and self-assess or remediate when and where necessary.

It is inappropriate to conclude that learners must be directed to relearn content and repeat learning they had completed previously; doing so devalues previously earned credentials, conflates formal learning with informal and non-formal learning, and invites substitution of prior learning assessment in place of credential evaluation. The sole use of traditional methodologies, which fail to acknowledge evidence of variations in learning styles, such as those indicated by the *Effective Practices* project, may further disadvantage adult learners.

COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER

Course-by-course transfer acknowledges learning that has occurred at various institutions over time, is cost effective, saves time, and enhances the coherence of the post-secondary education system.

BLOCK CREDIT TRANSFER

Block credit transfer enables students to build on their earlier education and training and reduces redundancy. It is cost effective, saves time, and allows a seamless transfer to further educational opportunities. It recognizes embedded learning and increases coherence of the post-secondary education system.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Prior learning assessment provides opportunities for learners to control the direction of their personal educational goals. By awarding credit for the application of learning in the workplace and other settings, PLAR allows learners to demonstrate higher level cognitive skills involving knowledge mobilization, which includes skill transfer, integration and adaptation of knowledge, and revision of fits between theory and practice.

PLAR values the learners' capacity to integrate and transform earlier learning; it individualizes application, demonstrates specific learning outcomes in valid ways, identifies knowledge gaps requiring remediation, and produces a verified record of learning. It also increases participation rates of adult learners who would not avail themselves of further education without their prior learning being adequately taken into account.

A seamless learning system for adult learners is learner-centred, involves individualized program planning, enhances motivation, accelerates achievement of educational goals, and lowers financial cost to learners as well as to the system. A seamless learning system increases

the qualifications of the adult workforce generally and on an individual basis, contributes to a positive self-concept, and provides motivation to explore and evaluate the prospect of success in next steps.

NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of the *Effective Practices* project study on the retention of learning support policy innovations that would enable adult learners to advance their education by accessing and participating in a learning system that would more fully take into account their learning from experience. The results confirm that institutional arrangements that facilitate the transfer from college credential completion to undergraduate degree level would be appropriate, as would opportunities to gain advanced standing based on prior learning assessment and recognition. Adopting such policy innovations would be an effective and economical strategy to follow because of the benefits it would provide to individual learners, educational institutions, and the labour market.

The *Effective Practices* project shows that the retention of learning is a crucial building block in the creation of a more seamless education system, one that will more effectively meet the actual needs of adult learners. Best practices for adult learners differ from those of young learners whose learning relies almost exclusively on supply-driven education. By looking instead at the actual inventory of education and experience an individual has, gaps can be identified and remedied as needed, rather than presuming that everyone starts from zero. Taking a more demand-driven approach will educate more adults, faster and better, than will the supply-side model. The demand-side approach appears to produce highly motivated, well-qualified individuals who receive the support needed to allow them to contribute more because it *mobilizes* the knowledge they already have.

1.2.2 DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR BLOCK CREDIT TRANSFER

A cross-section of human-services related programs offered by colleges across Canada were assessed to determine whether these programs had sufficient individual course content to justify the block credit awards that were being made since 2000 when the human services major at Athabasca University opened to students. At that time, there was still a general perception that these programs were primarily vocational and so were unworthy of block credit transfer of 60 credits. If this perception were true, offering two years' worth of transfer credit toward degree completion based on completion of a college diploma would have been very generous, even excessively so. As well, a perceived but unsubstantiated academic weakness among potential students accompanied this perception without any supporting evidence. It was believed that students admitted to the university following successful presentation of their two-year human services related diplomas might require additional supports to ensure their success. Accordingly, all programs to which block credit transfers applied in the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree area included four core courses to supplement or otherwise ensure the foundational knowledge needed for success in coursework at the senior level. The requirement that all students in the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree complete a "core" of three junior-level courses in English, computing, and critical thinking, as well as a senior-level course in professional ethics, institutionalized this perception in the regulations that frame degree completion. All program students were required to take these courses, or demonstrate that they had completed equivalents.



Some of the questions to be answered by the *Pathways* project included:

- Was block credit transfer justified?
- Were the various programs that received block credit transfer sufficiently similar to be treated the same?
- Did some programs warrant different treatment?
- What patterns, if any, existed in human services and related college programs across the country?

The work of developing block credit transfer arrangements in Alberta began at the end of 1999. Initially every applicant's transcript came across the desk of the program coordinator to assess the admissibility of the credential and the equivalency of the learning being presented. The program coordinator determined whether to admit each applicant and whether to award less than the entry amount of 60 credits. Academic oversight that drew on the subject-matter expertise of the program coordinator played a crucial role in the evolution of this broadly-defined multidisciplinary program.

In preparing to undertake program assessments, the human services program looked first to the other majors in the Bachelor of Professional Arts program, criminal justice and communications, for best practices and lessons learned. The criminal justice program limited entrance to college graduates holding diplomas in policing and security. Initially, about 70 programs across the country were closely evaluated for suitability for block credit transfer. The human services program decided that all credentials that had already been vetted and accepted by the criminal justice program would be acceptable. The communications program had begun the work of assessing more than 600 programs that could potentially apply toward entry to the communications major. The assessment model was based on detailed familiarity with communications-related programs offered by Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. Others that had similar program layouts, as determined by their recent college calendars, were accepted by the program coordinator of the communications major after vetting by the Evaluations Unit in the Office of the Registrar. Staff recorded the information, entered information on the block credit transfer awards into an electronic transfer credit database, and informed the sending college that their graduates would be eligible for admission to the communications major.

Block credit transfer recognizes credentials earned under programs that are vetted by three educational bodies:

1. the college delivering the program, which ensures the quality of the program and comparable standards of delivery at different sites;
2. program councils, such as those in British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta that ensure that the program standards set out by government departments of advanced education are adhered to by all colleges awarding the credential; and
3. departments of advanced education that oversee programs through program councils or bodies such as the College of Applied Arts and Technology in Ontario.

The coordination function is unnecessary in four provinces—Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan—where single colleges serve learners in each entire geographical area. In addition, academic programs in some human services fields meet accreditation standards administered by the provinces or territories. Completion of college credentials indicates competency to practice in the field.

Due to the existing levels of oversight of the integrity of human services and related programs within each jurisdiction, the expectation of the program coordinator and Program Advisory Council has always been that credentials awarded by recognized post-secondary educational institutions would be treated similarly, such that students who had earned the same credential, the same credential at different times, or the same credential in different jurisdictions at the same or different times, would be treated similarly, unless there were compelling academic reasons to treat them differently. Block credit transfer is a way of recognizing the comparability of the same and similar credentials in spite of the fact that the names and program outlay may change repeatedly without altering the fundamental academic worth of the content of the credential for purposes of transfer to post-diploma study at the university level. Two principles provided the operating assumptions for the human services program: treating likes alike, and treating credentials differently from the norm only when there is compelling evidence that the differences, as assessed by academic experts, justifies treating some credentials as being of lesser academic worth. These principles have guided the *Pathways* project research and established the basis for the anticipated treatment of participants in the subsequent *Gateways* project.

By applying these operating principles consistently, a level of *transparency* could be achieved that would facilitate partnerships with colleges and service to prospective and actual students as well as promoting the consistency, reliability, and accountability that are the hallmarks of academic rigour. The model was first implemented among colleges in Alberta.

TWO MODELS OF BLOCK CREDIT TRANSFER ALREADY IN USE

The scope of the human services program at Athabasca University had initially encompassed four of the most commonly offered programs in departments and faculties of Health and Human Services: early childhood education, child and youth care worker, rehabilitation services worker, and social services worker. Initial contacts with colleges in Alberta brought forward additional related programs, such as teacher assistant (Red Deer College), community wellness worker (Keyano College), and addictions counselling (Medicine Hat College), among others.

At the time that the human services program was ready to initiate block credit awards, the two models in use by the other majors in the Bachelor of Professional Arts degree were quite different. One was narrow and rigorous in its own terms; the other was equally rigorous in its use of triangulation to compare each program to similar programs across Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. The provision of consistent and equitable treatment for similar programs remained a primary concern for the human services program. The expansive model best suited the intent of the human services program because of its multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of study. In general, most such programs across the country had a smattering of introductory psychology and sociology, some had courses in interpersonal communications and all had a large amount of content specialization. Most also awarded credit for practica in which learners had to provide evidence of their capacity to apply their learning appropriately combining skills, knowledge, and values in a professional manner.

Differences across programs resided in the packaging of the coursework as it applied to the specialization being earned, rather than in major differences in the content and quality of programs. In addition, program hours of instruction and credit hours are not decisive indicators of the quality or academic rigour of the learning in the programs evaluated. Human services programs, it appeared, had *much more in common with one another* than appeared

on the face of things with their different course codes and numbering systems. *Differences* that might have been taken to be evidence of variation in relative academic worth showed themselves to be *few and far between*.

PILOT EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AT RED DEER COLLEGE, 2001–2002

For the block credit transfer evaluation of programs and courses, Red Deer College provided the comparator. Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Medicine Hat all had strong university transfers in the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) *Alberta Transfer Guide* for some of their human services related programs as well as already established laddering between each college and Athabasca University.

When college students completed only part of a credential, the practice had been to award *zero* block credit transfer. Instead, individual courses would be identified for transfer through ACAT. This practice put most human services-related college courses at a serious disadvantage, often because their program might have no entries in the *Alberta Transfer Guide* at all. The net effect left the unwarranted impression that none of the learning in these programs was equivalent to university level learning. The perception was not based on evidence, however.

For example, early childhood education and teacher assistant programs equated the perception of academic unworthiness because of the complete absence of individual course transfers from the *Alberta Transfer Guide* at that time (2000). This learning did not receive any university transfer; any block credit transfer that was available appeared to take the form of a “gift,” rather than having been earned.

This practice needed to be revisited because colleges often taught the same content under different program codes; for example, developmental psychology, sociology of the family, and interpersonal communications. Courses with very similar content, and perhaps the same instructor, would receive university transfer in some programs but not in others.

By looking at all of the programs at the same college at the same time, more reliable and consistent results were produced in the context of the overall programming offered at each college.

Several diploma programs at Red Deer College had a considerable number of individual courses that received university transfer in traditional disciplines such as psychology, sociology, English, and communications. Red Deer College had established a university transfer program in psychology with the University of Calgary, and had put in place a strong presence for university transfer classes through the *Alberta Transfer Guide*. For example, university transfers for individual courses in psychology and recreation administration had first been accepted for transfer in the mid-1990s.

The programs assessed from Red Deer College were early childhood development, recreation administration, rehabilitation services, teacher assistant, and social work.

Recreation administration already had strong and consistent transfers to the other three main universities in Alberta: the University of Alberta, Lethbridge University and the University of Calgary as well as Augustana University College, King’s University College, and Concordia University College, making assessment of this program straightforward, despite the fact that Athabasca University does not have a recreation program of any kind. Recreation administration is no longer offered by the college, but graduates who earned the credential continue to have several degree completion opportunities in Alberta and elsewhere.

Recreation administration provides an example of a credential that is tangential to the human services. No distance education opportunities for degree completion existed in Canada. Of the 12 additional courses that had not been evaluated before in the rehabilitation services program, two received transfer credit in the human services, three others received transfer at the 300-level in psychology in addition to *Educational Psychology 351: Introduction to Exceptional Children, Communication 329*, an unassigned 3-credit biology course at the 200-level, and a junior level unassigned 3-credit course in organizational behaviour.

TABLE 2: RED DEER COLLEGE RECREATION ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM: COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER EQUIVALENCIES

OCTOBER 3, 2002

RDC COURSE	AU COURSE EQUIVALENCY	COMMENTS
Year One		Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 220 (3) (RTDC 220)	HSRV 1XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 221 (4) (RTDC 221)	HSRV 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 233 (3) (RTDC 233)	HSRV 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
SOCI 260 (3)	SOCI 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ENGL 219 (3)	ENG 211 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 332 (3) (RTDC 332)	HSRV 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 321 (3) (RTDC 321)	HSRV 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
KNSS 250 (3)	ADMN2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
PSYC 260 (3)	PSYC 289 (3)	Possible prep for Phil 252
PHIL Option		
Year Two		Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 323 (3) (RTDC 323)	PSYC 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 325 (3) (RTDC 325)	HSRV 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 330 (3) (RTDC 330)	HADM 315 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 320 (3) (RTDC 320)	HSRV 3XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 333 (3) (RTDC 333)	HSRV 3XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
RLS 263 (3) (RTDC 263)	HSRV 2XX (3)	
Option 1		Common transfers: SOCI3xx, PSYC3xx, BUS303, ACCT202, STATS, KNSS209, SOCI310, BUS306, GEOG2xx, KNSS260, ECON202, Poli2xx. -Must be University Transfer Options.
Option 2		
Option 3		
Option 4		
OPTIONS	AU Courses	(Most popular only)
ACCT 202	ACCT 253 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
BUS 303	ORGB 3XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
BUS 306	MGSC 301 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECON 202	ECON 248 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
KNSS 260	APST 2XX (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
SOCI 310		No outline received for review

NOT TO TAKES: ENGL 211, PSYC 289

Because the program codes for, say, the early childhood development and teacher assistant programs had no university transfer recorded in the *Alberta Transfer Guide, 2001–2002*, students looking to transfer their post-secondary credential or courses to other institutions would find their learning likely to remain unrecognized in the case of teacher assistants, and recognized, but severely discounted, for diploma holders seeking to complete a BEd or BA degree. Applicants seeking transfer credit for unrecognized courses would be required to submit the course outline for evaluation. Additional information concerning assignments and formal evaluation, as well as the educational qualifications of the instructor, were sometimes also sought. The burden of proving the course was at a university level, and met all requirements, fell to the individual students. Many students who completed courses some time ago could not produce the level of documentation required. The process proved time consuming and often failed to produce the desired result due to incomplete information rather than actual content.

Hypothesis: Block credit transfer to recognize credentials earned, administered consistently, produces more reliable, high-quality and rigorous results than that produced by course-by-course transfer methodology in human services education.

Furthermore, a holistic approach, such as block credit transfer provides, would treat students with similar credentials across jurisdictions and over time more equitably than taking each credential apart to identify its component parts.

Prior to the *Pathways* project, learners who had earned an early childhood development diploma could receive 60 credits toward the Bachelor of Professional Arts – Human Services or “up to 24 units of course weight toward the BEd—Elementary at the University of Alberta.” In 2002–2003 this award increased to “up to 27 units of course weight toward the Bachelor of Education . . . Elementary at the University of Alberta” (*Alberta Transfer Guide, 2002–2003*, 293). Graduates of the rehabilitation services diploma would be considered for “entrance into the University of Calgary’s 10 full course equivalent Bachelor of Community Rehabilitation program, and holders of the Social Work Diploma will receive block credit in 5 unassigned Social Work half courses and 5 required Social Work half courses, and up to 10 (of the 15 required) general half courses” (*Alberta Transfer Guide, 2001–2002*, 287). In general, local college graduates might have one or two opportunities to transfer to a university program, but these localized transfers assumed low mobility for college graduates. College graduates in the human services had few good choices or none at all. None of them offered one-to-one transfer for completion of years of post-secondary study. The human services major at Athabasca University had been mandated to offer a transparent educational opportunity, and was the first liberal arts degree program within Alberta to do so in human services education.

Diploma holders from other jurisdictions, or other parts of the province, might be treated very differently and on a case by case basis if their college did not have an agreement with the receiving program. As an example, in 1995, the British Columbia Child and Youth Care Education Consortium developed a Canada wide block transfer arrangement for human service certificates and diplomas upon admission to the three degree-granting institutions in that province: University of Victoria, Malaspina University College, and the University College of the Fraser Valley. These graduates are eligible for block credit of 15 units/30 credits for a certificate or 30 units/60 credits for a diploma. They must complete the credential with an overall GPA of “B” (V. Ziegler, personal communication, February 10, 2006). Using this

transfer process, all graduates of various early childhood diploma programs from accredited institutions in Alberta, and elsewhere will be treated similarly in their transcript assessment based on these guidelines.

Each university program that accepts college diploma graduates operates according to its own rules. It is less clear how students whose credential was earned in Nova Scotia or Nunavut, or a credential earned five to twenty years ago, can expect to be treated. The institution that granted the credential, the program in which it was earned, and the number of years that have passed since it was earned, can all come into play to produce the result. Students who have earned the same credential in the same or different jurisdictions, at the same or different recognized institutions of post-secondary education, or in the same or different program at the same or different times, can receive widely differing amounts of transfer credit, ranging from zero to sixty credits. Incomplete coverage of transfer arrangements for applicants from other jurisdictions, as well as lack of transparency to prospective applicants concerning what they can reasonably anticipate receiving as block credit transfer based on the similarity of their credential to other credentials that *do* receive the maximum award of transfer credit are some of the factors. All contribute to uncertainty from the students' perspective. Added uncertainty among adult learners, many of whom initially lack confidence about their ability to make a successful transition to learning at the university level, requires them to take risks that could be lessened if diploma to degree completion opportunities were arranged more systematically and transparently. The expectation that learners need first be able to navigate an unwieldy mismatched set of post-secondary educational opportunities to identify the best fit raises barriers to further education that are *unnecessary* and *avoidable* with greater coordination of human services education across the country.

Following the *Pathways* project, early childhood development and teacher assistant diplomas from Red Deer had entries in the *Alberta Transfer Guide* (2005–2006) identifying individual course transfers. Once reported by the *Alberta Transfer Guide*, the transfers are more likely to be recognized by other post-secondary educational institutions in Alberta and elsewhere.

Twenty courses were assessed in the early childhood development diploma program. Seven courses earned unassigned junior level credit, one of them at the preparatory (i.e., non-university level), four half courses in applied studies, one unassigned communications course at the 200-level, two senior-level sociology half-courses, including *Sociology 316: Sociology of Families*, one junior-level communications course, one 300-level English course and one preparatory course in Indigenous studies.



**TABLE 3: RED DEER COLLEGE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:
COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER EQUIVALENCIES**

OCTOBER 3, 2002

RDC COURSE	AU COURSE EQUIVALENCY	Comments
Year One		
COMM 150 or COMM 254	ENGL 1xx (3); ADMN 233 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 201	HSRV 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 210	APST 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 211/216	PSYC 323 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 212	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 213	COMM 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 215	ENGL 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 217	PSYC 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 218	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 220	APST 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
Year Two		
ECD 305	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 307	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 308	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 309	NTST 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 310	APST 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 313	COMM 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 314	SOCI 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 317	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 320	APST 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 321	SOCI 316 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 323	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
ECD 325	PSYC 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>

In the case of the teacher assistant program, the results reported in the *Alberta Transfer Guide* produced junior-level university transfer and, in some cases, course equivalents to unassigned credit in human services, psychology and educational psychology, communications, and applied studies. Seven courses earned junior level university transfer and one combination of two courses earned credit for *Psychology 323: Developmental Psychology*.

Five of the 13 courses assessed earned 1XX credit, which was used in the project to reflect learning that would require additional documentation before being considered for university transfer at the 200-level that is equivalent most often to the one and two hundred level at other universities.

**TABLE 4: RED DEER COLLEGE TEACHER ASSISTANT PROGRAM (10 MONTH):
COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER EQUIVALENCIES**

OCTOBER 3, 2002

RDC COURSE	AU COURSE EQUIVALENCY	COMMENTS
COMM 150	ENGL 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
CMPT 261	COMP 200 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
CMPT 170	CMIS 245 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 111	HSRV 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 114/181	APST 1xx (6)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 116	COMM 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 160	HSRV 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 161	HSRV 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
Option 1		
Option 2		
Option 3		
Option 4		

TA PROGRAM OPTIONS	AU COURSE EQUIVALENCY	COMMENTS
TA 151/152	EDPY 351 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 153	PSYC 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 154	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 156	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 157	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 158	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 159	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 190	HSRV 1xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
TA 191		No course outline received to review.
TA 195		Need more information about which chapters are covered in the text and more detail about the paper.

Preparatory credit at the 1XX level is expected to be found, where it exists at all, in the first semester transition from high school to post secondary studies. This is because the curriculum is sequenced and semestered in human services programs at the college level. If a course syllabus is evaluated at a 1XX level in the final term of a four semester program, for example, the presentation of the learning may be weak rather than there being any shortfall in the content of the learning. College-level learning in the human services has been designed to be cumulative and summative. Analyzing program content in its entirety, rather than isolating the content of each course without its prerequisites and co-requisites further disadvantages human services and related courses assessed in isolation from the program layout.

This shortcoming is one reason why block credit transfer complements the transfer of individual courses rather than being a second-best alternative to course-by-course transfer. In recent years, when university transfer has become more common, most college programs were designed without university transfer being a major consideration. Many program outcomes were routinely embedded across the curriculum, made feasible due to the cohort-based delivery and sequencing of curriculum content. Because many programs in the arts and sciences do not as yet make use of learning outcomes in individual courses and degree completion, demonstrating equivalent learning outcomes between instruction at colleges and universities remain difficult in the best of circumstances. In the case of the human services, the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary content of this discipline further complicates such evaluations, making program-based assessment of content a fairer form of assessment for the student than can be achieved by exclusively discipline-based evaluations that do not offer human services themselves, and often do not equate the learning to more traditional disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and policy studies. While it is understandable that traditional universities are not compelled to recognize disciplines they do not instruct, the losers are the thousands of college graduates in the human services field, most of whom are

**TABLE 5: RED DEER COLLEGE REHABILITATION PRACTITIONER PROGRAM:
COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER EQUIVALENCIES**

OCTOBER 3, 2002

RDC COURSE	AU COURSE EQUIVALENCY	COMMENTS
REHB 201	EDPY 351 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 202	COMM 243 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 203	PSYC 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 204	APST 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 205	HSRV 2xx (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 207	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 208	APST 2xx (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 213	COMM 329 (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 214	PSYC 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 217	PSYC 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
COMM 254	ADMN 233 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
YEAR TWO		
PSYC 260	PSYC 289 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 309	SOCI 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 311	APST 2xx (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 312	APST 2xx (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 313	PSYC 3xx (3)*	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 315	APST 235 (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 317	PSYC 3xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 319	BIOL 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 321	HSRV 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 322	ORGB 2xx (3)	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>
REHB 324	HSRV 4xx	Added to <i>Alberta Transfer Guide</i>

women, and many of whom lack the time, resources, and motivation to repeat the first two years of post-secondary study at a university. The issues raised for this subpopulation of adult learners are the very ones pointed out in *Beyond Rhetoric*; those are, access, participation, and equity.

Transfers for university-level courses in the rehabilitation services diploma showcase the possibility that some human services diploma programs earn university transfer on a course-by-course basis as well as on the basis of block credit transfer. This occurs most often in fields, such as rehabilitation, that have a history of strong linkages to recognized professional fields already taught in the university setting. Human services fields, such as early childhood, educational assistant (formerly teacher assistant) and the many allied health fields that have close linkages to the human services, do not enjoy the same high level of recognition through existing transfer arrangements. The range of opportunities for continuing higher education varies markedly across human services education programs.

The assessment of the social work program at Red Deer College was delayed due to uncertainty as to whether the evaluation would be of benefit to learners who already had a degree completion route through the Bachelor of Social Work offered by the University of Calgary. This work was eventually completed, but has not yet been reported in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*. The assessment of programs at Red Deer College indicates that unassessed credentials remained a considerable disadvantage because of the perception that the content of these programs remained vocational and was generally considered as being unworthy of transfer regardless of the fact that no effort was put into providing evidence to support the presumption. Review of the course outlines from Red Deer indicated that the perception was unfounded in the case of the college's human services related programs.

Employment standards used for instructors require most permanent instructors to have masters degrees or to be working toward that credential. Moreover, some faculty members have doctorates, with others in the process of earning them. The educational qualifications required at Red Deer College are in line with trends nationally. It should be noted too that smaller colleges, especially those serving rural and remote locations, may be somewhat slower to increase the educational levels of their faculty, for reasons associated with their mandates and recruitment patterns. It cannot be concluded, however, that this results in poorer quality programs or graduates. Whitehorse has the highest ratio of master's prepared individuals in Canada, giving Yukon College a decided edge in the recruitment and retention of faculty. The quality of program content across institutions and jurisdictions in human services education, delivered at participating colleges, did not vary in any discernible way based on the formal qualifications of the course instructors.

In all cases, two-year diploma programs at Red Deer College earned a full two years' of individual course transfers in the amount of the block award from Athabasca University. Based on the work on course-by-course transfer completed for Red Deer College, similar amounts and levels of the block credit transfer were proposed for human services and related programs taught at all recognized colleges in Alberta. Block credit transfer could be extended to other programs in Alberta on the same basis. Because some of this work involved a good deal of paperwork, it would have been unmanageable to do further comparisons on block credit and course-by-course without additional resources. Equitable treatment of adult learners, most of whom are older women working in underpaid fields, made the answer to the questions more pressing.

Further work of this kind was needed to demonstrate whether or not this one college and its programs were unique. The review was conducted program by program with the assessment being done by co-team leaders who hold doctoral degrees, one who has twenty years experience in the college and university system in Ontario and the other who is the founder of the human services program at Athabasca University. The review was more systematic than any other such work of its kind completed in this field. Other institutions of higher education can draw on this groundwork when revisiting the treatment of human services and related college credentials, when reviewing their own practices in credential recognition and course-by-course transfers that contribute to the integrity and rigour of human services education.

Revisiting this listing periodically would be useful because college programs change names fairly often. New programs have been created or renamed and others have been suspended. For example, the recreation administration program at Red Deer College has been wound down. At the same time, graduates holding that credential will continue to seek out opportunities to continue their education. The teacher assistant and rehabilitation services programs have been renamed as “educational assistant” and “disability and community studies.” The early childhood programs are also in the process of changing their names to “early learning and child care” (ELCC) beginning in the 2006–07 academic year. These changes will be reflected in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*. The existence of a body that collects and verifies this information enables changes to occur with complete continuity with all pre-existing arrangements, and no inconvenience to alumni or current students. Graduates in jurisdictions where this service is not provided are at substantially greater risk of having their credential devalued in the future.

SIMILARITY OF HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS DELIVERED IN ALBERTA

Because human services and related programs often shared course content under different course codes and numbers across several human services-related college programs at the same college, a consistent pattern began to emerge. In all, there were about 75 human services-related programs to be assessed for block credit transfer in Alberta and all of them appeared to have comparable content, learning outcomes, and hours of instruction. What varied was the packaging of the content, the amounts of college credit awarded and how the content was “chunked.” Treating likes alike would be the best way to ensure consistency and even-handedness. This approach received additional support through the institutional framework that required all colleges to meet the same standards as regulated by the government’s oversight of post-secondary education in Alberta and by program councils that vetted each other’s delivery of the common program standards. Unless there were compelling reasons to single out a program for different treatment, the rule that developed was to treat likes alike. This approach becomes especially important for some small colleges that may not have the personnel to report and document their courses and programs with the same degree of consistency as the larger and better resourced colleges. The idea of equity among post-secondary educational providers subsumes notions about fairness to learners and the role of government in ensuring that standards exist, are upheld, and treat learners equitably regardless of where they live in Canada, how long ago their credential was earned, or which institution of post-secondary education is reviewing it for transfer.

APPLICATION FOR HRDC FUNDING

Dr. Arscott and Dr. Crowther submitted a proposal to HRDC in 2001 that sought to extend the model developed with Red Deer College and applied across colleges in Alberta to six to eight other colleges across the country to ascertain whether the Alberta findings were generalizable nation wide.

1.3 PAN-CANADIAN PATHWAYS PROJECT

This project was funded by the Learning Initiatives Program of HRDC and sponsored by Athabasca University (2002 –March 31, 2003). The project facilitated the establishment of a more consistent block and course transfer arrangement between colleges and Athabasca University by working with partnering programs to establish rigorous processes and procedures that, applied consistently, would produce comparable results.

Its purposes included further developing a human services model for block credit transfer, course transfer, and PLAR in order to produce new, innovative, and flexible pathways to undergraduate degree completion for practitioners in the human services field and communicating project findings to partners and university departments.

Its sub-objectives involved

- significantly reducing barriers that currently thwart adult learners' capacity to build on their college diplomas and work experience.
- establishing the profile of two-year college diplomas that contained appropriate junior-level university credits.
- awarding academic credit for learnings drawn from work and other related experiences as part of earning an undergraduate university degree.
- increasing timely access to undergraduate degree completion opportunities for holders of human services-related college credentials, regardless of the province or territory in which the college credential was earned, where the student currently resides, how long ago the education was completed, or level of labour market participation.
- connecting the assessment and recognition of academic credit drawn from work and other experiential learning to the institutional infrastructure of block credit transfer, and course-by-course transfer.
- enhancing mobility in the post-secondary education system across Canada.
- developing a model for a seamless national learning system to address the needs of adult learners.

In summary, the project aimed to

- produce new, innovative, and flexible pathways to undergraduate degree completion.
- reduce barriers for adult learners to continue post diploma education.
- establish PLAR as an integral part of earning an undergraduate degree.
- develop a model for a seamless national learning system.
- increase timely access to undergraduate degree completion.
- award academic credit in diverse modes.
- enhance mobility for degree completion.
- meet the needs of adult learners.



The research team initially developed a profile of human services programs delivered by recognized colleges. A baseline study provided an overview of information gathered from colleges. Information was also gathered concerning enrolments in human services programs at each of the colleges in relation to total enrolments, excluding vocational and trades programs, and information about the programs was sorted according to their frequency. The net result was a snapshot of human services education at the colleges in 2002, the program names, and the number of the various human services programs using the same or similar names offered at the colleges.

Seventy-two colleges across Canada, including the territories, offered human services and human services-related programs in which the language of instruction was English. English-language programs offered in Quebec were not included in the project.

The baseline study used information drawn from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) Web site and included information from colleges and university colleges that offer human services related certificate and diploma programs. The study listed which institutions were linked to PLAR at their own institution at the time as well as indicating the program names, block credit transfers already in place with Athabasca University, and the status of work to be completed, in progress, or deferred to future activity. About one third of the nearly 500 programs had been assessed previously, if only for admission of individual students, before the project began. By the end of the year-long project, another one third had been assessed by program, in depth, at about half the colleges across Canada. Because the results were similar and consistent, the final one third were extrapolated from the two-thirds already known; each unassessed program was compared to similar programs in Alberta and to similar programs at colleges across the country.

The study also identified policies concerning PLAR and the transferability of credit earned through PLAR to other post-secondary educational institutions.

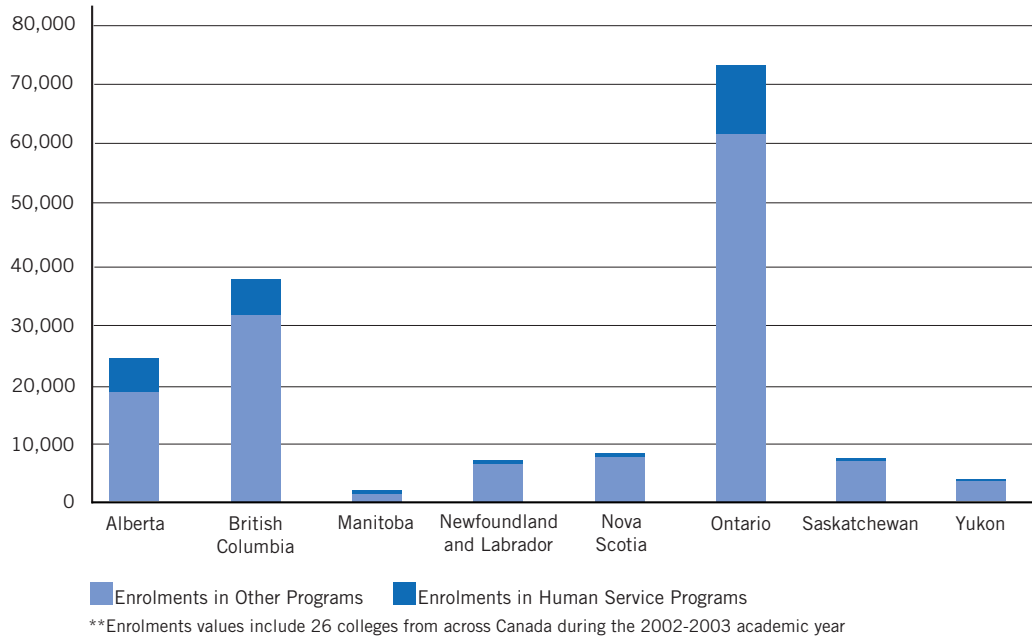
Enrolments in human services programs across the country were gathered by searching each college Web site. The college registrars were queried about the enrolment numbers at the colleges. Thirty of the 72 (42%) college registrars responded. The college enrolment figures do not include enrolment in the trades and technical areas, though they do include both part-time and full-time enrolment figures.

In order to identify relevant programs within the human services faculty for each college, the following programs were listed (Program names may differ across jurisdictions in Canada).

Human Services	Infant and Toddler Certificate
Early Childhood Education	Special Needs/Communicative Disorders
Child and Youth Development	Teacher Assistant
Family Childcare	Recreation and Leisure
Social Service Worker	Police Foundations
Development Service Worker	Law and Security & Administration
Personal Support Worker	Criminal Justice
Counselling Services – Addictions and Intervention	Pre-Service Firefighter
Community Development	Speech and Language Specialist
Therapeutic Assistance/Recreation	Fundraising

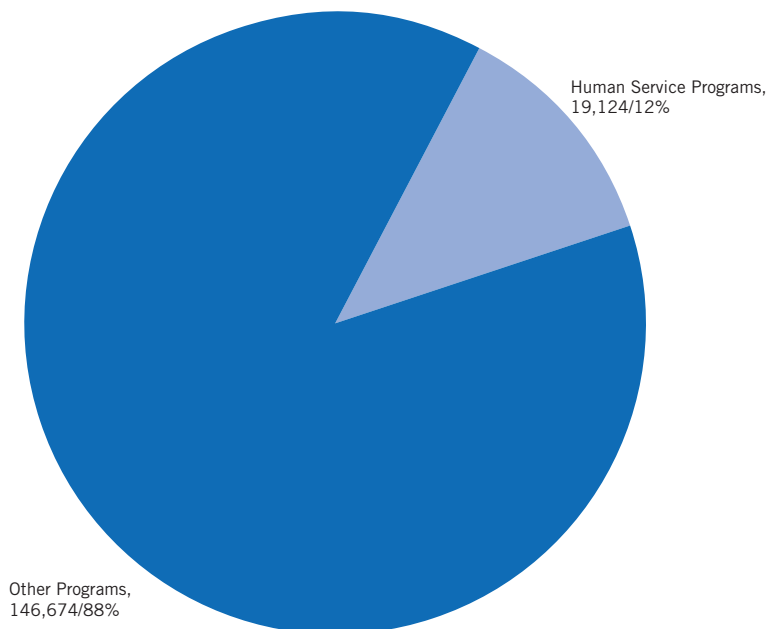
The percentage of human services programs within each college was calculated. Human services program enrolments make up approximately 12 per cent of academic college enrolments.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS BY PROVINCE



For additional information see the statistical profile of the colleges developed by team member Linda Ungarian (2003).

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS IN CANADA, 2002-2003



Because human services education is a multidisciplinary umbrella covering a range of program offerings that continues to evolve, these figures can only be regarded as preliminary. Producing reliable statistics in this educational area would be more suited to Statistics Canada and the CMEC than to a project of this kind. The purpose in attempting to gather some information was to highlight its importance in future efforts to quantify the numbers of students involved in human services education through programs delivered by colleges, and to note that we do not have readily available statistics on how those graduates filter through the labour force over time. Front-line workers in human services occupations tend to begin their employment across most of the National Occupational Classification System (NOCS) at the lower levels of pay. Among the better paying jobs, most require undergraduate degree completion that is not readily accessible to graduates who hold human services-related credentials earned at colleges.

The findings of the *Pan-Canadian Pathways* study were circulated to colleges, partners, and other educational authorities with a view to sharing this information with post-secondary educational bodies such as the CMEC.

The baseline study summarized the frequency of programs within provinces and territories across Canada. The programs were then grouped by jurisdiction under three headings:

- Foundational Programs
- Emerging Programs
- Specialties

Foundational programs are those that are included in all or nearly all jurisdictions despite variations in name, including, for example:

- early childhood
- child and youth
- social services
- developmental services/rehabilitation services
- teacher assistant/educational assistant

These programs made up ~ .7 of all participating programs.

Emerging programs, sometimes called allied health professions, are found in only some jurisdictions, usually where new needs have to be identified and include, for example:

- human services worker
- health care aide
- home support worker

These programs made up ~.2 of all participating programs.

Specialty programs are known by a variety of names and are usually found in few jurisdictions. These tend to exist apart from foundational programs and may be either short-term in duration or highly specialized. They include such professions as:

- community wellness worker
- native counsellor
- pre-service firefighter
- hearing aid practitioner

These programs made up ~.1 of all participating programs.

Of the 432 programs identified, approximately 300 were foundational, that is, offered widely at most colleges and quite evenly across jurisdictions. There were slightly fewer than 100 programs in the emerging grouping, and these varied more widely by college and jurisdiction than the foundational programs. There were also somewhat less than 50 human services related programs that tended to be “orphaned,” meaning they had no transfer arrangements of any kind even though they often shared program content and sometimes courses with programs that received somewhat better transfer arrangements. These different course codes and course numbers isolated the learning, negatively affecting the further education opportunities for graduates.

From the outset of the study, foundational programs tended to have the best transfer arrangements in place. However, even these arrangements often depended on local situations that graduates who had moved to other parts of the country frequently could not access. The unevenness of the existing transfer arrangements made it difficult for graduates of particular programs to know which universities and programs would treat their credential as two years of completed study at the post-secondary level, and which universities and which programs would accept the credential for lesser amounts or not at all. College credential holders in the human services faced great uncertainty in knowing how their earlier education would be treated if they sought to build on their college credential to ladder to an undergraduate degree. The *Pathways* project aimed to provide greater consistency and transparency in answer to the question, “What is my credential worth?”

The *Pan-Canadian Pathways* project produced additional transfer arrangements to facilitate undergraduate degree completion for practitioners. By initiating credit recognition, block credit transfer, individual course evaluations, and access to prior learning assessment and recognition in a labour sector that historically has had few educational opportunities for advancement, *Pathways* provided additional opportunities for practitioners to advance their careers, obtain better jobs, reduce their future need for income supports, and enhance labour mobility.

Pathways established partnerships with 30 more colleges than the project had projected, giving it a national scope. These partnerships continued to expand beyond the life of the project and provided the springboard to current activities in the area of PLAR. *Pathways* demonstrated the extent and intensity of unmet needs for adult learners who had earned their initial credentials some time ago. Often these learners had experienced difficulty receiving recognition for their learning when they sought to build on their college-level studies. The project created a level playing field for practitioners across the country and increased the opportunities for prospective students to gain admission to senior-level university studies as well as to graduate opportunities for successful graduates of the human services major.

Pathways contributed to national learning goals by providing a more seamless system of educational opportunity for adult practitioners, many of whom work full-time and would not be able to study full-time, especially if the required studies involved quitting their jobs, relocating their families, and taking on levels of debt that would not soon be repaid. This last consequence is exacerbated by the relatively low rates of pay and benefits typically earned by workers in these occupations.

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

PROJECTED, 2002	ACHIEVED, MARCH 31, 2003	ACHIEVED, AUGUST 31, 2005
6-8 Participating Colleges	37 Participating Colleges	35 Colleges received human services articulations (2 did not submit materials)
25 College Programs National Scope	120 College Programs in 7 provinces and 3 territories	Non-participating colleges in PEI, PQ, SK and NWT
30 new Block Credit Transfers	40 new block credit transfers completed	30 additional block credit transfers completed
500 Course Evaluations	500 (plus) ~1700 course evaluations completed	1130 course evaluations logged by Office of the Registry: 20% denied transfer; 18% other disciplines; 62% human services

SAMPLE OF COMPLETED RESULTS AS OF MARCH 31, 2003

- Red Deer College
 - Early Childhood Development, Teachers' Assistant, Rehabilitation Services, Recreation Administration
- Durham College
 - Early Childhood Education
- Grande Prairie Regional College
 - Early Childhood Development
- St. Clair College
 - Early Childhood Education Accelerated
- Fanshawe College
 - Law and Security Administration, Police Foundations, Developmental Services Worker, Social Services Worker
- Niagara College
 - Educational Assistant, Special Needs Support
- Sheridan College
 - Montessori Early Childhood Teacher Education, Early Childhood Education Intensive

UNMET NEEDS

- More than 100 college programs at various stages of processing their course evaluations
- Potential for at least 30 more block credit transfers
- Processing of more than 700 course evaluations remained incomplete for a long period after the funding ended due to short duration of project funding
- Late joiners: lack of resources and time to service in the current project
- Collaboration with university partners
- PLAR agreements and initiatives

Due to the snapshot-like quality of the work completed for a limited purpose, it would be advisable to revisit the study after five years to identify changes that have occurred over time and to enrich the baseline data by making use of additional refinements in the research tools. Although the researchers know there are a great deal more similarities in the program content and accreditation standards across the country, they cannot be certain that likes will be treated alike when graduates present their credentials to post-secondary educational institutions.

There was also an opportunity during the project to compare prior learning agreements across Canada using existing information on the Web. This work was not part of the *Pathways* study, but it did indicate that policy and practice are not as closely aligned as they would need to be for PLAR to achieve substantial results.

Recommendation 1:

Revisit the profile of human services education across Canada in co-operation with educational bodies such as ACCC, CMEC, and Statistics Canada.

SOME RESPONSES OF PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

- “In our catchment area Athabasca *is* our university” – President, Northern College
- “We want further to develop this relationship to serve our community better” – VP Academic, Portage College
- “We would like to sign this articulation with the Minister and media present; it will open doors for learners in New Brunswick” – Dean, New Brunswick Community College
- “Students will save time and money by not having to repeat work at the junior level” – Associate Dean, Sheridan College
- “Our graduates want to learn in their home communities” – Registrar, Medicine Hat College

FINDINGS

Most of the individual courses awarded through PLAR (60 credit block) were at the junior level (i.e., 200, entry level of university equivalency). The triangulation technique affirmed similarity to other human services programs at the same college in the human services faculty or division; similarity to other programs by the same name in the same jurisdiction meeting government-prescribed standards; and similarity to other programs using similar names across jurisdictions meeting comparable accreditation standards.

A 22-item checklist was developed to process individual course outlines to ensure that all course syllabi and program outlines were treated consistently by the project. Efforts to streamline practices resulted in internal changes in the processing of the work over a period of three years, indicating an impact well beyond the funded life of the project.

A short explanation of the principles used in the awarding of junior-level credit is in order. Benjamin Bloom’s name has become synonymous with a hierarchy of cognitive skills referred to by the shorthand of “Bloom’s taxonomy.” The label refers to work completed in 1956 by a group of educational psychologists who developed a classification system describing six levels of intellectual activity that play important functions in learning. At that time, testing required students to perform almost exclusively at the lowest possible level, that being the



recall of information. Recall or the capacity to recognize factual statements figure at the lowest level, with increasingly more complex behaviours moving to higher levels of mental abstraction: knowing, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. The use of certain verbs reflects these levels of cognition.

1. KNOWLEDGE: arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
2. COMPREHENSION: classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate
3. APPLICATION: apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write
4. ANALYSIS: analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test
5. SYNTHESIS: arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write
6. EVALUATION: appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, defend, estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate

The award of junior-level credit, equivalent to first and second year learning at the post-secondary level, emphasizes the first three levels of cognitive ability: knowledge, comprehension, and application. Among human services programs taught at colleges in Canada, the assessment of learning discerned from course outlines indicated that the first three levels of cognition were consistently present in the layout of the curriculum, the course content, and the methods of instruction and evaluation.

TABLE 7: APPLICATION OF BLOOM'S TAXONOMY TO COLLEGE COURSES

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY	EVIDENCE
Knowledge - recall of specific items	All of the course outlines evaluated required students to recall knowledge in formal testing situations.
Comprehension - recall involving defining or discussion of content	All course outlines provided evidence that students were tested on their comprehension of course materials using evaluation methods such as essay writing, group discussions and the evaluation of articles or other assigned resource materials.
Application - Demonstrated capacity to apply knowledge and comprehension in relevant contexts	All programs assessed involved the application of learning as evaluated by assignments completed during extensive field placements.

BEST PRACTICES

The existing practice had been to award a block of 60 credits made up of 33 junior and 27 senior credits. The assessments indicated that awarding of senior level credits was not justified in the case of the human services related college programs. Awards should ordinarily be made at the junior level. The block of 60 no longer includes any senior level credit except on the advice of the academic who is the program coordinator.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE PATHWAYS PROJECT

Drawn from assessments involving 37 colleges, 125 college programs, and nearly 1700 course outlines, the principal investigators concluded that: *human service-related programs are similar in content*: at the same college, in the same program across colleges in Alberta, across recognized colleges and other recognized post-secondary educational institutions awarding the same credential across Canada, and over time. (Professional associations renew the certification of practitioners working in the field, despite the fact that many of them earned their credential a long time ago.)

In summary, no significant differences in content or academic rigour were identified that would justify treating two-year college diploma holders in human services-related fields differently from one another.

- Where exceptions to this generalization appear to be justified, the credential should be assessed by academic experts.
- The basis for treating credentials the same or different should be their consistency or lack of consistency with the award of transfer credit to similar programs through block credit transfer.
- Like credentials should be treated alike, unless there are compelling academic reasons, as assessed by academic experts, for treating them as being less worthy, say, than those delivered in Alberta.

BEST PRACTICES

Where the credential has been earned a number of years ago, and the individuals have remained active in the field, there is no reason *not* to award the credential block credit transfer on the same basis as that received by recent graduates of the same program in the jurisdiction.

Where the credentials of individuals are regarded as equivalent by a professional association, there is no reason *not* to award the credential block credit transfer on the same basis as that received by recent graduates of the same program in the jurisdiction.

The fact that a credential may have been earned in a jurisdiction in Canada other than Alberta is not relevant when considering awards of a block of transfer credit for human services and human-services related credentials.

Credentials awarded elsewhere in Canada should be treated similarly to those awarded in Alberta, earning the same amount of block credit transfer for the same or equivalent credential. Certification by professional associations at the appropriate level in the home jurisdiction can be used as evidence of equivalence because, even though the length of educational program

may have changed over time, the certification process ensures currency; currency indicates qualification to practice by working in the field; and working in the field with professional certification indicates equivalency to current educational standards in human services fields, such as early childhood and child and youth.

Human services programs vary in the packaging of their content, the total hours of instruction, the recording of college credits, and the presentation of the learning in program layouts, and calendar and course syllabi. Variations in the presentation of program outcomes are not evidence of lack of rigour in the academic learning, however.

Recommendation 2:

Block credit transfer should be consistent in its treatment of similar credentials regardless of the jurisdiction in which they were earned so long as the practitioner remains current as indicated by certification or employment, or both.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

The *Pathways* project was successful for any number of reasons; a few are outlined here. First, it was built on previous success in meeting deliverables with partners. Second was the strength of the liaison with participating colleges. The focus group format provided initial face-to-face communication of the objectives of the project and call backs allowed for reporting on work completed and next steps in the development of the collaboration with partners.

Timing was the third reason for success. The project tapped a strongly-felt need for strategies and systems that will support learners regardless of where they live in Canada.

Fourth was team effort. The employees of the project were invited to participate in the research as members of a team. This sharing of responsibilities enabled all of the members, including those employed in support roles, to become active in the research.

Dissemination of results at conferences and through writing, unmet demand for the expertise of the *Gateways* team, and additional requests for consultation and services (e.g., Holland College, Prince Edward Island; Department of Education, Government of Nunavut; New Brunswick accreditation of childcare workers) are further indicators of the success of the project.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

A one-year certificate is half a two-year diploma.

The practice had been that students received block credit transfer for the completion of the credential. Prior to 2002, applicants who did not complete the credential usually received 0 transfer credit. However, many certificate programs at colleges comprise the first year of study of a two-year diploma, that is, half the learning award of 60 credits. Therefore, the first year of study toward a two-year diploma, or the completion of a one-year certificate program, is equivalent to one year of study at the post-secondary level of study, or 30 junior-level university credits.

OTHER LESSONS LEARNED

Course-by-course transfer disadvantages students from jurisdictions that do not have transfer guides.

British Columbia (includes Yukon College) and Alberta have transfer guides, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are working to develop transfer guides, and Ontario does not have a transfer guide.

Course-by-course transfers disadvantaged students whose programs had been designed before the prospect of future university transfer was in place. Course-by-course transfer applied to credentials earned some time ago may receive less transfer credit than those of recent graduates. Transcribing of credits is the reason for the diminution of credit transfer, not the merit of the learning. Adult learners who earned their initial credential some time ago continue to be more likely than recent graduates to encounter barriers to the seamless resumption of their education.

BEST PRACTICES

- Block credit transfer is a best practice that acknowledges learning in a holistic manner. (See Table 11).
- One year of full time study leading to a human services related certificate should receive 30 credits block credit transfer. This change occurred around 2001, and confirmed by the *Pathways* study, 2002–2003.
- Courses with highly similar content and perhaps the same instructor should receive university transfer in all of the programs in which the course content is taught. Different program codes and numbers, with similar content, should receive the same award.
- *By looking at all of the programs at the same college at the same time, more reliable and consistent results were produced.* Program-based evaluations provide more reliable and consistent results than are possible by evaluating course syllabi individually.

Recommendation 3:

Students who have not completed a human services or related credential in its entirety should receive transfer credit in direct proportion to the amount of the program successfully completed.

Transfer of a block of credit, based on the similarities among human services credentials, produces quality results unavailable through individual course transfers. Each method differs in how it represents the learning that occurs. The main contrasts point to differences between an incremental and holistic approach.

TABLE 8: COMPARISON OF COLLEGE LEVEL LEARNING IN THE HUMAN SERVICES, COURSE-BY-COURSE AND CREDENTIAL COMPLETION BASED ON BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

LEARNING	COURSE-BY COURSE	CREDENTIAL* COMPLETION
knowledge - recall of specific items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - course specific - discreet units of knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - program specific - requires integration of knowledge across courses
comprehension - recall involving defining or discussion of content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific units of knowledge described in course curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - units of knowledge integrated across many courses - some learning objectives embedded across several courses in the program of study
application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited application - few direct applications on a course-by-course basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - field practica require transfer and application of knowledge based on sequencing of courses by semester - program completion indicates all program outcomes adequately met

*Credential here means completion of a certificate or diploma at a recognized college or other recognized post-secondary educational institution equivalent to one or two years of full-time study.

The incremental approach identifies discreet units of learning, while the holistic approach takes into account additional learning that occurs across the program in human services education, including embedded learning and the academic value of practica or other placements in the field.

TABLE 9: SUMMARY TABLE - BARRIERS AND BEST PRACTICES IN HUMAN SERVICES EDUCATION DRAWN FROM THE PATHWAYS PROJECTS, 2002 - 2003

BARRIERS	BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human services college graduates systematically disadvantaged by absence of transfer arrangements using block credit transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentials recognized as awarded • No stale-dating for human services and related diplomas • No opening up of credentials awarded by other recognized post-secondary educational institutions
<p>Course-by-course transfer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounted post-secondary learning in human-services related specialties where outcomes had been embedded across several courses in a program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior consistency, reliability and rigour resulted from the implementation of block credit transfer • Consistent handling of program completion leading to credentials



BARRIERS <i>con't</i>	BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDED <i>con't</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discounted value of earned credential• Inequitable treatment of learners who have completed<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the same program,- the same program at different times- similar programs at different times awarded by recognized post-secondary educational institutions, and- similar programs in different provinces and territories<ul style="list-style-type: none">• as assessed by academic experts• Course-by-course transfer is time consuming and administratively costly, when done on an ad hoc basis• Need for academic experts to evaluate human services programs' to assess their academic rigour• Need to acknowledge expertise in human services education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proportionate treatment of incomplete credentials• Consistent criteria in place to support transcript evaluations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to acknowledge equivalency<ul style="list-style-type: none">- in terms of professional accreditation- in educational terms involving<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Years of study,• level of learning, and• amount of university-level learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team approach between registry and academic experts/faculty

From these characterizations of the two approaches, the researchers asked whether one or the other corresponded more closely to each semester and year of study at the post-secondary level. The results by jurisdiction were as follows.

TABLE 10: PATHWAYS BLOCK CREDIT AND COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFER TO DECEMBER 31, 2005

PROVINCE OR TERRITORY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING COLLEGES	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS REVIEWED	BLOCK CREDIT TRANSFERS COMPLETED	PROGRAMS ALSO ASSESSED ON COURSE-BY-COURSE BASIS
Alberta	5	17	17	16
British Columbia	1	1	1	0
Manitoba	1	3	3	3
New Brunswick	1	4	4	4
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	1	1	0
Northwest Territories*	1	--	--	--
Nova Scotia	1	11	11	10
Nunavut*	1	--	--	--
Ontario	22	88	74	60
Québec [^]	1	1	1	0
Saskatchewan*	1	--	--	--
Yukon Territory	1	4	4	4
ALL	37	130	116	97

*Circumstances at the colleges and in the project at the time did not allow colleges in these locations to be evaluated.

[^] Extending the study to Quebec is a desirable future activity.

SUMMARY OF THE PATHWAYS RESULTS

Thirty-four of 73 colleges offer educational credentials in the human services and human services related areas. Nine of 13 jurisdictions produced results in the project, including eight provinces and one territory, of which three were western, three central, two Atlantic, and one north of 60.

The expectation was that a one-year certificate would produce a block valued at 30 transfer credits, a three-semester program would produce a block of 45 transfer credits, a two-year diploma would produce a block of 60 transfer credits and a three-year child and youth program in Ontario would produce more than 60 credits. Seventy-two credits had earlier been settled on to represent the two-year diploma and the twelve credits in the core awarded at the 300-level in the human services discipline. In this program the final term of practica is not generally awarded transfer as part of the block to leave room for the completion of the coursework required by the degree regulations. The distribution of block credit transfer grouped consistently as anticipated.

COMPARISON OF TWO MODELS OF TRANSFER CREDIT APPLIED TO HUMAN SERVICES EDUCATION

TABLE 11: DISTRIBUTION OF BLOCK CREDIT TRANSFER AWARDS

	BLOCK SIZE				
	30	45	60	72	Other
ANTICIPATED NUMBER	13	3	92	6	2
ACTUAL NUMBER	17	3	84	6	6*

N=116

*The six programs in the 'other' category were atypical of most foundational programs: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder program at Lethbridge College was awarded 15 credits block transfer; Home Support Worker / Nursing Home Attendant, Yukon College, 24; Practical Nurse program, New Brunswick Community College, 51; Therapist Assistant Program at Medicine Hat College, 57; Massage Therapy, Sir Sandford Fleming, 75; and, Applied Child Studies, 90.

Based on the number of one-year certificates and two-year diplomas assessed for block credit transfer, the expectation was that about the same number of programs would receive a block award. This turned out to be the case in all but 16 out of 116 cases, six of which were atypical for reasons listed in the explanatory note at the bottom of the table. In general, programs by similar names received block awards in the same amounts. As a result, the various college programs across the country received comparable results that show that they were treated equitably. In consequence, recent graduates of foundational programs in particular can reasonably expect to receive the same amount of block credit transfer as their counterparts in other jurisdictions, with the possible exception of Quebec, which was not part of the study. Few programs in British Columbia were involved in the study; however, the existence of a transfer guide in that province, and the already well-known similarities between human services programs in British Columbia and Alberta, suggest there is no reason that the awards to those programs would deviate from those already completed. Block credit transfer from three human services education programs—chemical dependency, rehabilitation, and youth care—offered by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology had been completed in 2001 prior to the project, along with their corrections services program, assessed even earlier. All of these two-year diploma programs are also articulated to receive 60 credits of block credit transfer.

In the example of the Canadian Mothercraft Society of Toronto, Canada's oldest provider of childcare education in Canada (since 1931) and provider of an international program that is regarded as fully equivalent to all other diploma programs delivered by recognized colleges, a curious situation arises. Mothercraft received word in May 2003 that, on the basis of the only program it offers, that in early childhood, program graduates would be eligible to receive block transfer credit. When the award was reported to Mothercraft in 2005, the amount was half that of other diploma programs in Ontario, that is, a 30-credit block, not 60, despite the fact that this diploma program is recognized by Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. In the six months following the questioning of the amount of the award, there remained uncertainty as to what the award would be in the end. The policy issue that arises from this situation is: What is the meaning of equivalency? Moreover, who has the academic authority and what evidence is to be used in making that determination, and according to which criteria?

Recommendation 4:

In the field of human services education the meaning of equivalency needs to be determined in order to establish a baseline for its use in treating academic credentials reliably, consistently, and rigorously.

TABLE 12: DISTRIBUTION OF COURSE-BY-COURSE TRANSFERS

	NUMBER OF CREDITS AWARDED				
	30	45	60	72	Other
ANTICIPATED NUMBER	10	3	77	5	2*
ACTUAL NUMBER	8	3	25	3	58

N = 97 Compiled from project sources

* In addition to the three-year programs in Child and Youth Care in Ontario, two other programs could be anticipated to awards greater than 60: the Applied Child Studies degree offered by Mount Royal College in Calgary earned 90 credits and the Massage Therapy diploma offered by Sir Sanford Fleming in Peterborough earned 75.

The actual numbers appear slightly higher than they would if the assessment occurred today because credit awarded at the 100-level is permitted to be counted as part of block credit transfer to take account of embedded learning across the entire program. In the winter of 2006, the Council that oversees the Bachelor of Professional Arts program at Athabasca University decided to no longer accept any 100-level credit toward degree completion. The numbering system used by Athabasca University differs from that used by many universities in that it regards only transfers at the 200 level and above as equivalent in learning at the university level. For the purposes of the *Pan Canadian Gateways* project, the 100-level designation had been used by the co-team leaders to alert colleges to shortfalls in the presentation of the learning in particular courses that could be remedied through such things as indicating the extent and level of the learning resources, using varied methods of evaluation, requiring summative assignments in practica, and so on. The purpose of putting the evaluation this way was certainly not to produce the conclusion that learning within human services credentials was unworthy of consideration for inclusion in university transfer.

What becomes clear in the distribution of course-by-course transfers conducted for *Pathways* is that the incremental method of doing assessments produces no clear discernible patterns except to say that most programs would appear to produce less university level transfer than would be expected for the length of time in full-time study at recognized post-secondary institutions. Moreover, the use of this method in preference to block credit transfers contributes to the mistaken view that holders of these credentials ought to receive less than one-to-one transfer of their learning because some courses receive less than the 200-level designation needed to indicate transfer at the university level.

Comparison of the holistic model and the incremental model of transfer credit indicates that one provides results that are reliable, consistent, rigorous, and predictable. The other produces scattergun results that require each credential to be assessed individually; it does not recognize the evidence that the programs are, in fact, highly similar in terms of their program-based outcomes. The evidence from the *Pathways* project indicated there were no substantive differences in programs in human services education.

The incremental model suggests that there are differences that justify varying amounts of transfer credit being awarded for similar credentials, but the differences fall into no discernible pattern, but can be vetted to determine how much less than anticipated each credential should

be. Such conclusions are based on criteria that are not holistic, and the method cannot be used to anticipate how students with particular credentials in human services education can anticipate their previous education to be treated. Use of the block credit transfer to evaluate graduates from participating colleges in *Pathways*, and course-by-course for graduates for the other one- to two-thirds of programs that were not assessed as part of the project, constitutes a two-tier system of evaluation that may systematically devalue credentials that originate in British Columbia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, unless the *Pathways* findings are extended to these jurisdictions as well.

From the point of view of stakeholders, which includes academics whose professional integrity is implicated in the assessment of transcripts; current, new, and future college partners; evaluators in the Office of the Registrar who require clear rules to follow in completing transcript evaluations consistently and fairly; and prospective students who look for transparency in assessing their educational opportunities, the holistic model does more work, more reliably and consistently, producing more equitable treatment of human services education credential holders than the course-by-course model of evaluation produces.

MODEL FOR A FLEXIBLE ADULT LEARNING SYSTEM SUGGESTED BY PATHWAYS

An initially unforeseen result of the *Pathways* project was the emergence of a model of an improved learning system for adult practitioners working in the human services and related fields. Eligible individuals, 18 years and over, who have five or more years of work experience in human services or in a human services related field, would have access to participate in prior learning to attain college level credential that affirms their qualifications to practice in the field. These PLAR credential holders, along with credential holders who had earned their certificates and diplomas in more traditional programs of study, would have additional opportunities for block credit transfer, along with any individual course transfers, through a combination of:

- PLAR;
- block credit transfers awarded for college credentials;
- course taking, challenge for credit;
- learner supports, including career counselling, program advising, mentoring, and financial support.

Adopting this model would provide enhanced access, participation, and equity for adult learners. Many adult learners may be prepared to take incremental steps to further their education only if a sustainable and well-integrated process is available over the years to meet their goals. Others will not accede to being told they must repeat years of post-secondary study. They say, “Do you mean to tell me my credential is worthless?” Still others want clear assurances that they will be valued as adult learners whose learnings from experience will count toward achieving their education goals. Moreover, opportunities for participation in further education should be available in the community where the individual lives, regardless of geographic location or size of the community.

A summary of a pamphlet produced near the end of the project highlighted the main features of this preferred model.

A [MORE] SEAMLESS [I.E., FLEXIBLE] LEARNING SYSTEM FOR ADULT PRACTITIONERS WORKING IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

SIMPLIFIED MODEL

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Transfer credit} \\ + \\ \text{PLAR} \\ + \\ \text{Challenges for Credit} \\ + \\ \text{Learner Supports (e.g., advising, counselling, mentoring)} \\ + \\ \text{Courses} \\ = \\ \text{Degree} \end{array}$$

OUTCOMES

A flexible, high-quality learning system designed specifically to meet the needs of adult learners would be:

- Transparent
- Valid
- Reliable
- Easy to access
- Pan-Canadian

CAREER ADVANCEMENT POSSIBILITIES

- Promotions, pay raises
- More and better labour force participation
- Reduced reliance on employment and other income supports
- Labour mobility

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Post-degree education programs
- Graduate studies in
 - Counselling
 - Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine
 - Arts
 - Business Administration



IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING SYSTEMS

- Empowers the learner-citizen
- Grows social capital
 - Mobilizes knowledge
 - Strengthens social cohesion
 - Enhances mobility
- Values what Canadians know, value and can do
- Directs future learning to filling actual rather than perceived gaps in knowledge and skills
- Produces savings for
 - Individuals
 - Primarily
 - Time
 - Money
 - Institutions
 - Resources
 - Efficiency
 - Enhanced levels of achievement
 - Recruitment of different population of students
 - Systems
 - Cost
 - Competitiveness
 - More educated citizenry and workforce
 - Reduced reliance on long-term income supports
 - Reduced redundancy in training and associated costs

SAVINGS / COST EFFECTIVENESS?

The *Pan-Canadian Pathways* project did not attempt any specific cost-benefit analysis of such a flexible system of learning for adults. At present, statistics are not readily available to describe the size of the human services sector in the labour force. Anecdotally though, feedback from educators, practitioners, and professionals suggested to the researchers that substantial savings could accrue as a result of:

- Reduced redundancies in content
- Lower cost to the post-secondary system of public education
- Increased educational achievements of adult Canadians
- Better jobs, higher pay, benefits and pensions
- Reduced demand on Employment Insurance and income supports
- Less poverty for third age Canadians
- Reduced time to increase educational competencies of adult Canadians
- Decreased need for income supports

For a demand-side system of adult learning to be realized, it would be necessary to ensure the fit of the several components. Taking into account the life history and learning styles of diverse sub-populations of learners would address the most fundamental policy concerns: to provide educational opportunities that are accessible, participatory, and equitable. Recognition of credentials earned, as well as their professional equivalents as indicated through certification, would ensure that redundancies in the post-secondary system of education would be reduced in the human services area. Transfer of credit earned through various post-secondary institutions

can be effectively owned by the learner through the “banking of credits.” Recognition of experiential learning can become an integral part of the post-secondary system of education through a nation-wide provision of PLAR. Other demonstrations of learning could be achieved through challenge processes. Taking courses by traditional means—on-site, on-line, and in classrooms, as well as individualized independent self-study—will continue to be popular, especially among learners under the age of 25. However, adult learners demand more flexible methodologies for demonstrating learning that values what they already have achieved, know, value, and can do. The challenge for the post-secondary education system is to make space for them to have their learning appropriately valued, and gaps identified and filled in their own communities, without placing undue burdens on them to be other than they are: experienced and educable, and different from those under 25 in the demands they make on higher education.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: PLAR, THE NEXT PIECE

The OECD's *Beyond Rhetoric* notes that some countries have implemented methodologies and systems for the identification, assessment, and recognition of non-formal learning. The recognition of prior learning receives praise for its capacity to contribute to the success of adult learners

- as a *tool* for
 - realizing lifelong learning systems
 - motivating individual learners
 - individualizing career paths

- as a *support* that
 - avoids repetition of education already completed
 - shortens time required for additional education
 - emphasizes actual competencies rather than exclusively formal educational qualifications
 - supports flexible education, training, and learning throughout a person's life and career
 - enables individuals the better to afford education and training (Bjornavold, 2001; OECD, 80)

The *Pathways* project involved *a third* of all the human-services post-secondary college programs across Canada. While many more pathways to degree completion have been established than existed before, many more are needed before human services practitioners across Canada will have *equitable* access to appropriate educational opportunities. However, there are few supports in place to facilitate participation, access, and equity for human services practitioners. As a result, these practitioners continue to be educationally disadvantaged in the labour market. In addition, communities in the mid-North, the Territories, and the Atlantic region are particularly underserved. Human service practitioners who have not completed college credentials, and who may not have completed high school, are cumulatively disadvantaged because the pathways to credential completion may not be accessible at all for most of them. In addition to pathways to credential completion, ways for practitioners to enter the newly-created pathways are needed to make workplace training and job experience count toward learning that is accredited and recognized.

CHAPTER 2

THE PAN-CANADIAN GATEWAYS PROJECT

The purpose of the *Gateways* project has been to

- demonstrate that PLAR can be an integral part of post-secondary credential completion.
- model outcome-based educational program delivery in the human services sector.
- develop PLAR tools at an entry, diploma, advanced, and degree completion level.
- communicate the activities and results of the project to a range of employers, professional associations, colleges, and universities to broaden the use, acceptance and recognition of these awards.
- track and measure participants' success in achieving their educational and employment goals to evaluate the success of the project.

Its objectives were to

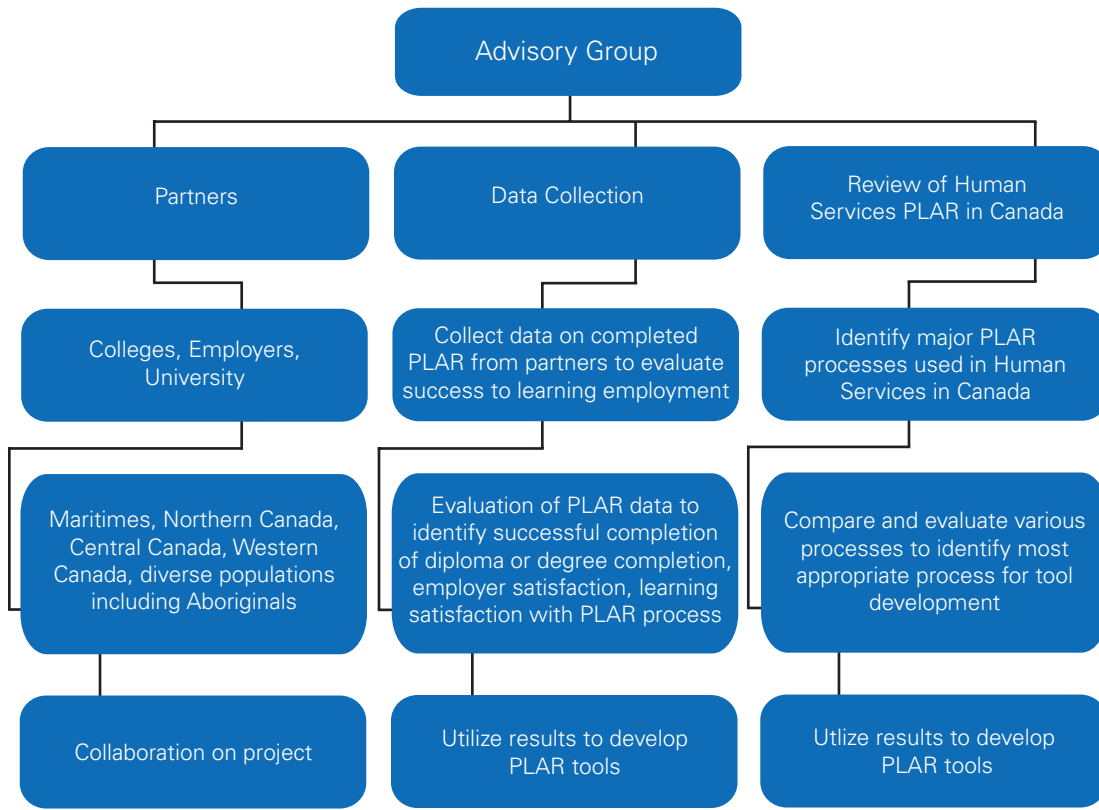
- partner with universities, government departments or agencies, professional association, and employers.
- develop tools in collaboration with *Gateways*' partners—colleges, universities, and employers.
- implement and evaluate these PLAR tools for their validity, reliability, effectiveness, and ease of use.
- track student success in program completion and employer satisfaction.
- measure PLAR outcomes qualitatively and quantitatively to demonstrate their academic effectiveness and savings.
- disseminate results by communicating with partners, employers, and educators in the human services field through the use of face-to-face meetings, conference presentations, publications, and a Web site.
- demonstrate the process of portfolio development through the participation of approximately 120 participants.

The *Gateways* project hypothesized that

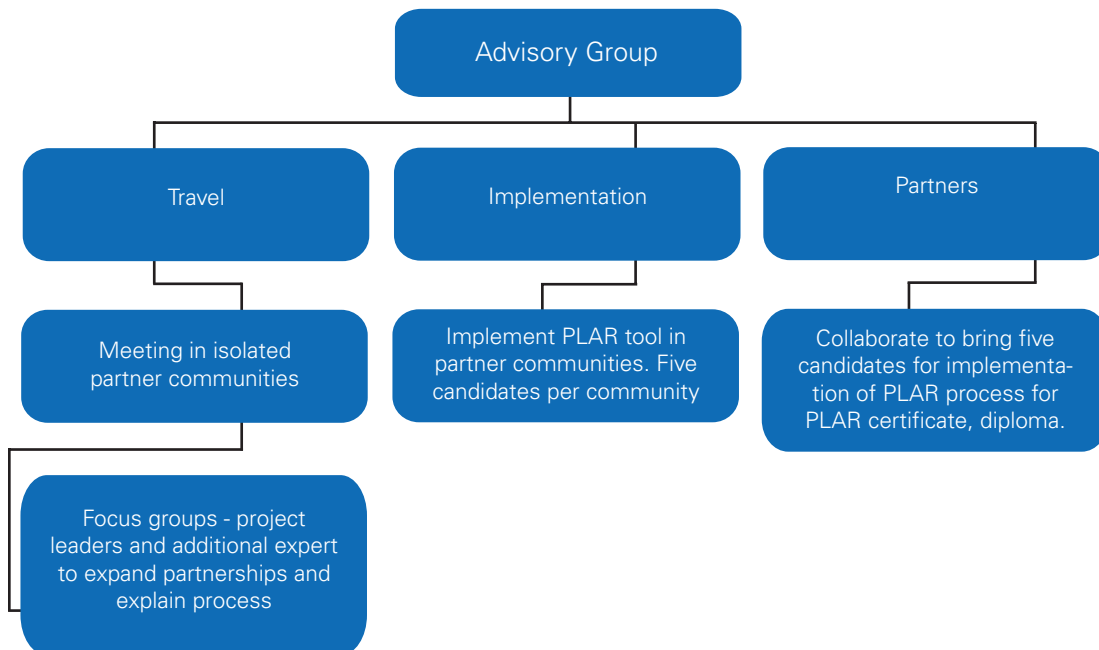
1. the inclusion of PLAR in credential completion produces a positive indicator of future success in education and employment in the human services.
2. underserved practitioners (individuals who presently have little opportunity to obtain formal education based on their lack of formal credentials) benefit from PLAR for career advancement.



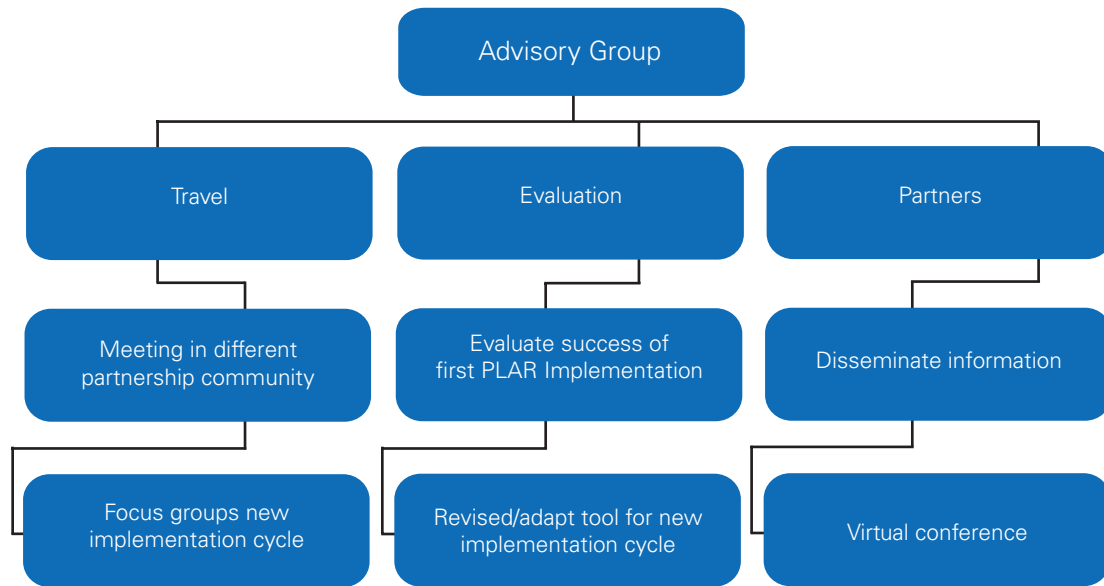
Year 1 Activities, 2003-2004



Year 2 Activities, 2004-2005



Year 3 Activities, 2005-2006



PREPARATION OF SKILL SETS

One of the first activities involved collaboration in the revision of the existing skill sets. A skill set describes the areas and levels of skills, knowledge, and values against which participants must compare and demonstrate their learnings. In this study, the demonstration activity involved the production of a portfolio that, when completed, is assessed for academic credit. It can be assessed either for entry to the program, indicating equivalency to learning at the diploma level when done with a college partner, or for advanced standing in the program when submitted to the university.

The human services skill set had initially been developed in 2000. About a dozen individuals had used it to complete portfolios and have them assessed. The earlier skill set clearly identified six areas of learning relevant to the outcomes of the program, and these learning areas have remained as before.

1. Interpersonal Communications
2. Relates Practice to Theory
3. Uses Critical Perspectives
4. Familiarity and Understanding of the Human Services Sector
5. Professionalism
6. Demonstration of Success as Human Services Educator

Individuals who had used it previously identified the skill set's main weaknesses as repetition of similar items, use of specialized vocabulary that was not readily understood and that itself posed a barrier to success, and excessive requirements to demonstrate learnings (i.e., 32 items at five levels of difficulty for a total of 160 separate demonstrations).

At an initial workshop, Paul Zakos led sessions that reviewed PLAR principles, strengths and weaknesses of the existing skill set, and strategies for improving it. A team of experts was then established including:

- the co-team leaders, Drs. Arscott and Crowther;
- Rose Marie Reid of the Portfolio Development Centre;
- Joan Fraser, Director of the Centre for Learning Accreditation at Athabasca University;
- Lisa Faingold, of the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society; and
- Margot Young, communications coordinator of the project.

2.1 REVISED HUMAN SERVICES SKILL SET

A series of meetings and revisions produced the human services skill set that is reproduced in Appendix 1: Criteria Table for Human Services, toward the end of this document.

Once the skill set had been revised, it was implemented first with pilot groups and then with the main body of learners. The preferred model would have been to have participants enrol in a senior-level course adapted for this research purpose to provide mentoring and coaching in the form of tutoring in a pre-existing, independent study course in project design, the purpose of which would be to learn by doing. Students would be introduced to the principles of prior learning assessment through the production of their own portfolios. As a result of being guided through the process, they would gain the skills, knowledge, and resources to reflect critically on prior learning to provide an assessment of its benefits and drawbacks. These reflections could then be fed back into the research of the project to assist in the production of its results as well as recommendations for future improvements. Participants would also learn some theory that is relevant to human services-adult learning theory and PLA theory.

A junior-level course in portfolio development, *Psychology 205: Prior Learning Assessment and Portfolio Development*, already existed, at the time that the project was developed. The few students who had taken *Psychology 205* were soon outnumbered by students in the human services program who were seeking more specialized assistance that would facilitate their understanding of their major. They sought an opportunity to work in a concentrated way to address the knowledge, skills, and values described in the *Gateways* skill set that seemed to reflect so clearly the desired learning outcomes for their program of study. There appeared to be a natural fit between the demands of students for support in this kind of activity and the opportunity to meet the demand through the *Gateways* project that would explore the viability of formalizing what was already being explored informally.

The co-team leaders' preferred model of having students enrol in a course, *Human Services 455* (specifically an independent individualized homestudy course in project design readily adaptable for use as a portfolio development option), to participate in the research, and also earn course credit along with a grade for their portfolio, attracted a number of participants to the project. The model had the additional benefit that the mentoring could be provided through already existing structures of student support rather than having to create short-term *ad hoc* structures for a limited purpose that would be lost at the end of the project. From the point of view of sustainability, it was desirable to develop an additional opportunity for learning that would continue after the project ended. A number of administrative glitches resulted in the closure of the *Human Services 455* portfolio option, which was the preferred option. Since the pre-existing PLAR model only offered a PLAR course at a junior level (*Psychology 205*), a third model was developed. One of the team leaders took on the task of mentoring students. In the end, neither the preferred model nor the pre-existing model of portfolio development was used. A comparison between the three processes was subsequently developed to clearly identify differences between the models and to compare the level of learning presented by each model.

Each model for the production of a portfolio to be used for PLAR has strengths and weaknesses that may suit some learners more than others. The view of the co-team leaders is that students who have already selected a program and who are attempting to demonstrate learning at a senior level should be able to have the demonstration of learning considered at the senior-level of study as well, since it is senior level cognitive skills that are demonstrated through individual self-directed learning. The mentoring process helps the learner strategize about how to proceed, but remains aloof from the development of the actual examples that only the learner can draw from their experience. The mentor has received training in PLAR but may be a subject matter expert in one or more human services fields. At a Fall Focus Workshop sponsored by the Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), Dr. Christine Wihak (2005) noted that discipline-based portfolio development may offer possibilities to provide additional supports to learners in fields as wide-ranging as the arts, business, nursing, and other professional fields. In the preferred model and the actual model, the mentors *were* also subject-matter experts in human services related fields, which tended to benefit the participants by providing highly-relevant feedback. From the participants' point of view, they universally felt that mentoring had been important to their success.

TABLE 13: COMPARISON OF THREE MODELS OF PLAR

EXISTING MODEL	PREFERRED MODEL	ACTUAL MODEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole credit-bearing option for PLAR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unavailable since October 2004 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer available
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2000–2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fewer than a half dozen students have completed <i>PSYC 205</i> for human services credit • Average award: approximately 15 credits out of a possible 30 credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2002–2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a dozen students completed <i>HSRV 455</i> • Average award: 24 out of a possible 30 credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To date (Jan. 2006), 13 students completed the actual model of portfolio production • Average award: approximately 27 out of a possible 30 credits and, at the college level, 48 out of a possible 60 credits

Mentoring, coaching, guiding, and tutoring, by whatever name it may be called, appears to produce better results, more often than when students undertook portfolio development without it. When the participant has access to someone who is both knowledgeable about PLAR, *and* expert in the subject-matter in which the learnings are to be demonstrated, the final product tended to follow a similar format with consistent and predictable results.

2.2 GATEWAYS PILOT GROUPS

Three pilot groups were initiated, one in Yukon at Yukon College and two in Ontario at Seneca College and at the Portfolio Development Centre (PDC) in Belleville, to implement the tools and processes developed, fine-tune the process, and gather initial feedback from the participants.

Each of the pilot groups brought unique expertise and concerns to the project. The experience and leadership of the PDC in Belleville had already assisted in the first revision to the portfolio skill set, and its long history in PLAR, which began with a social service worker program, provided a natural fit. The facilitator, Rose Marie Reid, also had experience in teaching in human services related programs at Loyalist College. In addition to working with an employer-sponsored group, Rose Marie led the production of portfolios through the PDC. Walter Burt, in the capacity of employer, recognized the need for further education of employees and supported recruitment of participants. He provided support for the portfolio development process early in the life of the project.

Diane Kashin led the pilot group at Seneca College. It explored the introduction of program-based PLAR in a college setting among college alumni. Diane had previously been involved in course-by-course PLAR at the college level. She also brought to bear strong linkages to professional accreditation through the provincial credentialing body, the AECEO. As a PhD candidate in early childhood education, she wanted to see whether program-based PLAR could be used to upgrade the educational qualifications of practitioners who had long records of service in the field. The final pilot group from Yukon focused on administrative matters from the perspective of a college interested in moving toward program-based PLAR with attention to the infrastructure that needed to be developed to ensure that students, staff, faculty, and employers would have a good experience with a minimum of administrative difficulties. Facilitation for this group was provided by Dr. Ingrid Crowther and Ann Gedrose, both in person and at a distance, using teleconferences, email, and telephone to support the participants.

Each group entered the pilot with different expectations.

- Yukon College – up to diploma completion (60 credits)
- Seneca College – up to 30, senior-level credits toward a human services degree
- Ontario, County of Hastings, Department of Social Services and PDC community group – up to 30, senior-level credits toward a human services degree awarded by Athabasca University and mentoring at the college or university level provided by the PDC.

2.2.1 BELLEVILLE EMPLOYER AND COMMUNITY FOCUS

The main purposes of this pilot involved

- recruiting and supporting two groups to develop portfolios for submission to Athabasca University to have credit assessed toward the Bachelor of Professional Arts Degree in Human Services.
- promoting the *Gateways* project.
- recruiting candidates for the Hastings/PDC groups and implementing the third-party assistance to individuals who chose to work independently.

- assisting in the development and refinement of PLA materials and processes, especially to make them more congruent with Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) principles (See Section 2.2.4).
- identifying and sharing effective learning resources.

The PDC recruited and supported two groups, both of which come from mixed backgrounds: Hastings County, as an employer sponsored five participants and the PDC group brought together 13 participants.

A focus group meeting was held at Maxwell College in Belleville, Ontario, on March 20, 2004. The twenty-four community members who attended expressed high interest in the *Gateways* project. The PDC agreed to provide third-party assistance to two groups of learners on a fee-for-service basis. The employer, Hastings County, selected the first group of five participants out of an initial pool of 50 employees of the Social Services Department who had initially expressed interest in participating. The second group was recruited on a first-come, first-served basis from the existing network of adult learners and service providers familiar with its history and activities in experiential learning. Seventy individuals attended orientation sessions, 25 individuals attended three information and recruitment sessions held in August. Eight others expressed interest, but were unable to attend. Five individuals attended a third orientation. Orientation sessions provided information about the *Gateways* project, the portfolio development process, and degree completion. Thirteen candidates applied to the project as part of the group. Three other candidates joined the project as part of the group but chose to complete their portfolios independently. One participant joined the early childhood diploma group being run by Yukon College. She participated at a distance.

Members of the employer sponsored and PDC groups met together over two months in late 2004 and continued with weekly meetings in 2005. In addition to group sessions, individual consultations provided support and feedback on documents. Feedback to participants occurred in person, by phone, and email. Group sessions developed candidates' understanding of PLA, portfolio development, the skill set, and other PLA requirements such as documentation and verification. Candidates completed resumés, chronological records, life history papers, and competency templates. They also gathered documentation that provided support for their learning claims. Members of the groups reviewed each other's work and gave feedback to assist each other through brainstorming.

The groups formulated goals that the members planned to achieve through their participation in the project. Goals reported by participants extend far beyond the immediate one of obtaining credit for prior learning. They spoke of changing jobs, advancing their education beyond degree completion to graduate work, and extending their plans for personal self-development to improve the quality of life for themselves, family members, and the community.

Feedback provided by the group indicated participants would not have been likely to have engaged in degree programs without the approach taken by the project and its services and supports. As well, it would have been extremely difficult for most of them to complete portfolios without group discussion, facilitated support, and instruction. Group interaction greatly enhanced motivation and confidence, they reported. Feedback from participants recommended that future activity should incorporate several of the ALFI "principles of effectiveness" discussed later in this report under Section 2.2.4.

In summary, the employer-sponsored and PDC groups are progressing well in the preparation of their portfolios for submission to Athabasca University to request credits for their prior



learning. About twenty assessments have been completed thus far, some at Yukon College and others through Athabasca University's Centre for Learning Accreditation. The confidence and learning that participants gain through the portfolio development process likely will increase their effectiveness, both in their studies following the PLA assessment and in their continued work with clients in human services.

2.2.2 SENECA COLLEGE, EARLY CHILDHOOD ALUMNI FOCUS

Early childhood education is a sector of the workforce that is still without the acceptance and recognition that it deserves given the importance of the work (Ogston, 1999). The sector is now considered critical to the well-being of a healthy and productive society with child care being recognized in policy-making as central to the provision of support to children and families. Yet low income levels, few benefits, lack of respect and recognition, as well as barriers to training, make it difficult to recruit and retain a skilled and sustainable workforce (Beach, Bertrand, Forer, Michal, & Tougas, 2004).

Research indicates that the most important ingredient in high-quality, early childhood education is the relationship between teacher and child. Since training remains the most salient variable in the provision of quality child care, the importance of practitioner education becomes crucial to any plan for policy change (Howes, Smith, & Galinsky, 1995; Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000). Increasing standards across the country have been recommended by research on the topic.

Currently in the consultation stage, the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services is suggesting that, in addition to accrediting training institutions, legislation be amended to increase the educational requirements for all staff working with children in early childhood settings to require completion of the diploma level as the entry to practice. The time frame suggested gives individuals up to five years to access additional training. Community colleges, especially in Ontario, will need to respond to this initiative if access for as yet untrained and insufficiently trained individuals is to increase (Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2005). Prior learning assessment and recognition is already identified as one possible strategy to increase accessibility to training and is one of seven strategies suggested by Doherty to supply the capacity for the training that would be needed.

The *Gateways* project leads by example in showing what form PLAR in early childhood education might reasonably be expected to take. Support has already been garnered in a number of separate jurisdictions. As well, the successful implementation of the model with alumni of Seneca College indicates that program-based PLAR for this large community of practitioners is closer to implementation than most policy-makers and educators know. Bringing this pilot to the attention of policy-makers and accreditation bodies such as the AECEO will be important to making PLAR more widely available, and available to more individuals, than has yet occurred. The Seneca pilot, delivered in co-operation with the early childhood education diploma program, ran in the manner described below.

Seneca professor in early childhood education, Diane Kashin, facilitated two groups of ECE graduates through the PLAR process, working exclusively with diploma graduates. This emphasis on alumni, whether of the college or other diploma programs, differed from the emphasis in the other pilots. The same PLAR methodology was used with a view to alumni gaining direct advanced standing toward degree completion and gap analysis and remediation. These diploma graduates sought support in their aspirations to gain recognition for their learnings from experience at a senior-level. They were all admitted to the human

services program at Athabasca University based on block transfer credit resulting from their diploma credential or equivalent.

Supporting experienced early childhood educators through the PLAR process appeared to be achievable to Diane, a PhD candidate working on her doctoral dissertation at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She had previous experience in course-based PLAR at the college within the ECE program, but program-based PLAR was new to her at the outset. She was to take two groups, a pilot group and a primary group, through the process. Seventeen individuals participated in the two groups, with ten likely to complete within the time frame of the project. Three have completed their portfolios and the rest are near completion. Some of these participants were hand selected; others came to the process through word of mouth. A correlation emerged between selection and attrition. Those who came to the process through word of mouth dropped out at a higher rate than those who were known to the facilitator.⁵ Among those who have withdrawn, several did so for reasons of timing. The project timeframe was too restrictive for some participants and others had personal circumstances that affected their decisions to withdraw from the project.

ACTIVITIES OF THE GROUPS

Five individuals participated in the pilot group at Seneca College, 12 in the primary group. The facilitator's role was identified as both a "mothering" and mentoring role. The mothering role was defined as providing reassurance, support, and reminding as needed. The mentoring role was defined as empowering the learners and providing information to, and inspiration for, the participants. The frustrations felt throughout involved the timing of the support materials—the manual came out after the groups were well into the process—and directions and guidance at times was confusing for the participants.

Groups communicated as needed, using group meetings, group mailings by email, phone calls, and meetings with individuals.

FEEDBACK FROM THE GROUPS

- Participants needed to be self-directed.
- Work has to be done individually; the forming of 'buddy' groups benefited those who chose to use them.
- Candidates appreciated due dates that were both somewhat firm and somewhat flexible.
- Candidates did not realize at the onset that portfolio development is a challenging task.

Mentoring requires more than clarification of tasks. The mentor also needs to provide reassurance, emotional support, and reminders. Many times, it involved more than Diane had time to give due to her other obligations and the time available, indicated by the stipend paid.

Diane concluded that the PLAR process involves the co-construction of knowledge. She reports having learned as much as the candidates did. There is an incredible wealth of knowledge gained through experience from informal and formal learning that each individual possesses, she concluded. The portfolio process helps to unearth that knowledge and recognize it. Helping others to reach their fullest potential is a gift that is only equalled by having the privilege of being privy to their stories of inspiration.

⁵ Because of the small number of individuals involved in the process, the correlation noted may not be statistically significant.

Here are some of the remarks of some of the participants.

Participant 1:

I finally sent my information in thanks to the great support I received from Margot, Ingrid, Jane, and yourself. I could not have done any of this without all of your support. Thank you!

Participant 2:

I was okay with the process of putting together my portfolio. However, I was not able to finish, due to my wedding plans. I found you did an exceptional job helping us. It would have been very confusing without you. I was grateful for you taking the time to sit with me personally and help me through the process. I don't feel I have ever met someone so dedicated and passionate about this field. Thank you for inspiring me and many others. THANK YOU for your continuous help. I hope that I will be considered and given a second chance when the next group begins.

Participant 3:

First of all, I think that this is especially valuable for people in the human services field. In this field you often have so many skills and abilities, much knowledge that you've gained through blood, sweat, tears, and just day-to-day observation of life. Others around us and we in the field often don't recognize the extent of the learning and abilities that we have gained. PLAR is a great way for society and the individual to recognize one's worth.

I also feel that the PLAR in human services can help address the imbalance that still exists between fields that are primarily dominated by female employees, and those that are (or have been) primarily male-dominated. It also addresses in some ways that women should get credit for family responsibility that often falls on their shoulders because of their gender. Having to jump in and out of the paid workforce to care for babies, parents, and or those with disabilities or sickness does lead to learning, but there is no economic recognition for this. PLAR can once again be a powerful tool to help women gain some self-esteem and economic redress through helping themselves and others see the amazing amount of learning that takes place as we care for humans.

I found the process itself, as set by Athabasca to be a bit confusing at first. Some of the semantics and terminology force one to do some mental wrestling and this is where discussion with the group and mentor is helpful. I also find it difficult to make sure that my Learning Narrative and the Skill Set reflect each other.

As a personal learning tool, it really does help me to see the strengths and gaps in my own knowledge and learning - a great exercise.

I think that what could help others is the knowledge that these programs exist so that those in the human services field, save, file, document items that can help them later with measuring their growth. Speaking for myself, I know that I would have hung on to more certificates, documentation etc. if I'd have know about this!

Participant 4:

This project was the most amazing thing I have ever been a part of (including certification with the AECEO).

It was not easy...it made me really think, analyze, talk about and support every one of

my thoughts and feelings. The process allowed me to justify and support each of my decisions I have made in my life professionally and in some cases even personally. Until I sat down to work on the portfolio I never realized how much experience I have had and knowledge I have gained. The process has helped me to focus on what I want for the future as well.

It was great to have the support from you as well as from the other participants. I only wish that there would have been more opportunity to share what we created with each other...

Thank you for encouraging me to follow through even during the really rough times and the delays.

Diane you were an inspiration for me and you helped give me the courage to continue even when I wanted to stop. Thank you.

2.2.3 YUKON COLLEGE, INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS

Yukon College and Athabasca University collaborated to develop a seamless PLAR process to encourage early childhood educators to earn college-based credit for the learning that has been gained as the result of working with young children. In collaboration with *Gateways'* partners—colleges, universities, government departments or agencies, professional association, and employers—PLAR tools have been developed to facilitate individuals' ability to continue their studies in order to be awarded credit toward a college certificate or diploma, or a university degree.

A skill set was developed that identifies the knowledge and skills embedded in the two-year early childhood education diploma offered by the college. It was developed independently from the human services skill set used in the other two pilots, but uses the same methodology, structure, and presentation. Participants wishing to gain college credits were asked to demonstrate their competency according to the early childhood education skill set. The process involved the development of an individual portfolio by means of a guided process that takes approximately three months to complete. Upon completion of the portfolio, an evaluation was done by three assessors to determine the number of credits to be awarded.

Sixteen students participated in the pilot group. The first intake involved seven students in the fall of 2004. Their average age was 41 years and they had an average of 15 years of direct experience working in the childcare field. Six of the seven participants successfully completed their portfolios. Two of these students were from outside of the Yukon (Alberta and Ontario). A second intake of nine students occurred in the spring of 2005. Their average age was again 41 years and the average experience level was nine years. Six participants have submitted their portfolios and it is doubtful that the other three will complete. In all, 16 individuals participated, 12 completed and four did not.

The statistical material in tables 15 and 16 below, describing the Yukon pilot project, is based on the results to December 31, 2005.

TABLE 14: YUKON PILOT 1

PARTICIPANT IDENTIFIER	ASSESSMENT RESULT	# CREDITS AWARDED	COMMENTS
1036	--	--	Did not complete – dropped out early due to personal reasons
1037	Diploma	12	
1038	Certificate + Diploma	29	
1039	Certificate		
1040	Diploma	32	
1041	Diploma	32	
1042	Diploma	29	
1043	--	--	Did not complete (relocated & changed jobs)
Summary of Pilot 1 Results	6 credentials* • 2 certificates • 5 diplomas	134	8 participants • 6 completed, • 2 non-completions

*One participant earned both a certificate and a diploma.

TABLE 15: YUKON PILOT 2

PARTICIPANT IDENTIFIER	ASSESSMENT RESULT	# CREDITS AWARDED	COMMENTS
1044	6 courses short of diploma	17	
1045	9 courses short of certificate	9	
1046	--	--	Did not complete (changed jobs)
1047	--	--	Did not complete (changed jobs)
1048	Diploma	28	
1049	3 courses short of diploma	67	
1050	2 courses short of Diploma	46	
1051	1 course short of diploma	41	
1076	--	--	Did not complete (changed jobs)
Summary of Pilot 2	1 credential • 1 diploma 5 participants require additional coursework to complete credential	208 credits awarded to date	9 participants • 6 completed, • 3 non-completions

Note: At Yukon there are 37 credits in the one-year ECD certificate and 75 credits in the two-year ECD diploma.

Drawing on Yukon College's experience in administering PLAR in the college system, the college has recommended the adoption of the following procedures to support program-based PLAR processes.

Intake Processes

In order to be eligible to enter this PLAR process, the student must have:

- a minimum of 10 years of direct experience working in the childcare field;
- a post-secondary English course or be assessed by college staff as having the ability to write at a post-secondary level; and
- met all the normal entrance requirements of the program.

Portfolio Training Processes

An experienced trainer, who has received certification as a mentor, must conduct training of the students in how to develop a portfolio.

- Dr. Ingrid Crowther at Athabasca University currently provides this training of PLAR participants.
- The student's initial orientation must follow college standards as outlined in the ECE Orientation Guide.

Portfolio Preparation Processes

Students participating in PLAR must complete their portfolios within six months of starting. One two-month extension may be granted in exceptional circumstances, but only with written permission of the portfolio supervisor. An appropriate fee will be assessed for the extension.

Portfolio Evaluation Processes

An assessment team, consisting of a college instructor, an external expert, and a specialist in the field will evaluate each completed portfolio.

All assessors must have received training and certification to be evaluators for the college.

- Dr. Ingrid Crowther at Athabasca University currently provides this certification.
- Students who wish to appeal the mark they have been assigned or the amount of credit received must follow the Yukon College Academic Regulations.

Recognition Processes

Students' portfolios will be marked and assigned a letter grade as per Academic Regulations. Credit for courses will be identified through the assessment of their portfolio and will be annotated on their transcript.

SUMMARY OF THE PILOTS

Following from the completion of the three pilots, the diverse uses of PLAR to assist human services workers, credentialed practitioners, and experienced professionals to achieve their educational goals and career advancement begins to take shape. While the quantification of results will have to await the completion of the main study, it is already apparent that functions can usefully be served.



- Third-parties can provide PLAR services as exemplified by the Portfolio Development Centre in Belleville.
- Employers can add value to their organizations by providing PLAR opportunities to employees as an option for their professional development.
- College alumni can be attracted back to education when a college facilitates its provision by providing administrative support for the activity.
- Administrative hurdles can be overcome or reduced by careful planning to put in place the institutional supports required for PLAR to work smoothly from the perspective of organizations that choose to integrate it into their service provision to the communities in their catchments.

Any one of these benefits to brain gain would make PLAR worthwhile. The list does not even touch on the benefits to individual learners, which vary with the goals of the users. In terms of employability, labour market mobilization, and labour mobility, the potential benefits that would flow from a network that could provide these services on a continuing basis would provide a tremendous boost to the provision of quality care in any number of the human services related fields.

In addition, learning resources were developed to support the participants.

2.2.4 ADULT LEARNING FOCUSED INSTITUTION PRINCIPLES

The Adult Learning Focused Institutions framework involves standards established in the United States by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). These standards are useful in assessing the *Gateways* project.

There are eight key principles of effectiveness accompanying the performance indicators identified, including:

- outreach,
- life and career planning,
- finance,
- assessment of learning outcomes,
- teaching and learning,
- support systems,
- technology, and
- strategic partnerships.

Institutions that are performing at a high level in implementing the principles are referred to by CAEL as Adult Learning Focused Institutions (ALFI). Further information about these principles and their applications are available in two publications.

1. Thomas A. Flint and Associates, *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A CAEL/APQC Benchmarking Study* (New York: Forbes Custom Publishing, 1999), describes the principles as measurable benchmarks.
2. Thomas A. Flint, Paul Zakos, and Ruth Frey, *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A Self-evaluation Workbook for Colleges and Universities* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2002), analyzes a subsequent consultation process, field testing, and its results. Leadership in applying ALFI principles in the post-secondary system in Canada has been led by Paul Zakos.

The *Gateways* project demonstrates some effectiveness in all of the ALFI indicators. Following a self-assessment process completed a number of years ago, Athabasca University was nominated and received recognition as an ALFI institution (Flint, Zakos, & Frey, 2002). The university did not participate in an ALFI follow-up study that began in 2005. A thorough self-assessment would turn up problems for learners such as

- the learners' perception that, in some cases, block transfers are not being honoured.
- learners' dissatisfaction with being advised to use prior learning assessment in place of admission based on equivalency.
- learners' concern that their credentials are not being treated equitably in comparison to other diploma holders.
- learners' questioning why involvement in PLAR is not regarded as an authentic academic activity that would safeguard their active status at the university.
- lack of financial support for PLAR.
- PLAR activities not being regarded on the same footing as those provided to students taking courses and student ineligibility for financial support.

On the main indicators, *Gateways* shows some positive features.

Outreach

Candidates reported that they would have been unlikely to have engaged in the project had the orientation and support services not been provided in their communities. Working professionals appreciated the opportunity to complete their undergraduate degrees without having to quit work and move elsewhere to continue their post-secondary education. Academic recognition of their prior learning encouraged members of the group to feel welcomed and valued by an institution of higher education.

Life and Career Planning

Through the portfolio development process, candidates developed career, educational, and personal goals and plans. Support from a facilitator as well as peer support improved the effective expression of their goals, increased their confidence in being able to achieve them, and improved their chances for success.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Support provided to participants by the facilitators enabled them to collaborate in identifying, documenting, and gaining recognition for achievement of the learning outcomes. They increased their understanding of what they already knew, identified gaps, and strategized how to use the remainder of their studies to fill knowledge gaps.

Teaching-Learning Process

Activities modelled in the *Gateways* project engaged participants in a collaborative learning process that made the demonstration of learnings from experience relevant to their work as well as to their personal sphere of activities.

Student Support Systems

Collaboration among third parties, employers, and faculty provided evidence that this principle had been addressed.

Technology

Project information has been made available and supported through the Gateways Web sites.

Strategic Partnerships

Similar to the student support system, the collaborative approach supported learners in a holistic manner. Facilitators also received support in problem-solving and the sharing of best practices.

2.2.5 FEEDBACK ON GATEWAYS TOOLS AND PROCESSES

Despite an initial revision of the skill set undertaken at the outset of the project, further refinements were requested.

Participants found the human services skill set format confusing and intimidating in its present form. Specifically, the numbering system should be simplified as it is in the templates.

The language used in the skill set is not readily understood by all practitioners in the human services field. The way it is framed is itself a barrier to success in that participants do not always identify the academic descriptions of the competencies with their relevant competencies. The skill set should be reworded to make greater use of the vocabulary used by practitioners or to include descriptions or examples that connect the competencies to contexts already familiar to practitioners. At the very least, the availability of a coach, tutor, guide, or mentor who has experience interpreting what is required, and who can assist learners in making the initial transitions to an academic vocabulary from that used by practitioners, will be crucial to wide use of the skill set. Initial support to overcome the artificial barrier of unnecessary use of specialized vocabulary would provide learners with the best chance of success by supporting their initiative and consolidating their confidence to move forward. The challenge is to incorporate wording of the competencies in practice language without losing the university level of the learning.

Because the competencies that are to be demonstrated are extremely broad, learning from a broad variety of contexts may be applicable. The skill set templates, as posted on the Web site, have been very valuable tools in preparing participants' portfolios.

Difficulty experienced by some participants in registering with Athabasca University detracted from their motivation. Several participants also ran the risk of losing their status as active students because involvement in PLAR was not regarded on an equal footing with enrolling in courses. Students undertaking to produce a portfolio for assessment are not regarded as "active" unless they have completed a course in the last twelve months. Students undertaking PLAR prior to taking any classes are not regarded as active. Students who have not successfully completed at least two courses are not considered to be "effective" (i.e., program students who are both active and successful).

Lack of transparency about the selection of assessors created anxiety among participants. Not knowing who would be assessing the portfolios, and whether these individuals shared an understanding of what was required, added to their stress levels. Anxiety was alleviated considerably once participants were told that one of the three assessors would be the facilitator.

Further work is needed to tie adherence to principles of fair assessment and transparency to portfolio evaluation for academic credit.

Many educational institutions use only one assessor; the project used three assessors whose scores were averaged. Participants regarded the three-assessor panel as inherently more fair than having only one assessor. Participants supported the practice of having their facilitator participate as an assessor. Participants agreed that having their assessments done independently by each of the assessors enhanced the fairness of the evaluation process.

Not knowing which courses might be covered by PLA created some confusion. Participants want to be eligible to receive specified credit for the two required courses in human services and replace them with two other human services courses at the 400-level to fulfill program requirements. The required elements might be *HSRV 455* (portfolio option) and an as yet to be developed course in human services education.

LEARNING RESOURCES USED BY PDC

Multiple modes of communication were used.

- Workshop by telephone
- Student Web site monitored with an online discussion forum
- An email and phone list was provided to encourage contact and collaboration outside of group meetings
- Combination of face-to-face, teleconference, and online participation
- Individual consultations to review documentation and provide individual feedback and editing provided by phone and in person

Participants received the publication, “A Guide to Assist in the Preparation of a Portfolio” produced by the First Nations Technical Institute, along with a collection of instructions for addressing Athabasca University’s requirements for producing a portfolio for assessment.

Various sample portfolios were made available to model and guide participants. Although not specifically produced for academic purposes, they provided concrete examples of completed portfolios. Participants agreed that access to portfolio samples benefited them in completing the elements and assembling their completed projects. What completed portfolios look like and samples of the kinds of activities and validation that are considered relevant helped to make transparent both the process and product they aimed to develop.

A workshop was held to review and discuss human services skill set competencies. The workshop helped candidates to clarify language and to contextualize competencies in a variety of human service settings.

Bloom’s taxonomy helped students to identify different levels of learning at the varying gradations of cognition.

The facilitator helped students to interpret academic vocabulary and usage.

Note: It is not the case that participants failed to understand the concepts being sought; however, the vocabulary used in prior learning, as well as in the emerging discipline of human services, is often unfamiliar to the uninitiated, making the very undertaking a barrier to success.

A key ALFI principle is to make the university environment welcoming and accessible to learners. Learners, whether participants in this study or more generally, need support to gain the confidence to move forward.

- An emerging disciplinary language can itself be a barrier to successful participation.
- Excessive emphasis on a limited conceptual vocabulary disadvantages participants whose educational background falls outside the foundational programs in the human services.
- Participants from emergent and specialty fields related to the human services are further disadvantaged by the vocabulary used.
- Disadvantages may be exacerbated when participants routinely operate in communities of practice involving specialized cultural sensitivities and a culturally appropriate knowledge base.

Therefore, recommendations in the final report should address these concerns for participation, access, and equity.

Addressing pitfalls with recommendations to remediate identified shortcomings should be a central feature of the final report for the Gateways project.

- The support role is regarded by participants as being crucial to their success.
- A portfolio template that provides a concrete example of how the Athabasca portfolio could be organized would be useful. In the template, instructions for each component would be provided.

The participants worked through the first components (resumé, chronological record, life history paper) with relative ease. There was a great deal of stress, though, when they began to document their competencies. Participants identified several concerns that the process brought out. They involved a general lack of confidence that appeared to stem from a variety of concerns.

1. Lack of previous experience with academic language and expectations at the university level. This can be described as an environmental intimidation factor. Although many participants had the knowledge and skills itemized in the skill set, and had them in fairly sophisticated ways over considerable periods of time, they had difficulty viewing their skills and knowledge as applicable in the context of university-level academic scholarship. Instead, they tended to downplay their competencies as “just part of my job.”
2. Lack of clarity about the outcomes of a degree program combined with expectations they somehow “don’t yet know” what they need to present to be successful. There was also frustration with the ambiguity of the wording of the skill set. “What is really being looked for?”
3. Fear of being judged. Who is going to be evaluating this? Are they going to think my claims have no value? Is the risk that participants are being asked to take too all-encompassing at the outset? Can the risk-taking to an individual’s self-concept be made less threatening by adopting a more incremental approach?

As the intimidation of “academia” lessens, skill in identifying learning becomes stronger and candidates build confidence. A great deal of learning occurs during this realignment of the participants’ evidence and criteria outlined in the skill set. They begin to relate their learning to the skill set and experience a shift about the value of what they know and can do. The natural process is to then to go back and revise the earlier documents (resumé, life history

paper) to focus more on the competencies, making the account even stronger.

As the group started to work on the competencies itemized in the skill set, they realized how much work is involved to get to this endpoint. They described the activity as involving an intense self-reflection and learning process. Some dug in by strengthening their resolve to work hard, while others hesitated, indicating their resistance to the amount of work involved.

Group members progressed at different paces. Some had personal issues (illness, family death, family issues) that caused them to need some “time out.” Others have had work challenges requiring their full attention. Others have worked and progressed faster than the rest of the group. With adult learners, these considerations are a natural occurrence. Participants worked at their own pace.

Learning that results from the prior learning process includes:

- what learning is;
- adult learning principles;
- improved skill in the reflection process;
- identifying skills;
- practice interviewing;
- expressing empathy; and
- providing feedback and support, along with experiential understanding of the impact of the PLA process.

Some candidates have identified personal development that has resulted from writing and reflecting about past personal experiences, enabling them to view past barriers or traumas in a different light. A result of the group process has been a broadening of their knowledge of the field through exposure to and learning about different aspects of the field from colleagues. Knowledge transfer, integration and synthesis, and high level cognitive skills emerge from the process of working on a portfolio and are consistent with learning expectations identified in the program outcomes and skill set items.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

A network of ambassadors for Athabasca University now exists in the community. The Portfolio Development Centre has received several inquiries about the Bachelor of Professional Arts Degree and other Athabasca University programs as a result of the *Gateways* participants talking enthusiastically about the project and process.

There is increased referral of clients for PLA services by *Gateways* participants. This likely arises out of increased awareness of the benefits of the PLA process. It is indicative that some group members are incorporating PLA practice into their human service skills and activities.

Individuals who are working independently on the *Gateways* project have touched base to ask for advice.

Involvement in the project has increased candidates’ networking and confidence as well as skill in adult learning. The project has already opened doors for career advancement for some. These benefits will be described in detail in the final report.



Through the group portfolio development process, *Gateways* participants are building knowledge and skill in subject areas relevant to the human services major. They demonstrate familiarity with PLA theory and practice, adult learning principles and the learning process, identification and assessment of transferable skills, time management, project management, and problem solving.

These unexpected outcomes suggest the following recommendations.

1. The demonstration of learning drawn from experience that results in the production of a portfolio should receive specific course credit as a successful challenge of a senior-level course or other academic recognition of portfolio development as indicative of knowledge and skill in PLA.
2. If academic credit at the senior level, that is, in the third and fourth year of a four year program, can be awarded through the portfolio development and assessment process on the basis of having demonstrated learning outcomes at that level, the portfolio itself, which is the product of that learning, should also be eligible for academic credit at the same level.
3. A grade should be awarded that reflects a marking rubric made available to the PLA candidate in advance.

In addition, participants demonstrated learning in very specific subject areas including:

Psychology

Knowledge of life stages (childhood and adult), individuals' response to transitions and mental health issues.

Sociology/Social Work

Familiarity with a range of social problems and how they impact on individuals' lives and affect social roles, culture, and group membership.

Counselling

Increased understanding of the helping process for resolving mental health issues through the personal growth and healing as well as increased skill in providing support.

Human services systems

Exposure to various approaches taken by different sectors of the system.

For example, the PDC group includes representatives from post secondary education, career and employment counselling, children's mental health, private practice mental health, support program for the developmentally challenged, ECE, crisis intervention services, a grassroots community support agency for mothers with preschool children, and social services. When group members collaborate on the portfolio development process, they discuss and share the relevant approaches and competencies of their part of the field, and thereby enrich the comparative aspects of their experiential base, broadening their own disciplinary bases.

Communication skills

Analyzing and clarifying the competencies of the human service field further develops skills in critical thinking. Competencies are also communicated orally and in writing using active verbs and professional language. Skill in understanding and using learning outcomes is also developed.

Group dynamics and team-building skills

Collaboration lends itself to the development of knowledge of group dynamics and skill in team-building, especially when members of groups combine efforts to assist each other through the task, problem solve as a group, and make efforts to keep less involved members included. Group members come from diverse backgrounds, making the task challenging at times.

Ethics and philosophy of human services

When PLAR candidates discuss and reflect upon their role in the field, they examine and articulate their agency's philosophy of practice as well as their own ethics of practice.

In addition to feedback from participants, information about the learning resources and how they were developed are among the most frequently asked questions received.

2.3 LEARNING RESOURCES

The revision to the human services skill set was discussed earlier. Three other learning resources supported learners: a diploma-level skill set for early childhood education and two support manuals for portfolio development, one for early childhood and the other for human services. In both instances, the support manuals accompanied the relevant skill set to assist participants in the preparation of the skill set. This section discusses each of these learning resources. The manuals are not part of this document but they can be downloaded from the project Web site. The early childhood skill set and manual can both be located at <http://gateways.athabascau.ca/eceskillset.htm>.

The manual that accompanies the human services skill set is available at http://gateways-plar.athabascau.ca/hs_skill_set.htm.

Because successful completion of the diploma outcomes in a college program like the early childhood education program at Yukon College results in the award of the diploma credential, as well as government authorized certification to practice in the field, it was important for the skill set to cover the specific outcomes required for both the credential and certification. The early childhood education skill set and the Glossary of Terms that accompany it are included as Appendix 2: Criteria Table for Early Childhood Education.

2.3.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SKILL SET

The early childhood education skill set reflects the need to combine appropriate knowledge, skills, and values that demonstrate learnings pertinent to a specialized field.

In order to provide an equivalent, powerful tool for other specialized fields in the human services, it would be necessary to develop additional skill sets, especially in those fields for other specializations in which accreditation is required to practice in the field, such as social services, child and youth workers, and so on. Working in collaboration with credentialing bodies, government, colleges, and PLAR experts was effective in Yukon. As a result, additional skill sets are being developed to address the education and accreditation requirements for home support workers and community support workers. Once completed, they can be used as

a starting-point for similar programs in other jurisdictions to build on work already completed or underway. Adapting skill sets from one human services specialty to another would ensure that the tools and resources remain broadly similar as well as professionally and culturally appropriate for users.

The availability and use of skill sets for the purposes of education and professional equivalency would also be useful in fields in which the upgrading of training is being mandated by governments, as is the case for ECE workers in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Ontario. The application of the skill set to an individual's learning identifies any gaps to be filled. Based on this program-based gap analysis, a remediation plan can be developed that will fill the gaps without requiring the users to redo competencies they have already demonstrated. Gap analysis leads to completion of all competencies and has been used with success on a small scale with the PLAR participants in Yukon. The merit of this approach is that, where PLAR candidates do not meet all of the competencies, it is incumbent on the assessors to state specifically what is missing, and put in place a plan to address shortfalls with the prospect of achieving the competencies leading to the credential and accreditation in the end. This process ensures a high degree of integrity throughout the process. It treats users respectfully and provides quality assurance. The requirements of the college program, along with accreditation standards, are built in to the process from the outset.

The skill set, then, incorporates college-level diploma program standards, equivalent to the credential, as well as accreditation standards equivalent to certification. When both of these standards have been fully addressed, the PLAR recipient can be regarded as fully equivalent to an ECE diploma holder who is certified to practice in Yukon. Because the *Pan-Canadian Pathways* study found no significant differences among diploma programs in human services and human services related fields across the country, PLAR can become more generally used to establish equivalency between educational credentials and professional certification in the future. *For this to occur, and occur equitably nation-wide, a great deal more work would need to be done to establish a network of PLAR providers who collaborate with governments, colleges, and accrediting bodies to adopt the principles and practices described here.*

2.3.2 SUPPORT MANUALS

Skill set assessment is difficult to administer without support being provided to the users. Skill sets are also difficult for faculty to create and use, especially in isolation from other educators, accreditation bodies, and experts who can guide them and ensure that PLAR principles are being followed and that the best practices that already exist in “small ‘islands of validation’” are being used (Bjornavold, 2004, p. 6). Training and support materials for faculty also are needed because identifying and evaluating learning outcomes involves specialized knowledge and skills that few possess. The activity also requires the use of terminology that is unfamiliar to faculty and learners. This is why, for example, educational institutions often have a policy to use PLAR in general, and portfolio development, assessment, and recognition in particular, but very few students choose to present their learnings this way. *The system of PLAR already established in Canada creates the illusion that opportunities for PLAR abound; in actuality, the opportunities to participate in PLAR for academic credit and professional certification is woefully lacking.* One place to start remedying this situation is with the production and use of support manuals.

A support manual was developed first for the ECE skill set and then for the human services skill set. In each case, the manual begins with an introduction that provides a simplified definition of PLAR, the idea of portfolio development, the process for developing a portfolio, the components of a portfolio, and a description of the final product and how it can be used. The manuals then go into detail about the purpose of each of the components, what to include in each of them, and an explanation of the importance of documentation and validation. Assembling the portfolio is also covered. Almost two-thirds of the manual is taken up with appendices that provide examples of each of the components, a list of things to do, examples of sample validation letters, and some additional resources that might be useful.

The components are the same in the early childhood and human services skill sets. The cover letter, resumé, chronological record, life history (ECE) or educational narrative and learning narrative (HS), goal-setting, documentation of skill set outcomes, and validation are the same.

TABLE 16: COMPONENTS OF ECE AND HUMAN SERVICES PORTFOLIOS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	HUMAN SERVICES
<p>1. Cover letter</p> <p>A letter that clearly indicates what credit is being applied for</p>	<p>1. Cover letter</p> <p>A letter that clearly indicates what credit is being applied for</p>
<p>2. Resumé</p> <p>Current resumé that supports the applicant's claims in the portfolio</p>	<p>2. Resumé</p> <p>Resumé adapted for the purposes of PLAR, that is, provides support for the applicant's claims in the portfolio</p>
<p>3. Chronological Record</p> <p>Major educational milestones that have been achieved in both formal (college, university credits) and informal (on the job, through work related training, or other educational or training opportunities) after graduation from high school or after the age of 17</p>	<p>3. Chronological Record</p> <p>Major educational milestones that have been achieved in both formal (college, university credits) and informal (on the job, through work related training, or other educational or training opportunities) after graduation from high school or after the age of 17</p>
<p>4. Life History Paper</p> <p>Preparation of a short paper that identifies what learning resulted from major life experiences</p>	<p>4a. Education Narrative</p> <p>Preparation of a short paper that identifies the user's knowledge, skills, and values</p>
	<p>4b. Learning Narrative</p> <p>Completion of a longer paper that analyzes and integrates learning from formal, informal, and non-formal education, employment, volunteer activities, and other life experiences, emphasising the extent and depth of these learnings</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	HUMAN SERVICES
<p>5 Setting Goals</p> <p>Goals help to set the direction of the applicant's portfolio. Goals will help direct the learning outcomes</p>	<p>5. Goal paper</p> <p>Clearly articulate short and long term goals in education and career advancement</p>
<p>6. Documentation of Skill Set Outcomes</p> <p>Clear identification of how the applicant has met the outcomes within each skill set</p>	<p>6. Documentation of Skill Set Outcomes</p> <p>Clear identification of how the applicant has met the outcomes within each skill set</p>
<p>7. Validation</p> <p>Support from external sources such as supervisors, instructors, performance evaluations, or examples to validate the authenticity of the applicant's work</p>	<p>7. Validation</p> <p>Support from external sources such as supervisors, instructors, performance evaluations, or examples to validate the authenticity of the applicant's work</p>

A comparison of the components for portfolio development in human-services related fields indicates how closely they are related. That said, it is important to note that the learning being assessed occurs at different levels for each field; that is, the ECE skill set is scored against expectations of the satisfactory demonstration of competencies acquired in the first two years of a specific college program, whereas those in the human services, while they could be used to obtain entry to the program for individuals who do not hold a two-year diploma, primarily focus on higher level cognitive skills and knowledge as discussed in relation to Bloom's taxonomy earlier in this report. The similar presentation of the learning makes it possible for participants of the study, along with educators, practitioners, and professionals in the field, as well as PLAR administrators, to possess a shared understanding of program-based outcomes at the diploma and university levels. PLAR can be used to assist experienced practitioners to achieve their educational goals regardless of where they sit along the continuum from basic employability skills, through college credential completion, to completion of an undergraduate degree. The components remain the same, but the demonstrations of learning differ in their extent and degree of difficulty from one skill set to the other and on the scoring scale of what has to be demonstrated for the scoring to result in the award of academic credit.

Further information about the purposes of each component, sources that may provide the relevant information and learning, and what the end result should look like, is provided for each of the components in each of the manuals. Appendices provide examples of what each of the components might look like. These models have been very important to the participants' understanding of what is required. The form and presentation of the information becomes more manageable when participants have access to a range of examples that show the diverse ways that learners put their materials together in a broad range of styles and organizational formats. The content is easily identifiable as authentic, due to its variety and cumulative effect on the reader. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of documentation, validation, and assessment, other than to note that there is extensive literature on these topics and that these materials were drawn upon in the development of the *Gateways* project.

Summary of the Fall 2005 Report to Advisory Committee, Dr. Crowther

In the fall of 2005, the Advisory Committee held a meeting in Athabasca. Progress with the pilot groups, recruitment to the main study, and administrative glitches were discussed. At that time, timelines for deliverables were behind because of difficulties in administering the project. According to the preferred model of PLAR delivery, participants would have enrolled in a senior-level, three-credit course at Athabasca University to receive tutoring in the production of their individual portfolios. This strategy was abandoned when university administration decided the course route could not be used for this purpose at the time. The fallback option, to provide mentoring without giving course credit, was followed. This, and glitches in candidates gaining entry to the human services program based on their possession of a two-year diploma from a recognized post-secondary educational institution or its equivalent, delayed recruitment of the 100 anticipated participants by six months. This, in turn, made it unlikely that participants could have completed their portfolios, received their assessments awarding credit, and been able to enrol and complete courses in order to compare the academic achievement of PLAR participants to non-PLAR students. However, it was projected that approximately 120 participants would complete the production of their portfolios and assessment of their portfolios would be completed with the resulting award of academic credit by the end of the funding period, that is, December 15, 2006. Due to these administrative glitches that caused delays, it would not be feasible to initiate a second 100 PLAR participants in an employer-based process as part of the current study.

GATEWAYS PROJECT STATUS

Pilot projects completed

- Portfolio Development Centre (Belleville, Ontario and Hastings County Social Services Department)
- Seneca College (Toronto)
- Yukon College

These pilot groups were completed in order to review and adjust the PLAR process as needed and provide feedback concerning appropriate strategies for supporting participants.

The main study recruitment extended to recruit the minimum number of PLAR participants.

- Number of completions
 - Human services major – 11 completed, three in evaluation process
 - Yukon College - one completed, three in evaluation process
 - Diploma (Yukon) – completed
 - Diploma (The Pas) – in progress

Additional research opportunities have become apparent in the analysis of the effectiveness of the PLAR mentoring process.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Closure of the senior-level course *Human Services 455* to portfolio students in November, 2004, meant the loss of revenue that would have come from course fees and been used for mentoring. If another solution had not been found, closure of the course would have meant that all *Gateways* participants would have had to work entirely independently. Also,



by incorporating portfolio development into a course enrolment opportunity, participants were not at risk of becoming “inactive.”

As a solution, meetings with senior administrators in February 2005 to solve the problem resulted in Dr. Crowther being hired to mentor all students. However, that did not solve the problem of students losing their active status.

Assessment of student credentials was inconsistent, varying by jurisdiction and year granted. In some cases, participants who had completed two-year diplomas were awarded amounts of credit other than the 60 accepted by Alberta Learning in the program design (1999). Varying amounts of credit, from 0 to 60 credits for a human services related program, were sometimes awarded based on a perceived lack of equivalence to current diploma credentials. Varying amounts of credit, from 0 to 60 credits for a human services related program, were sometimes awarded for the same credential. Although the researchers were committed to the equity approach established in the *Pathways* project, this approach has yet to be accepted internally, adopted, and applied consistently at the sponsoring university. The meaning of “equivalent” is not currently defined. This inequitable treatment resulted in some angry and frustrated students and in the loss of potential participants in the project.

This problem was largely solved by the recruitment of students already enrolled in the BPA program and by the initiation of an appeal process.

Changes in staffing at the university led to delays in completion of the PLAR process.

OVERALL RESULTS OF CHALLENGES

The research cannot be completed as contracted because of the above-mentioned problems. To date, nine BPA program participants’ portfolios and seven diploma-level portfolios have been completed. There are over 100 in process involving BPA students and 15 at the diploma level. Completion of portfolios tends to take at least six months; evaluation takes a minimum of another six weeks. Because of the delays, we can only measure the number of credits received; it is impossible to measure continued study in the contracted timeframe.

As a solution, team leaders will request additional funding to extend the time frame and complete the contracted research. The project will also produce additional research questions that will identify students’ preferred modes of participation (e.g., mentored, independent or group, open or paced, in person or on-line, and so on).

FURTHER CHALLENGES

Stale dating of diplomas (discounting the credit value of older credentials) that feed into the Bachelor of Professional Arts programs at Athabasca University had not been routine prior to the start of the project, and it has been the practice of the human services program not to stale-date diplomas. Older completed credentials began to be opened up, with the amounts of credit awarded varying from 0 credits to lesser amounts than that usually awarded to similar recent credentials. These evaluations occurred without collaboration to solicit the judgement of academic experts in the human services field. Half a dozen students have been dissatisfied with the results and have asked that the evaluation be re-reviewed or have decided not to continue their studies at Athabasca University.

Credentials had previously been regarded as equivalent regardless of the year they were earned as the *Pathways* project established. This practice is especially relevant to applicants who are mature, adult learners who have been practicing in the field for 10 years and longer. According to the current Director of the BPA, Dr. Evelyn Ellerman, “We currently do not have a stale-dating policy for the BPA, but should probably give it some thought in the future. We have always said that, if the student has current skills; that is, has been working in the field since graduation, there is no reason this person’s diploma should not be accepted, if she has been keeping her skills current.”

Former Associate Vice President Academic and Director of the BPA degree, Dr. Ken Collier, supports this viewpoint. He goes further to state that the program director, in his or her capacity as an academic expert, is involved in this decision. “I believe the program director can decide that old credentials are not stale-dated, or can waive the newness requirement if the person has been practicing in the related field since the credential was earned—meaning that she has kept her knowledge current by using it in employment and by getting training and going to conferences and so on.”

The Program Coordinator, Dr. Jane Arcscott, confirmed this practice: “In the past, an academic made this sort of determination for individuals.”

To address these problems the Advisory Committee passed several motions to seek resolution of these matters through administrative channels, explained the reasons for the delays to the funder, and sought new funding to be able to conduct the follow-up research on student success.

CONTINUED NEED FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING

The project faced another serious challenge to the capacity of the research team to research PLAR and the adult learner when the University turned away several adult learners, which was ironic, because they were members of the subpopulation that this program had specifically been designed to serve. The program was developed to attract “human service career practitioners who wish to pursue related undergraduate studies.”

The original agreement approving the human services major addresses “credible diplomas and or equivalent.” The programs in question either have articulation agreements or can be shown to merit being treated the same as the programs that have formal articulations.

The results of the *Pathways* project indicated that there is no evidence for distinguishing among human service-related programs that award a diploma credential from a recognized post-secondary institution in Canada.

Of nearly 500 human services and human services related programs across Canada

- 2 year diploma programs usually receive 60 credits.
- 1 year certificate programs usually received 30 credits.
- 3 year Child and Youth programs in Ontario received 72 credits, including 12 in 300-level credits.
- Mothercraft received 60 credits (academic recommendation 2003) or 30 credits (letter dated 2005), but there continues to be discussion about what amount will ultimately be awarded.

It is curious to note that the human services major came into effect when signed off by Alberta Learning on December 17, 1999. The major would have no population of credentialed learners to serve if diplomas were *not* recognized, since the entry requirement is a diploma. The view of the program has always been this: “The diploma as a credential is transferable.” If not, the human services program could not attract students who have both a diploma and a career in human services.

Consider the analysis provided by one student whose credentials (two diplomas) earned in Ontario were regarded as unworthy of transfer credit,

What I was trying to do was take a bit of time to think about what was really in my best interest after hearing that I would receive no accreditation or advanced standing for any of my previous education. I have been trying to take this in stride, but, I must tell you that at this time in my life, the idea that it is worthless is really bothering me and I am having trouble accepting it. This is particularly frustrating when I have heard from others that they have been given 2 years of credit for a recent social services diploma. There is no way that this kind of program would have been any more rigorous than what I completed and I did two diploma programs and a certificate as well as numerous other certifications over the past 20 years. Because of this, my interest and enthusiasm have waned and I do not see myself as benefiting by staying with the project. I can get the nearly same results by applying to McMaster University here. Or, I [can] try Empire [State University] in N[ew] Y[ork].

NEED FOR A PROCESS TO DETERMINE EQUIVALENCY

Candidates whom three academic experts in the human services program have regarded as suitable for block credit transfer and as clearly qualifying for PLAR have been denied block credit transfer. One of these individuals received her diploma from Nova Scotia community college. They have informed the college of a perceived lack of follow through on the articulation agreement that had been signed. The idea of stale-dating does not appear in the articulation the college understood their organization had negotiated.

Since all of the participants in the *Gateways* project are “seasoned practitioners,” opening up credentials to individual scrutiny may deny some of them entry level credit, even though they hold diplomas that are regarded as equivalent to current diplomas for purposes of professional accreditation. In order to identify whether or not this practice was widespread, project staff searched participant files for anomalies. It appears that diplomas had been accepted without question prior to June 2004. Since that time, anomalies have been introduced that have produced additional administrative work. For example, the holder of two diplomas awarded from recognized diploma programs in Ontario received no transfer credit for her credentials. A college employee from Nova Scotia who holds a diploma awarded by the college, was awarded zero credits. Two others who hold credentials recognized as equivalent to a diploma under the provisions of the *Day Care Act and Regulations of Nova Scotia* received less than 60 credits.

It is unknown whether students who are not part of the project have also had their academic credentials devalued without an academic expert’s involvement in assessing them.

Clearing up these kinds of discrepancies set back the intake to the project by six to nine months. The recruitment phase that was to have been completed by September 2005 had to be extended to December 2005 due to insufficient time for participants to both complete their

portfolios and have them assessed and then complete coursework on the basis of which their academic performance and retention was to be assessed against non-PLAR students. This research would affirm or disconfirm findings from the *Slice of the Iceberg* study, that PLAR students demonstrate greater success in course taking and program completion than non-PLAR students. Since that study used only course-based PLAR and *Gateways* used program-based PLAR, establishing comparisons will be important to answer those who consider program-based PLAR as being excessive in the amount of its awards. Proving whether or not this is true will be important if program-based PLAR is to succeed course-based PLAR as the preferred methodology.

2.3.3 COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR PLAR DEVELOPMENT

At present, the *Gateways* project is the largest concerted undertaking being conducted anywhere among anglophone PLAR practitioners in Canada. As a result, questions have often been asked by other PLAR providers about how the Research Team has been able to shift so successfully from policy to implementation. *Financing certainly has been crucial*. PLAR will not occur without dedicated resources being made available and PLAR most often falters due to insufficient resources. For PLAR initiatives to become a viable option, much more needs to be done to support it in a consistent and sustainable manner.

Equally important to funding the activity is the development of a collaborative PLAR process, preferably one that is networked, as *Gateways* has been, across several jurisdictions *to ensure that PLAR knowledge and skill itself is mobilized*. This project has already benefited in ways that could not be foreseen at the outset, especially in requests to assist newer PLAR undertakings in developing their methodology. Additional learnings have also come from consultation with experts, an active Advisory Committee, different strengths and foci among the partners, multiple modes of delivery, and committed participants. The question after, “How did you do it?” has been, “Can we do it too?” In this section, elements that figured large in the current project are itemized to indicate factors that may need to be taken into account when looking to build capacity in a sector across several jurisdictions, or nation wide. The elements that future networks should have to consider include:

- the identification of stakeholders;
- a collaborative process;
- the development of learning outcomes, including,
 - broad program-based outcomes, as well as
 - specific outcomes statements, and
 - training and other preparation of academics and assessors;
- criteria for the successful demonstration of learning outcomes;
- development of a hierarchy of learning outcomes;
- development of skill sets based on program-based outcomes, a hierarchy of difficulty;
- provision of resources to support the activity; and
- attention to evaluation, revision, and adaptation.

Although an entire book could be written on this material, for present purposes only the barest bones are outlined below.

IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

The key to success of any PLAR process is to identify and involve stakeholders within the local community.

Key stakeholders should include:

- college/university administrators,
- college/university faculty, employers, licensing agencies,
- certification bodies,
- accreditation agencies, and
- PLAR experts as well as several practitioners.

Forming a “PLAR team” of individuals whose work will be most directly impacted to assist in bringing all relevant perspectives to bear in the first instance may reduce resistance later on.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

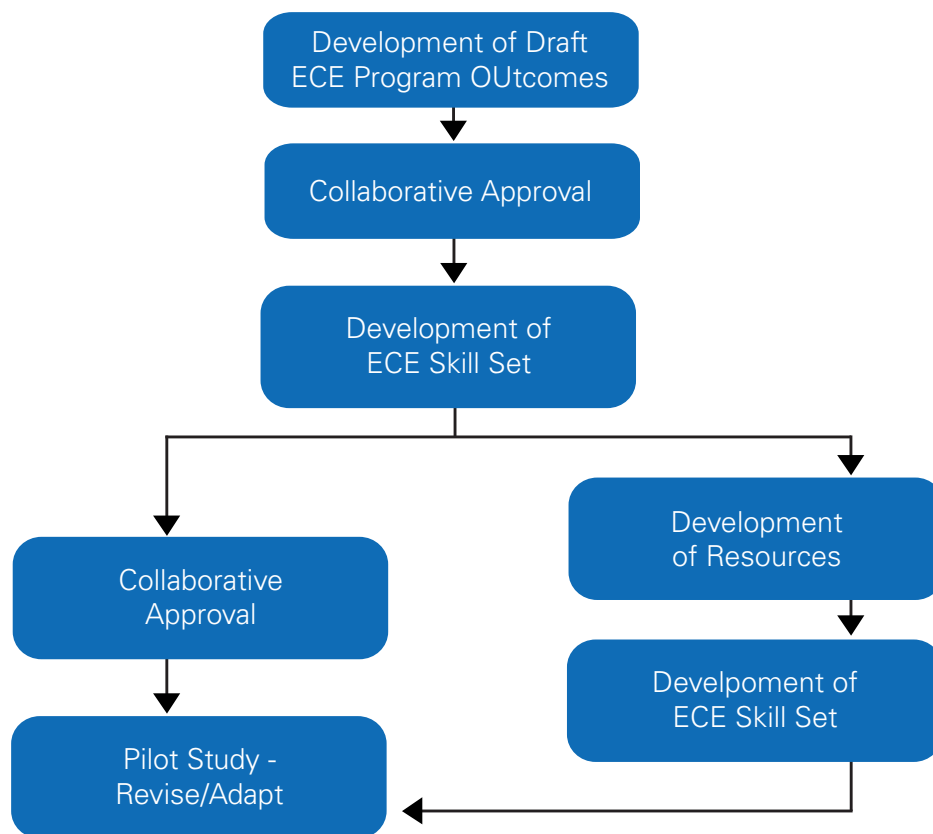
By including all major stakeholders as members of the development team, the end result is more likely to achieve support and to move toward implementation more quickly than would be the case if collaboration were not a central feature of the process.

Develop all components of the PLAR process—program outcomes, program skill set, and necessary resources—collaboratively, and match course outcomes to program outcomes and the program skill set.

Two broad types of learning outcomes are involved: program-based ones and specific outcome statements. The related parts of the overall learning outcomes can be conceptualized as depicted in the diagram on the following page.

PLAR Development Process

Partners (college, employers, ministries responsible for child care)



DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning outcomes are developed at two levels, broad learning outcomes at the program level and specific learning outcome statements that use the vocabulary that is familiar to practitioners in the field.

Broad, program-based outcomes provide a general picture of what a graduate should look like, that is, a recent graduate who has met all of the competencies to complete the program and earn the credential. It is *not* the *ideal* graduate who exceeds the required competencies in one or more ways. The comparator is all graduates from a similar program delivered by traditional methods who achieve competency. The graduate comparison implies *recent* graduates, not graduates who go on to have many years of experience in the field or who are measured against standards in place in the past or against ideal standards.

Broad, program-based outcomes are developed by identifying, in general, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes graduates should possess, categorizing outcomes into content and skills as well as attitudes and values, and providing the “glue” to create a coherent, stable program. A sample of a program-based learning outcome from the ECE skill set:

The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to develop and maintain effective interpersonal communication, written, oral, and nonverbal, with children, families, coworkers, employers and individuals/agencies.

Specific learning outcome statements are sometimes referred to as “performance indicators.” They provide more specific details for parts of the “picture of what knowledge/skills/attitudes a graduate should have.” Outcomes should be sub-categorized specifically into discipline related areas, such as professionalism, communications, or discipline-specific content. They provide the framework to develop specific learning outcomes.

Sample of specific outcomes to meet program based outcomes:

- Communicate with sensitivity
- Demonstrate self-awareness and interpersonal communication skills through an effective evaluation of one’s own performance and skills
- Communicate effectively in writing
 - Although all diploma holders and undergraduates demonstrate generic communication skills, those specific communication skills covering the range of communications that occur in human services fields would be what would be relevant here. For example, the bookkeeper in a non-profit organization might develop the vocabulary and style of communication characteristic of human services agencies as the result of being employed by an organization that does this work.

DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Provide detailed information about the specific learning outcomes, such as professionalism or communications, that a graduate should demonstrate. Provide the framework to develop specific learning outcomes or objectives for courses.

Example drawn from the ECE skill set: Communicate effectively in writing

Sample demonstration of specific learning outcomes:

- Use an accepted standard of grammar, spelling, and format
- Develop and utilize a variety of formats for the purpose of communication—data collection, newsletters
- Present accurate information in a manner that is timely and appropriate to the audience
- Produce appropriate displays to convey specific child-related information
- Utilize appropriate form, style, and level of analysis, detail, based on message audience, and purpose of communication

DEVELOP A HIERARCHY OF OUTCOMES

Decide on the difficulty level of each outcome (knowledge, skill, or value that should be learned) and arrange outcomes from the easiest to the most difficult. Assign outcomes to semesters in which they are to be taught.

Sample hierarchy of outcomes:

- Use an accepted standard of grammar, spelling, and format—entry requirement; if not met, take adult upgrading
- Develop and utilize a variety of formats for the purpose of communication—data

- collection, newsletters—Semester One
- Presents accurate information in a manner that is timely and appropriate to the audience—Semester Two
- Produce appropriate displays to convey specific child-related information—Semester Three
- Utilize appropriate form, style, and level of analysis, detail, based on message audience, and purpose of communication—Semester Four

DEVELOPMENT OF SKILL SET

Arrange all outcomes into appropriate formats. Example:

Demonstration of Learning in Area 6: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to develop and maintain effective interpersonal communication, written, oral, and nonverbal, with children, families, coworkers, employers, and individuals/agencies.

[(11 OF 18) COMMUNICATE WITH SENSITIVITY]

1____2	3____4	5____6	7____8	9____10
Ensure that information is comprehensive, concise, factual and objective	Convey accurate information appropriate to the audience in a timely and appropriate manner	Practice confidentiality in all communications	Demonstrate respect for diversity by monitoring and modifying responses and reactions	Demonstrate team work through inclusive team membership collaboration and consultation

DEVELOPMENT OF RESOURCES

Develop resources to encourage student achievement:

- Manual – step-by-step outline of expectations
- Samples – Examples of various requirements such as how to write learning outcome statements
- E-portfolio – a tool provided by TaskStream.com that enables those producing portfolios to create and submit them electronically
- Training faculty to provide guidance in the mentoring process of the PLAR process
- Training faculty to provide guidance in the evaluation process of the portfolio (end result of the PLAR process)

EVALUATION, REVISION, ADAPTATION

Evaluation, revision, and adaptation are collaborative processes. Evaluate the PLAR process, outcomes, resources, and materials and revise and adapt them as needed. Establish a regular cycle of evaluation with national partners.

DEVELOPMENT OF COURSE OUTCOMES/OBJECTIVES

Develop or revise course outcomes/objectives based on skills

- Example: Communicate effectively in writing
- Develop and utilize a variety of formats for the purpose of communication—data collection, newsletters

Example of possible course based objectives:

- Write reports that record accurately information collected during activities
- Write memos and letters that request and present information
- Write memos and letters that deliver difficult messages
- Write documents that present clear and concise summaries of information related to a given topic
- Prepare a newsletter based on a theme for distribution for a particular client audience

In describing the process of developing PLAR tools and resources, collaboration among stakeholders is the single most important feature for achieving the level of consensus needed to achieve support. *Gateways* achieved excellent support among its partners, especially those at the partner colleges and other institutions of post-secondary education.

2.4 INITIAL FINDINGS

1. The inclusion of PLAR in credential completion produces a positive indicator of future success in education and employment in the human services. PLAR recipients have continued toward additional post graduate education, for example, masters of education programs (St. Francis Xavier, University of Calgary); teacher education programs (University of Toronto); degree programs (Athabasca University). Other direct results for participants include enhanced employment opportunities, such as obtaining a “dream job,” management positions, and pay increases on existing scales due to increased level of education.
2. The PLAR process is a valid and reliable assessment of formal/informal learning. It is a rigorous collaborative process developed to identify specific program-based outcomes approved by post secondary institutions, related government accreditation branches, and employers. Program specific skill sets were developed that reflect current knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals’ programs. The process is rigorous; participants are mentored by qualified human services experts. Assessment is also rigorous; PLAR portfolios are each assessed by three independent, qualified, human services experts.
3. Underserved practitioners (individuals who presently have little opportunity to obtain formal education based on their lack of formal credentials) benefit from PLAR for career advancement. Most are women in low-income employment in the human services fields of early childhood, education, allied health services, social work, and special needs or at-risk youths.
4. Measurable outcomes produced by the project include development of tools, resources, and supports for the PLAR process in early childhood at the diploma level and the human services in the Bachelor of Professional Arts Degree at the senior level, meaning the final two years of study at the university level.

ACTIVITIES TO DATE

1. Establishment of an advisory committee to help and guide all parts of the process
2. Formation of focus groups at various points of the project to collect relevant information and resources, to develop PLAR tools, materials and resources
3. Activities completed
 - a. Human Services
 - b. Early Childhood
4. Activities in progress
 - a. Community Support Worker
 - b. Home Care Support Worker
5. Mentoring training for PLAR process
6. Implement the PLAR process
 - a. Training
 - i) authentic outcomes
 - ii) system requirements for PLAR
 - iii) assessor training
 - b. Assessment of PLAR portfolios
 - c. Tracking of PLAR participant data
7. Communication of results through meetings, conference presentations, web site, and publications.

The three projects described in this report have undertaken research to identify some possible best practices in learning systems for adult learners. The co-team leaders describe such a system as one that would be:

- open,
- flexible,
- consistent,
- transparent, and
- valid and reliable.

An open, flexible, and consistent system of learning for working adults may include

- recognition of credentials from accredited colleges or other post-secondary educational institutions.
- recognition of certification by professional bodies.
- additional course transfers where applicable.
- credit awards for learning from formal as well as informal sources (prior learning assessment and recognition).
- challenge for credit.
- course taking.
- combining credit-worthy learning from various sources to achieve degree completion in a timely manner.
- equal treatment of all individuals.
- provision of information that is easily accessed and with clear guidelines.

The benefits to individual adult learners of transparency, validity, reliability, and ease of access are similar to those experienced by the system as a whole. Moreover, such a flexible, integrated, and comprehensive learning system should provide

- increased access to labour market participation.
- improved potential for better jobs.
- increased pay.
- prospects for international partnerships.
- improved lifetime earnings.
- a “Canadianized” experience for prospective or current immigrants.
- decreased duplication of training.

Benefits to educational providers may also include

- reduced redundancies in provision.
- lowered overall costs to the public education system.
- accurate targeting of the actual, rather than perceived, needs of individual learners.
- enhanced educational outcomes for adults.
- reduced dependency on income supports.
- continued education of adults at more advanced levels of study, including credential completion, degree completion, graduate studies, as well as professional certification.

2.4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

Revisit the profile of human services education across Canada in co-operation with educational bodies such as ACCC and CMEC, and with Statistics Canada.

Recommendation 2:

Block credit transfer should be consistent in its treatment of similar credentials regardless of the jurisdiction in which they were earned, provided the practitioner remains current as indicated by certification or employment, or both.

Recommendation 3:

Students who have not completed a human services credential or related credential should receive transfer credit in direct proportion to the amount of the program they have successfully completed.

Recommendation 4:

In the field of human services education, the meaning of equivalency needs to be determined in order to establish a baseline for its use in treating academic credentials reliably, consistently, and rigorously.

CHAPTER 3

PRODUCING RESULTS

The *Gateways* project anticipates the completion of the development of at least 100 PLAR portfolios and their assessments by the fall of 2006. Participants will be surveyed and statistics gathered to provide a demographic profile of the PLAR recipients. In addition to quantitative information about the numbers of credits and credentials awarded, participants will be asked to speak up about their experiences and how their experiences could be used to benefit future participants. As well, comments will be solicited from employers, facilitators, and team members. In so far as possible, additional information will be provided about participants' plans for continuing their studies, employer satisfaction with the process, and limited comparisons between PLAR and non-PLAR participants' success in their studies.

There will be insufficient time remaining to complete this comparison as originally envisaged, but this important activity could be done later, once the participants have moved further along their education and career paths.

The final report, *Producing Results*, to be produced at the end of 2006 will include summaries of:

- Best Practices
 - Program-based PLAR
 - Advantages over course-based PLAR
 - Mentoring, Learner Support, Transparency
- Lessons Learned (This section will summarize major strengths and drawbacks experienced by the project, and what can be learned from them.)
 - Importance of Administrative Infrastructure
 - Collaboration
 - Barriers to Success
- Recommendations
- Looking ahead to as yet unfunded activities in the future that might involve one or more of the following:
 - Subsequent tracking of participants' continuation in education
 - Administrative practices and procedures that provide institutional support
 - Learner-centred, demand-side, educational opportunities for adult learners in human services and other professional areas
 - Further refinement of tools and resources based on feedback from users
 - Collaborative development of additional PLAR processes that draw on the *Gateways* model of program-based PLAR
 - Networking with other educational institutions and PLAR providers to consolidate and extend the application of the *Gateways* model of program-based PLAR
 - Sustainability through the training of facilitators and assessors in learners' own geographic or practitioner communities as measured by the continued use and acceptance of the *Gateways* model of program-based PLAR

Drawing on this interim report, *Producing Results*, will make recommendations to avoid pitfalls and amplify successes experienced in this project. Extending the current network of post-secondary institutions capable of demonstrating sustainable success and continued leadership,



this expansion can occur through the continued growth of expertise, further development of technological capabilities, and the elaboration of funding models that all contribute to a plan of action for the use of program-based PLAR on a national scale. Several of these prospects for future development of the infrastructure needed to incorporate PLAR more fully into the post-secondary system of education will be considered in the final report.

PLAR should be an opportunity for personal and professional development that can be accessed by individuals' whose knowledge, skills, and values have historically been undervalued in society due to their lack of credential completion. PLAR holds out a tangible prospect of contributing to the brain gain of a large segment of practitioners. Most human services workers and practitioners are women; many of them are sole-support parents, and some of them face additional barriers to having their skills and knowledge appropriately valued by employers, educators, and society in general. Accessing opportunities for further education and career advancement, enabling their participation through much-needed innovations in student financing, and ensuring fair and consistent treatment of individuals who have similar education, training, and experience could go a long way to making their lives better, along with the lives of their families and the communities they serve. Society would benefit from recognizing the learning of human services practitioners who are able to draw out their learning from their years of experience as qualified practitioners.

3.1 LOOKING AHEAD

For the model to grow, the network of partners would have to grow with several of the more experienced partners providing expertise to new joiners. In the final six months of the project, ways of doing this will be explored. *Moving Forward* provides some of the information that will be needed for other organizations to decide whether they would be willing to partner in future ventures to move the model of collaborative program-based PLAR toward sustainability. Sustainability in this context involves being in a position to respond to inquiries for assistance from late joiners and established partners who are now ready to proceed when they could not earlier.

For example, inquiries from Holland College in Prince Edward Island, the Ministry of Family Services in New Brunswick, and consultations with a Pan-Canadian Innovations Initiative being planned to introduce PLAR to Nunavut indicate that the work of *Gateways* has generated interest well beyond its immediate purview.

Our immediate challenge, in addition to assisting more than 100 participants complete their portfolio development and have their work assessed for academic credit, is to disseminate the knowledge and experience of the research team and our partners to pique interest in

- establishing a network of post-secondary institutions to pursue PLAR collaboratively in human services education in a consistent and coordinated manner.
- sharing our expertise and learning with educators, certification bodies, government ministries, employers, and prospective funding agencies, as well as potential users.
- broadening the base of support for this activity.
- identifying future partners.
- looking abroad, especially to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDFOP), for additional knowledge and skill that is transferable to the

Canadian context and that would bring initiatives in human services education into closer alignment with already established practices in Europe (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004).

Future activities could take several forms:

- Consulting
- Partnering
- Training the trainer
- Development of additional skill sets
- Assisting in the development of PLAR for sector councils
- Policy development

The direction future activities are likely to take depends on factors such as:

- the federal character of constitutional responsibility for education that produces policy silos that experience difficulty responding equitably to the demands of citizens in response to changing educational and labour force demands.
- absence of a nation-wide adult learning strategy such as that produced by the Government of Nunavut in 2005 (Rigby, 2005).
- lack of networks across jurisdictions to build on what has already been achieved.
- lack of a champion to fund and support pushing forward with innovative initiatives on a pan-Canadian basis to bring Canada into line with best practices already well documented in Europe through CEDFOP, the OECD, and the European Union.

Further information about the project can be found on the project Web site at <http://gateways.athabascau.ca/>

We welcome your feedback. We also invite you to ask us to provide you with electronic notification when the final report, *Producing Results* is available in 2007. Thank you for your interest.

GLOSSARY

Active student

A student who has been enrolled in a course during the last twelve months

Adult learners

Individuals, generally over age 25 and under 65, who seek opportunities to build on their formal and informal learning. The precise age range varies by provincial and territorial jurisdiction with Nunavut regarding age 16 as providing the youngest adult learners. A comparative study of adult learning policy in Canada has been completed by Roger Powley (2005) for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

Assessment

The method, process, and procedure for evaluating informal and non-formal learning to value experiential learning and other learning that has not previously been recognized.

Assessors

Individuals who have received training in the principles of PLAR, are familiar with the assessment process, and are knowledgeable in the area of expertise in which credit is being sought. At Athabasca, three assessors ordinarily evaluate each portfolio. In the human services assessment jury at least one assessor is an academic at the university, one is a community-based practitioner with knowledge related to practice, and one has expert knowledge of the area of specialty being presented from a professional perspective.

Block credit transfer

The award of a specific amount of credit based on the program layout and outcomes of the program, without requiring the learning to be packaged in chunks that are readily subsumed into existing university course formats. Its major advantage is being able to value learning overall. This method respects the fact that university transfer is not the sole or even the primary purpose of these programs but that the value of the learning can be discerned by academics who are expert in their fields. Block credit transfer enables learners with the same credential to have the reasonable expectation of having their credential earning the same amount of transfer credit as that of an individual who earned the credential some time ago, in another jurisdiction, or from a different recognized college.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (See CAEL)

Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (See CAPLA)

CAEL

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning is a national (US based) non-profit organization that creates and manages effective learning strategies for working adults through partnerships with employers, higher education, governments, and labour. Founded in 1974, CAEL has provided colleges and universities as well as firms, unions, and governments with the tools and strategies to effectively assess and recognize lifelong learning. CAEL has worked steadily to remove barriers to learning opportunities through the identification and sharing of effective practices throughout North America.

CAPLA

Since 1994, the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment has provided services and support to adult learners, PLA practitioners, unions, businesses, post-secondary educational institutions, and others. This non-profit organization assists the development of local, provincial, national, and international PLA strategies and programs.

Challenges for credit

May take a number of forms, set exams that challenge the content of the course, course-based portfolios, and other demonstrations of equivalent learning. Availability varies by institution.

Course-by-course transfer

The award of credit for a specific course or unassigned credit in a particular discipline that covers at least 60 to 70 per cent of the content of an existing course or a course at the same level of study as determined by an academic who is expert in that field.

Documentation

Evidence that supports the PLAR applicant's learning claims through presentation of the material that shows the learning was achieved. Documentation that includes certificates of participation should also indicate the learning that occurred including resources used, evaluations of learning administered, and other evidence that learning occurred.

Effective student

A student who has successfully completed two courses through Athabasca University and is working toward a credential is considered to be "in the program." This came about because, historically, many potential students registered with Athabasca University but never started or completed any courses.

Formal learning

Formal learning, such as education and training that produces qualifications, accreditation, and certification from educational institutions recognized for the credibility of the credentials they confer are "highly visible" (and valued accordingly) (Bjornavold, 2004, 1).

Human Services

A broad umbrella term in use in some colleges and departments of government for describing "helping professions" such as early childhood (education, development), child and youth, developmental services, educational assistant, and other service activities that combine aspects of social services, education, counselling, administration, and interpersonal communication.

Inactive student

At Athabasca University, a student who has not been enrolled in any course at the university in the previous 12 months.

Informal learning

Knowledge, skills, and values acquired from various sources outside of formal education settings such as the workplace, volunteer and other training, professional activities, workshops, seminars, and similar activities that provide opportunities to gain or increase levels of competence and knowledge. The acquisition may be either intentional or incidental.

Learning claims

Statements about a person's learning that can be supported with evidence or third-party attestation from an individual who is sufficiently knowledgeable about the claim to offer a credible judgement about the extent and depth the claim has been met by the applicant.

Learning(s) from experience

Experience may be a great teacher, but it remains for the learner to draw out of the experience the learning that occurred, the learning claims being addressed, and the level and type of cognition involved. This self-reflection on "lessons learned" demonstrates that the learning has occurred by providing details about its character, amount, and level.

Non-formal learning

Knowledge, skills, and values acquired along life's way from various sources outside of formal education settings. In addition to the various sources that provide opportunities for informal learning, the acquisition of non-formal learning in general is incidental, even accidental, rather than intentional. Individuals unfamiliar with the principles of experiential learning, that is to say, most learners and educators, including academics, require support and assistance in order to be able to reframe these activities as learning and to see it themselves as equivalent to formal learning.

Portfolio

A collection of materials that identifies learning obtained from a variety of sources such as work, workshops, conferences, research, professional development, and personal readings, including self-reflection and self-evaluation to demonstrate understanding of learning, evidence of documented research to support learning claims, and validation of learning from reputable external sources.

Prior learning

Previous learning that has occurred in a variety of settings, including but not limited to, formal educational settings.

Prior learning assessment

Refers to various methods of taking previous skills and knowledge into account. Historically, in the Canadian context, PLA has been used to refer to examinations that challenge the content of a particular course or credential, demonstrations of learning through simulated role play, equivalency of military training to recognizable civilian standards, and portfolio development, possibly, but not necessarily, for the purpose of gaining formal recognition with a particular employment-related, educational, or professional goals in view.

Prior learning assessment and recognition

Various methods used for taking account of knowledge, skills, and values drawn from experience in which recognition is directed toward a goal that indicates achievement of a standard of competence in the workplace, educational attainment, professional standing, or certification.

Recognition

Equates the assessment of learning to existing standards to determine its equivalence.

Recognition of prior learning

Here the emphasis is on acknowledgement that the learning claimed is real and valid. Recognition most often comes from third parties that are empowered to award equivalency in the form of academic credit, professional certification, occupational registration, employment and promotion, or other indications that the possessor is regarded as being entitled to be treated in a certain way.

Validation

Evidence that affirms the correctness of the applicant's learning claims. Ordinarily the validator indicates the basis upon which he or she is qualified to make this assessment. In Europe, reference is made to the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Validation of informal and non-formal learning

The Director General of Education and Culture for the European Commission, Jens Bjornavold, describes this learning as "tacit, silent or intangible" (2004, p. 1), with the result that it is frequently viewed in a lesser light. Or worse, it is systematically devalued or overlooked altogether.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CRITERIA TABLE FOR HUMAN SERVICES

CRITERIA TABLE VERSION FOR PROGRAM: B PROF ARTS HUMAN SERVICES REVISION 6.0 JUNE 28, 2004

Prior Learning Assessment applicants will be assessed on their demonstrated learning in 6 areas of education at the post-secondary level. Students present their learning in a portfolio. The criteria used by assessors is the same as that used by students in the preparation of their portfolio.

The 6 areas used by the Human Services program at Athabasca University are:

1. Interpersonal Communications (Items 1-4)
2. Relates Practice to Theory (Items 5-6)
3. Uses Critical Perspectives (Items 7-8)
4. Familiarity and Understanding of the Human Services Sector (Items 9-10)
5. Professionalism (Items 11-13)
6. Demonstration of Success as Human Services Educator (Items 14-15)

NOTE: 1 represents achievement of Essential Skills generally considered necessary to achieve employability. These 9 skills are:

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Reading Text | 4. Writing | 7. Thinking Skills |
| 2. Document Use | 5. Oral Communication | 8. Computer Use* |
| 3. Numeracy* | 6. Working With Others | 9. Continuous Learning |

Employability skills ordinarily are acquired prior to post-secondary study. Post-secondary study enhances most of them. The undergraduate curriculum in the Human Services further develops 3 and 8 incidentally. Courses and PLAR are available to strengthen and recognize Essential Skills.

In the preparation of these materials reference has been made to the Post-Secondary Education Qualifications Assessment Board standards for the award of credentials in Ontario.

__1st Year__	__2nd Year__	__3rd Year__	__4th Year__	__5th Year__
1 2 -- 3	4 -- 5	6 -- 7	8 -- 9	10

This scale describes increasing levels of competency associated with academic standing at a post-secondary level.

Each year of study usually earns 30 credits when a student is in full-time study at a recognized post-secondary educational institution. Completing each “year” takes longer than a calendar year if studying part-time or stopping out for periods of time.

0-60 university transfer credits Available University Transfer credit at the 100 - 200 Level)	30 university transfer credits Available at the Senior level (300 & 400 level credit in the Human Services)	Human Services Credit at the 400 level (up to 9 of possible 30)	Not applicable No additional credits available but exceeding expectations at the undergraduate level acknowledged
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Expectations of learning in relation to each year of study or its equivalent

1st Year __	2nd Year __	3rd Year __	4th Year __	5th Year _
Recent certificate graduate (No work experience or equivalent to 1 year of full-time study at the post-secondary level))	Recent diploma graduate (2 or more years of work experience)	Seasoned practitioner who has advanced knowledge in some areas	Student nearing graduation in the Human Services program at Athabasca University	Student who demonstrates knowledge of theory & practice expected for admission to studies at the graduate level

Demonstration of Learning in Area 1: Interpersonal Communication (Items 1-4)
Demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences

(1 of 15) Expresses self clearly: Demonstrates effectiveness in speech and in writing

1 2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Clearly expresses Human Services' values, skills and knowledge	Communicates clearly in oral and written form	Concisely argues or documents presentation of ideas	Communicates to support a position with evidence and argument	Demonstrates the ability to link ideas together

(2 of 15) Attentiveness to the framing of problems: Contextualizes problems using sophisticated analysis

1 2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
States problems in field in the Human Services using the language and communication style common to the field	Frames problems related to field of specialization	Frames and reframes problems in analytical & practice terms	Explains problems in Human Services field in pro-active, insightful & professional way	Initiates and integrates problem-solving in a professional manner

(3 of 15) Nurtures value-based learning
Uses values to guide theory and practice.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Describes values & ethics as basis for Human Services practice	Applies values and ethics to guide Human Services practice	Addresses systemic challenges using values and ethics	Assists others to respond to systemic challenges in an ethical manner	Promotes values and ethics in self, colleagues & clientele	

(4 of 15) Works well with others in a variety of settings
Demonstrates values, skills and knowledge for successful team-building.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Practices active listening skills in team exchanges and discussions	Responds accurately and respectfully to team communications	Demonstrates recognition of needs of self & others in several settings	Practices teamwork in a variety of collaborative relationships	Collaborates in team settings to achieve team goals	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 2: Relates practice and theory to each other (Items 5-6)

(5 of 15) Employs skills related to practice

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Uses appropriate resources, concepts, and theories under supervision	Seeks appropriate assistance to apply resources, concepts, and theories	Transfers resources, concepts, and theories to a variety of settings	Integrates resources, concepts, and theories in a variety of settings	Applies resources, concepts, and theories independently	

(6 of 15) Evidence of successful intervention and/or advocacy
Demonstrates effectiveness in intervention and/or advocacy

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Demonstrates interventions with individuals under supervision or assisted by support & guidance	Demonstrates interventions for groups with supervision or assisted by support & guidance	Interprets policy for intervention & advocacy with individuals or groups	Uses intervention & advocacy to influence policy change	Successful intervention &/or advocacy for individuals or groups as well as policy change	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 3: Uses Critical Perspectives (Items 7-8)

(7 of 15) Recognizes, critically evaluates, and analyses arguments and theories
Demonstrates critical perspectives and analytical thinking related to the Human Services Sector.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Recognizes arguments and distinguishes them from explanation, description, & expressions of opinion	Evaluates arguments and theories	Analyses arguments and theories	Transfers and integrates arguments and theories	Develops own conceptualizations. Supports and defends them effectively	

(8 of 15) Uses strategies for inclusive personal & social change

Demonstrates effectiveness in the use of strategies to achieve inclusiveness in personal change as well as social change.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Recognizes individual differences to develop strategies for personal or social change	Accommodates & respects group differences to develop strategies for personal or social change	Transfers effective strategies for inclusive personal & social change	Develops own conceptualizations of effective strategies to achieve inclusive personal & social change	Implements own conceptualizations of effective strategies to achieve inclusive personal & social change	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 4: Familiarity, Understanding and Knowledge of the Human Services Sector (Items 9-10)

(9 of 15) Knows emergence and breadth of the sector of Human Services
Demonstrates familiarity with the history and evolution of the Human Services along with several of its fields.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Identifies factual information	Describes core aspects Human Services using case or issue presentations	Collects, records and analyses data to provide explanations into conditions and issues in the Human Services field	Uses explanations into conditions and issues to assess the evolution of the Human Services field	Interprets the evolution of the Human Services field from several viewpoints	

(10 of 15) Contributes to developing professional character of the Human Services sector and their place/role within it.

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Identifies changes in a field of human services practice	Describes changes over time in several fields relation to their own field of specialization in the Human Services	Analyses changes over time in several fields that affect professionalism in the Human Services	Interprets changes over time in several fields that affect professionalism in the Human Services	Advocates for the Human Services professionalism	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 5: Professionalism (Items 11-13)

(11 of 15) Demonstrates ethical professional conduct & attitudes

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Conducts self professionally with regular appropriate supervision	Practices professionally with minimum supervision	Explains the meaning of ethical practice	Applies knowledge of ethical standards to practice, policy and issues	Implements ethical standards to practice, policy and issues	

(12 of 15) Relates self to the role of Human Services provider in broad contexts
Demonstrates impact of contexts

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Relates self to the role of Human Services' provider	Relates self to Human Services' practice	Relates self and practice to the context of Human Services provision	Uses self-reflective practice to guide/enhance Human Services knowledge and effectiveness	Acts to enhance value of Human Services professional practice in broad contexts	

(13 of 15) Continuous learning to integrate knowledge of related concepts, theories and policies

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Identifies policies and contexts for the benefit of clientele	Uses policies & contexts for the benefit of clientele & communities	Skill at Applying policy contexts & frameworks as tools & resources in Human Services practice	Interprets policy & context for the benefit of clientele & profession	Successfully Advocates to enhance or change policy for the benefit of the Human Services profession	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 6: Success as a Human Services Educator (Items 14 - 15)

(14 of 15) Continues learning from experiences for personal growth & development through self-reflective practices

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Participates in professional & personal learning opportunities	Initiates personal growth & development following self-reflection	Uses accurate self-assessment to identify personal & professional challenges	Develops an action plan to address professional development	Implements own professional development action plan & guides others	

(15 of 15) Evidence of professional effectiveness such as lobbying, policy-making, protest, advocacy

1	2_____3	4_____5	6_____7	8_____9	10_____
Identifies issues that impact professional effectiveness	Engages in actions relevant to promoting the profession	Participates in lobbying, policy making, protest & advocacy as a regular professional Human Services activity	Initiates activist stance in Human Services professional activity	Uses activism strategically to contribute to quality standards of practice	

APPENDIX 2: CRITERIA TABLE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

CRITERIA TABLE VERSION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Applicants will be assessed on Demonstrated Learning related to:

1. Current standards for entry level into the field of early childhood education
2. Collaborated Approval of current standards – New Brunswick Community College, (NBCC), Yukon College, BC Aboriginal Childcare Society, Northern College, Government of Nunavut
3. Formal* and informal* educational and experiential* based learning.

Evaluation of demonstrated learning will be taken based on the nine areas of education at the post-secondary level. Students present their learning portfolio. The criterion that is used by the assessors is the same criteria that are used by students in the preparation of their portfolio.

Graduates* demonstrate their ability to work with children from birth to twelve in order to:

1. Plan curriculum based on knowledge of child development
2. Provide curriculum based on holistic development of children
3. Utilize a variety of observation skills
4. Maintain responsive relationships
5. Maintain a safe and healthy environment
6. Maintain effective interpersonal communications
7. Apply relevant legislation, policies, procedures, and regulations
8. Apply a personal philosophy of early childhood education
9. Act in a professional manner

Wherever an * is placed please refer to the definition in the glossary at the end of this document.

Expectations of the student related to each year of learning

1st Year

0 – up to 30 college/university credits

1 _____ 2

3 _____ 4

5 _____ 6

7 _____ 8

9 _____ 10

This scale describes increasing levels of competency associated with academic standing at a post-secondary level.

2nd Year

30 – up to 60 college/university credits

Demonstration of Learning in Area 1: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to plan curriculum* that is based on a thorough understanding of child development.

(1 of 18) Identify developmental milestones and variations in children

1 _____ 2

3 _____ 4

5 _____ 6

7 _____ 8

9 _____ 10

Identify developmental milestones and variations of milestones of children

Utilize developmental milestones and variations of milestones to explain behaviour*

Utilize developmental milestones and variations of milestones to plan and provide a curriculum for children

Utilize developmental milestones to plan and provide a curriculum that is inclusive

Utilize developmental milestones to support children's learning, and development in the context of – family, culture, and society

(2 of 18) Utilizes principles of curriculum development.

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify components of developmentally and age appropriate curriculum planning	Plan a developmentally and age appropriate curriculum based on current and relevant research	Plan a curriculum that meets the needs of various age groups, and various developmental skill levels	Identify and implement adaptations/ changes needed to the curriculum based on observations of children	Evaluate, revise, and adapt as needed curriculum to ensure all children's strengths and needs are met

Demonstration of Learning in Area 2: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to provide curriculum that provides for the holistic* development of individual children and groups of children across a range of ages*.

(3 of 18) Recognize and express the value of diversity and commonality that exists among individuals.

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify developmentally appropriate practices and inclusive practices	Utilize developmentally appropriate and inclusive practices	Implement both planned and spontaneous experiences	Evaluate curriculum to ensure that children's needs are met, individually and as a group	Design and organize learning environments to enhance growth and development

(4 of 18) Provide a curriculum that reflects knowledge that children learn through active play and concrete experiences.

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Observe to identify interests and children's developmental levels	Plan based on children's developmental levels, interests, and background experiences	Set up a learning environment that reflects children right to make choices, solve problems, and participate in active play*	Involve families as partners in the planning process	Collaborate with all partners – children, families, other professionals to plan active learning experiences for children

Demonstration of Learning in Area 3: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to utilize a variety of observation techniques* to enhance work with children families and co-workers.

(5 of 18) Select appropriate data collection techniques in order to plan developmentally appropriate experiences based on the results and interpretations of observations.

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Utilize developmentally and age appropriate techniques to identify children’s skills, abilities and interests	Interpret observations to provide developmentally and age appropriate learning materials and active learning experiences	Utilize observations and interpretations in order to revise and adapt learning activities to support the developmental abilities, interests, strengths, and needs of individual and groups of children	Utilize observations and interpretations to monitor children’s success and to prepare reports and referrals	Share information gathered from observations with families and professionals in order to collaborate to design and modify curriculum as needed to ensure children’s success

Demonstration of Learning in Area 4: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to maintain responsive relationships with individual children and groups of children.

(6 of 18) Utilize developmentally appropriate interactions.

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Utilize developmentally and age appropriate interactions with various age groups	Utilize developmentally and age appropriate interactions appropriate to a particular child at a particular time	Utilize developmentally and age appropriate interactions in situations such as separation anxiety, or during transitions	Set up a positive environment that fosters secure relationships between home and early childhood settings	Facilitate building secure relationships that build upon children’s skills, abilities, and background experiences*

(7 of 18) Use a variety of positive guidance techniques

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify various positive guidance techniques with individuals and groups of children	Initiate positive interactions with individuals and groups of children	Identify and react appropriately to verbal and nonverbal signals of children	Utilize various positive guidance techniques with different age groups	Respond with a selective strategy to the children's behaviour

Demonstration of Learning in Area 5: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to establish and maintain safe and healthy environments* which meet the requirements of current legislation, regulatory bodies (associations, licensing organizations, aboriginals head start programs), and program policies.

(8 of 18) Ensure a healthy and safe environment in accordance with agency* policy and governmental guidelines

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify agency policies/ governmental guidelines and or requirements related to health, nutrition, safety, and emergency situations within the child care centre	Develop and utilize appropriate forms to implement safe and healthy practices in child care settings	Implement requirements for health and safety within indoor and outdoor spaces	Respond appropriately to unsafe related to health, safety, and nutrition of children	Identify issues related to health, safety, and nutrition and develop and implement a plan of action

(9 of 18) Ensure the well-being of groups of children

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify emotional, physical, intellectual, and nutritional needs of children of various age groups	Interact with families and professionals to discuss emotional, physical, intellectual, and nutritional requirements to meet the children's needs	Explore alternatives to meet various cultural differences within the group of children	Set up an aesthetic environments that encourage choice, independence and socialization	Meet the requirements of the children identified through planning and consultation with families and relevant professionals

(10 of 18) Ensure that specific health needs* of children are being met

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify relevant health regulations	Identify and respond children who are ill or show signs of abuse and/or neglect	Identify, develop, and utilize policies and forms for reporting illness, abuse and/or neglect	Identify the impact of personal health and wellness practices of early childhood educators on children and their families	Monitor and adapt all appropriate health and wellness practices in the environment

Demonstration of Learning in Area 6: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to develop and maintain effective interpersonal communication, written, oral, and nonverbal, with children, families, coworkers, employers, and individuals/agencies.

(11 of 18) Communicate with sensitivity

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Ensure that information is comprehensive, concise, factual and objective	Convey accurate information, appropriate to the audience in a timely and appropriate manner	Practice confidentiality in all communications	Demonstrate respect for diversity by monitoring and modifying responses and reactions	Demonstrate effective teamwork through inclusive team membership collaboration and consultation

(12 of 18) Demonstrate self-awareness and interpersonal communication skills through an effective evaluation of one's own performance and skills

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Demonstrate active listening* skills	Monitor reactions of others with respect to own communication and adapt communication as needed	Analyze personal feelings toward others or situations in order to communicate without bias	Evaluate personal performance as warranted and adapt and change	Demonstrate effective communications in a wide range of settings and audiences

(13 of 18) Communicate effectively in writing

1 _____	2	3 _____	4	5 _____	6	7 _____	8	9 _____	10
Use an accepted standard of grammar, spelling, and format		Develop and utilize a variety of formats for the purpose of communication – data collection, newsletters		Present accurate information in a manner that is timely and appropriate to the audience		Produce appropriate displays to convey a specific child-related information		Utilize appropriate form, style, and level of analysis/detail, based on message, audience, and purpose of communication	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 7: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to apply relevant legislation, policies, procedures, and regulations to early childhood education programs and settings in a changing social context.

(14 of 18) Demonstrate an awareness of the regulatory environment in order to impact change.

1 _____	2	3 _____	4	5 _____	6	7 _____	8	9 _____	10
Identify roles and responsibilities of government (social policy, funding, legislation)		Identify the impact of legislation and regulatory bodies, social policy, funding, and administrative practices on the quality of programs		Describe the tasks and responsibilities of early childhood educators in relation to legislation, regulation, policies, and procedures		Develop and implements a quality program that is responsive to regulatory requirements		Advocate* for quality programs for children, families, and the early childhood profession	

Demonstration of Learning in Area 8: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to apply a personal philosophy of early childhood education within the framework of ethical and professional standards.

(15 of 18) Analyze a variety of philosophical theories and historical trends related to the early childhood education field.

1 _____	2	3 _____	4	5 _____	6	7 _____	8	9 _____	10
Identify various philosophical approaches in early childhood education		Develop own philosophy of early childhood education		Ensure congruency between one's personal philosophy of early childhood education, and curriculum design and implementation		Demonstrate consistency/ congruency between one's personal philosophy and practice of early childhood education in diverse settings		Articulate and demonstrate a philosophy of early childhood education that integrates personal commitment to quality practices	

(16 of 18) Act in accordance with ethical and professional standards as developed by recognized professional organizations

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify a variety of professional organizations within the field of early childhood education	Identify ethical and professional standards in early childhood education	Act in accordance with ethical and professional standards	Research and utilize relevant resources for ongoing professional development to effect personal and professional change, as warranted	Advocate for services to children and families and for the early childhood education profession

Demonstration of Learning in Area 9: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to act in a manner consistent with principles of fairness, equity, and diversity to support the development and learning of individual children, within the context of family, culture, and society.

(17 of 18) Recognize and express the value of diversity and commonality that exists among individuals

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Identify characteristics of an environment that respects the needs of all individuals	Plan and implement an environment of mutual respect amongst children	Plan and implement activities that are inclusive	Evaluate and adapt an inclusive approach to curriculum	Collaborate with all partners – families, children, co-workers and other professionals to plan and implement a quality, inclusive program for young children

(18 of 18) Look at children in the context of their family, culture, community, past experiences, and current circumstances to create appropriate learning environments

1 _____ 2	3 _____ 4	5 _____ 6	7 _____ 8	9 _____ 10
Plan curriculum and develop programs that are responsive to the social and cultural needs of individual children and groups of children	Involve families as partners in developing learning experiences, curriculum, and evaluation of the program(s)	Respond sensitively and appropriately to children and families	Develop and implement intervention strategies sensitive and appropriate to children and their families	Develop and implement an environment of mutual trust, respect and sensitivity with children, families and coworkers

GLOSSARY OF TERMS [that accompanies the ECE Skill Set]

abuse and neglect

Includes all aspects of abuse as defined by the Department of Justice Canada – physical abuse such as assault with a weapon, beating, biting, burning, choking, hitting, holding child under water, kicking, mutilation, pushing, shaking, use of force or restraint; emotional abuse such as exhibitionism, fondling or touching sexually or inviting to fondle or touch sexually, incest, intercourse, prostitution, pornography, or rape; emotional abuse such as exploitation, exposure to family violence, intimidation, social isolation, terrorization, unreasonable demands, or verbal threats; neglect such as failure to provide adequate nutrition, cleanliness, clothing, medical care, protection from harm, or shelter; and emotional neglect such as failure to provide adequate love, safety, or a sense of self worth.

active listening

Involves listening to the intent of a message with an open mind without bias or prejudice.

advocate

Involves participation in activities to help children, families, and early childhood educators gain the support and care needed. Activities could include participation in public forums around child care issues, signing petition, or writing letters to municipal, provincial, or federal officials.

age appropriate

Ensuring that learning activities and materials are appropriate for the chronological age of the child.

agency

Agency refers to the childcare setting.

background experiences

The experiences that a child brings to the childcare setting such as cultural, ethnic, social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language from the child's home environment.

behaviour

All actions and activities engaged in by the child – social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive.

curriculum

Includes all forms of planning and implementation of children's learning activities in the child care setting such as individual and group program planning and implementation, spontaneous and special activities.

developmentally appropriate

Using practices, materials, and building learning opportunities with children that respect the child's right to learn through play, reflect individual children's background, experiences and changing capabilities, and are sensitive to the context of the family, culture, and community of individual children.

early childhood settings

All early childhood settings such as home-based care, centre-based care, full time and part time child care programs.

experiential learning

Learning that is the direct result of activities related to work or leisure activities.

formal learning

Learning acquired through post-secondary education leading to recognition of that learning through credential granting such as a certificate or diploma.

graduate

An individual who has completed the training requirements of an early childhood education program and has received a formal credential such as a certificate or diploma.

informal learning

Learning from a variety of activities including conferences, workshops, discussions, independent reading and research, job experiences, and leisure activities.

observation techniques

A variety of methods used to observe children's skills and abilities in order to plan and implement appropriate learning activities. Techniques include participant observation methods such as frequency counts, duration counts, charts, checklists or anecdotal records.

safe and healthy environments

Learning environments are set up to ensure that all children's needs are met - physical, emotional, social, cognitive and language in order to optimize the safe and healthy development of all children.