

Shopping for Training

by Karen Lior and Susan Wismer

Les auteures enquêtent sur les différents programmes et les modèles d'apprentissage offerts aux femmes et mettent l'accent sur les principes qui sous-tendent la création de programmes spécifiques aux femmes.

Legislative guidelines attached to the Act emphasize a "market" approach to training, promoting the idea that people seeking training should have the opportunity to seek out and explore a variety of possibilities.

Maxi, midi, mini—what length is best and does my choice fit me properly? Fashions in women's training have been changing constantly over the past few years in response to the seemingly capricious whims of the designers of public policy. Questions abound asking whether the latest fad in training is likely to meet the needs of general public for functionality, fit, affordability, and attractiveness. Does the labour market training which is available fit the women who are its potential consumers? Are we squeezing women into sizes too small, courses too short, off-the-shelf ready-to-wear which doesn't really match the dimensions of the real-life bodies and minds of women looking for training? Can a few general models or patterns be tailored to meet many diverse needs, fitting all shapes and sizes? How can women decide what is the "right" program for them? Once they know, can they find it? What training is actually available that meets women's needs?

The federal government has been gradually withdrawing from the delivery of labour market training for several years now, negotiating separate agreements with individual provinces for the provision of training services. Following the June 1996 implementation of the Employment Insurance Legislation (EI), all these agreements put the responsibility for finding and accessing training squarely on the shoulders of the consumer. This is a major change. Historically, federally-funded training was implemented by funding agencies and services providers, who had a responsibility as part of the funding to identify people who could benefit from training and design programs suited to their needs. As a result of the new EI act, individuals will receive funding for training directly and will be asked to "shop" for training in much the same way as we shop for clothes. When all the federal-provincial labour market agreements are concluded will there be any training left which is designed specifically to fit women's needs?

The provisions of the new EI Act have far-reaching implications, not only with respect to training funded through EI payments, but also regarding eligibility for EI. Eligibility has actually improved for some people, as a result of the possibility of using accrued part-time hours. For our purposes here, however, it is Part Two of the Act which is most relevant. It defines employment benefits and measures which will be available to EI-eligible clients through various programs and agencies. EI-eligibility has become the major avenue of access for Canadians to funded labour market training. The legislative guidelines attached to the Act emphasize a "market" approach to training, promoting the idea that people seeking training should have the opportunity to seek out and explore a variety of possibilities. In addition, the Skills Loans and Grants benefits measure will be calculated on the learner's ability to pay and not necessarily on the entire cost of the course or program. This means that some costs will be covered through a Skills loan or grant but that the shopper will be expected to pay something toward their training. For women who need supports beyond program cost, such as help with dependent care or transportation, job training may be far out-of-reach.

How will women choose the training that best fits their needs and budget? Design, fit, functionality, affordability, accessibility/attractiveness—are these the criteria women should be using in shopping for training? What about guarantees, warranties, durability? How long can we expect it to last? Does it travel well? Will it lead to other training or career mobility? Is the range of options available in a larger store incentive enough to give up the service and friendliness of the smaller place which is often closer to home? Do any of the options provide the tools women need to become self-sufficient, productive members of an increasingly sophisticated labour force?

Researching women's training

There are guidelines to use in determining the appropriate training "fit" or fashion. The criteria we offer here are based on three pieces of research. In 1994, the authors of this article carried out a research project on behalf of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Joint Working Group of Status of Women and Labour Market Officials on Education and Training (FPT) (see Wismer and Lior). The FPT had been asked by their Ministers to develop a series of principles and guidelines to be used in ensuring that training programs were of benefit to women. As part of the research for the FPT project, we surveyed women's training programs across Canada, talking with over 100 people from every province and territory who

were involved in offering training programs for women.

Since 1994 some things have changed. A number of the programs which we featured as case studies in our FPT research are no longer operating. While programs can ensure that they address specific needs and they are designed according to clearly articulated sets of principles,

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they cannot always ensure their own funding base. Similarly, programs cannot, by themselves, ensure that there are actual job openings available for graduates. In most parts of Canada, unemployment rates are more than high enough to guarantee that well-qualified and willing workers will not find the employment they are seeking. There simply are not enough jobs. In a critique of the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) Program, the Auditor-General wrote, "You don't start with training, you start with jobs. 'Retraining for non-existent work simply breeds cynicism'" (Cameron). The majority of the programs we investigated are still in existence. Many have had to make major adjustments and most have experienced dramatic cuts in funding. Still, these programs continue to demonstrate that while training alone is not sufficient to solve all employment problems, good training programs are a viable option for women who want to move into the labour force after an absence of some time, or who want to increase their range of choices and opportunities regarding paid work.

The second piece of research was a survey of employment and training services for women in Metropolitan Toronto, published in early 1997. It was carried out by A-Z Learning Associates with Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women (ACTEW). ACTEW is a network, a coalition of organizations and services offering training for women. Members come from across Ontario, however, the majority are in Metro Toronto. Although the survey was carried out in Toronto only, we believe its results are more broadly applicable (A-Z Learning Associates).

The third study has recently been reprinted (April 1997) as *The Future of Training for Women*. The National Women's Reference Group on Labour Market Issues was established by the Canadian Labour Force Development

Board (CLFDB) to support the work of the Women's Representative to the CLFDB. The Women's Reference Group produced its first version of the Women's Agenda on Training in 1991, outlining seven key principles for the delivery of high quality, effective training for women.

Shopping for women's training: three types of service providers

There are three main places to look for training: community-based non-profit programs, private sector for-profit companies, and community colleges. Although the individual programs offered vary considerably within each category, each type of service provider has a common basic structure and orientation toward training.

Community-based programs are offered by independent non-profit organizations. Their strengths usually lie in offering a comprehensive set of skills in a supportive environment, with a particular emphasis on flexibility in meeting individual needs. They are not usually able to offer accreditation or professional skills training.

For example, Rexdale Microskills works with immigrant women in north Etobicoke, in Toronto. It offers part-time and full-time training in computer skills, job search and career planning, accounting, self-employment, accessing accredited educational programs at colleges and universities, as well as settlement and counselling services.

STEP UP is a program offered at Dixon Hall Community Centre. It is a training program designed for women who want to improve their office skills. It offers training in office, computer, communication, and personal management skills. It was originally intended for sole-support mothers on social assistance and is now primarily a program for EI recipients.

Some private sector for-profit trainers offer professional certification for specific trades or occupations. Others offer training in specific skills, which are usually closely tied to particular occupations. Their strengths lie in offering up-to-date training in a variety of locations and at various times so that currently employed people can work around their job hours. These programs respond well to market demand and tend to invest in new equipment and training materials in order to keep up with the "leading edge" in their respective fields. They are not usually accessible to people needing subsidized training since costs are often high and subsidies are not usually available. They tend to focus rather narrowly on skills training and do not usually see it as part of their job to assist unemployed people with dealing with concerns such as child care, job finding, or confidence-building.

For example, the Drake Institute offers Certified Net-

work Engineering and Certified Network Instructors courses, as well as basic computer applications courses. They design their courses to train for corporate jobs. Students need to have access to a computer off-site.

The Academy of Learning offers diploma programs and single courses in basic computer skills. Students work with a text and/or audiotape. A tutor/instructor is available for questions. The program serves best people who do not need an instructor-led course.

Community colleges were established to provide professionally-accredited degree-granting programs. Because they receive public funding, they also have a commitment to making their courses accessible to a wide range of people. Most programs are of one to three years in duration. Many require full-time attendance in order to complete the program in that time. The colleges, as public educational institutions, offer resources such as libraries, a range of instructors, practice equipment. Their strengths lie in their ability to offer a broad range of accredited courses. They do not usually offer short-term training and, because of the need to concentrate resources in one location, college campuses can be large and impersonal, sometime difficult to get to. Classes can be large and the study schedule for full-time courses can make it difficult to balance family responsibilities with schooling.

For example, Humber College offers a WITT (Women into Trades and Technology) program. It is a full-time twelve-week intensive survey program on technology and computers designed to equip students to enter one of several possible full-time one-year college programs in technological fields.

George Brown College's Training Services Department offered three programs designed primarily for job-ready people with a diploma or already-developed job skills and who needed assistance with job search. The programs were: the Targeted Wage Subsidy Program, the Job Search Strategy Workshop, and the Job Search Club, and were offered in partnership with the local Human Resources Counselling Centre (HRCC).

All of the programs and agencies described above offer skills training. Each approach varies and is best suited to a specific group of consumers. Women interviewed in the ACTEW survey were looking for a client-centred model of service which respected their ability to make intelligent choices by "providing them with adequate information and a variety of services matching their needs" (A-Z Learning Associates 42).

What to look for: five models for training

Basic skills training includes: literacy, numeracy, communication, orientation to computer or employment, life skills, upgrading to high school completion. For example, the Metro Labour Education Centre (MLEC) is a community-based provider offering basic skills training to laid-off workers through its Post-Closure Adjustment Program and to those currently employed who may need assistance

with English as a Second Language and other basic skills.

ABC Canada is a private foundation offering programs promoting literacy in locations across Canada. The Workplace Advisory Service partners with unions and management in identified project locations to build basic skills training into the operations of the companies involved.

Bridging training includes: a focus on overcoming/compensating for systemic barriers to labour market participation, ensuring basic skills are in place, on-the-job training in particular job sectors (for example, women's introduction to trades and technology). Humber College's WITT program is a good example of a college-based bridging program.

One of Canada's first bridging programs, WISE (Women Interested in Successful Employment) was started in 1987 in St. John's, Newfoundland, as a community-based non-profit program. The program worked in partnership with local colleges. It was organized into 13 components, some of which can be used as credits toward Newfoundland's Adult Basic Education Diploma.

Community economic development training includes: community-based inventories of capacity and/or needs, leadership skills, working with volunteers, self-employment, project feasibility, project management, financial management, product and service development/invention.

For example, Women and Rural Economic Development (WRED) is a community-based non-profit provider serving rural women in Ontario. Its REDI (Rural Enterprise Development Initiative) program was developed to assist rural women to plan and start their own businesses.

The Women Inventors Project (WIP) is a non-profit organization offering education and networking to women and girls, encouraging their participation in innovation and entrepreneurship in science and technology. WIP offers workshops and training programs as well as distributing books and training materials across Canada.

Advanced skills training includes: on-the-job or in-service training in a particular skill set, training which assumes competency in basic skills, management training, apprenticeship training, professional training, some labour adjustment "up-skilling."

For example, the CDI Institute is a private provider with multi-locations offering advanced skills training in computer-related occupations. They have instructor-led classes at many levels and provide a whole range of technology-based training.

The Yellowhead Tribal Council and Athabasca University in Alberta have jointly developed a two-year program in Community Health Administration to provide certification for Native people interested in administrative positions in local health centres. The program has been running since 1988.

Positive measures training, includes: gender sensitivity training, diversity training, remedial training in areas such as sexual harassment, training programs designed to overcome barriers to career advancement for specific groups.

For example, the Centre for Immigrant Women in

Estrie, Quebec, started its *projet d'integration professionnelle des femmes immigrantes* in 1989 to provide cultural integration assistance as well as language and management training to immigrant women who have come to Canada with professional qualifications from other countries.

The Bank of Montreal organized its Customer Service Training Program for People with Disabilities jointly with the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, Centennial College, and the Training Coordinating Group for Persons with Disabilities in Ontario.

Will it work: seven principles for women's training

Training programs which work the best are designed to meet the needs of specific populations and groups; are adequately funded; and are related to jobs that are available. They also are developed in accordance with principles similar to or the same as those proposed by the National Women's Reference Group and FPT.¹ The seven principles identified by the National Women's Reference Group have been formally endorsed by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB), as guidelines to be used in designing any training program which has been funded through federal programs or federal-provincial training agreements. For women shopping for training, the seven principles provide a list of things to look for in order to assess whether a program is likely to be able to address individual needs and interests.

Access: Training programs which work best acknowledge that a variety of mechanisms are needed in order to ensure that those who need a program can participate in it fully. These include: information, support services, child care, training allowances for those who need subsidies, broad eligibility criteria, counselling, accommodation measures, available means of transportation, bridging courses and programs.

Equity: Equity means fair treatment for everyone. It means equal rights and benefits regardless of race, gender, country of origin, class, religion, sexual orientation, geographic location, income, age, and ability. No one should be excluded from or not fully included in training because of characteristics which are not relevant to the tasks or skills for which they are being trained.

Right to basic education: Integrated and flexible programs that provide adult basic education, literacy skills, life skills, administrative and technical skills, and language training are a necessary foundation for all advanced skills training. Advanced skills training programs may not offer basic skills directly, but need to partner with or have strong working relationships with basic skills programs.

Recognition of skills: Recognition of acquired skills, education, and experience is important and can be addressed through prior learning assessment, flexible accreditation criteria and other forms of formal and informal recognition.

Quality: The ACTEW survey identified 5 competencies which all high-quality training programs should design

for in curriculum development: ability to decide on a career or occupation, acquisition of the skills necessary to be successful at the chosen job and of experience in using those skills ability to search for a job, ability to maintain employment, and ability to find and access the resources to master all of the above.

Accountability: Programs need to arrange for regular evaluation. Participants should be able to ask for and receive information about what the experience of other participants has been with a particular training program. Evaluation procedures should include participants as the key source of information.

Integration of training and economic development: Training programs need to be linked to available jobs. Programs should address relevant community issues and should be linked to local/regional/national economic development planning processes, through, for example, connections to local labour force development councils, boards, and committees.

The future of women's training

These principles could act as guidelines for women confused by the array of options available in the market. Unfortunately, as funding formulas change and access to training is based on the individual consumer there will be fewer programs that match the criteria described above. The situation is paradoxical. We are witnessing huge numbers of women displaced in the labour force. Since 1989, close to 200,000 clerical jobs have been lost in Metro Toronto. Most of these jobs were done by women.

Training for women is important. By the year 2000 fully half the labour force will be female in Canada. Many of those working women are also parents, bearing a large portion of the responsibility for the well-being of the children who will be tomorrow's working people. Unfortunately, our training system continues to make it difficult for women to find the training they need, where, when, and how they need. Informed shoppers are necessary, of course. Even more important, however, is a training "market" that provides adequate choice and opportunity so that training dollars can be well spent. Every economist knows that markets do not respond perfectly to the needs of individual consumers. Advocacy and enlightened policy and program mechanisms will continue to be needed if the Canadian economy is ever to realize the benefits which women's potential represents.

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¹The FPT set out 5 principles: (1) training as part of a comprehensive and inclusive economic strategy; (2) development of a training culture valuing diversity; (3) adequate personal and financial supports; (4) accessibility; and (5) delivery and outcomes which are high quality, gender-sensitive, and inclusive (see Wismer and Lior).

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ROSE ROMBERG

Role Model

Bubbie, bride-like lace shawl
 blessing candles, Sabbath-flamed.

Zaideh telling tales
 about Baal Shem Tov
 I curl his beard.

A thatched-roof hut
 on earthen floor
 I sleep in the loft
 on a hay mattress.
 Koo-koo-rrah-koo ...
 the red-crowned rooster's call
 awakening the day
 a baby bird softly chirps.

I gaze from my window
 magenta ribbons
 the dawning sky
 my heart pounds.

In the deep forest
 crowded with spruce,
 oak and ash trees
 earth heaves in symphony
 of whispering sounds
 I discover speckled eggs in nest
 pick blueberries and mushrooms
 my baskets fill.

Through the fields
 of sun-bathed buttercups
 meadows thick
 with purple heather
 sweet fragrance fills my senses
 envelopes me.
 I trail behind Bubbie Sarah
 along with edge of marsh grass
 she plucks tall, tall reads
 braids my first doll.

Rose Romberg was born in Poland and arrived in Toronto in 1925. Several of her poems have appeared in the White Wall Review, and her essay, "Especially for Seniors," was published in Ontario Senior Citizens' Affairs.