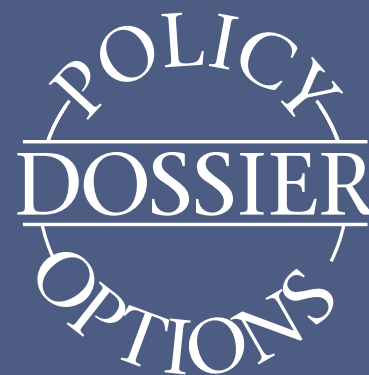


CONNECTING THE DOTS ON LIFELONG LEARNING: CANADA'S NEW COMPOSITE LEARNING INDEX



Paul Cappon

Released in May 2006 by the Canadian Council on Learning, the Composite Learning Index became the world's first measurement tool for lifelong learning. Meaningful and significant improvement in Canada's culture of learning is a long-term project involving many players, and the index provides a coherent and common point of departure for this complex policy intersection. "Lifelong learning is crucial to Canada's continued competitiveness and prosperity, particularly in light of our aging population and growing skills shortage," writes the president and CEO of the Canadian Council on Learning. "It is clear from our findings that Canadians do relatively well as learners throughout the formal education system. But after graduation we collectively fall short. To be competitive, we need to do better."

Lancé en mai 2006 par le Conseil canadien sur l'apprentissage (CCA), l'indice composite de l'apprentissage (ICA) est le premier outil au monde donnant une mesure de l'éducation permanente. L'amélioration significative de la culture d'apprentissage au Canada est un projet complexe et de longue haleine qui implique de nombreux acteurs, auxquels l'ICA fournit désormais un point de départ unique et cohérent. « L'éducation permanente est indispensable à la compétitivité et à la prospérité de notre pays, surtout face au vieillissement démographique et à la pénurie croissante de main-d'œuvre », écrit le président-directeur général du CCA. « Nos travaux montrent qu'en tant qu'apprenants, les Canadiens réussissent relativement bien dans le cadre du système d'éducation officiel. Mais au-delà du diplôme de fin d'études, nous ne répondons plus collectivement aux attentes de demain. Nous devons faire mieux pour être compétitifs. »

The benefits of learning are well documented. For individuals, higher levels of learning are associated with higher wages, better job prospects, improved health and a more fulfilling personal life. The benefits for communities include more engaged citizens, a more cohesive society and economic prosperity. It is not surprising that countries around the world are seeking to develop strategies and policies to foster a culture of lifelong learning.

Until now, no country has had a means of gauging the extent of lifelong learning within its population. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) released the Composite Learning Index (CLI) in May 2006. It is the world's first tool to measure the state of learning, over time, for individual communities and across the country.

The index reveals that Canada has not yet progressed beyond the traditional concept of learning as formal, struc-

tured education. Learning that ends upon leaving the classroom is not adequate for the 21st century, when globalization demands perpetual reorientation and reinvention, from the personal level through to the national. Lifelong learning is crucial to Canada's continued competitiveness and prosperity, particularly in light of our aging population and growing skills shortage.

CCL released the first annual CLI with two major objectives in mind: to stimulate an informed discussion of lifelong learning in Canada; and to identify areas of strength and weakness in learning conditions nationally, and in individual communities, in order to enable communities to learn from one another.

Composite indices offer a relatively simple way to present complex concepts and link diverse sources of data to show trends over time. The best-known composite index

in Canada is the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Every month, the CPI combines the cost of purchasing about 60 typical items—from apples to fuel—in order to track overall trends in prices for a typical household. In comparison, the Composite Learning Index combines 15 major indicators of lifelong learning on an annual basis.

These indicators, taken from reliable national surveys and other sound data sources, reflect a wide range of learning activities, including literacy skills, post-secondary attainment, job-related training and community engagement through volunteering, sports or cultural activities, among others.

CCL built the index on a conceptual framework that recognizes learning as much more than the three Rs. The framework is loosely based on the four major components, or “pillars,” of learning identified by the UNESCO Commission on Learning for the 21st Century. These pillars are also reflected in the goals of ministries of education across Canada (although in some cases different terminology is used). The four pillars are:

- Learning to Know, which includes the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of learning tools such as concentration, memory and analysis.
- Learning to Do, which concerns occupational, hands-on and practical skills.
- Learning to Live Together, which is learning that strengthens cooperation and social cohesion.
- Learning to Be, which includes the fulfillment of the whole person, as an individual, as a member of a family and as a citizen.

In developing the index, the research team set out to meet the following criteria:

- The analysis must relate to the social and economic outcomes that Canadians desire.
- The index must use current data that are available nationwide.
- The model must be flexible enough to accommodate new and better sources of data, but still be

able to chart progress year over year.

- There must be international support for the conceptual model.
- International comparisons of individual indicators must have been drawn whenever possible.
- The index must engage Canadians by comparing their expectations with our actual performance in learning.
- The index must be relevant to Canadians in every walk of life, from the truck driver to the banker.
- Although the focal point of the index is Canada as a whole, the results must be available at the community level, because that is where Canadians live and where learning occurs.
- Canadians must be able to understand the index at the level they choose — whether that is simply the score for their community or the country, or a more complex analysis of the particular indicators.

The first step in developing the Composite Learning Index was to identify the known economic and social benefits of learning, such as income, employability, population health, civic engagement and literacy. Next, in consultation with a wide range of learning experts, the research team sought to identify the best sources of information in Canada

related to the four pillars of learning (see table 1).

Once the indicators had been selected, the team developed a sophisticated statistical model that determined the relationship between the learning inputs, or indicators, and the social and economic outcomes. This model calculates the weights (or relative importance) of the indicators used in the index.

The final score for the index was computed by combining the learning indicators together after applying the respective weight for each indicator.

CCL tested the validity of the model by calculating the scores for the index without weighting. With the weighting, the correlation between the indicators and the outcomes was 0.84; with equal weighting for each indicator, the correlation was only 0.5. The results of the different approaches to weighting are available on the CCL Web site (www.ccl-cca.ca/cli).

The first results of the Composite Learning Index were released in May 2006. Overall, Canada achieved a score of 73 out of 100. This score reflects the fact that compared with other countries in the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation, Canada does well in some areas of learning, particularly with respect to formal education. Nonetheless, there is significant

TABLE 1. INDICATORS USED IN THE COMPOSITE LEARNING INDEX

Learning to know	Learning to live together
Student skills High school dropouts Participation by young adults in formal education Post-secondary attainment	Volunteerism Charitable donations Participation in clubs Access to community institutions
Learning to do	Learning to be
Participation in job-related training Availability of training at work Access to institutions of learning	Learning through sports and recreation Exposure to Internet and reading materials in the home Access to resources like libraries Learning through culture and arts

Source: CCL

room for improvement in our national learning culture.

For example:

- Canada is among leading OECD countries in literacy scores for secondary school students, but literacy skills appear weaker for adults

The indicators with respect to adult literacy and job-related training are particularly troubling. According to the most recent Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey, 42 percent of Canadian adults in 2003 did not have sufficient literacy skills to succeed in a knowledge-based economy. Less than a third of working-age Canadians participated in job-related training in 2002, well behind many OECD countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, Canadian employers often offer only basic workplace training, which does not allow employees to practise or update fundamental skills and competencies like literacy and numeracy.

in Canada. Evidence suggests that Canadians experience a decline in these skills over the course of their lives.

- More young adults are participating in formal education after high school than ever before. Canada is among the leading countries in post-secondary attainment, though it is performing less well, internationally, in university attainment than in college attainment.

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Although the nationwide score was 73, there was significant variation

across the country, ranging from 47 to 88. The results show that analysis at the community level is often more relevant than analysis by province. For example, the neighbouring regions of Campbellton-Miramichi in New Brunswick and Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-

Madeleine in Quebec have identical CLI scores.

The results counter some of the concerns expressed in the course of consultations held during the development of the index. For example, the scores do not just reflect the distribution of wealth in the country, as some had feared. While some wealthier communities, such as Calgary and Ottawa-Gatineau, have high CLI scores, others with comparatively weaker economies, such as Regina and Winnipeg, also have high scores. Also, the index does not simply reflect the population density of the country. Although scores for rural communities were on average lower than for urban areas, some rural areas scored higher than some urban areas. For example, predominantly rural southwestern Saskatchewan achieved a score of 74, higher than many major Canadian cities, including Montreal (see table 2).

The Composite Learning Index illustrates the diverse elements of lifelong learning — in the home, the workplace and the community, as well as in more structured settings. It shows the ability of specific communities to fulfill learners' needs in each element. Western Canada, for example, achieves relatively high

scores on the Learning to Do pillar, largely because British Columbia and Saskatchewan lead the country in the proportion of employers offering structured training. Saskatchewan also scored highest in the Learning to Live Together pillar, leading the country in the proportion of its citizens who formally volunteer and belong to clubs and other community organizations. Alberta leads the provinces in the Learning to Be pillar, with high scores for exposure to reading materials in the home, sports and recreation, and exposure to museums and other cultural venues.

By recognizing and giving weight to learning outside the classroom, the CLI provides a richer, more accurate picture of learning in Canada and its communities.

Analysis of the underlying indicators is the key to determining why a community's learning conditions are weaker or stronger. Statistical data for each of these indicators are available through CCL's website (www.ccl-cca.ca/cli).

CCL has set ambitious goals for the Composite Learning Index: it must be useful and accessible to a wide audience, including policy-makers, education researchers and practitioners, individual students and parents.

The usefulness of the CLI to Canadian policy-makers is to a large degree determined by its ability to address Canadian policy priorities. The CLI allows for the setting of national benchmarks in lifelong learning, and for further international comparisons of the underlying learning indicators of learning. Measuring indicators of lifelong learning is fundamental to improving lifelong learning; it is a truism that what gets measured gets done.

Better than any other tool yet developed, the CLI will enable policy-makers to envisage what consti-

tutes an effective investment in learning, and to align policy with learning priorities. For example, the CLI can help to identify areas that would benefit from offering more workplace training initiatives, programs to help youth complete high school or a unique blend of approaches to address a community's particular needs.

The CLI will also inform and connect with those who are outside professional fields related to learning, and who have not to date been part of the discourse on lifelong learning. For example, research has identified a correlation between illiteracy and criminal recidivism. Health is also strongly linked to learning: better-educated Canadians are healthier. In addition, the CLI highlights the link between learning and social cohesion and civic engagement. While many in education, health and other fields may have

accepted the new paradigms of lifelong learning, the Composite Learning Index will open up these ideas and dialogues to a wider population.

Countries around the world have identified lifelong learning as a strategic priority, but Canada is the first country to develop an index that assesses the state of lifelong learning within its borders. The European Union and the OECD have expressed considerable interest in the work of CCL and in the Composite Learning Index in particular. In fact, the Joint Research Centre, which supports both the EU and the OECD, provided assistance in the development of the index. The centre, along with other stakeholders and academics, has recognized the unique methodology and application of the CLI and sees the index as a milestone internationally for those who value learning. In June 2006, CCL researchers were invited to present the

Composite Learning Index to a joint OECD-EU workshop called Measuring Well-being and Societal Progress. The event focused on the challenges involved in building "comprehensive measures of well-being, and of the specific role that education plays in well-being."

Results from the index have been made available through an intuitive, sophisticated and interactive online map that allows for complex analysis of learning. Through it, anyone can get results by city, economic region and province. At every level, these results include scores for the CLI and each pillar, as well as providing a measure of performance for each underlying indicator. Anyone can use this Web-based tool as the starting point for research on learning conditions in Canada — a place where questions can be formulated more clearly and inquiry can be given direction.

TABLE 2: COMPOSITE LEARNING INDEX SCORES AND PILLAR SCORES FOR MAJOR CANADIAN CITIES

City	Composite Learning Index score	Pillars of learning			
		Learning to know	Learning to do	Learning to live together	Learning to be
Abbotsford	77	5.9	6.5	4.2	4.8
Calgary	88	6.3	5.4	6.4	6.9
Edmonton	82	5.9	5.4	5.6	5.8
Halifax	74	4.7	5.6	5.3	5.1
Hamilton	76	4.7	5.1	5.9	5.8
Kingston	73	4.7	5.0	5.7	4.8
Kitchener	76	4.7	5.2	5.9	5.5
London	74	4.8	5.1	6.1	4.7
Montreal	69	5.6	4.0	3.9	4.4
Oshawa	75	5.8	5.1	4.3	5.2
Ottawa-Gatineau	85	5.8	4.6	6.5	6.8
Quebec City	71	5.4	4.0	5.4	3.8
Regina	80	3.8	6.3	7.6	6.1
Saguenay	66	4.3	3.8	4.4	5.0
Saint John	58	3.0	3.6	5.1	3.3
Saskatoon	80	4.4	6.4	6.7	5.9
Sherbrooke	64	4.8	4.0	4.3	3.5
St. Catharines-Niagara	76	4.7	5.1	5.9	5.7
St. John's	64	4.2	3.9	4.5	4.3
Sudbury	67	4.2	4.7	4.5	4.8
Thunder Bay	70	4.6	5.0	5.2	4.4
Toronto	76	5.8	5.2	4.5	5.3
Trois-Rivières	62	4.3	3.9	3.4	4.4
Vancouver	79	5.9	6.9	4.4	5.1
Victoria	81	5.1	6.7	5.6	5.8
Windsor	75	4.5	5.1	6.3	5.3
Winnipeg	80	4.9	6.1	6.1	6.1

Source: CCL

However, there are significant data gaps that CCL hopes to address in the future. For example, there are insufficient data to allow for the inclusion of the territories or of Aboriginal people living on reserves. For the same reason, indicators of early childhood development are not included at this time. Some of the data used for the CLI are not ideal, particularly those measuring the personal and social aspects of learning. CCL strongly advocates the need to collect better data related to lifelong learning.

Questions of data are only one aspect of the dialogue that needs to take place. Lifelong learning is the product of many decisions, policies and individual choices, and cannot be addressed by a single ministry or department or by a single jurisdiction. Meaningful and significant improvement in Canada's culture of learning is a long-term project involving many

players. CCL hopes that the CLI has already succeeded in communicating the message—well supported by the four pillars of learning—that learning spans all areas of life and, consequently, a broad spectrum of public policy.

This final goal is critical because the four pillars of learning are more than just a conceptual framework—this broad approach to learning is the foundation for prosperity in a knowledge-based society and economy. Each pillar requires equal attention. The CLI reinforces the message that responsibility for developing lifelong learning does not rest solely with the school system, even though it has an important role to play. Along with Canada's educators, the country's employers, communities and individuals must all actively participate in a learning culture.

Canada has far to go to achieve a culture of learning. The index shows

that while Canadians receive a strong basic preparation in their school years, learning declines throughout adulthood. While learning through formal schooling is important, there are multiple methods of engaging in learning throughout the lifespan, all of which affect a community's and an individual's well-being. The policy challenge is how to create a road map that supports learning as a lifelong endeavour, from early childhood through the formal school system and into the workplace, home and community.

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the art of the state

Volume III



Edited by
Keith Banting,
Thomas J. Courchene
and F. Leslie Seidle

Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada

Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada, a collection of papers originally presented at the IRPP's third "Art of the State" conference, will be published in 2007. Edited by Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle, the volume will shed light on Canada's approaches to recognizing and accommodating diversity, including instruments of shared citizenship, and their capacity to respond to new pressures and concerns. Analysis of the approaches of certain other countries and the critiques that have emerged will provide a comparative perspective.

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