



Understanding Ontario College-Community Agency Linkages

Research Report

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Executive Summary

Colleges are increasingly serving adult, immigrant students particularly in larger metropolitan areas. Ontario's college and settlement sectors (amongst other institutions) have been trying to respond to changing demographics and the challenges they present. The Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) project is a major Ontario colleges' systemic change initiative aimed at modifying existing institutional structures so that internationally trained immigrants can attain suitable employment more quickly.

Colleges and community based agencies have been restructuring their offerings to try and match the needs of internationally trained immigrants by providing employment programs, bridging education and language programs. The service landscape is becoming increasingly blurred as funding dollars through the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Development Agreement signed in 2005 have begun flowing. Colleges host Job Connect, Second Career and other employment initiatives while agencies provide the bulk of settlement programming. Major changes are coming to Ontario through the consolidation of various employment programs funded by different levels of government under a single Employment Ontario framework in 2009-2010. This has created levels of uncertainty unprecedented since the creation of community agencies in the 1950s and the evolution of colleges providing services to immigrants since the 1990s.

Collaborations between colleges and community agencies as well as other key stakeholders such as employers, universities, funding agencies and immigrants themselves are critical to the development of meaningful solutions to the integration of immigrants into commensurate employment in Ontario. Research demonstrates that while such collaborations are on-going between colleges and community agencies, their strength is often undermined by the lack of formal partnership agreements, clarity of roles in the provision of services to internationally trained immigrants and underlying issues of territoriality. If a continuum of services is to be provided to internationally trained immigrants, colleges and community agencies will have to strengthen their relationships, clarify their roles in providing services, foster and sustain open dialogue.

Background

Over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Ontario has seen at least four specific waves of immigration (Bambrah, 2006). Roughly speaking these four waves corresponded to:

1. Pre-world war II immigration comprising of predominantly unskilled and semi-skilled labour into an agricultural Canadian society.
2. Post world-war boom (1945-1967) with an economy characterized by low unemployment and rapid technological change stimulating the demand for skilled labour in Canada (Avery 1995; Hamilton 2002).
3. Increasing numbers of skilled workers recruited (1967-1986) with pre-arranged employment immigrant-selection criteria eased.
4. Knowledge workers (the majority being economic migrants) recruited on the basis of their education, skills and experience and without pre-arranged employment (1986 – present).

Of all the four waves of immigrants, the most recent wave has been and continues to be the most highly educated, skilled and experienced with over two-thirds having post-secondary education and or higher (Statistics Canada, 2006). Almost 20% of Ontario's skilled immigrants are from within the regulated professions that typically require a Bachelor's degree or higher. In 2007, 37% or 1.2 million immigrants of core working age, those aged 25 to 54, had a university degree, compared with only 22% of the core working-age Canadian born. The difference was even more pronounced among those who immigrated between 2002 and 2007, with more than half of these immigrants, or 320,000, having a university degree (Statistics Canada 2008). This immigrant wave is also unlike previous waves in that immigrants overwhelmingly come from non-traditional (non-European) source countries such as China, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. They have partial language disconnects (given that many come from the Commonwealth countries and speak some English or French) and most have very high ethnic, social, cultural and religious disconnects (Bambrah, 2006) in relation to the current milieu.

Settlement services for immigrants have gone through at least a similar number of iterations based on these client groups. During the first wave, there were few if any settlement organizations. Immigrants were helped to some extent by already settled family members or members of the community or neighbours, to some extent by churches and, later, by settlement houses. With mass migration (mainly from Europe) in the wake of World War II, the need for services to newcomers increased greatly in Ontario, especially in Toronto (Azim, 1987). Ethno-cultural organizations emerged to aid the largely semi-skilled, non-English speaking European immigrant population. The 1960s saw the first formalized organizations being set up for immigrants focusing on skills upgrading and language. For example COSTI (the Centre for Organizing Technical Training for Italians) was set up in 1962 to assist trades workers from Italy.

Meanwhile, the higher education system was also evolving during the 1960s. The Ontario College system was founded as “a new level and type of education to serve those parts of the population whose needs were not met by the existing education system. Focused mainly on career-oriented education, colleges would create a system which would be a coherent whole” (Ontario Department of Education, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Basic Documents, 1967). Community colleges were created as a response to a particular need at a particular point in time – that need was to meet the needs of that part of the population for

whom university was not accessible but who still needed and desired a post-secondary education. In other words, the history of community colleges cannot be categorized as an organic evolution but rather as reactionary construction (Quint-Rapoport, 2006).

The community college system in Canada, while different to some extent in every province, was created largely as a measure to address the social and economic circumstances of the 1960's. As Gallagher and Dennison wrote in 2005, "The first was the influence of human capital theory, which persuaded governments that investment in people could be key to economic growth. The second was a disturbing prediction by a number of social scientists that an unprecedented wave of students would soon demand access to post-secondary education. The third factor was the popular acceptance of the view that Canada's prosperity would now increasingly depend on the technical skill of its work force. Manpower training was seen as crucial to fuelling the economic engine, particularly when the longstanding policy of importing technically skilled individuals from other countries would be a less practical course of action."

Post-1986, large numbers of highly skilled immigrants began arriving in Ontario without pre-arranged employment and the settlement mandate was extended to include employment support in the broadest sense as well as language training. "Upon arrival in Ontario, many these immigrants were drawn to formal settlement services, many of which were founded on the basis of a service model that was created to meet the needs of refugees after the World War II, but subsequently were adapted to include employment-preparation programs based on language training, résumé writing, cold calling, networking, and work-placement programs for unskilled immigrants" (Bambrach, 2006). Settlement agencies had to evolve their programming and services considerably to fulfil the settlement needs of this highly skilled immigrant population.

Over the 1990s and 2000s, colleges began to offer applied baccalaureate programs to meet the needs of an evolving knowledge economy. This was an extension of their traditional role (of awarding diplomas and certification) which had in practice been restricted to the universities. As with their initial creation, this shift was a response to the particular social and economic context of the times, although this is a matter of great debate within the institutional framework, with some likening it to an 'identity crisis' (Rapoport, 2006). Michael Slonik (1995) said regarding the identity of community colleges that, "one of the most central and powerful elements of its identity was that it was not a university and did not aspire to be one." In his 2002 address to the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario, Skolnik argued *against* the five characteristics of community colleges outlined by Dennison (1989) "open door access; community orientation; emphasis on teaching; comprehensiveness; and responsiveness to societal needs" – by emphasizing that "the biggest part of what a community college does is preparing people for jobs in the mid-range of the occupational structure without which the modern economy would grind to a halt". While the debate as to the identity of community colleges continues, these institutions also continue to evolve to respond to the needs of students, employers and the community.

The community itself has been changing. The student population at colleges has been shifting from traditional, direct entrants (straight from high school) to non-traditional, indirect entrants (adult learners with or without work experience) – a look at the previous education of Ontario College and University graduates (class of 2000) shows that 30% of graduates had delayed entry (no previous post-secondary education); 36% came directly from high school; 11% had incomplete post-secondary education; 10% had a college diploma or certificate and 13% had a university degree (National Graduate Survey, Statistics Canada,

2000). The age of this population is also changing. In fall 2006, 50% of first year college students in Ontario were under 20 years of age; 34% were between 20-24 years; 8% were between 25-30 years; 5% were between 31-40 years and 3% were over 40 years (OCAS Data Cubes, 2006).

One of the reasons behind this shift towards adult, non-direct entrants has been immigration, particularly for the larger metropolitan areas of Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and the Golden Horseshoe. Large numbers of skilled immigrants have been settling in Ontario since the late 1980s and this has impacted the student population at colleges as well as a significant number of them go on to undertake some post-secondary education or training. Almost one in five very recent immigrants (in Canada for five years or less) university graduates were attending school in Canada in 2007, even though they already had a university degree compared with 1 in 15 of their Canadian born counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2008). Of those in school, 25% of them were in “other” studies (including language training and accreditation or professional upgrading programs) and another 25% were enrolled in CEGEP (general and vocational college) or college (Labour Force Survey, 2008).

However, regardless of attending post-secondary education in Canada, immigrant employment rates and income levels continue to be disproportionately low. Recent and established immigrants (those in Canada for more than 10 years) who received their highest university education in Canada or Europe had comparable employment rates in 2007 to the Canadian born. In contrast, many of those who obtained these credentials in Latin America, Asia or Africa had lower employment rates. (Statistics Canada 2008) and most immigrants (60%) come from these countries (Statistics Canada, 2007). Even if immigrants are employed, they are usually working outside of their field of education and experience, at low levels of income and at low status jobs (Lum, Rasheed, Chassels and Schuldt, 2009 and Rasheed, 2009). In 2007, with few exceptions, very recent immigrants who had any level of postsecondary education (whether a certificate, diploma or university degree) had employment rates that were lower than that of their Canadian-born peers – no matter where this postsecondary education was obtained (Statistics Canada 2008).

Research Methodology

Aim

The aim of this research was to explore how community agencies in Ontario view community colleges, to what extent they are linked to each other and how these linkages can be strengthened – from the perspective of the community agencies.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through an online survey over a 60 day period from December 2008-January 2009. Building on a previous exploratory CIITE study in which 25 agencies in the province had participated, this study was designed to understand the college-community agency relationship from the agency point of view.

Invitations to participate in the online study were sent electronically by college representatives participating on the CIITE Employment Support project (of which this study was a part). Information about the study was also circulated on relevant listservs. The study was conducted in both English and French and participants provided their consent for participation.

Results and Discussion

Description of Sample

- A total of 126 completed responses were received (121 English; 5 French) with an overall completion rate of 34.89%.
- 79.48% of agencies were located in and served the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto - 65.87%; Mississauga – 5.56%; Markham – 3.17% and Brampton – 3.17% and Oakville 2.38%) and Ottawa (6.35%).
- 75.20% of agencies did not serve a particular ethno-cultural population whereas almost a quarter did.
- Most agencies served high numbers of immigrants – a third had served over 3000 immigrants in the previous 12 months (32.79%); 15.57% had served over 1000; 9.84% had served between 500-999 and two-fifths (41.82%) served under 500 immigrants.
- 58.14% of Toronto area agencies served over 1000 clients and 80% of Ottawa agencies served between 200-999 clients (none served over 1000).
- 43.65% of respondents self-identified as agency staff, 33.33% as management, 21.42% as executive or senior management and 1.59% as board member.

Employment Preparation Activities

Community agencies serving immigrants provide multiple employment preparation activities to immigrants with almost four fifths providing access to labour market and sector specific information, employment resource materials, generic job search, resume and cover letter development workshops. Over two-thirds provided links to professional regulatory or licensing bodies, information on researching employers, networking events or career fairs. Two-thirds or fewer agencies provided active employment preparation services such as individualized job development, interview preparation, cold calling and bridging programs and about half provide some sort of work placements and mentoring. Less than one-third provided workshops for self-employment and networking opportunities to meet investors. Less than one in five provided simulated work places.

Interestingly, nearly a third of respondents identified 'Other' and most of these services were not employment preparation services but settlement services that could impact the ability of immigrants to find work such as applications for funded training such as Second Career, specialized training such as ICDL computer licensing and workplace rights, volunteer programs such as HOST, assistance with translations, housing, youth camps, social assistance and childcare and office services such as computers, internet access, printing and faxing.

Immigrants in another CIITE study had identified three employment preparation activities as being of particular use to them in obtaining employment: interview preparation, work placement opportunities and individualized job/career development. Only about half the agencies in this study provided any of those services.

Capacity to Provide Service

Additional information was sourced on whether or not community agencies had appropriate capacity to provide these services. Respondents were asked if specific capacities at their agency sufficient to meet current demand for employment support services from immigrant clients. 79.04% agreed that process and program management capacities were effective to meet immigrant client needs and 69.17% agreed that infrastructural resources such as technology were sufficient.

However, 65.87% of respondents agreed that both fiscal and human resources were sufficient to meet demand for services. Not surprisingly, almost 40-45% of the agencies serving over 1000 clients felt that human resources were not sufficient in contrast to around 16% of agencies serving less than 500 clients. Cross-tabulations between number of clients and fiscal resources did not correlate quite so neatly. While 45% of agencies that served over 3000 clients felt fiscal capacity was not sufficient, a full one-third of those serving less than 49 immigrants, 40% of those serving less than 99 and 27% of those serving less than 199 immigrants per year felt the same.

Good Customer Service Management

Good customer service management requires identification and fulfillment of customer needs and immigrant needs were elicited from the aforementioned CIITE ITI survey (Rasheed, 2009). Overall, the vast majority of agencies responded that services were client focused (93.43%), low cost or free (94.85%) and available in multiple methods i.e. in-person, by phone or email (80.00%). However, fewer agreed that services were flexible and available outside regular work hours (63.98%), accessible and included accommodation for special needs (77.04%) and available in multiple languages (66.91%). Overall though, respondents believed that their agencies followed good customer service practices.

Linkages with Colleges

A strong network and wide linkages between community agencies and the local community college can influence the quality of service available to immigrants. Respondents were asked to rate specific attributes describing strong linkages. While 65% did undertake referrals to each other 53% agreed that formal partnership agreements existed between agency and college; 57.72% agreed that regular sharing of information, promising practices and ideas occurred between agency and college and 55% of respondents agreed that their agency and their local college collaborated on projects. Overall, respondents reported an average relationship with their local community colleges with 27% reporting poor or below average relationships and 46.94% reporting good or excellent relationships.

Policy Implications

According to participants, resources (fiscal, human and technological) continue to be a challenge for community agencies and improvements to internal structures of program and process management would enhance client services. Colleges (in another CIITE survey) identify similar challenges and exploring similarities and differences between their resource structures may be of interest going forward.

The study outlined that community agencies value relationships with their local community colleges. However, these relationships vary tremendously from region to region – while

some colleges have very strong links with community agencies and partner with them effectively on serving ITIs, others have weaker referral systems and limited information sharing. Few colleges have formal partnership agreements with community agencies and the development of such agreements, enhancement of information sharing and being able to measure effective referrals would demonstrate the commitment between the two parties. Stronger relationships may also create a seamless service experience for ITIs.

A good example of this is the upcoming CIITE ITI Advisement System. Used by ITI advisors at community colleges across the province, this system will generate action plans for ITIs based on their advising interaction and this action may include referrals to specific community agencies. Institutional sharing of such information may strengthen relationships between the two. Another possibility suggested by community agency respondents is the sharing of curricula developed by one institution with the other. Instead of spending tax dollars developing the same curricula, open sharing of relevant curricula would ensure not only funding dollar efficiencies but also standardized delivery of programming.

Community agencies also have specific, independent relationships with individual colleges and there exists an opportunity for systemic collaborations to be developed under an umbrella project such as CIITE and OCASI (Ontario Community Agencies Serving Immigrants) and others.

However, while they serve the same population in many geographical areas and their roles are complementary to a great extent, community agencies sometimes view colleges as competitors in certain areas, for example, in the provision of language assessments and training such as LINC, ESL and ELT. The language training landscape is a multi-layered, competitive one. Several different institutions provide this training including community agencies, colleges, school boards and even universities (as long as it pertains to admission). As colleges strive to provide more integrated services to ITIs in their campuses, territoriality may be an on-going issue that undermines their collaboration with their local community agencies – a potential area of concern for funding agencies. Clarifying roles and perhaps even identities would go a long way in strengthening the linkages between Ontario's colleges and its community agencies.

Finally, the ability to track clients seamlessly into meaningful employment is quite important. Clients enter both colleges and settlement services at multiple nodes or entry points. Capturing this data and being able to provide customized, seamless, multi-partner services that ease an ITI's pathway into meaningful commensurate employment may be another way to strengthen college-community relationships while benefiting the client and making efficient use of funding dollars. Exploring the applicability of Job Connect or other Employment Ontario models in tracking client satisfaction and employment status may be useful.

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