

What's inside...

In this issue we take a look at School-Work Transition programs – how they work, how they benefit students, and how you and your students can take advantage of them. We also report on the Sustaining Quality Curriculum initiative and the work being done by educators across the province to keep Ontario's curriculum current.

As well, we speak to Carol Yaworski, Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, about early intervention, and feature a software review by educator Mark Carbone.

While our focus has been – and remains – on the classroom, we break with tradition in this issue to hear from Gerard Kennedy, the new minister of education, on his vision for the education system.

Comments and suggestions can be provided through 'Point of View'. If you would like to receive your own personal copy of Curriculum Update, please subscribe at the address below.

Address all correspondence to:

Curriculum Update
Programs Support Branch
Ontario Ministry of Education
16th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Subscribe at:

subscribe@curriculum-update.info

Email:

editor@curriculum-update.info

Visit our website at:

www.curriculum-update.info

Inside This Issue

School-Work Transition	1
Learning Disabilities: early intervention ...	2
Sustaining Quality Curriculum	4
In Conversation: Gerard Kennedy	6
Software review	8

Curriculum update

Presented by the Curriculum Implementation Partnership
in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Education

School-Work Transition

A critical link between education and the workplace

They represent almost 50 percent of secondary school students. They enter the workforce directly after graduation, and their success in the labour market depends on their ability to demonstrate sound workplace skills. How can these students prepare for the world of work?

Ontario's School-Work Transition programs are designed to allow students to fulfill their high school graduation requirements while gaining valuable workplace experience and skills. An option for all students, School-Work Transition programs can also be an effective choice for some at-risk students.

Effective School-Work Transition programs require a genuine partnership between business and education. Accordingly, the ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities

spearheaded the creation of the Provincial Partnership Council, a group of business and community leaders from across Ontario, which leads ongoing employer recruitment in order to help create opportunities for students to gain work experience.

The Provincial Partnership Council also works with the ministry and local Business-Education Councils and Training Boards, to help build partnerships with individual schools and boards.

Extensive training and support materials have been created for schools and business leaders, to facilitate those partnerships, and a recruitment program, called Passport to Prosperity, was launched to bring the importance, value and benefit of School-Work Transition programs to the attention of business leaders throughout Ontario.

continued on page 9

Through School-Work Transition programs, students:

- gain relevant, practical experiences that complement theories and practices taught in school;
- receive on-the-job training – and in some cases, industry certification – while earning credits toward a high school diploma;
- are exposed to networking opportunities and references for future employment;
- increase their confidence, motivation and self-reliance, and develop initiative;
- develop knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful transition to work, apprenticeship or post-secondary education;
- build their awareness of the demands, expectations and responsibilities of employment, and
- become aware of opportunities, challenges and advancement criteria in various careers and sectors.

Learning Disabilities: Promoting Early Intervention Project

Over the past three years, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) has been leading a pilot program in as many as 35 school boards, aimed at facilitating early identification of, and intervention with, students at risk of developing learning problems. With \$3 million in funding provided by the ministry, the LDAO Promoting Early Intervention (PEI) project has demonstrated that early intervention can provide significant benefit to students and may eliminate the need for remediation later in their school careers. Curriculum Update interviewed Carol Yaworski, Executive Director of the LDAO, about this initiative.

What was the PEI project designed to address?

Actually, there were two things we wanted to accomplish.

The first was to develop tools that could identify students with learning disabilities earlier in their school careers, before they develop secondary behaviour problems as a result of frustration. The goal was to try and find these children sooner.

The second thing we determined was that there were many children who had no formal learning disability, but whose academic difficulties simply reflected poor preparedness for school. What these kids really needed, at 5 or 6 years old, was a bit of targeted instruction, and a bit of individual or small group attention that would catch them up fairly quickly.

Our belief was that children who, as a result of screening were identified as less school ready, and who responded to a specific kind of instruction, could become academically successful while being diverted from entering special

PEI: Goals and Objectives

The PEI project was developed to address 8 key goals:

- Identify and help children at risk by age 5
- Make a greater number of intervention techniques available to teachers
- Achieve greater accuracy in the identification of learning disabilities
- Decrease waiting list times for assessment
- Help to reduce behaviour and emotional problems associated with learning disabilities
- Provide resources and support to boards
- Support educators and parents to have ready access to help
- Facilitate an increase in the knowledge of learning disabilities among educators

For more information about PEI contact:

Carol Yaworski LDAO
(416) 929-4311
carol@ldao.on.ca

Tracy Odell Ministry of Education
(416) 325-2727
tracy.odell@edu.gov.on.ca

education. That was our second challenge or goal.

Of course, if a child doesn't respond, then you have an indicator that there may be a more deep-seated learning problem that might, in fact, be a learning disability.

"...we found...a wide range of practices regarding screening. There was no standardized approach..."

Was your goal to move the identification point forward?

Yes, earlier and more accurate identification, so that at the point where you're making referrals to expensive services like psychological assessments, you're doing so on a much more informed basis. This is a much more scientific approach, and it engages the classroom teacher more effectively in looking at alternatives before the student reaches Grade 2.

Can you describe the PEI project development process?

We began four years ago, and initially

conducted 14 focus groups across Ontario to consult with school boards about their screening and assessment practices.

What we found is that there was a wide range of practices regarding screening. There was no standardized approach, and sometimes no guarantee that screening would in fact lead to intervention.

What was your response to those findings?

Well, what emerged for us was the importance of having uniform protocols and tools available to all boards. That led us to developing an updated and detailed definition of learning disability. Correspondingly, we also developed a new diagnostic protocol, and a 'web-based teaching tool'.

This is a very 'user friendly' tool teachers can use as a part of their day-to-day work with students. The tool includes an online teacher preparation program, so the teacher begins working with the tool, and simultaneously learns about the pedagogical foundations of the model,

and how to use the screening tools.

What do the screening tools consist of?

The web-based teaching tools consist of a set of carefully selected screening tools that measure school readiness and phonological awareness.

As students are flagged through the screening process, curriculum-based checklists are then used to determine where students' strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of the curriculum. As well, a student's learning profile is generated by the tool, and then depicted graphically. Using this profile as a guideline, the teacher can search the extensive database for appropriate interventions. In fact, the database also includes 'take home' strategies for parents.

"...this year and in our earlier pilots...students exposed to the pilot program are far less likely to be 'at-risk'."

What has been the response to the tools?

Well that's interesting. The added advantage, we're finding, is that there is an enormous side-benefit related to professional development for teachers, through this product. It creates a way of using the web to identify teaching strategies, and obtain information on teaching without bombarding them.

We've been very pleased that many teachers are comfortable with this technology. There have been very few

glitches with it. We've also developed support material to help teachers. It helps them with report cards, it helps them to individualize instruction, and it helps them to identify the students who need extra support.

What is the status of the pilot project?

In June we finished our second year of the pilot with Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1, and we had 20 school boards participate. The boards were right across Ontario, both rural and urban, French and English language. All of our tools have been released simultaneously in English and French. What we've found, this year and in our earlier pilots in 2001/2002, is that students exposed to the pilot program are far less likely to be 'at-risk'. Certainly, we're seeing measurable results.

What's next for PEI?

Well, our hope is that, based on the results we've seen, the web-based teaching tool will in future be available to all boards.

Over time, I think the tool will also give us, on a provincial level, a clearer picture of demographics, and how students in various areas of the province are entering the school system in terms of readiness. We're very gratified by the results we've seen in the pilot projects, and look forward to bringing these new tools to teachers throughout the system.

Development of the PEI Project

The Promoting Early Intervention project is funded by the Ministry of Education. It is led by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, which worked with a steering committee representing a broad cross-section of organizations:

- Ministry of Education, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
- Hospital for Sick Children
- The Provincial Demonstration Schools
- Integra Foundation
- Council of Directors of Education
- Ontario College of Psychologists
- The Deans of Faculties of Education
- The Learning Opportunities Task Force

Update:

In the Fall 2003 issue we featured an interview with first-year teacher Luce Willam. For family reasons, Luce has left the Whitby area and relocated to Eastern Ontario. We will keep in touch with Luce, and speak with her again when she has had the opportunity to resume her career in public education.

Point of View

Our readers write

Do you have comments or suggestions? Write or email at the address on the front page.

Curriculum Update will not respond to or acknowledge receipt of individual letters. At the discretion of the editors, selected letters may be published without further notice to the writer. Letters may be edited to suit the requirements of the publication. Letters not published will be destroyed.

Sustaining Quality Curriculum

Curriculum review begins with province-wide input

Through the Sustaining Quality Curriculum initiative, launched in February 2003, each subject area within the Ontario curriculum will be reviewed every five years. This five-year review cycle is designed to ensure that the curriculum keeps pace with change in the world, continues to address the needs of students, and reflects the latest research on learning, skills development and effective teaching strategies. Changes to the curriculum will be made only if the evidence demonstrates the need for revision.

As part of a pilot for this process, educators from across the province took

part in a comprehensive consultation process on Social Studies, History and Geography/Canadian and World Studies curriculum in the spring of 2003. More than 500 teachers, school and board leaders, subject experts, parents, students and community representatives provided input for the review process, through focus groups and technical analysis work teams. Based on the consultation, as well as research and other data, summer writing teams drafted revisions. A draft of the revised elementary curriculum document was prepared and school boards and education partners were invited to provide

feedback on the draft. The final document will now be prepared.

Work is continuing on the Grades 9 – 12 Canadian and World Studies documents, in preparation for feedback consultation.

As part of the Sustaining Quality Curriculum process, a review of achievement charts across all disciplines K – 12 was also undertaken to ensure they reflect a continuous and unified approach. A team of educators reviewed the achievement charts, and provided recommendations for revision.

Year 1 of the review cycle is now underway, and includes a review of Mathematics K – 12, Business Studies, Guidance and Career Education.

Interview:

Kit Rankin and Sue Durst on Sustaining Quality Curriculum

Curriculum Update spoke with Kit Rankin, Director of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch, and Sue Durst, Manager of the Implementation and Review Unit, about Sustaining Quality Curriculum.

Why was the curriculum review cycle initiated?

Rankin: There are a variety of reasons. One that's important, I think, is that by developing and implementing a cycle of regular review, teachers – as well as parents and students – can be assured that the curriculum is evolving, as it must, but that there is continuity with the existing curriculum as we move forward.

Durst: That's been confirmed by the focus groups we did last spring. There's no need for major revision. What there is a need for is to be constantly checking quality. Finding out if there are ways to make it better. So what this process is really about is building on a very strong foundation, and addressing the pieces that people have told us need strengthening. And of course, simply keeping pace with change.

What kind of change?

Rankin: Well, for one, just changes in the

world. Take the social studies, history and geography curriculum, for example. A lot has happened since 1998 and 1999 when the elementary and secondary curriculum came out. So it's obvious that you can't just have a status quo curriculum in this subject area. Likewise, if you think about science, there are new discoveries every day. If you think about health and physical education, there's a shift in concern about children's health and fitness that wasn't nearly so prevalent when that curriculum was written.

Durst: Then you have the research that's being done in jurisdictions around the world. Just look at literacy alone, for example, language, and some of the skill pieces on the teaching of reading and math. There's pedagogical research going on, brain research, issues around gender and literacy, gender and mathematics. If there is new knowledge available that will help to improve teaching and learning, we need to take full advantage of it and make sure it's reflected in the curriculum.

Rankin: There is also student achievement data. More data has been collected over the past few years that help to give us feedback on the curriculum. And of course it wouldn't have been until the late 90s that longitudinal data was available, such as multiple years of SAIP or TIMSS. So this data now becomes a very valuable

tool that can be used in the process.

You're looking at feedback from educators as well?

Rankin: Absolutely. That's been the backbone of the process since day one. And of course, with teachers in particular, you're not only looking for content feedback but also insights on implementation. When you develop new curriculum, it's inevitable that some things will be easier to implement than others. There may need to be adjustments in the way things are structured. So that's a big piece of what we're after as well. By responding to that feedback from educators, hopefully we make learning better for students, and improve teacher's workflow.

Durst: That's actually where the process began, for this pilot discipline – social studies, history and geography – back in February 2003. We've been working with people in the field, subject and division experts. For the pilot, we consulted with more than 500 educators across the province through focus group sessions, which has been extremely valuable.

Rankin: We also had 42 people from across Ontario doing the technical analysis of this pilot discipline, looking for overlaps, looking for gaps, as well as strengths. Last summer about 50 people worked on the revisions, and a team of

Sustaining Quality Curriculum: at a glance

Analysis: of current curriculum policy documents, student achievement data, curriculum in other jurisdictions, recent research on teaching and learning, input from consultations with educators and other education partners.

Synthesis: of information and collected data.

Revision: of the curriculum document by summer writing teams of educators with specialized expertise.

Consultation: with school boards and education partners for feedback on the revised curriculum document.

Editing and publication: of the final curriculum document to reflect required revisions.

Implementation: of the revised curriculum, including information on minor changes and teacher training for more extensive changes.

curriculum leaders came in to look at the continuum from K-12. Curriculum has never been thought about across that entire spectrum. But in the best of possible worlds, when a child walks into Kindergarten, you'd have a clear vision of the skills, knowledge and attitudes that child would have on graduation. So the K-12 piece is another very significant contribution that our educator teams have brought to the equation.

You're pleased with the way the process has unfolded?

Rankin: Very much so. From the beginning, I've viewed this as nothing more than good, solid professional practice. Every good professional knows that the way you did it last year may have been good, but probably there's something that could be improved. If you don't take that point of view, you're essentially looking at planned obsolescence. So I've had a good deal of faith in the process from the beginning. What's been particularly gratifying, though, is hearing from the teachers, hearing about the incredible work they're doing. And their insights on the curriculum. We've had a great deal of valuable feedback, and also an extremely healthy sharing of expertise right across the province.

Two teachers share their experience

The Sustaining Quality Curriculum process was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my career.



Ivan Ius
Wellington Catholic District School Board
Geography Grades 7 – 9 Writing Team

The team, consisted of Project Manager Jennifer Watt, Project Leaders Mike Ball and Bernie Rubenstein and teachers who represented a cross-section of the province, received excellent support from subject and division associations.

We spent endless hours at Mowat Block revising, rewriting, adding, deleting and reorganizing the curriculum from the top to the bottom. We looked at the curriculum in Social Studies 1-6, History and Geography 7-8 and Canadian and World Studies 9-12.

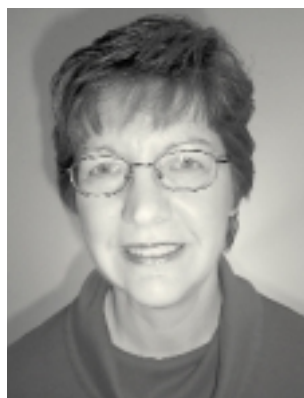
We all put our hearts and souls into this project. Trying to build consensus among many knowledgeable and passionate colleagues is very often a trying task. An email here, or a fax there, combined with the debate among expert groups in every field of the social sciences was very common in this review process. Everyone wanted to create a common vision that would help us build an exciting and hands-on curriculum.

Like the forensic detectives in the TV show CSI, our teams looked through the many lenses of curriculum design,

combing over the curriculum using the achievement chart, skills and content continua, course destinations, gender and cultural equity, and critical thinking. One of the most interesting challenges was to coordinate all of this activity with the French-language panel.

I personally struggled to keep alive the spirit of the original curriculum while looking for ways to make the documents robust, more understandable and more teacher-friendly. I believe we accomplished this task and have given teachers a fresh new model, which will help them grow in their classroom teaching.

My involvement with the Social Studies curriculum review process during the summer of 2003 provided



Carolyn Loewen
Alexander Graham Bell Public School
Durham District School Board
Social Studies Grades 1 – 3
Writing Team

me with an opportunity to work with enthusiastic educators, examine the many aspects that are considered when writing curriculum, and experience the satisfaction of working toward the completion of a project on time.

I was honoured to be selected as part of a team of more than 50 educators from across Ontario. During the orientation to the team, both elementary and secondary teachers, administrators and consultants met with us to share their strengths and experiences and assist us in working effectively on the assigned project.

The task of reviewing and clarifying the elementary Social Studies curriculum was

continued on page 8



Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education

what's happening, and where they can feel like they're part of something.

"We want educators to be able to focus on their jobs..."

We want educators to be able to focus on their jobs, and not fear that something is going to come around the corner and make life more difficult.

I think you do that by building a genuinely cooperative environment where we work together and capitalize on each others' expertise.

When I talk to educators about that, another thing I notice is how quickly they are willing to engage in a cooperative process, and say "okay, what can we get done together? That's impressive to me. It's heartening to see that the system is very adaptive, and that people want to go forward and explore new ways to do things.

"...we need to be more about enabling."

I want to see a system where there are teachers in their classrooms, principals in their schools, and they're able to make decisions about what's in the best interest of their students. That's what we train people for. We didn't have clerks running our classrooms. We have people who are actually trained to think and trained to recognize opportunities and challenges with individual children.

"Thank You"

"I've visited a lot of schools, a lot of classrooms and a lot of staff rooms, and one thing I notice consistently is a yearning for peace and stability. I think educators are looking for a patch where they can predict

That's not necessarily in place right now. But it's what I believe in. I refer to it as 'enterprising'. It's problem solving. There are very few classrooms or schools I've visited where principals and teachers didn't know what was needed. So there's a need to end that sense of being hemmed in that a lot of educators relay to me.

Of course, you can point to resources and funding issues, but there are also idea issues. Ideas around what you need to do to unleash that enterprising spirit. At the same time we need to be watchful to avoid scenarios in which an idea is imposed on the system. I'd say that we need to be more about enabling.

"That...is one of my first desires. To see respect injected back into the system."

We don't want to revamp the education system. We just want to let it work. I wouldn't even say make it work. Just let it work.

I think we need to begin by bringing in a healing element. Letting people do what they know how to do. Letting them feel like they belong, and that they're respected. That, in particular, is one of my first desires. To see respect injected back into the system. And to develop an education partnership that would flatten the hierarchy and include the voices of school boards and principals and teachers.

What we're trying to do in the short term is set up the basis for success over the next number of years. And in many ways, what we're doing is

unglamorous. But it's important. Creating a means to set shared goals within the system, and creating an environment in which government is a facilitating resource. We'll set goals, yes. But we'll set goals, in consultation with educators.

"...we need to re-connect with the public..."

Another important aspect of this, for all of us, is to remind ourselves how important education is. You know, it's the one area in which we can have a positive influence on the future well-being of people. I think the education system is often taken for granted. So we need to re-connect with the public, with our own role in building citizenship among our young people, and the importance of that role.

The public education system has to sell itself to society. No one else is going to do it. We have to open up those blinds and let the rest of society in. When we do that, I think people will be very impressed by what they see.

"...we have the resources...the ambition...and the talented people..."

But we won't be able to do that if we're fighting amongst ourselves. What we should fight against is ignorance. So, I do believe we need to get around the table. It will take time. It will take resources. But people should know that those things are my priorities, and that education is the

number one priority of the government.

We want, as do all educators, a very good education system. We believe that public education in Ontario has to be as good as anywhere else in the world, because it can be. We have no excuse not to develop the potential of our children. We have the resources, we have the ambition, and we have the talented people.

One mark of our success in accomplishing all of this will be our ability to have good teachers continue teaching. So we'll work on the barriers. We'll work on class sizes. We'll work on the extra resources teachers need.

"...educators make a difference in people's lives..."

I'm also hoping that new teachers, who sometimes suffer the roughest road, will similarly hang in there. Because we do recognize that more support has to be focused on that critical beginning of a teaching career.

You know, someone asked me an interesting question recently: if you could say only one thing to teachers, what would it be? Well, I think the people who are doing this work should be appreciated. Educators make a difference in people's lives. And I think that teachers should be recognized as key people who make this happen.

So what is the one thing I'd like to say? Thank you."

Software Review

Finale Music Software

by Mark Carbone

Consultant, IT Services

Waterloo Region District School Board

Strike up the band – your technology band! The arrival of the new Finale music software in Ontario schools is great news for educators.

Finale is music notation software for PC and MAC platforms. Primarily designed for creating, editing and printing sheet music, it is also an ideal tool for manipulating existing Finale, Encore or MIDI format music files, and can be used as a simple MIDI sequencer.

Finale is a comprehensive program capable of handling a simple 8 bar, 1 part composition, a round or a multi part, multi page complex arrangement or original composition. Score layouts may be set up using the built in wizard or one of the templates provided.

One of the strengths of Finale is that it can be used in a variety of classroom set ups with a wide range of equipment. Music notation can be entered into a score using a number of methods including computer keyboard and mouse, step time recording via MIDI compatible keyboards or MIDI guitars, real time MIDI

recording, scanning music (additional software and/or plug-ins required) or using software's MICnotator mode with a wind instrument.

Finale provides extensive notation editing capability to add all of the musical details to a score, including time and key signatures, accidentals, dynamics and articulation. Advanced editing features provide full control over note spacing, beaming, enharmonic spelling, lyrics and guitar notation. Scores may be viewed in concert pitch or by instrument transpositions. Individual parts may be extracted from the master score.

Bring an orchestra to life with a touch of your fingertips. Each staff in your score can be assigned a sound which is played back using the internal sound source on your computer, MIDI keyboard, MIDI sound module or software synthesizer. Music created in Finale can be published to paper, portable document format (.pdf), a web page or Finale Showcase, a free web site for sharing music.

Finale is a comprehensive software package that provides an effective, integrated technology method for addressing many of the required curriculum expectations.

In addition to its use in the classroom, Finale is an excellent tool music educators can use to prepare teaching resources, student work sheets, warm up exercises, and original studies or compositions for their students.

"...a comprehensive software package...for addressing many of the required curriculum expectations."

Take some time to explore this valuable tool for students and educators, let your creative juices flow and strike up the band!

Each year a wide variety of software titles is licensed by the Ministry of Education for use in publicly funded Ontario schools. Information on these titles is available through Ontario Educational Software Service (OESS) representatives at each board. To search for the OESS representative in your board, go to www.tvo.org/oess. To keep up to date on licensed software resources, visit the Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee (OSAPAC) website at www.osapac.org. It contains news on software releases, negotiations, an online survey and a complete database of licensed software titles with many links to the curriculum expectations and other resources. If you are Interested in profiling a software title for Curriculum Update, write us at editor@curriculum-update.info.

Two teachers continued from page 5

set before us. We were encouraged to consider many factors when processing our decisions: inclusivity, age appropriateness, content, gaps and overlap.

"By the end, I felt satisfied that we had prepared a document that we could proudly present to our peers."

My role was to work on revisions for the Grades 1 to 3 curriculum. Initially the task seemed onerous, but excellent leadership, encouragement, structure, and organization gave us focus and

direction. Our team hashed through decisions in all areas of the curriculum. Some were made easily, but many decisions stressed our team and tested our ability to reach consensus. It was not always easy to work on such a decision-based task with three other strong-willed individuals. During the first week, we learned to listen to each other. Throughout the second week, we learned how to work with each other. By the end, I felt satisfied that we had prepared a document that we could proudly present to our peers.

This experience was most worthwhile in my role as Primary Chairperson at my school. It allowed me to intimately understand each aspect of the Primary Social Studies curriculum so that I could share with my teaching partners the intended continuum of this curriculum. It provided contacts for valuable resources to support the curriculum. Finally, it encouraged me to make Social Studies an exciting aspect of my students' education.



Chef Daniel Schick watches Amanda Robitaille demonstrate some of the cooking skills gained in her apprenticeship at the King Edward Hotel, during the launch of Passport to Prosperity Month in May of 2003.

Passport to Prosperity

Employer-to-employer recruitment pays big dividends for students

Passport to Prosperity is an employer recruitment program, sponsored by the Ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities, and led by the Provincial Partnership Council and local Business-Education Councils across Ontario. The program includes personal employer-to-employer recruitment activities, program profile building through speaking engagements, a public service campaign, and specialized educational forums for business leaders.

Through this program, more than 20,000 interested employers have been identified across Ontario.

Ontario Skills Passport

The Ontario Skills Passport is a detailed record of the skills and work habits students have demonstrated in the workplace. It's designed to help students develop the generic skills used in virtually all occupations such as reading, writing, decision-making and problem solving. The Ontario Skills Passport is also a powerful skills assessment tool, which gives prospective employers the information they need to make a hiring decision.

The Ontario Skills Passport is being developed as a pilot project by the Ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities, with the collaboration of Human Resources Development Canada. The print version of the Ontario Skills Passport was piloted from November 2001 to June 2002. A new electronic version of the Passport is being piloted from January to June of this year. The electronic passport provides a simpler, more streamlined format, as well as access to a rich database of occupation-specific skills information. Pilots for both versions have involved 19 school boards and 7 Job Connect agencies.

The Ontario Skills Passport was developed to address one of the biggest challenges faced by employers – finding people with the right skills for the job – and the challenge faced by students who need to know what skills will be required to prepare for a specific career. Through Human Resources Development Canada, the ministry has been able to determine the specific mix of skills required of employees in hundreds of specific jobs, and has incorporated that information into the new electronic Passport.

The result is that students who are interested in a particular occupation can select their work placements to gain the exact experience they'll need to qualify for a job, and then use that work experience to secure successful employment in their chosen field. Students also learn that these skills are transferable to other occupations and that continuing to develop their skills will assist them to progress in their careers.

Three steps to using the Ontario Skills Passport:

1. Before beginning a work placement, students search the Ontario Skills Passport database to build a work plan that lists the specific job tasks related to the placement. The employer reviews this work plan with the teacher and student, and together they finalize it.
2. During the work placement, employers complete and sign the work plan to confirm that specific skills and work habits were demonstrated by the student.
3. After the work placement, students keep their work plans and other skill-related documents in a portfolio which they can use in developing an effective resume, and preparing for job interviews.

The pilot of the new electronic Ontario Skills Passport will run from January through June 2004.

e-Cooperative Education opens new doors for students

Virtual co-op (e-Cooperative Education) is now available as an option in Ontario secondary schools. Resource materials for co-op teachers were distributed to schools across the province in the fall of 2003.

A pilot took place at five Ontario schools in the fall of 2002: Chippewa Secondary School, Dryden High School, Lambton Central Collegiate and Vocational Institute, Ecole Secondaire L'Escale and Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School.

It was designed to explore the feasibility of providing students with co-op placements that can be carried out on the school site, using technology, rather than on the employer's site. It also explored the use of online tools to deliver the pre-placement component, traditionally offered in a classroom setting.

At the conclusion of the pilot, a report prepared by the five participating schools concluded that with the appropriate technology and technical support, e-Cooperative Education is a viable and effective model. The report also indicated that student assessment, in a 100% virtual placement, may be carried out by non-traditional means such as telephone conversations, written communications, emails and teleconferencing or videoconferencing.

The report also noted that offering the classroom component of a co-op program online provides a number of benefits to schools and students, including continuous intake of students throughout the school term, and greater scheduling flexibility for both the school and student.

e-Cooperative Education: lessons from the pilot program

What are the benefits of virtual co-op? Here is a brief summary of what students, teachers and employers learned during the pilot process:

STUDENTS

Students involved in virtual placements reported the following benefits:

- access to employers outside their immediate community;
- opportunities for a co-op experience that would have otherwise been prevented by timetable constraints, and
- exposure to a working style prevalent in some sectors of business and industry.

TEACHERS

Teachers involved in the pilot reported that it enables schools to more fully meet the needs of students through:

- a more extensive employer base beyond the local community;
- an alternative way for students with special needs to explore a wider variety of career options;
- a reduced need for student transportation arrangements, and
- more flexible program scheduling

EMPLOYERS

Employers in the pilot project found that having a student work with them off-site meant that:

- companies with limited space, or those working from home offices, could take advantage of student placements through virtual co-op;
- companies with limited or sporadic time to supervise student work could accommodate students more easily, with a flexible schedule for student communication;
- employers had access to students with a keen interest in their field, and
- employers found the process comfortable, as many currently utilize suppliers and contractors, and could mirror this process in working with students.

For more information about virtual co-op, visit the Co-operative Education Association website at www.ocea.on.ca or contact Anne Sasman at the Ministry of Education: anne.sasman@edu.gov.on.ca

e-Cooperative Education in action

Two cooperative education teachers, John Greer and Mary Vanden Eynde, who took part in the 2003 pilot, reflect on their experiences with this technology-based approach.



John Greer
Cooperative Education Teacher
Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

With the emergence of a new economy, in which many people work from home and may never actually see the people they're working for, virtual co-op exposes students not only to the world of work, but a unique working style as well, said John Greer, who was also interested in the model because of the flexibility and convenience it offers students.

"With virtual co-op, students can easily do a 1-credit placement, working right here at the school."

"We're a rural school, and 90 percent of our students are bussed each day. A 4-credit, full day co-op placement is certainly workable for our students, but a half-day 2-credit program presents some real difficulties in terms of both time and transportation," he said. "With virtual co-op, students can easily do a 1-credit placement, working right here at the school. So that's a lot more flexible, and gives them far more choice."

In addition to a classroom-based pre-placement program, John also piloted an online pre-placement tool, which he

believes was effective in providing students with greater access to co-op programs.

"A student comes along, three weeks into the semester, and we're too far along in the classroom-based pre-placement process to accommodate them," he said. "Using the online pre-placement, students aren't bound to a classroom, so we can accommodate their needs at any time."

Nine students participated in the pilot at Robert F. Hall. A total of 21 students are enrolled in the school's virtual co-op programs today.

In John's experience, virtual co-op requires that the student have a genuine interest in what he or she is learning, and sound communications skills.

"I don't think virtual co-op is suitable for every student," he said. But for a student who is highly motivated, and works well independently, it can provide a high quality learning experience that might otherwise be unavailable."



Mary Vanden Eynde
Cooperative Education Teacher
Lambton Central Collegiate
Lambton Kent District School Board

Mary Vanden Eynde was attracted to the virtual co-op model because of its ability to provide students with placements beyond the local community. Like many schools in Ontario, Lambton Central Collegiate does not have a large industrial base nearby, which represents a significant barrier to providing a full range of choices for students.

"...we found that getting the program off the ground did involve some initial effort, and some added research."

Mary piloted the virtual co-op model, combined with traditional classroom pre-placement, and monthly 'integration' days in which co-op students can share their progress and experiences.

"We found that the placements were a little more challenging to establish," she said. "With traditional placement, you come to know the organizations available to you in the community, and you work with them over and over again. So we found that getting the program off the ground did involve some initial effort, and some added research."

"Our teachers and students have had great success with it..."

Mary placed one student with the Canadian Space Agency, researching teleconferencing technology. Another did research for an author in Toronto. Other students were engaged in varied projects including website development, journalism and video production.

As for her thoughts on implementation?

"Our teachers and students have had great success with it, she said. "And what we've found is that students who are successful in virtual co-op tend to be those who are good time managers, good problem solvers, and students with good self-discipline. We've also found that virtual co-op is just as teacher-intensive as traditional co-op, and maybe a little more so because of the technology involved. But it works. And we've had very good student feedback, so we're very pleased with the results."

Pathways to Employability

Five boards spearhead innovative pilot project

A pilot project launched in September, 2003 will develop new School-Work Transition planning tools for use in Ontario school boards, including a School-Work transition 'How to' guide, and nine sector-specific School-Work Transition program models.

...these pilot programs will provide students with specific skills and work habits...

The Pathways to Employability pilot project is a multi-board initiative that involves the District School Board of Niagara, Limestone District School Board, Thames Valley District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board and Waterloo Region District School Board. This consortium of

boards has been given the mandate to create a School-Work Transition program model for those students who choose to enter the workplace directly from secondary school, whether with or without an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Supported by Human Resources Development Canada's leading edge research on workplace skills, these pilot programs will provide students with the specific skills and work habits they will need to make a successful transition to the workplace, combining relevant courses and course packages with experiential learning.

Implementation and evaluation of the School-Work Transition program models

will take place during the 2003 to 2005 school years. The tools and resources developed by the consortium will be shared with all boards as they become available.

It's Free! Subscribe now!

To subscribe to Curriculum Update and e-Bulletins, just send your name and address, or email address, to the contact addresses on the front page, or subscribe online at www.curriculum-update.info.

All personal information provided will be used solely for the purpose of distributing Curriculum Update and e-Bulletins. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without prior permission of the publishers. For more information contact the Programs Support Branch at (416) 212.4651 or Lorri.Pope@edu.gov.on.ca.

How can students benefit from School-Work opportunities?

Short Term Several hours to one day

- **Career talks:** help students learn about careers through classroom presentations
- **Career Fairs / Career days:** familiarize students with career opportunities
- **Workplace and industry tours:** give students a first-hand look at the workplace

Medium Term One day to four weeks

- **Job Shadowing:** allows students to observe a workplace, typically for one to two days
- **Work experience:** enables students gain on-the-job experience for one to four weeks

Making the Connection

- You can contact the Ontario Learning Partnership Group, a consortium of Business-Education Councils, for the name of the local Business-Education Council or Training Board in your community at 1-888-672-7996 or visit their website at www.olpg.on.ca
- The Ministry of Education also provides information on resources, programs and contacts on its website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/passport/

Longer Term 100 to 400 hours over several months

- **Cooperative education:** students earn secondary school credits by applying classroom learning and exploring career interests at a work placement
- **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP):** students earn credits and start working towards an apprenticeship through a cooperative education placement in a skilled trades area – some students may also receive in-school apprenticeship curriculum training
- **School-Work Transitions:** students take a combination of courses and do multiple work placements as part of a specialized program to assist them in making the transition from school to the workplace
- **Mentoring:** business representatives act as role models and mentors for individual students
- **Project-Based Learning:** business representatives work as mentors and collaborators with students on projects aimed at providing solutions to real workplace problems