Strategic
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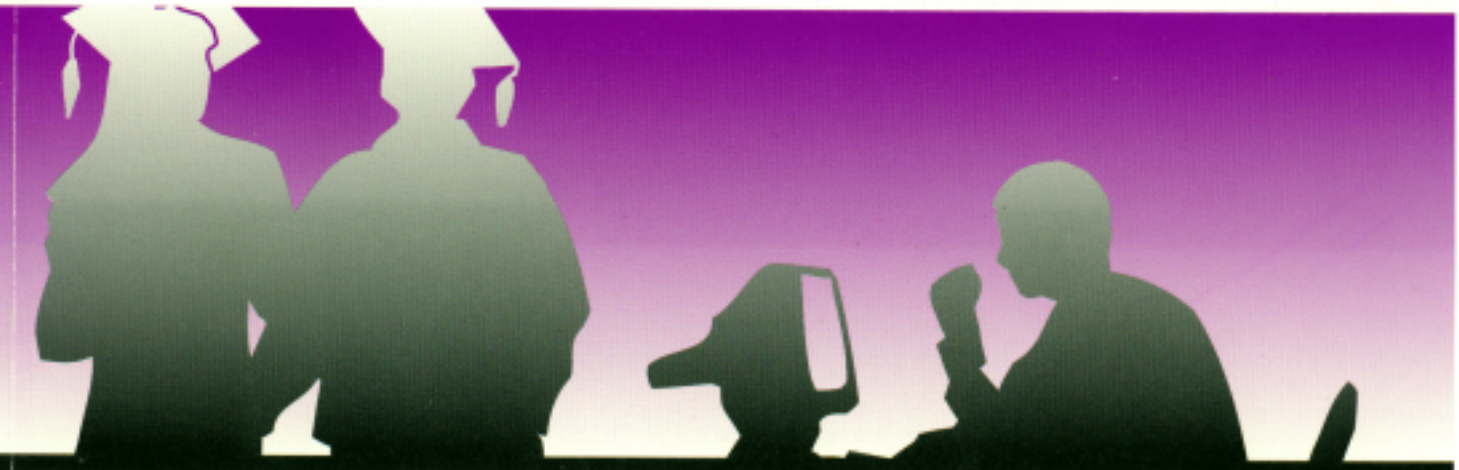

Process Evaluation Ready-to-Learn Project

Prince Edward Island

Human Resources Development Canada
Développement des ressources humaines Canada

Government of Prince Edward Island

Canada

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PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND READY TO LEARN PROJECT

Evaluation and Data Development
Strategic Policy
Human Resources Development Canada

September 1995

Acknowledgements

The Ready-to-Learn Evaluation Committee wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the Ready-to-Learn participants, facilitators, counsellors, Manager and Consultant from Federal and Provincial Departments as well as the P.E.I. Literacy Experts who willingly gave their time to the study.

Finally, we thank the consultants from Norpark Research Consultants Inc. who participated in the conduct of the evaluation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prince Edward Island's Ready to Learn (RTL) project is a three-year Strategic Initiative that offers counselling and training to 120 young P.E.I. residents with low literacy levels. The ultimate aim is to enhance their literacy level, education and job skills so that they become more employable.

As a strategic initiative, evaluation is a central requirement for RTL. The focus of the evaluation is on 13 issues of three broad types: relevance, project design and delivery and project success. To address the evaluation issues, five sources of information were used: a review of available documents and literature; an analysis of administrative data; interviews with key informants; focus groups; and surveys of RTL participants and non-participants.

This report presents a summary of the findings of a formative evaluation of RTL which focus specifically on the program planning and implementation, the bifurcation from the planned project and the on-going monitoring system. Moreover, the evaluation assesses some preliminary outcomes of the program such as participants's satisfaction, effects on incentives, changes in attitudes, discontinuation and effects of personal counselling.

The design of RTL is experimental: that is, eligible participants were assigned at random to a treatment or control group. A baseline questionnaire and a literacy level test was administered to all applicants before assignment to group. There were very few differences between the treatment and control groups on the baseline measures.

PROFILE

Funded for three years at $6.5 million beginning in September 1994, the P.E.I. Ready to Learn Project was designed to serve P.E.I. residents who: were on UI and/or SA; were job ready; functioned below a grade 10 level; volunteered to participate; could travel to the training site; had not participated in CEC or college preparation courses for more than 12 weeks in the last two years; were "walk-ins"; and were 18 to 26 years of age.

The first stage of RTL was to consist of community-based literacy training aimed at each student's educational level. Literacy training and support were to be provided by "facilitators" in one of 10 communities chosen mostly on the basis of sufficient numbers of participants to justify inclusion and regional

balance. This phase is an "individually based modular curriculum" cast at the grades 7,8,9 level covering Language Arts, Science and Math. The goal was to raise skill levels in mathematics, reading and writing so that they could enter a college preparatory program in the second year.

At the end of the first stage, participants would gain relevant experience at summer subsidized work for local employers. During the second year, participants who had attained a grade 10 level in reading, writing and math would enter the academic upgrading phase. Twenty were to stay at home for computer-based study, but the rest must attend institutions in one of five communities. Facilitators are supposed to follow participants into this second stage, continuing with social and personal support. After another summer of work experience, participants would spend the final year of the project taking skills training in Charlottetown or Summerside.

Participants - Facilitators

RTL participants were split 50:50 by sex. Their average age was 22.9 years. All participants were aged 30 or younger. About three-quarters of both groups were single. About 14% graduated from high school, but 22% never made it to grade 9.

The vast majority — 96% — had worked for pay in the past. Low-skill occupations were the norm for participants, with labourers, sales/service workers and restaurant workers most prevalent. On average, participants worked 9.6 months in the last two years. Participants who were SARs spent almost half the two years prior to RTL on welfare. The story is similar for UI clients, with RTL participants spending 11 of the previous 24 months on UI. All participants revealed a very positive attitude toward work and education.

As a strategic initiative, evaluation is a central requirement for RTL. This report presents a summary of the findings of a process evaluation of RTL.

MAIN FINDINGS

Constraints to Planned Implementation

Two main limitations forced decision-makers to alter their original plans. The primary one was that project designers had exceptionally little time to do the initial planning and to implement the project. The second

was legislative constraints, particularly the UI Act. These constraints have caused policy makers to deviate from the planned course in several important respects. The following aspects of the project have all been affected by those constraints.

a) A significant minority of participants is outside of the target group (i.e., did not meet eligibility requirements). Many cannot read and require remedial reading courses. Others qualified for skills training before RTL. Some were neither on UI nor welfare.

b) With a substantial proportion of participants from outside the target group, planned services were insufficient for many. Grade 7, 8, 9 upgrading is unsuitable for those who cannot read, and for those already operating at a grade 10 or better level. Upgrading in the second year is irrelevant for those with high school.

c) Some literacy groups have expressed concerns from the beginning primarily related to quality control. For the most part, partnerships with community groups and employers do not exist because there was not enough lead time. In consequence, there is no sense of ownership at the community level as several people told us. The lack of partnerships with employers makes finding placements more difficult. RTL certainly succeeded in developing partnerships between levels of government, however.

d) There was no intervention data gathered during the first phase of the project. Therefore, virtually nothing was known about how participants were faring in RTL, except at an anecdotal level.

Outstanding Issues

Plans for Future Stages of RTL — The list of important issues yet to be finalized as of late March for the upcoming year is startling. Among the issues requiring quick resolution: What arrangement will be made for those whose literacy skills do not improve after remedial training? Can enough summer jobs be found for participants? Will they be related to career goals? Can high level participants go directly to Holland College? Can low level participants stay in literacy/upgrading for another year or two? Can facilitators be with their participants next year in Holland College? Will participants be able to remain in their small groups at Holland College? Will there be a distance education component? Who will pay how much for it? What support will there be for home study students? Will there be a fourth year of RTL and how will it be paid for (important to know soon because students need to take pre-requisites next year)? What is the Coordinator's role next year and the year after? This is a lot to settle before the summer.

Changing roles — Everyone is reasonably sure of their roles and responsibilities *now*, but may not know exactly what will be expected of them a few months from now.

Communications system — Communications between management and facilitators was acknowledged to be haphazard early on in the project. Despite some improvements, the communications system remains somewhat extemporaneous. There are no policies or procedures manuals to standardize responses to common problems (and no one identified the need for them).

Preliminary Outcomes

Preliminary outcomes investigated included satisfaction with RTL, project impact on attitudes, incentives and self-reliance, project impact on employment skills, and facilitator training.

Participant satisfaction — Ready to Learn participants are satisfied with the project. Participants awarded RTL a B+ grade on average. Most facets of the project received a B+ or B- grade.

Attitudes, incentives and self-reliance — That the project has succeeded thus far in removing disincentives to training seems evident from the low drop-out rate. It is too early to assess the project's impact on augmenting incentives to work.

RTL has caused participants to become more negative with respect to certain aspects of work and training. As a result of RTL, participants now consider it less important to have work that is challenging, to have the opportunity to learn new things, to use their skills to the maximum, to make their own decisions, and to extend their range of abilities. They worry more about relying on themselves, and the quality of their family life. They advanced less than they otherwise would have in terms of knowing how to find a job and the work they have done in their life. They think it less likely that they will apply the skills they are learning. In consequence, they take a less positive attitude toward themselves and the things they can do than they would have had they not participated. On the positive side, as a result of RTL they are much happier with the quality of the education they have received, think it less likely that they will have to rely on social assistance in the future and attach more stigma to being unemployed.

Employment skills — The project has not yet assisted in pre-employment orientation, taught job search skills, taught occupational/academic skills, or provided work experience. Thus far, the project has used two main strategies to prepare participants for self-sufficiency: beginning with a high level of support and the gradual weaning of that support through successive stages of the project; and the small group concept.

As for the project's effect thus far on facilitators, all felt they were gaining valuable experience and learning many new skills as well as developing a greater awareness of the difficulties of the participants. In addition, they felt they were gaining confidence in new areas. The facilitators believed they would be more employable with the skills and insights they were acquiring. The skills also were said to be transferable to such levels as junior high school.

Facilitator training — There was agreement among interviewees that facilitator training was not all it could have been. The length and content of training were criticized by interviewees, regional literacy experts and facilitators. Life skills training was said to be inadequate. Curriculum training was also assailed. Finally, there was no training on the assessment of learning disabilities — something that RTL experience has demonstrated to be extremely important.

CONCLUSION

The existing project is different in many important respects from that submitted for SI funding. Most importantly, a large proportion of the participants are not from the intended target group; the services and resources available are inadequate to deal with those outside the target group; and the project has little support from outside agencies or from communities.

Time constraints still plague the project. RTL has been too busy putting out fires all along to attend to the vital business of planning for the long-term. As a consequence, there are a daunting number of overdue matters still pending, matters that left unresolved could derail the project. RTL has faith these matters can be resolved.

Participants are quite satisfied with RTL thus far, assigning an average mark of B+. Facilitators, too, seem pleased with the program.

Participant attitudes have become somewhat more negative as a result of participating. This may reflect the difficulty some are having with the curriculum, or a more realistic perception of what they are likely to accomplish after the program.

Management Response

The evaluation of the Ready-to-Learn Project was undertaken during February and March 1995. This was a formative evaluation, which focused on the administrative process. The summative evaluation, which will take place in the latter stages of the project will concentrate on results.

The Management Committee accepts the report as written, while recognizing that a formative evaluation by its very nature, concentrates on the administrative processes. The preliminary findings therefore, are primarily internally focused, and this context can be anticipated in a formative evaluation.

On a positive note, the evaluation also revealed that most participants are very satisfied with the program, and the high retention rate is evidence that project is doing well in meeting participants' needs. It also revealed some areas for improvements in planning and implementation.

Adjustments are being made to address those issues as well as any further needs of the clients as they become apparent.

We must continue to build on the positive results of the program in order to ensure that the Ready-to-Learn Project positively enhances the literacy levels, education and job skills of participating clients.

Verna Bruce, Deputy Minister
Office of Higher Education, Training and Adult Learning

Gerry Blanchard, Director General
PEI -Region, HRDC

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of jobs created in the coming decade will require at least a high school education. As the work becomes ever more demanding, young adults will need to acquire more and more knowledge and skills to find and keep a job. Contrast this with a very high drop-out rate[1] from high school and the prospects for secure employment for many of our young adults appear bleak. The implications are especially severe for those with low literacy skills. They tend to suffer more from poverty and have a harder time finding permanent jobs. There are also significant non-economic problems. People with low levels of literacy tend to have poorer health, a lower life expectancy (Council of Ministers of Education, 1988), and have a more difficult time fully participating in the social and political life of their community and their country.

As a result, many people believe that there should be a greater commitment to job training and education, arguing that Canada's future prosperity is at risk unless major reforms are undertaken. An integral element of the federal government's response is the Strategic Initiatives Program — an innovative mechanism that enables governments to initiate and evaluate various strategies for making social programs more job-oriented and responsive to participants needs. Under this program, the federal government reaches accords with provincial partners to test unique ideas for addressing high priority areas such as employment, learning and education, training, and income support.

One early innovative initiative is the Ready to Learn (RTL) Project in Prince Edward Island. Comprising five program elements, it offers counselling and training for about 120 young P.E.I. residents with low literacy levels who are on Unemployment Insurance (UI) or Social Assistance (SA), with the ultimate aim of enhancing their literacy level, education and job skills.

As a strategic initiative, evaluation is a central requirement for the Ready to Learn Project. This report presents the findings of a process evaluation of RTL. Its purpose is to examine how the program was designed and implemented and how it is operating so that program managers can effect improvements in the early stages of the project, and to expedite possible adoption of the model in other jurisdictions.

[1] The actual figure is in dispute, and depends on how it is measured. Many newspaper report the rate at about 30%.

1.1 Background

To help set a context for this report, this section briefly reviews the literacy situation in P.E.I., summarizes reliance on government financial support in the province, and summarizes the Strategic Initiatives Program.

Literacy in P.E.I.

Statistics on literacy levels in P.E.I. are hard to come by because of the small population size. What there is shows that the situation in P.E.I. is somewhat worse than that in the nation as a whole. Statistics Canada's Adult Literacy Study showed that approximately 40% of Prince Edward Islanders did not have sufficient reading skills to meet everyday reading requirements. Although 23% could carry out simple tasks if the material was clearly laid out in a familiar context (level 3), 17% could not deal adequately with the reading material they encounter in daily living (levels 1, 2)[2].

Prince Edward Island was found to have the second lowest rate of reading literacy in the country:

Table 1.1 Reading Levels by Province

Province	Average Reading Literacy
Newfoundland	236
Prince Edward Island	**243**
Nova Scotia	258
New Brunswick	262
Quebec	261
Ontario	266
Manitoba	269
Saskatchewan	265
Alberta	273
British Columbia	272
Canada	264

[2] Stats Can defined four levels of literacy:
Level 1 - Canadians at this level have difficulty dealing with printed materials.
Level 2 - Canadians at this level can use printed materials only for limited purposes such as finding a familiar word in a simple text.
Level 3 - Canadians at this level can use reading materials in a variety of situations provided the materials is simple, clearly laid out and the tasks involved are not too complex.
Level 4 - Canadians at this level meet most everyday reading demands.

The Statistics Canada study also showed that the gap between P.E.I. and the national average was greatest for older residents. Youths were generally on a par with their counterparts from the rest of the country[3]:

Table 1.2 Mean Reading Score by Age, P.E.I. and Canada

Age Group	*Mean Reading Score*	
	P.E.I.	Canada
16 - 24	268	269
25 - 34	274	276
35 - 44	224	273
45 - 54	198	255
55 - 69	192	234

Note: P.E.I. scores may be unreliable due to the small numbers in each age group

Another source of evidence for comparative literacy levels is the education level, often used as a proxy for literacy level. In P.E.I., the average education level is below the national average: mean years of schooling completed in P.E.I. are 11.6 compared to 12.1 nationally (1991 Census).

Reliance on Government Financial Support

Islanders have depended on the Unemployment Insurance system to provide them with a secure income in the past. Throughout the mid-80's, the number of individuals in P.E.I. on Unemployment Insurance remained fairly constant but since 1990 there has been a substantial increase. There were almost 28,000 Unemployment Insurance beneficiaries in 1993. Almost 83% of those claims related to occupations in seasonal industries. The highest rate of Unemployment Insurance dependency is in Lower West Prince County where it is 56% and the lowest rate is in Charlottetown at 8%. P.E.I. has the second highest rate of five or more repeat Unemployment Insurance claimants in the nation at 64% (after Newfoundland at 65%) and the lowest rate of first time claimants at only 9%.

[3] Figures in the following tables are the average reading literacy scores on the Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities for each province.

During the fiscal year 1993-1994, there were over 10,000 cases on social assistance within the province of Prince Edward Island. This figure represents over 20,300 individuals and accounts for 15.4% of the Island population. Of this caseload, only 67% are considered employable, with slightly over 20% being single able bodied individuals. Heads of households receiving social assistance are coded by educational levels. Some 20% have grade eight or less, 30 % have grade 10 or less, and 33% have grade twelve or less.

The Strategic Initiatives Program

Announced in the federal budget of February 1994, the Strategic Initiatives Program is scheduled to run through the 1998-99 fiscal year[4]. Under the program, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) was given the responsibility to work with the provinces and territories to conceive and fund innovative approaches to improve job opportunities, reduce barriers to employment, and curtail reliance on social security.

Pilot projects are funded on a 50:50 basis with the province or territory[5] for two, three or four years. Each project tests an innovative model for addressing recognized problems of the target group. Specifically, the program (Backgrounder, Strategic Initiatives, 1994):

- tests innovative and cost-effective ways of reforming social security programs;
- experiments with imaginative ways of addressing areas such as employment, training, income support and services;
- helps people develop the skills they need to find, keep, and create jobs;
- better serves Canadians unable to find work; and
- provides opportunities for program coherence and integration to reduce the jurisdictional and structural barriers between labour market/training/education and social services.

Among the target groups of the program are single parent families, Aboriginals, women, minorities, children at risk of falling into the intergenerational poverty trap, youth in the

[4] The 1995 federal budget cut the SI budget in half, from $800 million to $400 million.

[5] Some demonstration projects and Aboriginal projects may be undertaken without provincial/territorial involvement.

school-to-work transition, low-literate individuals, persons with a lack of marketable employment skills, disabled people, and older displaced workers (Backgrounder, Strategic Initiatives, 1994; PreEvaluation Assessment). Projects supported under the program are determined on merit and on key criteria such as (Backgrounder, Strategic Initiatives, 1994):

- relevance to policy direction;
- innovation/experimental potential;
- regional balance;
- linkages to broader reform issues;
- affordability;
- integration of federal-provincial/territorial efforts; and
- evaluation potential.

This last criterion is important because the point of pilot projects is to test promising models for possible adoption across Canada. A summative evaluation will ascertain whether the model is worth transplanting (because the objectives were or were not met); a process evaluation will document how the ideas were implemented, what problems were encountered and how they were confronted so that expansion of the model will be facilitated (assuming the model merits expansion).

1.2 Structure of the Report

The document is structured as follows. Part 1, comprising chapters 2 and 3, sets the context for the evaluation by describing the evaluation and presenting a summary of the program — its rationale and objectives. Part 2 presents the evaluation results, organized into chapters by key themes. The last chapter summarizes the findings on the evaluation questions.

PART I

Setting the Context

CHAPTER TWO:
EVALUATION ISSUES AND METHODS

This chapter presents the evaluation design, evaluation issues, and the methods used to answer those issues.

2.1 Evaluation Design

The primary purpose of this project is to carry out a formative evaluation that will assess the management and operation of the P.E.I. Ready to Learn Project. The essential components of a formative evaluation are: clarification of goals; determine program design (how it is supposed to work); examine implementation and document problems; clarify progress on outcomes; ensure measures are in place for ongoing monitoring and the upcoming summative stage; and analysis of results and report to client.

The evaluation includes important elements of a summative evaluation to assess early impacts and to ensure a proper foundation is laid for the upcoming summative stage. The design of RTL is experimental: that is, a pool of eligible participants was assigned at random[6] to a treatment or control group. A baseline questionnaire was administered to the pool of applicants before assignment to group. The baseline survey contains several attitude measures relating to motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, satisfaction with life, and work and unemployment. By repeating these questions in surveys of participants and non-participants, the program's impact on attitudes can be gauged.

Analysis of baseline data showed that the random assignment was very successful. With very few exceptions, the two groups were equivalent on everything examined. There was no significant difference between the two groups on any of the 34 attitude items in the baseline survey. Randomization and the baseline survey have set the stage for a sound summative evaluation.

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[6] During the interviews, we learned that assignment to treatment or control groups was random, with two important qualifications. Applicants were assigned to groups by drawing their names out of a box *by area*. Some areas (e.g., Wellington) took *all* eligible clients, therefore there are no control groups in those areas. Other potential clients lived in remote communities with too few clients to justify a class; none of these were selected.

The Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT) was also administered to the pool of applicants before assignment to group. CAAT tests for vocabulary, reading, and mathematics were administered.

A monitoring system has been put in place to monitor the progress of participants through the different stages of RTL. In addition, several follow-up surveys will be administered to participants during the course of the program.

2.2 Evaluation Issues

The Terms of Reference specified 13 evaluation issues[7]. The issues were of three broad types: relevance, project design and delivery, and project success.

2.2.1 Relevance Issues

Under this category of issues, the main focus is on the relevance of the project to Strategic Initiatives' objectives. How well the project has targeted its services and how relevant the services are to the target group are central concerns. How well the program conforms to Strategic Initiatives criteria is another relevance issue.

2.2.2 Project Design and Delivery Issues

The focus here is on RTL design — the organizational structure, tasks, roles and responsibilities of members, decision-making, lines of communication, monitoring system, and operating environment — and constraints impeding planned implementation. Here, the central business of the formative evaluation — whether the program was implemented as planned — is addressed.

2.2.3 Project Success Issues

The primary focus here is on the impact RTL has had to this point. Are participants satisfied? Are they progressing? Are facilitators benefiting? Although it is too early to render a definitive verdict on program

[7] The questions and summarized responses to each are presented in the concluding chapter.

impact, we look for early signs of program success, primarily through surveys with participants to determine their progress and satisfaction thus far.

2.3 Methods

To address the evaluation issues, we used five sources of information: a review of available documents and literature; an analysis of administrative data; interviews with key informants; focus groups; and surveys of RTL participants and non-participants. This section presents an overview of the methods used in the evaluation.

2.3.1 Document Review

To provide important background information for the design and analysis phases of the evaluation, a succinct review of issues concerning literacy and upgrading in P.E.I. was undertaken during the early stages of the evaluation. An evaluation team member reviewed the literature. The major areas covered in the review were: various statistical data on P.E.I.; literacy programming and curriculum development, CAAT tests, community based training, distance learning, target population needs, and skills training.

2.3.2 Analysis of Administrative Data

Data drawn from the baseline survey of applicants, a similar survey of facilitators, and an exit survey of drop-outs were analyzed to draw profiles of the participants, the non-participants, the facilitators, and drop-outs. An examination and assessment of the completeness of the monitoring system was also performed.

2.3.3 Survey of Project Participants and Non-Participants

The participant survey focused on measuring participant progress and satisfaction with various aspects of the program. The non-participant survey focused on their activities since the project started. Questionnaires were self-administered during class time. The three facilitators without their own groups ("floaters") and an evaluation team member distributed the questionnaire and oversaw the process, available to answer questions from participants.

The questionnaire booklet included a cover page with the participant's name. We wanted to know who completed each questionnaire so that we could merge survey responses with baseline data. Participants could tear off the front page, but an identification number written elsewhere on the instrument enabled us to link with baseline data.

The booklet also included a covering letter asking for cooperation in completing the survey, and assuring anonymity. The questionnaire itself was 15 pages, and was completed in the official language of the respondent's choice.

The surveys were collected and sent by courier to the Consultant. Data were cleaned, edited and computerized for analysis. Of the 117 participants, 115 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 98%.

The non-participant survey was conducted over the phone by the Consultant who entered the approved questionnaires into their CATI system and attempted to reach all individuals from the target group not selected for participation. Surveys were completed with 67 non-participants, for a response rate of 57%.

2.3.4 In-Depth Interviews

The purposes of the interviews were: to assess program implementation, management and operation; to determine informants' understanding of the goals and objectives of the program; to identify any major obstacles to achieving program objectives; and gather suggestions for making the program more successful.

The process began with the provision of a list of interview subjects from the RTL evaluation committee. Concurrently, interview guides were designed to govern the interviews. Somewhat different guides were needed to reflect the different perspectives of each of the above groups.

Interviews were completed with 15 individuals including RTL program managers, RTL Board members, Technical sub-committee members, the RTL Coordinator, and a CEC worker and social worker.

2.3.5 Focus Groups

The purposes of the focus groups were: to discuss the appropriateness of program targeting; to uncover problems of implementation; to gain a better appreciation of how RTL carries out its activities; to make an early assessment of satisfaction with services provided; to examine preliminary impacts on motivation and attitudes; and gather suggestions for making the program more successful.

The Evaluation Committee provided lists of potential focus group participants. The Committee supplied a list of all facilitators, and forwarded names of participants who volunteered and who were thought to be most informative. We were also given a list of regional literacy experts who were involved in literacy as skill providers, program designers or advocates.

Separate focus group sessions were held with two groups of facilitators, two groups of participants, and a group of regional literacy experts. Three different protocols were drafted to govern the three target groups.

CHAPTER THREE: RTL PROGRAM DESIGN

This chapter sets a context for the evaluation results by describing the RTL program *as it was planned.* This will serve as a point of departure for a chapter outlining constraints to implementing the project as planned and deviations resulting from those constraints (Chapter 5). The next chapter continues laying the foundation for the evaluation findings by presenting profiles of RTL participants and non-participants.

3.1 Ready to Learn

Funded for three years at $6.5 million beginning in September, 1994, the P.E.I. Ready to Learn Project was originally designed to serve P.E.I. residents who satisfied all the following conditions:

- were on UI and/or SA;
- were job ready;
- functioned below a grade 10 level according to the Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT);
- volunteered to participate;
- could travel to the training site;
- had not participated in CEC or college preparation courses for more than 12 weeks in the last two years;
- were "walk-ins"; and
- were 18 to 26 years of age.

The planned program had five major elements (Backgrounder, Ready to Learn, 1994; Pre-Evaluation Assessment):

1) **Peer Counselling** — Participants were to be matched with instructors/counsellors called "Community Education Facilitators," to create a supportive learning environment. This was viewed as important because the client group has experienced high drop-out rates in the past. Two years of such support were meant to improve literacy, academic and employment skills.

2) **Long-term Tracking/Professional Counselling** — Two counsellors were on staff to provide long-term tracking for participant progress, to provide on-going testing of these participants, and to help participants with problems that facilitators are not qualified to handle.

3) **Community Based Literacy Training** — Participants began involvement in the project in one of ten communities across the province, but were expected to make a successful transition from their community to the larger institutional training locations for academic upgrading in the second year (5 locations). Community-based literacy projects were devised as a means of aiding this transition.

4) **Computer-Based Home Study for Single Parents** — The initiative allowed, via computer-based home study, 20 single parents to remain at home for the upgrading phase.

5) **Graduated Summer Wage Subsidy** — During the summers, employers were offered wage subsidies to ensure that participants gain worthwhile summer experience (i.e., related to their employment goals). The summer subsidy was 50% of wages to a maximum of $3.00.

Project Objectives

As listed in the Pre-Evaluation Assessment, the stated objectives of Ready to Learn were to:

- test the effects that two years of small group tutoring has on the success of students in literacy training, academic upgrading, and skills training;
- test the effectiveness of having professional counselling support available to students;
- test the success of the social/interpersonal support provided in the small group settings;
- test linking community-based literacy training to institutional academic upgrading and skill training in a three year process;
- provide computer home-based training for academic upgrading and compare to institutional training;
- provide some tutoring and teaching experience to a group of UI/SA recipients.

How It Was to Work

CEC and Social Services staff were to identify potential participants among their clients. Participants could be identified from walk in traffic, from case files or from a search through data banks for those who fit program criteria. Interested clients were to come to a group information session, and if still interested take

the CAAT Level C test to determine their literacy level. Those meeting the literacy criteria became the "target population." Program participants were to be selected *at random* from the target population; the rest form the control group.

Concurrently, the facilitators were to be recruited through CECs and Regional Service Centres. Eighteen UI/SA recipients with post-secondary credentials and or experience in education were to be hired as Community Education Facilitators, and trained at Holland College to provide literacy and life skills training, monitoring and counselling. Fifteen were to have their own classes (each with eight or nine participants) and three would be "floaters," substitute teachers who fill in where necessary.

During the first year of the project, literacy training and support would be provided by the facilitators in one of 10 communities chosen mostly on the basis of sufficient numbers of clients to justify inclusion and regional balance. The first stage of RTL was to consist of community-based literacy training aimed at each participant's educational level. This phase is an "individually based modular curriculum" cast at the grades 7, 8, 9 level covering Language Arts, Science and Math. The goal was to raise skill levels in mathematics, reading and writing so that they could enter a college preparatory program in the second year.

At the end of the first stage, participants would gain relevant experience at summer subsidized work for local employers. During the second year, participants who had attained a grade 10 level in reading, writing and math would enter the academic upgrading phase[8]. Twenty were to stay at home for computer-based study, but the rest must attend institutions in one of five communities. Facilitators were supposed to follow participants into this second stage, continuing with social and personal support.

After another summer of work experience, participants would spend the final year[9] of the project taking skills training in Charlottetown or Summerside — assuming they have achieved the prerequisites (i.e., High School Completion Certificate for Mature Students).

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8 Those who have not yet reached this level continue their literacy training and join the college prep program when ready — a "continuous intake model" that allows for individual pacing.

9 Many courses last for two years. Participants may still be eligible for assistance during the second year — they can re-qualify for UI during their summer work placement — but they would have to pay tuition.

Participants would continue to receive UI or SA benefits, and perhaps supplementary benefits during their tenure with the project.

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities of Partners

There are several identifiable agencies and positions in RTL with prescribed roles and responsibilities. To start at the top, P.E.I. Ready to Learn is overseen by the Federal-Provincial Management Committee, co-chaired by the Deputy Minister, P.E.I. Office of Higher Education, Training and Adult Education, and by the Director General, P.E.I. Human Resources Development Canada. The committee has the final say and arbitrates any disputes (though it hasn't been called upon in this capacity as yet).

The Ready to Learn Association is the "heart and soul of the project." The Association was formed to gain access to funding and to provide a mechanism to solicit community input. The Association is legally responsible for carrying out the program mandate; it makes the decisions. It has a Board of Directors that meets monthly. Within the Board is an unofficial "operations management" or "coordinating committee" which meets every week or two to look after the details of operations. The committee deals with everyday issues which speeds up the decision-making process. They "move the project forward" and bring their recommendations to the full Board for formal decision making. The association employs the three staff and 18 facilitators to carry out the project.

The Technical Committee (also known as the Technical sub-committee) was not in the original plans. It was devised as a way to get input from important partners — especially Holland College and the Literacy Alliance. The Terms of Reference for the committee are clearly specified and documented. "The real work is done at the technical sub-committee. The Board deals with issues that have been resolved." Soon the Board and the sub-committee will be amalgamated.

The Coordinator manages the project at the ground level. A large part of the Coordinator's role is to be a link between the facilitators and management (accounting for 70% of her time); being a support for facilitators and providing consultation (15%); planning for the project (10%); and providing support to participants (5%). She has more of an administrative role than was at first envisaged. The other counsellor has the primary responsibility for counselling participants.

Holland College is the service deliverer for higher levels of academic upgrading and skills training, which will take place during the second and third years of the project.

CHAPTER FOUR: RTL PARTICIPANT PROFILE

This chapter presents a profile of RTL participants, which will serve as important background information for the chapter reporting preliminary outcomes of the project (Chapter 6). Data comes from the baseline survey administered to all qualified individuals interested in participating in RTL.

The analysis opens with a brief look at the number of participants by UI/SAR[10]. It then turns to demographics, followed by an examination of family situation. Sections on work experience and education, expectations of RTL, and attitudes complete the descriptive analysis.

4.1 Number of Cases by UI/SAR[11]

About half of RTL participants were UI clients upon entering RTL (Table 4.1). Another 36% were SARs before the program. Only nine participants were relying on both programs at the time of the baseline survey. According to the baseline data, seven individuals selected for participation, were on neither program at the time of the survey. One criterion of participation was being in receipt of UI, SA or both.

Table 4.1 Number of Participants by Program Type

Program Type	Number	Percentage
SAR	40	36.0%
UI	55	49.5
SAR & UI	9	8.1
Neither	7	6.3
TOTAL	111	100.0

[10] To keep from overwhelming the reader with figures, most of the subsequent tables will include only percentages; the total number of cases will appear at the bottom of each table.

[11] Baseline surveys were missing for 11 RTL participants.

4.2 Demographics

Participants were split 50:50 by sex. The average age was 22.9 years. As well, both men and women were 22.9 years old on average. All participants were aged 30 or younger as required for participation in RTL. Only one participant was a member of a visible minority group.

About three-quarters of the participants were single (Table 4.2). Particularly noteworthy is the high proportion of single parents in the program: seven in eight of these families were headed by women. Half the participants had children. On average, participants had 1.6 children.

Table 4.2 Family Type Distribution

Family Type	Percentage
Single, no children	45.5%
Single parent	29.1
Childless couple	3.6
Couple with children	21.8

N=110

On average, participants successfully completed 9.4 years of education. The distribution of final grade completed (Table 4.3) shows that about 14% graduated from high school, but 22% never made it to grade 9.

A minority augmented their education level through night school or via the General Education Diploma (GED). The column on the right of the table shows the final grade completed after accounting for the GED and night school. Note the considerable improvement in proportion of participants having attained grade 12.

Table 4.3 Final Grade Completed

Final Grade	Regular School	Highest Credential
5	0.9%	0.9%
6	2.7	2.7
7	3.6	3.6
8	18.0	16.2
9	27.9	24.3
10	27.0	22.5
11	6.3	8.1
12	13.5	21.6

N=111

Final grade completed often does not equate with actual level of abilities. CAAT tests for vocabulary, reading, and mathematics were supposed to be administered to all those interested in taking part in RTL. CAAT scores were missing for 10 participants, however. From Table 4.4, it is clear that most participants have a long way to go before functioning at a grade 12 level, at least in vocabulary and mathematics. Note that 15 participants had achieved grade 12 standing (all but three of these students scored below 9.9 on at least one CAAT test). Another 16 had all CAAT scores above 9.9, three of whom had achieved grade 10 or higher in the regular school system. According to entrance criteria, the six with grade 10 or more and all CAAT scores above 9.9 should not have qualified for the program.

Table 4.4 CAAT Scores by Subject

CAAT Score	Vocabulary	Reading	Mathematics
Under 5	0.9%	0.0%	1.0%
5.0-5.9	5.4	0.0	2.0
6.0-6.9	4.5	0.9	18.8
7.0-7.9	13.4	8.0	8.9
8.0-8.9	14.3	14.3	19.8
9.0-9.9	21.4	8.9	19.8
10.0-10.9	8.9	8.0	4.0
11.0-11.9	7.1	17.9	5.9
12.0+	5.4	9.8	5.9
Post high school	18.8	32.1	13.9

N=112

4.3 Family Background

Most participants (74%) grew up in two-parent families. The rest were raised by single parents. Around 70% grew up in families that had received UI at least once before participants reached age 16; 36% were raised in families that had been on welfare. Some 35% still lived with their parents in the late summer of 1994. At the time of the survey, the typical household size was 3.4.

Some 37% of participants lived in households where no one was employed. Even in households where someone was employed, the jobs were often seasonal, temporary or part-time. Only four participants had spouses who worked in full-time, permanent jobs. More frequently, spouses were unemployed and on UI or welfare.

Given the extent of unemployment in these households, it is not surprising that average household income was only $19,262 in 1993.

4.4 Pre-Program Work Experience

The baseline survey posed a series of questions concerning work experience. This section examines general employment history, employment/unemployment experience during the past two years, and some specific information about the last job held by the respondent.

The vast majority of the respondents (96%) had worked for pay in the past. Since the first job, the typical participant had worked for 4.2 employers. The longest paid position lasted for an average of two years and four months. But 42% of participants never had a job that lasted for more than a year.

Within the last two years, the typical participant had held two jobs. Only 10% had not worked during this period. On average, they worked just 9.6 months in the last two years.

With the high proportion of time spent unemployed, it should come as no surprise that reliance on passive assistance was high during the past two years. Participants who were SARs spent almost half of the two years prior to RTL on welfare. The story is similar for UI clients, with RTL participants spending 11 of the previous 24 months on UI.

Table 4.5 shows the type of work the youths did most recently. Low-skill occupations were the norm, with labourers, sales/service workers and restaurant workers most prevalent.

Table 4.5 Occupation — Last Job Held

Occupation	Percentage
Labourer	20.8%
Restaurant worker	21.7
Flag person	4.7
Fisherman/Fisherman's helper	4.7
Farm work	10.4
Forestry	4.7
Sales/service	8.5
Baby sitter	6.6
Other	17.9

N=106

Most of these jobs were full-time. Two-thirds worked 40 or more hours per week. Only 9% of their jobs were under 20 hours per week. On average, participants worked 39.9 hours per week. Mean hourly wage was $6.70.

Most of the participants' jobs were seasonal (48%) or temporary (30%). Given this profile, it is not surprising that around 45% lost their last job because seasonal work ended. Lay-off from a non-seasonal job was the next most common reason — 20% cited this.

4.5 Expectations of the Ready to Learn Project

Participants were quite optimistic about their prospects for maintaining steady employment and staying off welfare[12]. Almost everyone thought it likely or very likely that they would apply the skills they will learn and find a job related to the training they will receive.

[12] Unfortunately, from the question as posed, we cannot ascertain whether respondents were answering with the expectation of participating in RTL, or on the basis of their current qualifications.

Virtually everyone said the primary benefit of RTL would be to improve their skills or to get a good job. Many (47%) were primarily interested in bettering themselves as an end in itself. Ultimate goals included finishing high school, learning new and different things, and improving their quality of life. The remainder (53%) sought to upgrade their education/improve their skills as a route to eventually obtain good jobs.

RTL participants aspired to a wide range of occupations (Table 4.6). Mentioned most often was work in the area of social work and counselling; next most prevalent for both groups was an auto mechanic. Another popular choice was working with computers. The ambitions were very different by sex: virtually all those aspiring to working with animals, to secretarial work, and to hairdressing were women; also most of the undecided were women; on the other hand virtually all those aspiring to be mechanics, carpenters, electricians, and truck drivers were men.

These ambitions seem realistic for the most part — few hoped to work in highly paid professions, for example— and represent a step up from the most recent jobs held by these groups. Expected minimum wages mirrored this prudence: the typical participant specified a reservation wage of $8.97 per hour.

Participants knew that they had to augment their skills to realize these occupational goals. Although most felt their pre-program skills sufficed for their most recent job, many believed their current skills were insufficient for the job they would like to be doing three to five years hence. On average, they held that their current skills matched the requirements of their last job very well: on a five-point scale where 1=poor and 5=excellent match, they averaged 3.8. But this perceived score fell to 2.5 when matching current skills against planned jobs.

Table 4.6 Career Goal Three to Five Years Hence

Occupation	Participant	Non-participant
Social worker/counsellor	19.7%	14.8%
Computer work	8.8	7.8
Mechanic	16.7	10.4
Secretary	9.8	3.5
Chef/cook	4.9	3.5
Police officer	2.9	3.5
Hairdresser	2.9	2.6
Book keeper	3.9	6.1
Carpentry	2.9	3.5
Electrician	3.9	1.7
Management	3.9	2.6
Truck driver	1.0	4.3
Working with animals	1.0	3.5
Not sure yet	7.8	13.0
Other	9.8	19.1

N=102

4.6 Attitudes

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their attitudes towards work, UI, welfare, training, themselves, and life in general[13]. It is particularly important to establish baseline measures of such pre-program dispositions because participant attitudes can determine the success of programs such as RTL (and because it is impossible to reconstruct these attitudes in retrospect at the summative evaluation stage).

All respondents revealed a very positive attitude toward education. With few exceptions, 80% or better of participants gave positive responses to every statement about learning/training. For example, 90% said it was important or extremely important to extend their range of abilities, and 88% said it was important or extremely important to have the opportunity to learn new things.

[13] The tables may be found in the technical report on the surveys. Also, Chapter 6, section 6.3 includes all the attitude questions and degree of change for participants and non-participants from baseline to follow-up survey.

Participants also divulged very positive attitudes toward work. For example, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that they like going to work, and 80% strongly disagreed that they would be better off on welfare than working.

Similarly, the vast majority of these youths rejected reliance on government for long term financial well-being. Thus, 80% strongly agreed that they were looking for solid job skills so they would not have to rely on government in the future, and 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they can't depend on government to take care of their economic future.

A substantial minority of participants professed a lack of control over things that happen to them. Thus, 22% agreed or strongly agreed that they have little control over their lives; another quarter were noncommittal. Some respondents ascribed labour market success to luck: around one-quarter agreed or strongly agreed that getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time; under half disagreed with this statement.

Respondents generally displayed healthy levels of self-esteem (Table 4.9), and were happy with their quality of life (Table 4.10). For instance, nearly 80% asserted they have a number of good qualities, and that they are equal with others. On the other hand, about half thought that it was sometimes or often true that they are no good at all. Generally they feel good about themselves, but there are periods of doubt, perhaps befitting their current straits. Still, few would allow that they were unhappy with important aspects of their lives, with one important exception: about two-thirds were unhappy or not very happy with the quality of the education they had received. A substantial minority was also concerned about the work they had done in their lives. Despite this, only 4% were unhappy with the overall quality of their life.

4.7 Summary

The typical RTL participant was 23 years old, single, had completed only 9.4 years of education, grew up in a two-parent family, lived in a household with $19,262 income in 1993, had four jobs prior to RTL, had been largely dependent on public financial support for the past two years, and held very positive attitudes concerning work, education, self-esteem, and quality of life.

PART II

Evaluation Results

CHAPTER FIVE: RTL IMPLEMENTATION

It very often turns out that programs are not implemented as planned. As one interview informant put it, "Although it is easy to plan in the abstract, once the project (got) real clients they started to realize that details had to be changed." The primary objectives of RTL have not changed, but some important aspects of project delivery have.

This chapter will first review the constraints that forced decision-makers to alter their original plans. It will then detail how the program was actually operating, pointing out departures from planned design caused in large part by these constraints. Finally, it examines some important outstanding issues that need to be addressed.

5.1 Constraints to Planned Implementation

Informants identified two cardinal constraints to planned implementation: the lack of time for planning and implementing RTL; and legislative/regulatory limitations. A shortage of job placements was also mentioned by some informants.

5.1.1 The Primary Constraint — Lack of Planning Time

Project designers had exceptionally little time to do the initial planning. The original proposal was not long on details — it was four pages. There was very little time to work out the operational details once the project was approved. "Too little thought has gone into how the guarantees of counselling, three years of training and of work will be fulfilled," according to one interviewee.

Most informants were in agreement that the primary constraint to implementing the program as designed was the lack of time. The project was announced at the end of June, 1994. The Office of Higher Education worked with Human Resources Development Canada to devise the organizational structure, hire staff and put things in place by September of the same year. Nearly everyone we spoke to was critical of this time frame: "There should have been at least six months' lead time to develop the model and approach community development."

The lack of planning time led to a host of other problems with which the project is still contending. "The whole process was much too rushed. Program parameters changed because of the rush." There was no time to do grass roots recruitment and full assessments, leading to the problems with project targeting. There was no time to go into communities and identify adequate numbers of potential participants, resulting in a lost opportunity to obtain valuable input from local communities. Once communities were selected, there was also "a mad scramble to find sites." Facilitators had to do this one or two weeks before classes were due to start. In some cases, participants were told on Friday where to show up for class the following Monday. Time constraints also led to high levels of confusion for CECs, social services workers, facilitators and participants because so many things were in flux and their was too little information on what was going on. "This meant a lot of students were given wrong information." And the lack of time alienated some groups whose cooperation could have been very valuable to RTL.

There is still planning taking place that ideally should have been done long ago. This will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.2 Legislative/Regulatory Constraints

Apart from the shortage of time, only one other constraint was raised by the majority of interviewees: the rules and regulations of UI and SA benefits. Some informants complained about the inflexibility of the UI Act in particular the restriction on length of time clients can draw UI benefits. For RTL, this will result in arbitrary imposition of work situations (i.e., some participants have to re-qualify for UI this summer and thus will not necessarily have placements that are tied to their career choice[14]). When re-qualifying, the participant's UI benefit rate is based on insurable earnings; therefore clients on a $6/hour subsidy for a summer job placement would be entitled to a reduced UI benefit, and would be at risk of leaving the program.

Social assistance rules could mean that the summer's wages could be taxed back by the department. (This was also the case for the attendance incentive paid out of UI funds, but social services has agreed to exempt it[15]). Negotiations are under way with the department to preclude this. In addition, the department

[14] Because of the higher incomes associated with some seasonal jobs, this was viewed as a preferred alternative.

[15] The commitment was made but the word did not get out into the field and some participants had the amount deducted. RTL wrote to the CEO to resolve this.

was said to be "very inflexible ... The commitment to three years at $150/month clouds decisions for the longer term." As well, the provincial government, as part of fiscal restraint measures, has reduced the money available to singles without dependants, further exacerbating the situation.

SARs sit next to UI recipients whose income can be much higher. In consequence, as one informant put it, "SARs often feel like they're second class." The Board has tried to deal with this issue by writing a letter to the Ministry of Health and Community Services to see if a training allowance could be paid to the SARs. No decision has yet been reached. One informant suggested for future projects, the budget should be put into one pot from which all participants would be paid (similar to the NB Works model).

5.1.3 Lack of Job Placements

The availability of job placements was also identified as a potential constraint to meeting program objectives. Efforts to find placements were delayed by the departure of the previous counsellor, and time is running very short. Some participants, particularly those needing to re-qualify for UI, have been asked to find their own jobs (the same one as last year). For the most part, this experience will not be applicable to career plans.

5.1.4 Conclusion

It is certainly impressive how such a complex project was designed and implemented in so short a time. But the time constraints have led to many problems that still plague RTL. Members have struggled to get the project running smoothly. They are still "flying by the seat of their pants," as more than one interviewee put it, in a reactive mode to meet deadlines.

These constraints have caused administrators to deviate from the planned course in several important respects. This meant the program as implemented was considerably different in important respects than that designed. This is the subject of the next section.

5.2 RTL As Implemented

The constraints identified above — particularly the lack of time for planning and implementation — have led to important adjustments to program design. This section concerns how RTL was actually operating during the evaluation period in terms of project targeting, the relevance of services for RTL participants, the partnerships developed by the project, and the monitoring system.

It is important to note that the deviations discussed in this chapter were possible because of the project's flexibility. Most of those associated with RTL construed the tractability as beneficial, indeed necessary. With a new and still evolving program, informants asserted that it was very important to have room for change as unforeseen issues arise. "Nothing is etched in stone." As we shall see, however, flexibility is a two-edged sword.

Another noteworthy point is that the material in this section focuses on the problems identified by informants. This is because an evaluation is much more valuable if it tells policy makers what needs improving, and why it is important to improve. While reading this chapter, the reader should keep in mind that most informants felt the program is meeting the needs of most participants. The high retention rate was cited as evidence that the project is doing a good job of meeting participants' needs.

5.2.1 Eligibility Criteria

Interviewees and regional literacy experts said the original concept of the project was to provide literacy training for those with low levels of functioning and take them to skills training. Regional literacy experts held that RTL should have stayed with its original intention, saying that those most in need of literacy training were the 23% of P.E.I. residents with a literacy level below grade 6. In their opinion, RTL skipped the literacy training stage and went directly to academic upgrading.

Some informants said the original concept was implausible however, because clients who test at low levels of literacy could not possibly qualify for skills training within the time allotted. Thus, the target group was decided by working backwards from the requisites for one-year skills training within the three-year funding period allocated to the project. It was felt that people needed to be functioning at a minimum of grade 7 to reach the required levels in the time allotted. Also salient in the minds of the designers was that existing

programs targeted either high education levels (i.e., grades 10 and up) or extremely low levels (i.e., basic literacy programs). It was felt that the middle education group was not being served.

As it turned out, the project had difficulty finding enough of the target group. This difficulty was attributed to a number of factors: a) one of the criteria was that participants should not have taken other programs — such people are hard to find; b) the target population tends not to come for counselling and hence is not to be found in counselling files; c) there was not enough lead time to do a proper search for clients; and d) RTL is a voluntary program and it is difficult to get people to commit to a 3-year program on a low income without the work portion to increase their UI. The problem became acute when it was realized that as a Strategic Initiatives the program needed a control group for its evaluation.

Responding to these exigencies, RTL decision makers began to relax some of the criteria for qualifying. First, the upper age limit was extended from 26 to 30. Next, the goal to have three equal groups of UI, SA, and dual recipients was abandoned; not enough of the last group could be found. Also, the initial requirement that participants could have taken any program except upgrading was changed so that they could have taken upgrading and dropped out.

Acceptable CAAT standards also became more labile. What was initially a narrow range of grade levels was expanded to include clients who tested at levels defined as functionally illiterate (CAAT test under 9.9). RTL decided to allow people who had achieved grade 11 as long as they scored between 7.0 and 9.9 on one test (clients who scored above 9.9 on CAAT test(s) were accepted if their grade level was 9 or below). We were told that one person was tested twice because s/he really wanted to participate; two others were re-tested because they almost qualified. Many participants missed one, two, or even all three CAAT tests (as we learned in the review of administrative data).

Despite the slackening of criteria, many participants did not meet them. A small number who were not on UI or SA were included. As we learned in Chapter 4, six participants had achieved at least grade 10 standing, and had all CAAT scores above 9.9. Facilitators implied that they are wasting their time in year 1 of RTL. At the other extreme, according to facilitators, a substantial proportion of RTL participants was actually functioning at less than grade 7 reading levels. All facilitators agreed that the ability to read was the crucial element that was lacking in a number of cases. One interviewee apprised us that approximately 1/3 of the

120 participants may need to go to Spell/Read for remedial reading training. At one site, all eight participants need this remediation. "There are some students who cannot read or write at all."

There was a consensus among facilitators that there were many participants who did not have the academic ability to complete the project. One opined that there was a great deal of material to get through in three years, which required exceptional students, and added there were few such students in the project. Another felt that the project was already not as focused as it should be and that it was not possible to accommodate all the needs (especially the non-academic needs) of all the participants.

Experts and facilitators pointed to problems with quick implementation and CAAT testing as the culprits for the partial failure in enroling the intended target group. In the scramble to fill the spaces for RTL, some participants who may not have been ideally suited for the project were encouraged to participate. Experts cited instances of students already in an upgrading program being encouraged to switch to the project. To persuade them to apply to RTL, students in one class were promised a career at the end of three years, according to the experts.

It should be noted that when the project implementees became aware of this "referral", that group of potential participants were screened out of RTL. Note: This worked for the initial selection. Later, when the project backfilled for quits, one or two of these students were included.

The CAAT was meant as an objective measure for including people in the program (determining whether they met the program criteria). It also can and was used to measure participants' grade ranking in order to determine their starting level in the program.

Experts questioned the accuracy of the testing and hence were uncertain whether the majority of participants were indeed functioning at their tested level. Facilitators concurred that the initial testing of the participants was not effective. Contrasting the number who need remedial reading help with the small proportion who tested below grade 7 in reading (1%), points out the inadequacy of relying on the CAAT as a sole indicator of performance in a learning environment. A needs assessment would have been beneficial to identify learning disabilities and the range of counselling needs.

In short, the weight of evidence supports the contention of many interviewees and focus group participants that a minority of participants is outside of the target group.

5.2.2 Appropriateness of Services/Interventions

There is a sizeable group of participants who cannot read. According to one interviewee, the implications of the need for 6 months of remedial training depend on how they respond to the training: if after 6 months the "light doesn't come on" it will be necessary to look for on-the-job training for these participants. For those for whom the light does come on it may be necessary to lengthen the project to 4 or 5 years. In short, the planned services and interventions are not suitable for those who cannot read, and different arrangements will be required.

At the other extreme are those functioning at higher levels than expected. We were told that they didn't want to move into college prep because they would be out of the project. According to the informants, many were ready for skills training, and others had moved into senior levels of academic upgrading. Others were passing time doing book reports. For these participants, planned services and interventions may have been inappropriate for their needs. However, further information provided indicates only two have passed the entrance requirements for skills training.

Besides the targeting, the appropriateness of the curriculum, the qualifications of the facilitators, and the adequacy of materials were discussed by focus group members and interviewees.

Appropriateness of Curriculum

The curriculum consists of a number of individualized self-directed learning packages that present the skills expected to be acquired at the end of the package along with some examples of texts.

Were the participants functioning at a grade 7 level, the first year curriculum is appropriate, according to experts. But, as discussed above, experts and facilitators contend that many participants function well below grade 7, especially in reading, and some others function above grade 9.9. Experts felt that the first year curriculum was not suitable for either group.

For the low-level participants, the material contained in the curriculum (especially the science component) was too hard for the purported grade level and irrelevant to the career goals of many participants, according to a number of interviewees. All facilitators agreed that the curriculum was difficult, especially the grades 7,

8 and 9. One facilitator stated that although participants were intended to work through the curriculum on their own, if they did not have the literacy skills it was very hard for them to do.

For high-level participants, first year training is redundant. Initially, Holland College was reluctant to provide the curriculum for the senior grades, feeling that this section could best be offered at their sites. A compromise was reached, however, whereby Holland College would make the curriculum available to the facilitators for a short period. Possibly due to communication problems, not all facilitators have been allowed the agreed-upon access to the packages.

As far as the second year of RTL, experts held that to be successful in the college prep, participants should be functioning at a strong grade 9 level at the start of that stage. Given where many participants began, there is some doubt that they will have progressed enough to meet this criterion.

Qualifications of Facilitators

As we shall see in the next chapter, students were very pleased with their facilitators for the most part. Still, experts called into question the ability of the facilitators to meet the participants' needs. They asserted that none of the facilitators had experience with adult learning and that their training at the start of the project did not equip them to address the difficulties participants experienced in their lives. The Board did not realize the extent of the needs of the client group, according to some interviewees. Certainly, they were aware that the client group often has a variety of barriers which cause them to drop out. But the extent of participants' emotional needs and the time needed to address them was not anticipated.

Regional experts included in the focus groups claimed facilitators lack understanding of literacy, life skills and the implications of social factors that tend to beset the target group. According to them, the participants who have been out of the school system for quite a while and often have major social and emotional difficulties; turning them over to inexperienced facilitators is setting both participants and facilitators up for failure, contend the experts.

There are no established standards for literacy instruction and the views expressed by experts may reflect their strong belief in their own literacy programs and personal opinions. It must be recognized that the

project was designed to test a model of using facilitators who are also UI recipients, to provide a basic level of literacy instruction and not to test the status quo of having fully qualified teachers on site.

Data from the facilitator survey provides some evidence on the qualifications of facilitators. Twelve had professional training for teaching, although three of these individuals did not have a university degree, and the duration of teacher training for another was three months. Although facilitators are not trained to counsel youth, one took a life skills course and another took youth worker training.

Adequacy of Materials

RTL suffers a serious shortage of test books and computers, according to facilitators and participants.

Facilitators had to arrange for the acquisition of any texts. To obtain the texts, the facilitators had to go to the provincial book depository and pick out the texts and then wait to see if they were allowed to have them — i.e., if there were enough after the school system got what they needed. In some cases there weren't.

Students in the focus groups told stories about an entire class sharing one book. In some instances, text books had to be shared not only among members of a group but also in some cases among groups. Although facilitators tried to coordinate their scheduled activities, the lack of materials sometimes caused scheduling conflicts.

Concern was also raised regarding the lack of computers in the classrooms. Although computers had been promised, one facilitator stated that he had been informed that they would not now be available until the end of May, 1995 (after the end of the first session).

Lack of workbooks and reference materials were also decried by facilitators. Ideally, it was suggested, the curriculum should come with references and text material.

Another noteworthy point: The french group operates somewhat differently from the english groups. To begin, the group is located in the college de l'Acadie and can make use of the college's resources (including computers). The pass mark for each package is 65% to 70% (as opposed to 80% for the english group). However, the college will allow participants to proceed to the next package on a mark of 50% to 55% for one

time. Better facilities and resources but laxer standards than for anglophone participants will need to be accounted for in the summative evaluation.

5.2.3 Development of Partnerships

The process of designing, implementing and operating the Ready to Learn project has necessitated joint planning and management among officials of different levels of government and other agents such as community colleges and literacy groups. Unfortunately, as we were told in our interviews and focus groups, in part due to time constraints, RTL did not ensure all linkages were in place at the outset to ensure the cooperation of organizations involved in the project.

The relationships between the project and other trainers or similar service providers is best summed up in the following quote: "The literacy field has a lot of factionalism. Different organizations have different philosophies of how to deliver services. Some organizations are more politicized — there is a fair amount of competition between players in the adult education field for a piece of the pie." The technical subcommittee was conceived to minimize such tensions.

Some literacy groups are standing back or are openly hostile because nobody consulted them regarding the program design. They have complained about various aspects of the project as discussed elsewhere in this report (e.g., target group are not those most in need; facilitators are not qualified). According to one informant with RTL, they remain "miffed." Clearly, they feel they should be playing a more central role in the project. A proposal to consolidate the subcommittee with the Board is one way to bridge the gap.

Holland College was also upset at being excluded from project planning. They have expressed concerns from the beginning about what the project is doing. The concerns are primarily related to quality control (i.e., what were the participants being taught and by whom). RTL and the college remain at loggerheads on these issues. The college is not shy about making it known that they should have delivered RTL. Some RTL officials counter that the College already runs everything else connected to training and there was a need for an alternative; besides they will be the key player in years 2 and 3 of the program. In fact, some informants expressed the view that the project will be swallowed by Holland College next year.

For the most part, partnerships with community groups and employers do not exist. A cardinal lament of many if not all people associated with RTL is that there was not enough lead time to establish partnerships

with community agencies. "As a community-based project the design should have been bottom-up but there was not the time to do it." In consequence, there is no sense of ownership at the community level as several people told us. "If the community had been more involved, facilities may have been better and there may have been more support for job placements." Communities are pleased to have the project operating there, of course. Even in these communities, though, there is no significant contact with local groups.

With the summer quickly approaching, the project is only now beginning to contact employers. The lack of partnerships with employers makes finding placements more difficult.

RTL certainly succeeded in developing partnerships between levels of government, however. Everyone who expressed an opinion said that the relationship between the federal and provincial departments co-managing the project was good to excellent. The individuals involved "work very well together and their relationship includes personal as well as professional courtesy."

We were told that generally there is a good relationship between CECs and field offices of the provincial Health & Community Services agencies. In smaller communities where people know each other and the offices co-locate, the relationship may be better than in larger communities. Not all CECs, however, have bought in to the project. Not being involved from the beginning, being given very little time to find clients, and being very decentralized, CEC staff embraced the project with different degrees of enthusiasm.

Interestingly, senior management of the social services department has very little involvement in the project. Better links with Social Services could have prevented some of the problems concerning financial support of SARs, such as the low level of financial support, and treatment of summer wages and of the attendance incentive.

5.2.4 The Monitoring System

The RTL system was supposed to include three files: the client file, the provider file, and the intervention file. The baseline survey of participants and non-participants and the CAAT test scores constituted the client file; the survey of facilitators comprised the provider file. Data on services received by participants was to form the intervention file.

As stated in Chapter 4, surveys were missing for 11 participants. Otherwise, baseline data were complete and, as far as we could tell, error free. It should provide an excellent baseline for the purposes of measuring changes at the summative stage.

CAAT scores were missing for 10 participants. More problematic was the lack of a client needs assessment: many participants do not operate at the level tested and may have learning disabilities. These data may not be of much use at the summative stage.

The provider file was missing data for one floater. Otherwise, the data set was complete and seemingly error free. The file should be valuable at the summative stage.

At the time data were being gathered, there was no intervention file in place. Therefore, virtually nothing was known about how participants were faring in RTL, except at an anecdotal level. A new system was in the planning stages. A separate report has been submitted to recommend improvements to the monitoring system.

5.3 Outstanding Issues

The primary constraint — the lack of time for planning and implementation — have helped cause a backlog of important matters that require immediate attention. This section will focus on the most important outstanding issues: plans for the second and third year of RTL, changing roles and responsibilities, and the communications system.

5.3.1 Plans for the Next Two Years

As noted above, the state of planning for future stages of RTL is worrisome. The list of important issues yet to be finalized for the upcoming year is startling. This section will summarize these issues.

The most important unresolved issues concern how to deal with participants outside the target group (participants who do not meet eligibility criteria) for the next two years. What to do with those who cannot read? They can hardly move to academic upgrading next year. On-the-job training was suggested by one interviewee. What about those who have just learned to read (through Spell/Read)? They missed a good deal of what they were supposed to learn in the first year, having spent every second day in remedial the training. One person suggested that these participants may be allowed to pursue academic upgrading for

whole 3 years. Another maintained, "They will not be abandoned although there are no plans regarding how to support them as of yet." As for those who need no academic upgrading, next year (as well as this year) is wasted. Can they move directly to skills training? Time is very short to settle these crucial matters.

A second imminent issue is summer placements. Arrangement of summer placements has been delayed primarily due to the departure of the previous Counsellor. Participants were then encouraged to return to jobs they had held the previous summer and also facilitators were being told to try and help their participants to find jobs. With summer fast approaching, chances of finding placements relevant to career choices are getting more remote.

Negotiations with Holland College for next year have just begun. Holland College is an autonomous training institution and cannot be dictated to by either level of government. But RTL seems to take it for granted that they can work important matters out with the college. One outstanding issue is Holland College's insistence on integrating the students in the College Prep classes. RTL, on the other hand, has said they are not prepared to accede to integration because the RTL will disappear. Various options to be studied include: keeping the groups in the community, keeping the groups within the college; integrating the groups. RTL officials acknowledged that much negotiation is needed to reach a compromise. RTL also acknowledged that keeping the groups in the community would pose a problem since facilitators are not specialists in all areas and it may be necessary to combine groups or rotate facilitators. This is a very complicated issue that RTL assumes can be resolved quickly. Negotiations with Holland College regarding the College Prep stage have only just begun; negotiations for skills training seats have not started. These negotiations need to be at the senior level and should be concluded quickly, especially with regard to second year.

Another key outstanding issue is the status of facilitators next year. There is no guarantee that Holland College will hire all the facilitators as lab assistants - it will depend on the number of participants going into College Prep and also on the facilitators' qualifications. And Holland College has not agreed to assign facilitators to their current students.

As well, the province has yet to negotiate with Holland College to obtain extra seats and reduced per diems for the seats. Some informants wondered whether the college would acquiesce to this request.

Another important outstanding issue is the state of planning for distance education. Only now is the project looking at whether it is feasible. "A lot more pre-planning should have been done," according to one interviewee. A survey has been done of participants who would be interested in home study and sufficient numbers have been found (the option is no longer restricted to single parents).

The distance education component is on hold while technical aspects, costs and funding are reassessed. The component has a proposed budget of $370,649 for which application will be made to the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency: ACOA has not even been approached yet. The biggest impediment is the charges for lines into participants' homes which amount to $200,000: almost as much as for the equipment.

Some interviewees were concerned about the expense of providing interactive computer systems to 20 people for one year's use. "The projected cost of the distance education component is prohibitive and will need to be reassessed." The proposed cost would be $18,532 per participant (excluding assistance and RTL overhead). Even if the component proved successful, what is the prospect of future funding at this level for other groups of students?

No decisions had been made by late March regarding support for home study participants and concern was expressed for the high level of expectations of these students. RTL officials conceded they need a cut-off date to decide whether this component will be effected or not.

Another issue that must be examined is the recently identified need for 2 years in skills training for many participants. The region is negotiating with HRDC Ottawa for a 4th year of funding. It is not known if the province will help participants in a 4th year. One possibility is to use the Feepayer option; another is for the participants to obtain student loans for the second year — but then SARs would not qualify. A decision on this issue will be made once the numbers going into 2-year training are known.

5.3.2 Changing Roles and Responsibilities

It seems fair to conclude that most of those involved with the project are clear about their roles and responsibilities. But here too, there are negative consequences relating to RTL's continuous modification. Because of the evolving nature of the project, roles and responsibilities are constantly changing. So,

everyone is reasonably sure of their roles and responsibilities *now*, but may not know exactly what will be expected of them a few months from now.

This is certainly the case for facilitators. They expect to be lab assistants at Holland College next year, continuing to provide support for their students. But as mentioned above, negotiations with Holland College concerning the facilitators' roles there have not been completed. Facilitators have asked that they be the primary instructors next year, but this is probably out of the question. "Facilitators are not trained and are not qualified to teach the senior academic upgrading levels," according to two informants. It is not even a foregone conclusion that they will be permitted to accompany their students as lab assistants: participants will not necessarily be in the same class as their own facilitator. Also, RTL is considering various other options. In the second year, some facilitators may be lab assistants, some teachers, and some may be home visitors for distance education. There are no plans for the "floaters."

Given the degree of uncertainty about what will happen next year to facilitators and participants, it is not surprising that the Coordinator's future role is unclear at this stage. There will be more counselling next year (although this has not been planned yet) so that participants will take the appropriate prerequisites for their chosen career. The coordinator's role in the third year has not yet been addressed.

Confusion may also soon reign for members of the Board and technical subcommittee. The technical sub-committee is going to be amalgamated with the Board. This means changes for current members of both groups; new roles and responsibilities will have to be worked out.

Due to the evolving roles and the number of players, many informants felt that the organizational structure of RTL was too complex. "There are so many different players in the project it can be very complicated to get things done." And each player brings his/her own agenda.

5.3.3 Evolving Communications

Communications between management and facilitators was acknowledged to be haphazard early on in the project. It was basically by word of mouth, with predictable confusion. Some facilitators had information that others lacked, for example.

The steps taken to ameliorate the situation included production of a "handbook" for facilitators and participants to try to answer their questions (facilitators said the handbook was just a series of question and answer sheets) and transmitting consequential information in memo form with a follow up by phone if necessary. Also, there are regular meetings between the Coordinator and facilitators.

There are two problems outstanding with the communications system. First, communications between the project and other organizations were said to be inadequate. A cogent example is the poor communications between RTL and Holland College. Two subcommittee members pointed out that a large part of the reason for participants' misgivings about moving to the upgrading stage at Holland College next year was the inadequate communications between the project and the college. "If communication had been good between the college and the sites the current desire of students to stay in their groups could have been avoided."

Second, getting timely information to participants is problematic because there are so many players. Consider, for example, the desire of participants to stay in small groups next year. The facilitators communicated this to the Coordinator. The matter is brought up for discussion in the Coordinating Committee, then raised at the Board meeting. Technical committee input will be important (although this will be simplified with amalgamation). Then senior staff have to negotiate with the College. Results have to be approved by the Board and the Management Committee. More negotiations may be necessary. The final decision then goes to the Coordinator and finally back to facilitators. This process may take weeks or months.

In short, despite some improvements, the communications system remains somewhat extemporaneous. There are no policies or procedures manuals to standardize responses to common problems (and no one identified the need for them).

5.4 Conclusion

Because of the constraints identified in this chapter, RTL had to diverge from initial plans in several areas. RTL was not able to identify enough participants in the target group, establish community ties, take time to look at the target group and their needs, enlist the support of the literacy community, involve Holland College

to agree on the role it will play, adequately plan for the second and subsequent year(s) of the project, or set up a proper communications system.

As noted at the outset of section 5.2, the constant modifications were enabled by the project's high degree of pliability. But one person's flexibility is another's anarchy. A certain amount of flexibility is very helpful to decision-makers, but there must be a limit, otherwise the program ceases to be an identifiable program. As one respondent put it, "the goals of the project need to be clarified and solidified." As a result of the constant changes, the project as it stood in late March is considerably different from the one designed, although the objectives remain substantially unchanged.

CHAPTER SIX: PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

This chapter assesses preliminary impacts of the Ready to Learn project on participants and facilitators. Concerning participants, it examines satisfaction with RTL, project impact on attitudes, incentives and self-reliance, project impact on employment skills, and discontinuation. Regarding facilitators, it investigates impact on employment skills and the value of their experience with RTL.

6.1 Participant Satisfaction

Participants were asked in the survey how satisfied they were overall with the project. They were also asked about their satisfaction with various aspects of RTL including services received, their facilitator, the counsellors, information provided, their group, materials/facilities, and monthly income.

For the most part, respondents were asked to assign a letter grade when evaluating different facets of RTL. They had no problem converting their ratings into an equivalent grade, where A meant excellent, B good, C average, D below average, and F fail.

6.1.1 Overall Satisfaction

Overall, participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction with RTL. No one gave the project a grade below a C, and only seven (6%) assigned it a C. Some 46% of the participants gave RTL an A, and 48% gave it a B. The mean grade was B+.

Most participants (70%) said that they were very satisfied with their decision to take part in RTL. Another 27% said they were somewhat satisfied; only 3% said they were not very satisfied. These sentiments did not differ significantly by type of participant (SAR, UI, SAR/UI).

6.1.2 Satisfaction with Services Received

To begin with, participants were asked what services they had received (besides the normal training/upgrading) from RTL. Their responses are tabulated below. Most of the extra help was provided by

facilitators, and dealt with academic shortcomings in writing or reading. Perhaps most surprising is the small percentage (8%) who claimed to have received help from the counsellor for personal problems.

Table 6.1 Type of Services Received

Service	% saying they received help	
	From Counsellor	From Facilitator
Extra help with reading	2.6%	39.1%
Extra help with writing	1.7	50.4
Help with budget	0.9	12.2
Help with math	0.0	5.2
Counselling for personal problems	7.8	22.6
Counselling for alcohol or drug problems	1.7	3.5
Other help*		
Received no help	1.7	4.4
	32.2	23.5

* e.g., help with computers, stress management, career planning

Seventeen percent of participants asserted they wanted help from the project that they had not gotten. Most often mentioned (albeit only by seven participants) was computer experience. No other type of help was mentioned by more than two participants.

Overall, nearly all participants claimed to be very satisfied (49%) or somewhat satisfied (49%) with the services they had received through the project. Only 2% were not very satisfied.

The moderate to high level of satisfaction with services seems to derive mainly from the academic training they received (Table 6.2). Respondents gave the training a mean B+ grade. They also gave a B+ to the hours of training received. On the other hand, they were less enamoured of the other services provided (mainly those in the previous table), assigning them a B- grade on average.

Table 6.2 Satisfaction with Services Received

Aspect of project	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Overall grade for training	34.8%	55.7%	9.6%	0.0%	0.0%	B+
Hours of training received	42.9	47.3	8.0	0.9	0.9	B+
Other services	12.5	42.9	37.5	1.8	5.4	B-

6.1.3 Satisfaction with Facilitators

For the most part, ratings of facilitators were very high. As shown in Table 4.6, large majorities of participants gave facilitators an A for the help they provided, for their level of skill, and for their friendliness. Average marks were B+ for help from facilitators and A- for the other two aspects.

Students in the focus groups asserted that facilitators were extremely important to their progress. Facilitators were felt to be friends who treated the participants as adults and engaged in activities with the participants outside of the classroom despite being no better off. They were thought to understand the lives of the participants and to provide emotional support as well as important academic support. Facilitators were perceived to care about the participants and to be role models.

Table 6.3 Satisfaction with Facilitators

Aspect of project	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Help from facilitators	62.3%	21.9%	11.4%	4.4%	0.0%	B+
Skill of facilitator	63.7	28.3	3.5	4.4	0.0	A-
Friendliness of facilitator	77.2	14.0	5.3	3.5	0.0	A-

6.1.4 Satisfaction with Counsellors

Ratings of counsellors were lower than those for facilitators. As shown in Table 6.4, a substantial proportion of participants gave the counsellors a C grade or lower for the help they provided; the average mark was only B-. Marks were higher for the perceived skill of counsellors — on average a B+.

Table 6.4 Satisfaction with Counsellors

Aspect of project	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Help from counsellors	18.6%	49.6%	21.2%	8.8%	1.8%	B-
Skill of counsellors	38.9	44.2	14.2	1.8	0.9	B+

Reactions to career counselling were mixed. Almost 40% had not talked to the career counsellor about their occupational plans as of late March. Those who had were most often very satisfied (18%) or somewhat satisfied (63%) with the help the career counsellor gave them in choosing a career. This leaves a substantial minority of the participants who were not very satisfied (17%) or not at all satisfied (2%) with the career counselling. All told, half the participants had either not received career counselling or were dissatisfied with the help they had received.

6.1.5 Satisfaction with Information Provided

Before making the decision on whether to take part in the RTL project, clients were to take part in an information session to apprise them of what they could expect from the project. It turns out that 32% of participants never went to an information session. In any event, the information sessions had little effect on how well informed participants felt *before deciding to participate*.

Looking back, many participants conceded they did not know what to expect when they decided to take part in the project. A substantial minority claimed they did not know what to expect very well (37%) or at all (8%). Only 8% said they knew very well what to expect; 47% said somewhat well.

Participants remain somewhat critical of the information provided to them after over five months in the project (Table 6.5). They gave a C+ to information about summer work, and a B- to information provided about future stages of the project.

Table 6.5 Satisfaction with Information Provided

ASPECT OF PROJECT	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Information provided about summer work	7.0%	38.6%	34.2%	14.0%	6.1%	C+
Information provided about future stages of the project	12.3	44.7	30.7	11.4	0.9	B-

6.1.6 Satisfaction with Small Group

Participants seemed pleased with their class size and classmates. On average, they gave an A- to the size of the groups, and a B+ to the support provided by the groups (Table 6.6). Students in the focus groups judged the size of the groups as very good and the cohesion and support among the groups was very important. Participants felt they were "one big happy family."

Table 6.6 Satisfaction with Small Group

ASPECT OF PROJECT	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Size of group	67.5%	22.8%	7.9%	0.9%	0.9%	A-
Support provided by group	49.6	33.6	12.4	1.8	2.7	B+

6.1.7 Satisfaction with Learning Materials/Facilities

Participants were satisfied with the location of the classroom, giving it a B+ average. They were less enthused with the learning materials used in class, assigning them a B- average (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7 Satisfaction with Materials/Facilities

ASPECT OF PROJECT	Grade Distribution					Mean Grade
	A	B	C	D	F	
Learning materials used in class	25.4%	43.9%	21.9%	5.3%	3.5%	B-
Location of classroom	57.0	31.6	9.6	1.8	0.0	B+

Despite the lukewarm endorsement, participants gave the learning materials overall, they thought that the learning packages were useful (Table 6.8). The math package in particular was well received, with two-thirds finding it very useful. Still, many participants expressed complaints about the packages. Seventeen participants said the science package was hard; the English package had the most complaints with 11 participants saying it was hard, and another eight saying it was long, confusing or vague; eight complained that there were many mistakes in the math packages; several maintained that there were not enough packages to go around.

Table 6.8 Ratings of Learning Packages

SUBJECT	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Very Useful	Not At All Useful
Language	39.8%	46.0%	8.8%	5.3%
Math	67.3	29.2	3.5	0.0
Science	43.8	38.4	11.6	6.3

6.1.8 Satisfaction with Monthly Income

Respondents expressed the most dissatisfaction with their monthly income. The average grade was a C, with only 5% giving an A, 34% a B, 33% a C, 20% a D, and 8% an F. SAR participants gave a lower average mark (C-) than did UI participants (C+), a significant difference ($t=3.01$, $df=94$, $p<.01$).

Students in the focus groups were particularly exercised by financial arrangements. Although it was stated that participants do not discuss their incomes among themselves, all knew that they were receiving different amounts depending on whether they were receiving UI or social assistance and, for those on UI, what income they were receiving in their last jobs. In addition, the timeliness of the assistance was a concern.

Delays in payments tended to cause difficulties in payment of bills and in attending classes (due to the cost of transportation).

6.1.9 Summary

Ready to Learn participants are satisfied with the project. Participants awarded RTL a B+ grade on average. Many facets of the project received an A- or B+ grade. Aspects of the project receiving relatively low marks were information provided, monthly income, learning materials, and other services.

6.2 RTL Effect on Incentives

There was widespread acknowledgement among interviewees that UI and welfare create disincentives to taking employment, especially low-skill, low-paid jobs. Although many recipients of UI and welfare would prefer to work if they could find a job, others grow comfortable on passive assistance and look for ways to extend it. Indeed, we were told that, for some participants, the project started off as a way of continuing benefits.

Students in the focus groups rejected the stereotypical view of people in eastern Canada wanting to be on UI. They stated they did not want to receive UI or social assistance, but there were few jobs to be had in the region. But they were quick to admit that there were some "slackers" in their groups — people who did not come to class for days at a time, some who came drunk, and some who did nothing. Although they believed these people should be given a chance and admired the effort facilitators made to help and motivate them, participants felt there was a tendency toward undue leniency for these unmotivated students. It was apparent to the participants that these other students attended only in order to maintain their benefits and would leave if their benefits ran out. In the participants' view, attendance rules needed to be more strictly and consistently applied so that the seats of those who were not serious about the project could be given to those who were.

One facilitator acknowledged there were a few in his group whose motivation could be questioned. Other facilitators conceded that attendance was a problem for some participants. There was call for stricter attendance rules, but some facilitators feared that this would increase the drop out rate. A high rate of absenteeism is a sure sign of motivational problems, according to facilitators.

In planning RTL, committee members were cognizant that the target population needed strong supports to keep them in training because many lacked motivation and tended to have other problems. Thus, *before trying to build incentives to work, the project had to remove disincentives to taking training*. Informants identified several measures included in RTL for this purpose:

- The mentoring/counselling approach helps participants to sort out their other problems, which would help keep them in the project. Facilitators felt the support they provide has had a great effect on keeping the participants and keeping them motivated to attend.
- Having it community-based increased access to the project.
- The three-year continuum provides an element of security and predictability that makes it easier to stay with the project.
- Since "finances are a huge issue for SAR and low UI recipients," a $5 daily attendance incentive was instituted to offset the financial disincentive to remaining in the project.
- Babysitting, relocation, and travel allowances are also covered. Students do not get a training allowance, however, because "Straight UI is an incentive to break the cycle of dependence." In other words, if participants were too comfortable financially, the project could jeopardize their motivation to work.

Once the disincentives are addressed, the project can work to cultivate motivation to work. Interviewees mentioned how the project attempts to achieve this:

- Providing participants with increased levels of education is a factor in their being able to secure meaningful and long-term work and will open their eyes to other possibilities.
- Job placements provide them with a positive experience of work.
- Through individualized programming, RTL deals with the specific skill shortages of each person.

That the project has succeeded thus far in removing disincentives to training seems evident from the low drop-out rate. It is too early to assess the project's impact on augmenting incentives to work. Anecdotal evidence supplied by one interviewee is that some participants have become more motivated, but some have become less so. There can be no definitive answer on this until after the project ends.

6.3 Changes in Participants' Attitudes

A series of questions about attitudes towards work, UI, welfare, training, themselves, and life in general was repeated from the baseline survey. We learned from the baseline survey that there were no significant differences between participants and non-participants on any attitude item. The story was certainly different six months later.

Both groups continued to evince very positive attitudes. On many items, however, non-participants were significantly *more* positive. All in all, of the 34 attitude items, there were significant differences between the groups on 17. Non-participants gave more positive responses on 12 of the 17.

Over the first six months of the program, participants became significantly more negative in eight areas — mostly towards work and training — and significantly more positive in four areas, most notably in their regard for the education they have received. Non-participants have become more positive in 11 areas — mostly concerning work, self-esteem and quality of life — and more negative in only one regard: their perceived likelihood of being on social assistance in the future.

Can the attitude changes exhibited by participants be attributed to RTL? This section addresses this question by determining the significance of the difference between groups in the attitude changes[16]. Since respondents were assigned at random to groups, this procedure will allow us to ascribe significant differences to the project — i.e., to determine how participants' attitudes would have changed had they not enrolled in RTL. Tables 6.9 through 6.13 present the results of our analysis.

Work and Education

The first five items in Table 6.9 are significant. Participants have become significantly more negative (when compared to non-participants) concerning the importance of having work that is challenging, having the

[16] That is, for each respondent, we subtract the former response to each attitude item from the current response. We then calculate the mean change on each item for each group and do a t-test on the two means to determine significance. Strictly speaking, a t-test requires interval-level data and we are working with ordinal-level data. Statisticians have argued about the appropriateness of using a t-test with ordinal attitudinal data and have not come to a consensus. The most recent research, however, asserts that the use of t-tests is permissible and that conclusions drawn from them are likely to apply to the underlying attitudes (Davison and Sharma (1990), *Psychological Bulletin*, V107, pp394-400).

opportunity to learn new things, using their skills to the maximum, making their own decisions, and extending their range of abilities. As well, as shown in Table 6.10, participants lost ground to non-participants concerning believing they knew how to find a job. And, participants became more likely to agree that they would be ashamed to admit they were not working, which might mean they are now more motivated to look for work.

Table 6.9 Change in Attitudes Towards Importance of Work, Learning and Making Money
(Table entries under "Mean Change" represent the difference in mean scores from the Baseline survey to March, 1995)

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR YOU TO:	Participants		Non-participants		t-test
	N	Mean Change	N	Mean Change	
have work that is challenging	105	-.171	66	.530	4.16, df=169, p<.001
have to opportunity to learn new things	105	-.362	66	.212	3.40, df=169, p<.01
use your skills to the maximum	106	-.264	66	.212	3.20, df=170, p<.01
make your own decisions	105	-.457	65	.139	3.35, df=168, p<.01
extend your range of abilities	105	-.381	66	.030	2.81, df=169, p<.01
make more money	106	-.189	66	-.106	0.60, df=170, p>.50
provide for your family/ dependents	105	.076	64	.219	0.87, df=167, p>.30

Government Dependence

RTL had no measurable effect on attitudes towards dependence on government as shown in Table 6.10.

Locus of Control

As a result of the program, participants felt less able to rely on themselves to solve their problems.

Table 6.10 **Change in Attitudes Towards Self, Work, Dependence on Government, and Self-Reliance**
(Table entries under "Mean Change" represent the difference in mean scores from the Baseline survey to March, 1995)

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?	Participants		Non-participants		t-test
	N	Mean Change	N	Mean Change	
DEPENDENCE ON GOVERNMENT					
I would be better off financially on welfare than working	105	-.076	66	.152	1.29, df=169, p>.10
Not qualifying for UI is among the worst things I can think of	106	.274	65	.046	1.02, df=169, p>.30
I'm looking for solid job skills so I won't have to rely on government	105	-.210	65	.062	1.81, df=168, p>.05
I really can't depend on governments for my economic future	106	-.019	65	.077	0.49, df=169, p>.60
WORK					
I like going to work	105	.019	67	.119	0.94, df=170, p>.30
I would be ashamed to admit I was not working	106	.274	64	-.141	2.01, df=168, p<.05
I know how to find a job	105	.086	67	.537	2.73, df=170, p<.01
I prefer not to work so I can look after my family	104	.164	67	.000	0.90, df=169, p>.30
LOCUS OF CONTROL					
Getting a good job means being in the right place at the right time	106	.160	67	.060	0.47, df=171, p>.60
I have little control over things that happen to me	105	-.286	66	.000	1.22, df=169, p>.20
I usually have influence over things that happen to me	106	.170	65	.215	0.25, df=169, p>.80
More than most I like to rely on myself	106	-.236	65	.215	2.51, df=169, p<.02
Many unhappy things in life are partly bad luck	106	.217	66	-.121	1.68, df=170, p>.05

Self-Esteem

Two items were significant in Table 6.11. Participants and non-participants diverged on the attitudes they took toward themselves, and toward doing things as well as others. In both cases, the divergence — participants more negative, non-participants more positive — was enough to reach significance.

Table 6.11 **Change in Attitudes Towards Self**
(Table entries under "Mean Change" represent the difference in mean scores from the Baseline survey to March, 1995)

HOW TRUE ARE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?	Participants		Non-participants		t-test
	N	Mean Change	N	Mean Change	
I'm a person of worth, equal with others	106	.094	66	.333	1.47, df=170, p>.10
I have a number of good qualities	106	.000	65	.215	1.55, df=169, p>.10
I can do things as well as most other people	105	-.057	66	.273	2.39, df=169, p<.02
I take a positive attitude toward myself	104	-.039	66	.394	3.73, df=168, p<.01
Sometimes I think I am no good at all	106	-.066	66	-.379	1.50, df=170, p>.10

Quality of Life

As shown in Table 6.12, non-participants have become significantly happier (compared to participants) over the last six months regarding the quality of their family life and the work they have done in their life. Participants, though, grew much happier respecting their education than did non-participants (though non-participants became significantly happier in this regard as well).

Expectations

Finally, as shown in Table 6.13, participants have grown more pessimistic, but non-participants are more optimistic concerning applying the skills they will learn. The groups diverged as well on the prospects of being on welfare in the future.

Table 6.12 Change in Perception of Quality of Life

(Table entries under "Mean Change" represent the difference in mean scores from the Baseline survey to March, 1995)

HOW HAPPY ARE YOU WITH THE...	Participants		Non-participants		t-test
	N	Mean Change	N	Mean Change	
quality of your social life	106	-.057	66	-.046	0.06, df=170, p>.90
quality of your family life	105	-.095	66	.485	3.52, df=169, p<.001
quality of the education you have received	102	1.431	66	.652	3.33, df=166, p<.001
work you have done in your life	105	.095	66	.606	2.90, df=169, p<.001
overall quality of your life	106	.057	66	.394	1.87, df=170, p>.05

Table 6.13 Change in Perception of Future Prospects

(Table entries under "Mean Change" represent the difference in mean scores from the Baseline survey to March, 1995)

HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU WILL...	Participants		Non-participants		t-test
	N	Mean Change	N	Mean Change	
maintain steady employment	106	.255	65	.246	0.04, df=169, p>.90
go/remain on social assistance	102	-.137	64	.688	4.41, df=164, p<.001
find a job related to the training you'll receive	105	-.314	23	.130	1.81, df=126, p>.05
apply the skills you will learn	105	-.371	23	.130	2.19, df=126, p<.05

Analysis

RTL has caused participants to become more negative with respect to certain aspects of work and training. As a result of RTL, participants now consider it less important to have work that is challenging, to have the opportunity to learn new things, to use their skills to the maximum, to make their own decisions, and to

extend their range of abilities. They worry more about relying on themselves, and the quality of their family life. They advanced less than they otherwise would have in terms of knowing how to find a job and the work they have done in their life. They think it less likely that they will apply the skills they are learning. In consequence, they take a less positive attitude toward themselves and the things they can do than they would have had they not participated. On the positive side, as a result of RTL they are much happier with the quality of the education they have received, think it less likely that they will have to rely on social assistance in the future and attach more stigma to being unemployed.

In searching for an explanation for this, we first postulated that changes in the lives of non-participants contributed to the negative findings for RTL (since in the final analysis participants are compared to non-participants), reasoning that most non-participants had not stood still over the past six months, but had found other training programs or found jobs, which in turn led to positive attitude changes. To test this, we began by subdividing the non-participants into two groups — those who were unemployed at the time of the survey, and those who were in school or working at that time. It turns out that the current status of non-participants had little effect on their attitudes: the unemployed were slightly more negative in most areas, but not enough to change our conclusions.

We then subdivided the non-participants into a group of those who had worked at any time over the past six months and a group of those who had not. Again, final results were little changed, with the exception of some self-esteem items. Those who had worked were more positive towards themselves. Unemployed non-participants do not take a more positive attitude towards themselves than do participants. Finally, we tried categorizing non-participants into a group that had taken training and one that had not. Again, although the training group was more positive toward training, the finding that non-participants are often more positive than participants still stands.

We cannot explain why non-participants have become more positive in their attitudes towards work, training, and themselves. But we can say that RTL is the cause of many of the negative (and some positive) changes of participants. Why this is the case is cause for speculation. Perhaps the project has caused participants to be more realistic with regard to the number and kinds of jobs available for people with the skills they are learning: certainly, a lot of participants changed their occupational ambitions since RTL began. This alone could explain why they are more pessimistic about applying their skills. If they have (or were given) reason to doubt the future job market would allow them to apply their new skills, they could become more negative

concerning having challenging work, using their skills to the maximum, knowing how to find a job, and even taking a more negative attitude towards themselves than they otherwise would have.

A more mundane explanation could be that being in the early stages of a three-year program with an uncertain and distant pay-off is not conducive to positive attitudes about the value of work or training. To the extent they find RTL hard — any many do (based on their reaction to the learning packages) — they could be less inclined to want work that is challenging, to have an opportunity to learn new things and to take a positive attitude towards themselves.

Whatever the explanation, RTL was certainly not intended to negatively affect such attitudes. Although most attitudes remain positive, the project must be on guard lest attitudes deteriorate more, which could lead to quitting.

6.4 Preparation for Self-Sufficiency

A major goal of RTL is to prepare participants and facilitators for self-sufficiency. For participants, this is to be accomplished primarily through the imparting of literacy skills, upgrading, and skills training. The project has not yet assisted in pre-employment orientation, taught job search skills, taught occupational/academic skills, or provided work experience. Thus far, the project has used two main strategies to prepare participants for self-sufficiency.

One key strategy for fostering self-sufficiency, mentioned by several interviewees, was the model of beginning with a high level of support and the gradual weaning of that support through successive stages of the project. The initial high level is viewed as important because the client group has experienced high drop-out rates in the past. A gradual easing of support should force participants to develop their own coping skills.

The second strategy, the small group concept, is meant to make the participants comfortable enough to progress on their own. That the groups have bonded seems clear; their wish to remain in their groups next year is ample evidence. In this comfortable environment, participants were said to gain confidence. The program's long-term commitment to them was also said to augment their confidence. And confidence is important if motivation is to be maintained. The low drop-out rate was offered as confirmation that motivation is high.

It is too early to measure any pay-off in terms of improved self-sufficiency. The only objective information we have thus far is that many participants have displayed a reluctance to join Holland College next year beyond the confines of their small groups. Participants (in the focus groups) expressed a number of concerns in this regard: they were being put back into a system that they felt had failed them; they might be put into larger classes where they would not get the attention they needed and where other students may not be project participants; and other students might be younger and might look down on project participants. A number of participants stated that they had asked that they be left where they were for the second year but no decision had yet been made. This reluctance to join a larger institution next year could be used as evidence against enriched self-sufficiency.

The big test will come next fall, when participants are scheduled to begin academic upgrading at Holland College or home study. Participants will need strong motivation and coping skills. Holland College allows that when students transfer to the College, their marks will be accepted at face value, but insists that they will be put back if they cannot keep up in their assigned classes. Many will need much stronger reading skills than they now possess to avoid this fate. "The skill of reading needs to be taught first, for which more than a comfortable environment is needed — you need someone who is trained and able to move people forward."

As for the project's effect thus far on facilitators, all felt they were gaining valuable experience and learning many new skills as well as developing a greater awareness of the difficulties and issues of people who received UI and social services. In addition, they felt they were gaining confidence in new areas. The facilitators believed they would be more employable with the skills and insights they were acquiring. The skills also were said to be transferable to such levels as junior high school; insights into why project participants had dropped out of school and how they compensated for their academic deficiencies could be applied to this younger population.

6.5 Effect of Personal Counselling

Participants have a variety of life problems in addition to academic deficiencies. Facilitators may spend between 10% and 80% of their time in a given week in counselling and crisis intervention. Crises can range from abuse to a lack of clean clothes.

Facilitators' support was believed to be very important for participants because they had little success without such support in school. There was some disagreement about whether participants could achieve success without this support. Some facilitators felt that they had participants who were capable of progressing on their own. But most facilitators considered their support crucial for the majority of the participants. The support allows the participants to gain in self-confidence and become more willing to ask questions when they don't understand something. Facilitators point to the low drop-out rate as evidence that the personal counselling has been effective.

If the facilitators are not sure how to respond to a situation, they call the Coordinator. The Coordinator and Counsellor were perceived as an accessible resource although it was acknowledged that both had very heavy workloads, and could not be as responsive as desirable. The departure of the previous counsellor made matters worse, although the new counsellor was praised for his enthusiasm and for the work he was doing with the groups.

Regional literacy experts questioned the adequacy of the support for facilitators. They agreed that two counsellors for the whole island did not provide adequate support and assumed a greater ability to handle situations on the part of facilitators than would probably be the case.

The participants in the focus groups viewed the facilitators and the other members of their group as the "front line" for any help they needed. They appeared to feel that no other resources were necessary, although they were aware that the Project Coordinator and the counsellor were available for situations that the facilitators could not cope with.

6.6 Participant Discontinuation

Long-term voluntary programs such as P.E.I. Ready to Learn (RTL) inevitably lose participants who no longer can or wish to participate. Indeed similar programs aimed at helping the unemployed achieve financial dependence typically suffer quit rates in excess of 50% over the long term.

Only 18 participants had left RTL by early May. Facilitators argued that personal counselling and support was the reason for the high retention rate in the project. They were confident that they could predict those

that were in danger of dropping out through personal interviews. Those who were thinking of dropping out generally did so because of issues outside of the classroom for which they needed counselling or support. Those likely to leave showed by their behaviour — absenteeism, lack of reasons for not attending, doing the bare minimum of work.

Using baseline survey data, we also identified factors that may predispose a participant to drop-out. Given that only 18 have left the project thus far, the analysis must be considered preliminary. We found that the following traits were predictive of a high propensity to drop out: participants with poorer than average health (compared to other RTL participants), who had not been on UI in the past two years (but on SA), and would be ashamed to admit they were unemployed.

RTL facilitators complete a form every time a participant quits. It contains the bare essentials — name of participant, date of withdrawal, and reason for leaving the program. The only other item is an option for the facilitator to record comments: none did. The form lists 14 possible reasons for leaving plus a provision to specify another reason. Facilitators could circle as many reasons as applied to each case. The 18 quitters cited 11 different reasons for leaving RTL. Three persons gave no reason; only four cited two reasons. Suffice to say, no trend is apparent for quitting as yet.

Table 6.14 Reason for Leaving RTL

Reason for Quitting	Number of Quitters
Not getting enough financial assistance	2
Found a job	2
Moved	1
Transportation problems	4
Did not like RTL/facilitator	3
Pregnancy	1
Medical reasons	4
Expelled — too many absences	2
Started college	1
Too much stress	1
Problems with social assistance	1
No reason given	3

From the survey we learned that 42% of those still in the project had contemplated quitting. This proportion did not differ significantly by client type. Table 6.15 lists the factors that caused these participants to

contemplate withdrawing. Lack of money was the number one reason, mentioned by over a fifth of all participants, and by over half those who had considered quitting. Transportation problems and difficulty with learning were next most cited.

Table 6.15 Factors That Made Participants Consider Leaving RTL

FACTOR	Participants mentioning the factor	
	Number	Percentage
Difficulty with learning	11	9.8%
Project not useful	4	3.6
Project too long	2	1.8
Lack of child care	5	4.5
Lack of money	24	21.4
Lack of transportation	11	9.6
Lack of family support	6	5.4
Illness in family	4	3.6
Own illness	6	5.4
Other*	11	9.8

* e.g., job opportunity, did not get along with facilitator.

Not surprisingly, those who had pondered leaving were significantly less satisfied with RTL than were those who had not ($t=2.91$, $df=112$, $p<.01$). The former group gave the project a B+, whereas the latter group assigned it an A-.

6.7 Value of Facilitator Training

There was agreement among interviewees that facilitator training was not all it could have been. Facilitators spent two weeks with Holland College during which they were trained in adult education and some counselling techniques to address the "whole person." They spent three days with an instructor at the college on the curriculum and had the opportunity to spend a day observing an adult class. They also spent a couple of days to investigate resources in the community and spent time together in county groups getting backup material for the packages.

The length and content of training were criticized by interviewees, regional literacy experts and facilitators. "The training could have been longer especially because many of the facilitators had not worked with adults before." Life skills training was said to be inadequate. Curriculum training was also assailed. Finally, there was no training on the assessment of learning disabilities — something that RTL experience has demonstrated to be extremely important.

Regional literacy experts acknowledged that facilitators are highly motivated and want to do a good job, but asserted that there is a problem either with the training or with facilitators' background and experience. They were particularly concerned that the RTL project had been developed and target groups established without any consultation with those who worked in the field of adult literacy. They contended that in a long-term program such as RTL, it was necessary to ensure adequate support for the facilitators as well as on-going training.

Facilitators believed that the training was valuable and "at least gave me a model for where to start," but asserted that it was wanting in certain regards. Although the training identified the types of issues and situations facilitators might face, it did not adequately identify how these situations might be addressed. One participant felt that the extent of the counselling that would be required was not anticipated.

One facilitator felt that the training time could have been spent more wisely; for instance on what it is really like to teach adults. The facilitator went on to say that on the one hand they were told they were not counsellors but that on the other they were being versed in how to talk to people who were suicidal or having marital difficulties.

The facilitators held that more training time should have been spent on the curriculum, which for most of them was completely new. Training in basic literacy instruction was overlooked.

The training may have been fine for the planned program, but not for the program as it has evolved. Management has recognized the problem and are planning to provide facilitators with training over the summer, although the utility of this is dubious since it will be too late to help for the first year (when facilitators play a central role). The type of training they will get is uncertain, not surprising since their roles for next year remain undefined.

6.8 Conclusion

For the most part, it is far too early to determine the extent of RTL impact on its participants or on facilitators. This is especially the case for such outcomes as self-sufficiency in employment and motivation to work. It would be unrealistic to expect the project to have affected these areas as yet, and we found little evidence to shed light on these issues.

It is more reasonable to expect measurable impacts in terms of participant satisfaction and changes in attitudes and self-esteem. Our preliminary analysis revealed that participants are satisfied with the first stage of the project, giving it a B+ grade overall. Participants were particularly satisfied with the skill and friendliness of their facilitators, and the size of their group. They were dissatisfied with monthly income.

Contrary to expectations, participants became more negative in their overall outlook, non-participants more positive during the six months from October, 1994 to March 1995. Moreover, much of the more negative sentiment can be ascribed directly to RTL.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
ADDRESSING EVALUATION ISSUES

Once their project was approved as a Strategic Initiative, RTL administrators had exceptionally little time to plan and launch the project. Under the circumstances, it is a testimony to the talent and dedication of those involved that the project is operating reasonably well.

The flexibility that enabled planners to overcome the time and legislative/regulatory constraints carried a price, however. The existing project is different in many important respects from the one originally planned. Most seriously, a considerable proportion of the participants are not from the intended target group; the services and resources available are inadequate to deal with those outside the target group; and the project has little support from outside agencies or from communities.

Time constraints still plague the project. RTL has been too busy putting out fires all along to attend to the vital business of planning for the long-term. As a consequence, there are a daunting number of overdue matters still pending, matters that left unresolved could derail the project. (These are enumerated in Chapter 5.) RTL has faith these matters can be resolved. There is certainly room for scepticism that everything will work out satisfactorily, given that the end of the first year is imminent.

7.1 Responding to the Evaluation Issues

RELEVANCE

1. In what way does the pilot project reflect the criteria established for Strategic Initiatives (SI)?

- **innovation/experimentation potential?**
- **relevancy to SI objectives and elements of social security reform?**
- **evaluation/information potential for social reform, etc.?**

Most informants related something they held innovative about RTL. Cobbling together the various responses yields the following approximation of what was said to be innovative:

RTL is a long-term, community-based training program that uses small group tutoring, counselling and work experience to augment literacy and prepare participants for academic upgrading and later skills training. The continuum of support with gradual easing of that support will help participants achieve self-sufficiency.

SI officials thought the most important innovation was the concept of establishing and maintaining small groups for the length of the project, guided by the same facilitator. They were aware of no other program that does this. They also considered the breadth of services offered as innovative.

Only one person questioned whether there was really any innovation, although many conceded that most of these interventions had been tried before in P.E.I. or elsewhere in an attempt to break the cycle of dependency. Indeed very similar programs have operated or are still operating in Atlantic Canada (e.g., Newfoundland Youth Strategy — community-based projects; New Brunswick Youth Strategy — continuum of service; NB Works — long-term counselling).

The Strategic Initiatives program aims to test unique ideas for addressing high priority areas such as employment, learning and education, training, and income support in order to boost employability and lower social costs. Given what interviewees told us was innovative about RTL, it would seem to have exceptional information/ experimental potential. Among the aspects that can be tested experimentally: home-based versus institutional model; comparison of outcomes for UI and SARs; and outcomes of participants versus non-participants. The project may also experiment in the college setting by putting some of the groups in their own classes and mixing some with the larger college population. SI officials stated they were satisfied that RTL meets the objectives of the Strategic Initiatives Program.

Summarizing across interviews, information provided to the social security reform will include: information on where people started and how much they progressed[17]; rate of college completion; effectiveness of community-based training; the feasibility of distance education; the link to formal training through community-based training; the total cost of the project versus the success rate measured by how many participants are still dependent on income assistance; retention rate; and a lot of valuable information regarding program supports, especially multi-year counselling.

[17] Although this was not available at the time of the process evaluation.

2. To what extent does the project reach the intended target group? Are participants representative of the target group? If not, for what reasons do discrepancies occur?

Because not enough people in the target group could be found in the time allotted, qualification criteria were continually relaxed. Yet, despite the slackening, many participants did not meet the criteria. Some people who were not on UI or SA were included: 7 according to the baseline survey data. Six participants had achieved at least grade 10 standing, and had all CAAT scores above 9.9. At the other extreme, a substantial proportion of RTL participants were actually functioning at less than grade 7 reading levels. Approximately 1/3 of the 120 participants may need to go to Spell/Read for remedial reading training.

Experts and facilitators pointed to problems with quick implementation and CAAT testing as the culprits for the partial failure in enroling the intended target group. In the scramble to fill the spaces for RTL, participants who may not have been ideally suited for the project — and some who were clearly unqualified — were enticed to participate. Experts questioned the accuracy of the testing of participants and wondered whether the majority of participants were indeed functioning at their tested level.

3. Are the services/interventions provided consistent with the needs of the target group?

As might be predicted, with a fair proportion of the participants not in the target group, the planned services were insufficient for many of them. Project length and services are not adequate for those who cannot read. The remedial reading course that RTL purchased helps, but it is doubtful that these clients can pursue the three-year intervention envisaged. They may need to pursue literacy training or academic upgrading for the whole 3 years.

At the other extreme are those functioning at higher levels than expected. Year 1 of the project is not very useful for this group. Apparently, many are ready for skills training now and others have moved into senior levels of academic upgrading. Others are passing time doing book reports.

PROJECT DESIGN AND DELIVERY

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project organizational structure? Are the roles and responsibilities of the various partners and service providers (e.g., coordinators, facilitators) clearly enunciated?

When asked about strengths of the organizational structure, informants tended to point to the quality of the people involved at the Board and subcommittee levels. There was a consensus that the competence and dedication of the people involved in the project makes the structure work. "People on the Board are very committed to literacy and to the project and seeing it succeed. The Technical sub-committee is composed of dedicated people who are very client-centred." They care enough about the project to challenge some of the assumptions and effect changes to programming. The Board provides a non-government focus and brings a lot of experience in adult literacy.

Turning to stated weaknesses, the predominant sentiment was the complexity of the organizational structure. "There are so many different players in the project it can be very complicated to get things done." And each player brings his/her own agenda.

Several other weaknesses were mentioned:

- There is no voice for facilitators or learners on the Board or the Technical sub-committee.
- The project did not get as much grass roots input as it should have.
- The Board does not have direct access to senior government management.
- The lack of provincial funding.
- The absence of people knowledgeable about adult education on the coordinating committee.

5.A) What monitoring mechanisms have been put in place to collect information on participants and interventions?

- **Are these adequate for measuring project impacts?**
- **Is sufficient baseline information collected?**

While the evaluation was taking place, a monitoring system was just being put into place. As a result, virtually no data exist on how much clients have progressed or what interventions they have received. The survey of clients was used to fill in the information voids. Norpark has written a separate report with specific recommendations for improving the monitoring system. Supplemented with periodic client surveys to monitor progress and interventions, the recommended system should suffice for measuring project impacts.

As is evident from Chapter 4, a wealth of valuable information was gathered in the baseline survey. No key information is missing to impede the summative evaluation. Unfortunately, baseline surveys were lost for 11 clients. The raw data set was not very useful for analysis purposes, but Norpark has made extensive modifications so that RTL administrators can more easily use the data in the future.

5.B) Have control groups been identified? Using what criteria?

Assignment to treatment or control groups was random, with two important qualifications. Clients were assigned to groups by drawing their names out of a box *by area*. Some areas (e.g., Wellington) took *all* eligible clients, therefore there are no control groups in those areas. Other potential clients lived in remote communities with too few clients to justify a class; none of these was selected.

A second important caveat was that some who were chosen for participation refused to participate (the project was voluntary). This was most likely to occur with SARs for whom a long-term commitment posed a financial problem. This in itself is not a problem. Unfortunately, these people were then relegated to the control group. This is a problem, because it introduces self-selection bias into the equation: some control group members were clearly not as motivated to participate as the treatment group members.

As shown in the technical report profiling participants and non-participants, the random assignment worked to yield treatment and control groups that are equivalent in almost every way. This lays a strong foundation for a robust analysis at the summative stage.

6. Have any operational/legislative/regulatory/jurisdictional constraints been identified that impinge on the ability of the project to achieve its objectives? Are the project design features consistent with the stated objectives of the project?

Most informants were in agreement that the primary constraint to implementing the program as designed was the lack of time. Policy makers had a lot of particulars to flesh out once the project was approved, but had very little time in which to do it. The lack of planning time led to a host of other problems with which the project is still contending. There was no time to do grass roots recruitment and full assessments, leading to the problems with project targeting. There was no time to go into communities and identify adequate numbers of potential participants, resulting in a lost opportunity to obtain valuable input from local communities. Once communities were selected, there was also "a mad scramble to find sites." Time constraints also led to high levels of confusion for CECs, social service workers, facilitators and participants because so many things were in flux and their was too little information on what was going on. And the lack of time alienated some groups whose cooperation could have been very valuable to RTL.

Apart from the shortage of time, only one other constraint was raised by the majority of interviewees: the rules and regulations of UI and SA benefits. Some informants complained about the inflexibility of the UI Act. For RTL, this will result in arbitrary imposition of work situations (i.e., some participants have to re-qualify for UI this summer and thus will not necessarily have placements that are tied to their career choice). Social assistance rules could mean that the summer's wages could be taxed back by the department.

These constraints have caused policy makers to deviate from the planned course in several important respects. RTL was not able to identify enough participants in the target group, establish community ties, take time to look at the target group and their needs, enlist the support of the literacy community, involve Holland College to agree on the role it will play, adequately plan for the second and subsequent year(s) of the project, or set up a proper communications system.

PROJECT SUCCESS

7. How and to what extent has the project succeeded in developing partnerships among the various levels of government, employers and community groups? In integrating dual services? How and to what extent has it assisted in addressing jurisdictional issues?

HRDC and the Office of Higher Learning Everyone who expressed an opinion said that the relationship between the federal and provincial departments co-managing the project was good to excellent. The individuals involved "work very well together and their relationship includes personal as well as professional courtesy." As a result, jurisdictional issues have not been a concern.

We were told that generally there is a good relationship between CECs and field offices of the provincial Health & Community Services agencies. In smaller communities where people know each other and the offices co-locate, the relationship may be better than in larger communities. Not all CECs, however, have bought in to the project.

RTL and service providers Some literacy groups are standing back or are openly hostile because nobody consulted them regarding the program design. They have complained about various aspects of the project (e.g., target group are not those most in need; facilitators are not qualified). They feel they should be playing a more central role in the project.

Holland College was also upset at being excluded from project planning. It has expressed concerns from the beginning about what the project is doing. Its concerns are primarily related to quality control (i.e., what were the participants being taught and by whom).

RTL and community groups A cardinal lament of many if not all people associated with RTL is that there was not enough lead time to establish partnerships with community agencies. "As a community-based project the design should have been bottom-up but there was not the time to do it." In consequence, there is no sense of ownership at the community level as several people told us. "If the community had been more involved, facilities may have been better and there may have been more support for job placements."

RTL and employers At present, there are no partnerships with employers. The lack of partnerships makes finding placements more difficult.

8. To what extent has the pilot project succeeded in removing disincentives to employment and training or, alternatively, in increasing incentives?

In planning RTL, committee members were cognizant that the target population needed strong supports to keep them in training because many lacked motivation and tended to have other problems. Thus, before trying to build incentives to work, the project had to remove disincentives to taking training. Once the disincentives are addressed, the project can work to cultivate motivation to work.

That the project has succeeded thus far in removing disincentives to training seems evident from the low drop-out rate. It is too early to assess the project's impact on augmenting incentives to work.

9. How satisfied are participants with various aspects of the project? To what extent did participants discontinue before their anticipated completion date? What were the main reasons for discontinuation?

Ready to Learn participants are satisfied with the project. Participants awarded RTL a B+ grade on average. Most facets of the project received a B+ or B- grade:

Aspect of RTL	Mean Grade
Overall grade for training	B+
Hours of training received	B+
Other services	B-
Help from facilitators	B+
Skill of facilitators	A-
Friendliness of facilitators	A-
Help from counsellors	B-
Skill of counsellors	B+
Information provided about summer work	C+
Information provided about future stages of the project	B-
Size of group	A-
Support provided by group	B+
Learning materials used in class	B
Location of classroom	B+
Satisfaction with monthly income	C

Only 18 participants had left RTL by early May, 1995. The 18 quitters gave 11 different reasons for leaving RTL. No reason was cited more than four times so no trend is apparent for quitting as yet. Medical reasons

was cited by four leavers, as was transportation problems. Three said they did not like the program or the facilitator.

10. Has the project brought about any changes in participants' attitudes toward education, social assistance and toward their self-esteem and motivation?

RTL has caused participants to become more negative with respect to certain aspects of work and training. As a result of RTL, participants now deem it less important to have work that is challenging, to have the opportunity to learn new things, to use their skills to the maximum, to make their own decisions, and to extend their range of abilities. They worry more about relying on themselves, and the quality of their family life. They advanced less than they otherwise would have in terms of knowing how to find a job and the work they have done in their life. They think it less likely that they will apply the skills they are learning. In consequence, they take a less positive attitude toward themselves and the things they can do than they would have had they not participated. On the positive side, as a result of RTL they are much happier with the quality of the education they have received, think it less likely that they will have to rely on social assistance in the future and attach more stigma to being unemployed.

11. To what extent has the project <u>prepared</u> participants and facilitators for achieving self-sufficiency in employment skills?
a) assisted in pre-employment orientation?
b) improved their job search skills?
c) provided them with occupational/academic skills?
d) employment maintenance skills?
e) provided them with work experience?
f) provided them with mentoring skills?

The project has not yet assisted in pre-employment orientation, taught job search skills, taught occupational/academic skills, or provided work experience. Thus far, the project has used two main strategies to prepare participants for self-sufficiency: beginning with a high level of support and the gradual weaning of that support through successive stages of the project; and the small group concept.

It is too early to measure any pay-off in terms of improved self-sufficiency. The only objective information we have thus far is that many participants have displayed a reluctance to join Holland College next year beyond

the confines of their small groups. This reluctance could be used as evidence against enriched self-sufficiency.

As for the project's effect thus far on facilitators, all felt they were gaining valuable experience and learning many new skills as well as developing a greater awareness of the difficulties and issues of people who received UI and social services. In addition, they felt they were gaining confidence in new areas. The facilitators believed they would be more employable with the skills and insights they were acquiring. The skills also were said to be transferable to such levels as junior high school.

12. To what extent did the personal counselling and the mentoring help the participants to improve their self-reliance and to take career appropriate decisions? To what extent did the personal and employment counselling and the teaching support provided to Facilitators had an impact on the program success?

Facilitators' support was believed to be very important for participants because they had little success without such support in school. The support allows the participants to gain in self-confidence and become more willing to ask questions when they don't understand something. Facilitators point to the low drop-out rate as evidence that the personal counselling has been effective.

Regional literacy experts questioned the adequacy of the support for facilitators. They agreed that two counsellors for the whole island did not provide adequate support and assumed a greater ability to handle situations on the part of facilitators than would probably be the case.

Participants' post-project occupational plans changed markedly from the time of the Baseline survey to the March, 1995 survey. Indeed, only 28% had the same occupational plan in March as they had six months before. Another 24% specified a different occupational goal. And 10% were unsure about occupational plans both times. This leaves 38% who moved into or out of the unsure/don't know category: 18% of the clients who formerly were unsure about their work plans, stated an occupational goal in March; on the other hand 20% who identified an occupational aspiration at the time of the Baseline survey, were unsure what they wanted to strive for by March. By March, 30% of clients were still unsure about the type of work they would like to do after the project.

13. To what extent did the Facilitators get valuable and pertinent tutoring, peer counselling and teaching experience?

There was agreement among interviewees that facilitator training was not all it could have been. The length and content of training were criticized by interviewees, regional literacy experts and facilitators. Life skills training was said to be inadequate. Curriculum training was also assailed. Finally, there was no training on the assessment of learning disabilities — something that experience has demonstrated to be extremely important.