Preparing skilled immigrants for the Canadian workplace

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Barriers to employment

- English language difficulties
- lack of Canadian work experience
- non-recognition of foreign credentials
- lack of recognition of prior work experience
- employer discrimination

Data Collection

- Research partner
  - Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS)
- Document analysis: annual reports, newsletters, AGM minutes, web, and program brochures
- Interviews
  - Board members
  - Executive directors
  - Administrative staff
  - Instructors
  - Immigrants
- Site visits and observations

Major Findings

- **Bridging the gap**: The organization was initially founded to bridge the gap in settlement services for immigrants and refugees in Calgary.
- **Responding to changing community needs**: The development of the organization reflected the growth of local immigrant population and their responses to the changing needs of their communities.
- **Diverse educational programs and services**: i) language assessment and training; ii) employment programs; iii) citizenship education; iv) community participation and education.
- **Community response to the devaluation of foreign credentials:** They spearheaded alternative community responses in addressing the issue of devaluation and denigration of foreign credentials and prior work experience.

One Program

Integrated Language Instruction for Skilled Immigrants (ILISI)

- 14 weeks of in-class instruction on ESL and employment skills training
- 4 weeks of work placement
- Focuses on English acquisition for immigrant professionals

Bridging the Gap

- Meeting the employers
- Preparing job-search skills
  - resumes and portfolios
  - mock interviews
- Emphasis on transferable skills
- Improving communication skills
- Learning Canadian workplace culture

Mock Interview

- “I think I’m a little bit lucky to get this human resource guy to give me a mock interview and give me the feedback. It’s really useful and important for those employment counsellors to help you find your problems and to help you answer the interview questions tactfully.”

Emphasis on Transferable Skills

- “ This program is very helpful when they try to help us explore what kinds of skills we possess. I might take it for granted and never sort it out. The teachers tell us how to find out the transferable skills we have from our previous experience and put them into use here.”

Example of Transferable Skills

- “ I have a bachelor degree in civil engineering. I started to work as a civil engineer about 20 years ago. My last position was the vice president of a company with about 200 people. I have strong management skills. I am responsible, honest, hard-working, and a good team player.”

Communication Skills

- “The biggest benefit from the program is that I speak more and feel more confident dealing with people in English. The pronunciation instruction was very useful. I would like more feedback on my writing and more writing instructions in general. I need to know how to write a business report.”

Workplace Culture

- “I feel this company is more equal. In my past experience it is more hierarchical and you cannot directly talk to the top management and here it's easy to communicate with the management.”

Canadian Experience

- “This program is good for immigrants because it helps me get a work placement. My company has hired me because I now have Canadian experience.”
- Work placement is the key

Challenge of Work Placement

- “The biggest challenge of this program is to find the appropriate work placement for our clients. Many employers are not willing to take immigrants as volunteers.”

Summary

- Career bridging programs: Important stepping stones for immigrant professionals
- It helped immigrants ameliorate the challenge of devaluation of their international credentials and work experience: Canadian work experience; language and communication skills; workplace culture; confidence
- Community organizations as agents of social change
- Immigrant service organizations are responsive to community needs.

Further Questions

- What do “Canadian experience and communication skills” mean?
- To what extent has the program addressed the root causes of the devaluation of immigrants’ international credentials and work experience?
- What needs to be done to fully address the root causes?

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