

College Transformation des Collèges Project

(March 2020 to September 2023)

Research and Evaluation Report

January 25, 2024

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*The College Transformation des Collèges Project is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre.
Le projet College Transformation des Collèges est financé par le Centre des Compétences futures du
gouvernement du Canada.*

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA) College Transformation des Collèges Project Research and Evaluation Report

1. Project Background

1.1 Context

Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA) is the association of the seven public institutions that deliver college programming in Atlantic Canada. These institutions partner with a wide range of stakeholders, including both large and small employers, industry and trade groups, cultural and settlement associations, education professionals, and government staff. ACA member-based institutions operate across diverse communities, cultures, and languages within the Atlantic region.

ACA institutions collectively served approximately 60,000 full- and part-time students across 40 campuses throughout the region. In past fiscal years, their combined economic impact was estimated at \$6.2 billion, making a significant contribution to the local and regional economies.

Atlantic Canada has experienced dramatic changes in its economy, population, labor force, and demographics. Traditional jobs are disappearing, new industries have emerged, and business models have undergone fundamental changes. The green economy has become a significant focal point in this 'Age of Disruption.' This global reshaping of economies demands new ways of thinking and doing business, as employers increasingly seek flexible, adaptable, and highly skilled employees.

The demands of this shift were further exacerbated by the global pandemic, which profoundly impacted our lives, community functioning, the world of work, local industries, and the global economy, leaving lasting impacts. Since the onset of this project in the Spring of 2020 to the present day, the pandemic has created societal shifts, fostering an environment where flexibility and innovation are both necessary and expected.

A strong response from the region's post-secondary systems was warranted. Colleges had to be innovative in developing ways to impart new skills, abilities, and approaches to workplace innovation and inclusion, all while creating more opportunities to collaborate with industry partners. This approach ensures ongoing support for the future economic and social development of the Atlantic Region by addressing industry's demand for skilled workers and providing a clear path to employment for Atlantic Canadians.

1.2 College System Transformation Vision

Our goal is to transform the public college education and training system in Atlantic Canada in response to the profound changes taking place in our economy, population, and labor force. To actualize our vision and drive change in the Atlantic Region's colleges, we recognized the importance of adopting a partnership-based approach to diversify the region's workforce through innovative and responsive recruitment and pedagogical practices. Additionally, we placed a strong emphasis on lifelong skill development through upskilling and re-skilling, along with the integration of cutting-edge technologies into program design and delivery.

A transformed college system would better serve current and future students by offering more accessible and flexible learning opportunities. It would also cater to local SMEs and industries whose success hinges on having a highly skilled, diverse, and productive workforce. All colleges worked together on the institutional transformation mandate established by the College Presidents and led by ACA. Their varying sizes, locations, primary languages, expertise, and skills helped maximize the applicability and transferability of key learnings from this project to colleges across the country.

Atlantic Colleges activities since 2020 have been guided by a document titled *“Atlantic Colleges – A Roadmap for Transformation”*; the product of a collaboration between ACA, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA). This document articulates the colleges’ vision towards the desired future state and the steps needed to achieve the ACA collective goals.

1.3 Transformation Project

ACA's transformation vision aligned with the mandate of the Future Skills Centre of Canada, which aims to build a resilient and dynamic labor force and test innovative ideas to meet Canada's future skills needs. Through the Future Skills Centre's Strategic Initiatives Fund, ACA's *College Transformation des Collèges Project* was initiated.

The *College Transformation des Collèges Project* involved all seven of ACA's partner institutions in the Atlantic region:

- **Collège de l'île** on Prince Edward Island
- **Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick** in New Brunswick
- **College of the North Atlantic** in Newfoundland and Labrador
- **Holland College** on Prince Edward Island
- **New Brunswick Community College** in New Brunswick
- **Nova Scotia Community College** in Nova Scotia
- **Université Sainte-Anne** in Nova Scotia

The project had two primary goals. First, it aimed to build organizational capacity and enhance regional expertise within a collaborative network dedicated to creating innovative delivery models, addressing sector needs, and reducing systemic barriers to improve post-secondary accessibility for all. Second, it sought to empower the Atlantic Canada region to effectively respond to rapid technological changes by establishing more responsive, flexible, and innovative learner pathways for students and workers. This

would help grow regional skills, abilities, and new approaches in the workplace while generating solutions to address specific regional labor market challenges.

Each partner college developed and deployed innovative and flexible cutting-edge pilot projects to test, evaluate, and generate potential solutions. These projects aimed to optimize Atlantic skill development systems, address capacity gaps and constraints, facilitate collaboration and engagement across the learning ecosystem, and generate regional solutions for labor market needs in priority sectors. The initiatives also enhanced institutional capacity by piloting high-impact innovations such as microcredentials, advances in prior learning assessments, work-integrated learning, cutting-edge technology, continuous intake, industry engagement, and other leading practices. These efforts rendered the college system more accessible, offering full-time education for some while providing various scenarios for those seeking up-skilling while remaining employed.

To maximize the transformation and support the pilot projects, the *College Transformation des Collèges Project* established the ACA Innovation Centre. This regional body took on several key roles:

- Offering project management, guidance, and fostering connections for the pilots.
- Coordinating the Human-Centered Design study conducted by Blueprint.
- Creating opportunities for sharing and collaboration across the learning ecosystem.
- Developing a hub for regional knowledge sharing (e.g., website, file sharing structure, networks, etc.).
- Enhancing innovation and cultural fluency by providing expertise and support to build high-impact practices and programming.

In essence, the ACA Innovation Centre's activities accelerated the transformation pathway and maximized regional learning and growth by fostering collaboration, innovation, and cultural fluency.

1.4 Equity and Inclusion

An essential component of this project was to prioritize programming for students from equity seeking communities as well as to identify and address systemic barriers to education. The colleges worked diligently to improve labor market attachment for members of equity seeking groups. They achieved this by designing responsive programs that catered to their specific learning needs and by providing opportunities for learning and leadership to achieve equitable outcomes for all learners. This approach aimed to contribute to a more diverse workforce and an inclusive economy in the region by enhancing outreach and engagement among under-represented groups, including the under- and unemployed, women, youth, Indigenous People, newcomers, racialized people, persons with disabilities, people from rural, remote, and northern communities, and people living in official language minority communities. The colleges actively worked towards removing barriers for members of these equity seeking communities.

Much effort was dedicated to understanding what equity and inclusion resembled. At the onset of the project, a study was commissioned to inform the pilots. Blueprint, an FSC partner, conducted a Human-Centered Design Research for the *College Transformation des Collèges Project* to assess the needs of equity seeking groups. Pilot projects were subsequently designed to consider and address those needs.

Evaluation of the pilot initiatives will contribute to informing future initiatives as colleges strive to provide accessible education for all learners.

The ACA Innovation Centre played a pivotal role by providing support and various training opportunities during the project to enhance inter-cultural fluency and interaction. This effort was directed toward fostering welcoming and inclusive learning and working environments, ensuring that all participants felt valued and included.

1.5 Project Partners

The College Transformation de Collèges Project was a regional undertaking that involved the four Atlantic Provinces and engaged a broad range of external partners and collaborators in the overall initiative and the proposed pilot projects. These partners and collaborators included industry representatives, employers, licensing bodies, as well as organizations serving equity seeking communities. Many of these collaborations and partnerships will be highlighted in the case studies below.

2. Research and Evaluation Process

A significant focus of this project was placed on research and evaluation to ensure that key learnings were derived from the innovative efforts undertaken. By understanding which efforts were successful, identifying areas that needed improvement, and assessing participant satisfaction, the project aimed to replicate and apply positive impacts to future courses, programs, and initiatives.

The project's research and evaluation were structured into two phases:

- Phase 1: Planning and Research
- Phase 2: Design, Delivery, and Evaluation

2.1 Phase 1: Planning and Research

In this initial phase, a Human-Centered Design (HCD) research study was conducted with potential students to provide guidance to the pilot initiatives hence maximizing their positive impacts and addressing significant barriers. This study included a needs assessment, which provided guidance and recommendations regarding innovations and approaches that would best meet the needs of members of equity seeking groups. The ultimate goal was to design responsive programs that would maximize program completion and employment rates.

As the project unfolded, the inclusion of Human-Centered Design concepts was the first step to informing a research pathway that was at the basis of better understanding the needs and requirements of our target audiences to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of the pilot project. Blueprint, a company specialising in analytics, design and evaluations lead the research initiative to gather survey information from potential pilot participants, equity seeking groups as well as employers and industry representatives. Pilot projects were able to include the findings to maximize their efficiency and reach.

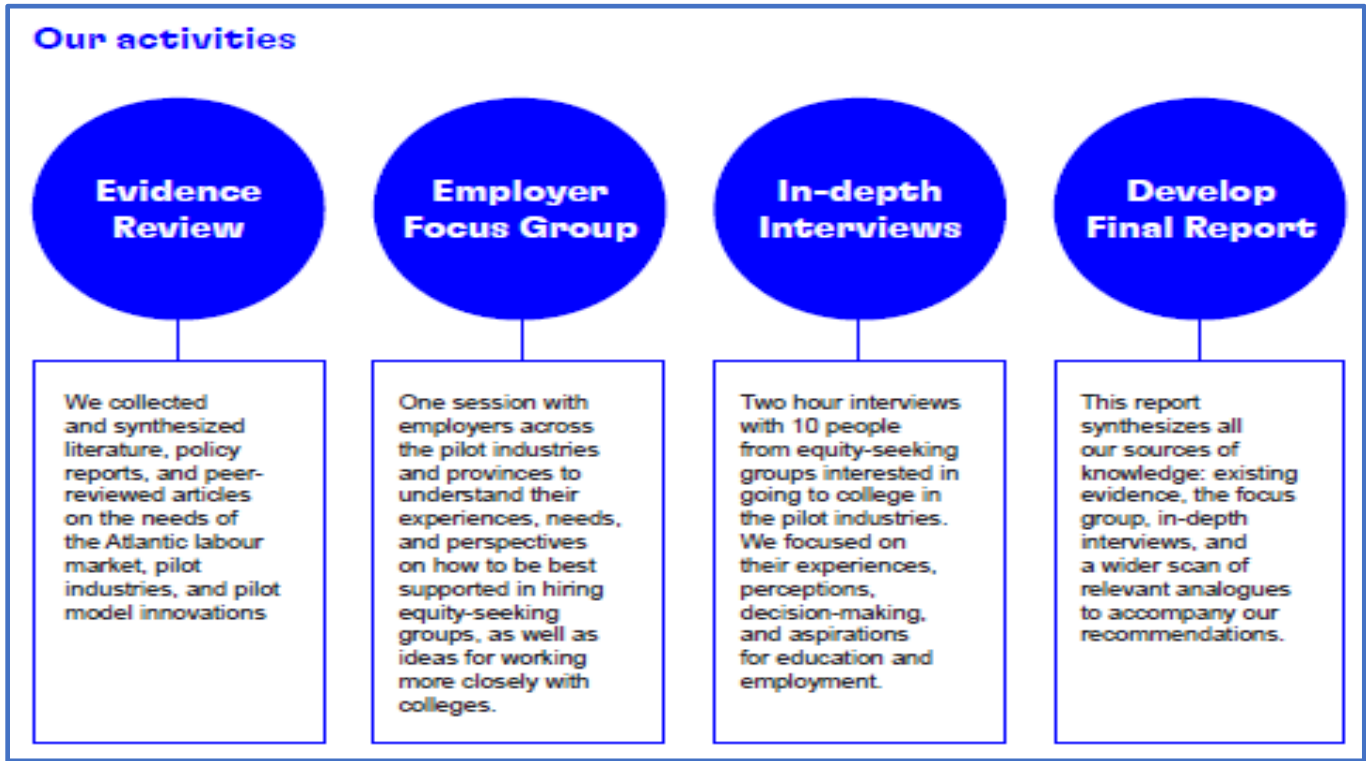
REB approvals for the HCD component, including the sampling and recruitment plan, and interview protocols were sought before the onset of the research.

The central research question guiding the HCD research was:

- How might the *College Transformation des Collèges (CTC) Project* help people from equity seeking groups succeed in college-based training programs in Atlantic Canada?
- Success was defined on three levels:
 - Finding and being attracted to a program.
 - Program accessibility and completion.
 - Achieving sustained employment post-program.

A full report titled "Needs assessment for equity seeking groups - Human-centered design research for the *College Transformation des Collèges Project*" is available in Appendix 1. This report draws upon Human-Centered Design research conducted with employers and potential students from the Atlantic region. A summary of the activities conducted is featured in Figure 1. This structured approach to research and evaluation allowed the project to gather valuable insights and data to inform the success of the initiatives and shape future strategies. This report will continue to be a source of guidance and inspiration for colleges on the path to improve accessibility.

Figure 1: Blueprint’s activities to provide the ACA and partner colleges with recommendations as to how they can best support equity seeking and how to collaborate with employers to ensure sustainable employment pathways for these students.



Recommendations in the form of Design Principles

Recommendations from Blueprint were presented to colleges on how best to support equity seeking groups in enrolling and succeeding in industry-specific college programs. Additionally, guidance was provided on how to foster collaboration with employers to ensure sustainable employment pathways for these students. The Design Principles outlined in this report played a pivotal role in guiding the pilot initiatives, particularly in their efforts to break down barriers to education.

Here are the six Design Principles identified in the Blueprint report:

- **Accessibility over accommodation** Choosing accessibility over accommodation prompts us to consider the breadth of what is required to “access” programs across dimensions such as financial cost, digital infrastructure and resources, pedagogical styles, physical space, sensory, social, and language.
- **Be proactive not reactive** Be the ‘first-mover’ to engage students, employers, peer colleges, and industry associations to identify challenges towards attracting and retaining qualified candidates.
- **Share instead of replicate** Design for addressing resource constraints specific to the Atlantic Regions/CTC pilots by prioritizing partnerships where resources are already available and can be shared.
- **Go where the people are** Leverage the existing communication and service provision channels of the specific networks’ that equity seeking groups are plugged into to market, engage, and problem solve for students.
- **Re-brand ‘school’** Designing pilots that offer various models for learning helps to ‘re-brand’ school; changing mental models of education and increasing student success.
- **Be employment-forward** Design pilots and supports to tenaciously focus on education as a clear

These Design Principles served as a foundation for pilot projects, improving accessibility to post-secondary education and contributing to the project's broader goals of supporting equity seeking communities and fostering a more inclusive educational landscape in Atlantic Canada.

2.2 Phase 2a: Design and Delivery

Building upon the research conducted in Phase 1, seven pilot programs were meticulously designed and successfully implemented across the seven corresponding Atlantic colleges. Table 2 table offers a concise overview of the pilot programs undertaken by each of the participating colleges within the project.

Table 1: Key Information for the Seven Pilot Projects of the *College Transformation des Collèges Project* Designed and Delivered during Phase 2a:

College	Holland College	NBCC	Université Sainte-Anne	College de L'Île	CNA:	NSCC	CCNB
Demographic(s) of focus/ Minority seeking group	Uncredentialed early childhood educators; women, youth, newcomers, mid-career workers, Indigenous students	Mature and mid-career individuals, immigrants and refugees, people in rural and remote areas, non-completers	Newcomers, mid-career workers, people starting a second career.	Newcomers, youth, Francophone ECE educators	People with disabilities, women	First Nations peoples, Black/ African Nova Scotians	Newcomers (French speaking), new career workers, graduates of LPN programs, mid-career workers
Model Innovation (s)/ Program Certification	Early Childhood Care Education year 2	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Information Technology (IT)	Microcredential course in Translation & Interpretation: <i>Foundations in Dialogue Interpreting</i> (Fall 2021) & <i>Medical Interpretation</i> course (Fall 2022).	Early Childhood care certification level 1: 3 courses Microcredential s blended learning, continuous intake.	Information Technology. Microcredentials, essential skills development, flexible learning, individual training plans, and work-integrated learning (+1-week job shadow)	Aquaculture College Certificate, Microcredentials , essential skills development, virtual reality, environmentally friendly technologies, industry collaboration, work integrated learning.	Health-Licensed Practical Nurse Microcredentials , work-integrated learning
PLAR	yes	yes	-	yes		yes	yes
Duration of course or project	2 years – part-time.	Jan. 2021-August 2022		flexible	Semester (offered during 2 semesters)	19 weeks	Transition et réadmission en soins infirmiers auxiliaires (TRSA), un semestre
Number of courses/credits	10 courses /credits	Prior assessment of 1 or more courses	1 course/micro credential	3 courses/ online	7-8 modules/semester	6 courses	5 cours dont un stage en milieu de soins actifs
Delivery method	Blended (online & in person) work-integrated learning, universal design for learning	online	Online	Blended	In-person	In-person and blended, work-integrated learning	Blended
Pre-requisites	Completed year 1 (EC Assistant certificate)	open to all learners- Pre-registration self-assessment		-		High school graduation or equivalent	Formation de soins infirmiers auxiliaires suivie à l'étranger ou au Canada, évaluation du dossier par l'AIAANB

Number of students per offering	9	5		20	Offering 1: Offering 2:	Offering 1: 6 Offering 2: 4 Offering 3: 7	Phase de pilotage : 9 inscriptions. À compter de septembre 2023, 20 sièges par cohorte.
Accessibility	Flexible program	Accessible & Flexible	"Accessible, flexible, convenient, quicker and cheaper"	Flexible and accessible		Accessible	Accessible and flexible
Aim/objective	Allow a flexible opportunity for early childhood educators to remain employed while attaining their ECCE Diploma	Emphasize accessibility and flexibility for participants in order to reduce barriers to education, particularly for equity seeking groups,	a program geared toward those who work with immigrants and linguistic minorities.	Allow a flexible opportunity to non-certified adults working in daycares to obtain level 1 ECC certification		Designed to provide the skills and knowledge to work as an entry-level technician in a sea farm operation. Also serves those looking to build upon existing knowledge and abilities, as well as those who have an interest in starting a career in the industry.	Permettre aux infirmières auxiliaires formées à l'étranger ou à celles qui ont dû s'absenter de la profession pour une période prolongée d'intégrer la profession infirmière auxiliaires au N.-B.
Further Activities to build on pilots.	Create more opportunities for PLAR across college programs.	Applied the knowledge learnt to the Every New Brunswicker Program and to the Regional PLAR Initiative.	Developed 2 other microcredentials focused on interpretation: *Legal Interpretation *Medical Interpretation	Further invested in the on-line course to render it self-supporting	Partnered with the Women in Resource Development Corporation (WRDC) to deliver three offerings of the ITCF programs in the Fall 2023 semester to eligible women of racialized groups.	Developing an industry-needs modularized / microcredential program to suit those already in industry looking to advance; will develop as independent micro courses, online where appropriate.	Le programme TRSA va être offert à temps plein en septembre 2023 et à temps partiel à l'hiver 2024. C'est le modèle privilégié établi en collaboration avec l'AIAANB

2.3 Phase 2b: Evaluation

This phase, which took place from January to September 2023, focused on developing a comprehensive plan for the evaluation of the seven pilot programs. The evaluation process encompassed data collection from various stakeholders, including those involved in planning and delivering the pilot programs, as well as the participating students. The primary objectives were to assess the overall effectiveness of the programs, identify successes and challenges encountered during planning and delivery, capture the experiences of the students engaged in the programs, and derive valuable lessons for future initiatives.

Furthermore, the findings were disseminated to our valued partners, stakeholders, and partner colleges, facilitating shared insights and collective progress.

3. Research Methodology and Data Analysis

In the following section, we present the research methodology and data analysis employed during Phase 2b for the examination of data from the seven colleges.

3.1 Purpose of the Study

This report signifies the culmination of a project financed by the Future Skills Centre and supported by the ACA and its seven partner colleges. Its primary objective was to assess the pilot programs implemented across seven Atlantic Colleges.

The pilot projects were designed to achieve the following:

- Enhance engagement with equity seeking and underrepresented groups.
- Develop accessible, flexible, and innovative learning paths to remove educational barriers.
- Address specific labor market shortages in various sectors.
- Utilize insights from these pilot projects to offer future recommendations.

3.2 Research Questions

The study aimed to answer three key questions:

- What are the obstacles that equity seeking groups in Atlantic Canada face when pursuing education?
- Did the pilot projects in each college effectively address these barriers?
- What lessons can be drawn from these experiences, and what are the implications for future programs?

3.3 Overview of Methodology:

The Seven Atlantic Colleges participated in the project, each implementing a unique pilot program with varying contextual elements, content, duration, and specifications. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these programs, a case study approach was employed. This approach allowed for in-depth analysis of each college's pilot program individually and a comparison across all seven colleges.

Each case study delved into the implementation of the pilot program, assessed its impact on students, college administrators, and instructors, and facilitated a cross-case analysis to identify commonalities and differences. This analysis helped generate feedback and recommendations for improving future program delivery.

The primary data sources for these case studies included surveys and interviews with college administrators, students, and instructors. Additionally, we collected and analyzed various documents such as proposals, progress reports, program descriptions, and available artifacts.

To ensure the validity of our findings, we applied triangulation by gathering data from multiple sources. Furthermore, we prepared individual case studies for each pilot project based on the information gathered and shared with the respective participants for validation, enhancing the overall credibility and reliability of the study.

3.4 The Seven Colleges Transformation des Collèges Project Pilots

The Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA) embarked on an ambitious mission to develop and implement seven distinct pilot projects. These initiatives were strategically designed to address critical labor shortages and skills gaps in priority sectors across Atlantic Canada within a 24-month timeframe. The primary objectives of these pilot projects were as follows:

- To rigorously test and evaluate innovative approaches.
- To generate potential solutions aimed at optimizing and transforming the college system.
- To foster collaboration and engagement among colleges throughout the region.
- To dismantle systemic barriers that hinder access to post-secondary education, ensuring that it becomes more accessible to all.

The pilot programs were carefully crafted and spearheaded across seven esteemed institutions in the Atlantic Canada region, each playing a vital role in addressing the unique needs of their respective communities. These institutions include:

These colleges partnered to pioneer innovative solutions within their province. These institutions in Nova Scotia joined forces to champion transformative education. Prince Edward Island saw the collaboration of these two institutions in paving the way for educational improvements. Newfoundland and Labrador's College of the North Atlantic actively contributed to this regional initiative.

3.5 Case Studies

To gain a comprehensive understanding of each college's pilot program and to identify both its strengths and the barriers it encountered, we conducted individual case studies for each institution. These case studies serve as a means to delve into the intricacies of each program, shedding light on successful elements as well as the challenges encountered. In the following section, we will closely examine these case studies, providing insights into the unique initiatives undertaken by each college and the valuable lessons to be drawn for the future.

3.5.1 Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick Case Study - "Transition et Réadmission en Soins Infirmiers Auxiliaires"

Introduction

Funded by the Future Skills Center of Canada (FSC) and supported by Atlantic Colleges Atlantique, the "Transition et Réadmission en Soins Infirmiers Auxiliaires" aimed to prepare students to enter or re-enter the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) profession. The program was designed to allow candidates recommended by the Association of Licensed Practical Nurses of New Brunswick (ALPNB) to update their education through an individualized pathway. The program primarily targeted individuals who were trained outside of New Brunswick, either in a foreign country or in another Canadian province, as well as those who wished to re-enter practice in New Brunswick. Successful completion of the program, with a minimum passing grade of 75%, granted students eligibility for the entry examination into the profession. This enabled them to reintegrate into the nursing profession or job market as licensed practical nurses in New Brunswick.

Overview of the Pilot program

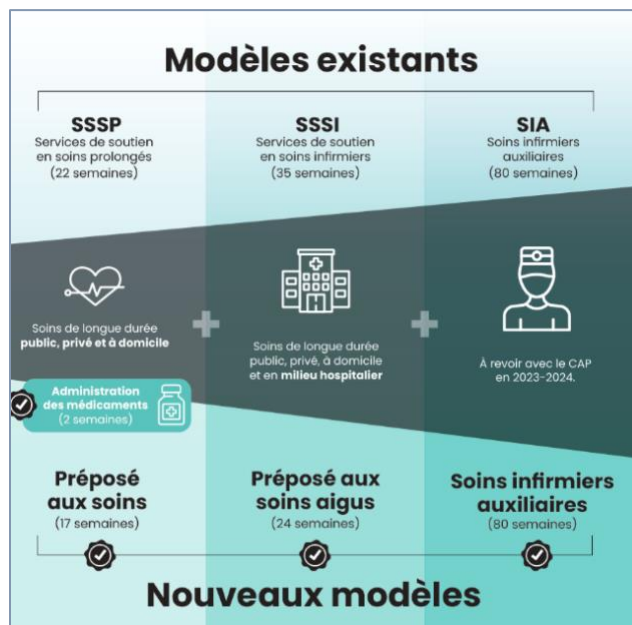
The innovative program, "Health: Licensed Practical Nurse," emphasized a competency-based learning approach. This program catered to French-speaking newcomers, individuals transitioning to new careers, graduates of LPN programs, and mid-career workers.

Under the condition that students received a recommendation from a provincial regulatory body, the program extended to the following categories:

- Licensed Practical Nurses trained in Canada who wished to re-enter practice, or who were facing challenges in passing the national examination, or who required performance improvements with corrective measures; or
- Individuals trained as LPNs or in nursing abroad who wished to practice the profession in New Brunswick; or
- Graduates in practical nursing in Canada who had not successfully passed the national entrance examination for the nursing profession.

The figure below represented the continuum in nursing care, highlighting the differences between the new model and the existing model. "Service de Soutien en Soins Infirmiers (SSSI)"/Personnel Support Worker and "Soins Infirmiers Auxiliaires (SIA)"/Licensed Practical Nurse. Over the years, the former SIA program became increasingly overloaded. Through the program analysis exercise that led to the "Approche Centrée sur le Développement des Compétences" (ACDC), it was observed that several contents were repetitive. Consequently, the design of the current program provides students with many more opportunities for enriched learning.

Figure 2: CCNB's Nursing Continuum Models



What Worked Well and Why?

The implementation of the Competency-Based Learning program, known as "Approche Centrée sur le Développement des Compétences" (ACDC), resulted in numerous positive outcomes and successes, fundamentally transforming the learning experience for both students and instructors. This section highlights the significant achievements and feedback gathered from instructors and students regarding the ACDC program.

Participants consistently praised the ACDC program for its exceptional quality and comprehensive approach. They particularly emphasized the outstanding competence of the instructors who cultivated a comfortable and supportive learning environment. A notable portion of surveyed students expressed their feelings of comfort and ease with the instructors, acknowledging the instructors' patience and understanding. As one surveyed participant noted, "I find the program to be of exceedingly high quality and exceptionally comprehensive, with the best instructors. Despite facing occasional communication difficulties, when expressing myself, I feel remarkably comfortable and at ease with the instructors, who consistently display patience and understanding towards me."

Over 50% of instructors acknowledged the program's success in providing a wide array of diverse learning activities that effectively capture and sustain students' interest. These activities have played a pivotal role in maintaining students' engagement and proactivity throughout their learning journey. This diversity in learning strategies has significantly contributed to a more dynamic and effective educational experience.

Equity Seeking Groups

The ACDC program demonstrated a commitment to equity by catering to various groups, including newcomers (French-speaking), career changers, LPN program graduates, mid-career workers, and students with special needs. Notably, a significant number of international students, totaling 48 out of

66, participated in the program during the 2021-2022 academic year. In that same academic year, CCNB offered 4 groups of SIA and 4 groups of SSSI across all five campuses. It's important to note that these statistics included second-year Licensed Practical Nursing students in Dieppe and Edmundston, as the program's entry is every two years.

New Program, Competency-Based Learning

The transition to Competency-Based Learning (CBL), known as *Approches Centrée sur le Développement des Compétences* (ACDC) in French, was implemented to replace CCNB's existing educational model. CBL is an educational approach that focuses on assessing a student's progress and learning outcomes based on the mastery of specific skills, knowledge, and abilities. This approach departs from traditional metrics such as classroom time or course completion and places greater emphasis on demonstrating competence rather than accumulating credits or grades.

A survey was conducted with 13 instructors to gauge their opinions on the ACDC program. The results showed that 5 instructors (38.46%) strongly agreed, while 7 (53.85%) simply agreed that the ACDC program better met the learning needs of the students; one instructor had no opinion on the matter. During an interview, one teacher expressed that learning had consistently been contextualized within the program. They pointed out that readings and assignments were always aligned with pedagogical intentions. The teacher elaborated, stating that "The cumulative and stackable effect of learning from one course to another promoted complex, enduring, and transferable knowledge and skills. Courses were never an end in themselves. Learning progressed from simple to complex." Furthermore, they argued that "Continuous formative assessment created a supportive learning environment that accompanied students. They forgot that they were being assessed; they were always in a learning mindset." In a statement, a first-year SIA student expressed, "By sharing my experience with current hospital employees, they made me realize how much more prepared we would be for practicums since we were learning through scenarios based on real situations and learning to complete documentation at the same time."

A former inclusion coordinator at CCNB provided her observations regarding students facing challenges in the SSSI and SIA programs who began with the ACDC approach in September of the previous year. She reported, "Firstly, students told me they had a lot of fun learning this way. They were fully engaged and actively involved. They loved having the opportunity to apply their learning in simulated workplace settings earlier on in the classroom. They felt less stressed, less anxious, and achieved better results. They found a sense of peer collaboration and shared that they had a better relationship with the instructors. By engaging with their work environment earlier, it also let them assess if they'd made a good career choice."

Another first-year SIA student, who had a learning disability, shared, "The course that had been put together was just wow! It was incredible how by working on the topics, we understood better, and then the debriefing in the laboratory allowed us to apply everything immediately. I was so glad I started in the new program."

Upon comparing students from the old program to those in the ACDC program, it was discovered that first-year SIA students (ACDC) performed better and were much better prepared at an equal point in

time to fulfill their roles. Some teachers mentioned experiencing less stress and feeling less exhausted since the approach was more flexible and adaptable, tailored to the students' learning needs. Additionally, there was more time for learning feedback. When the 13 instructors were asked whether the decision to have a common core between the SSSI and SIA programs was a wise decision for the students, 5 (38.46) strongly agreed, 7 (53.85%) agreed, and one (7.69%) did not agree. Regarding whether it was a sound educational decision, 5 (38.46%) strongly agreed, 6 (46.15%) agreed, one (7.68%) did not agree, and one had no opinion. An instructor wrote in the survey, "What I liked about the ACDC program was that the student was constantly evolving, and we never placed them under stress. We could conduct formative assessments without them being aware, so they could feel comfortable, and we could continue our teaching seamlessly."

On the other hand, out of the 50 students who completed the survey, 22 (44%) strongly agreed, and 17 (34%) agreed that having a common core for the first semester between the SSSI and SIA programs allowed them to better understand both professions, while 5 (10%) disagreed, 1 (2%) strongly disagreed, and 5 (10%) had no opinion. One student stated, "I liked the concept of the common core."

In the final report, the project coordinator highlighted the most surprising outcome, which was the staggering increase in the success rate of the national examination for auxiliary nurses, rising from 84% to 99% between 2021 and 2023. This result unequivocally demonstrated the validity of the ACDC approach. A survey was also conducted among students and educators in the Care Assistants and Auxiliary Nursing programs in 2022-2023 to assess their experience with the programs offered under the ACDC approach. The satisfaction rate was found to be high in both cases.

Lastly, the 13 instructors were asked about their perception of support in integrating the approach. Two instructors strongly agreed (15.38%), 7 (53.85%) agreed, and 4 (30.77%) disagreed regarding the level of support they received. One instructor expressed, "There were still many difficulties with non-traditional teaching methods, and there weren't enough explanations to provide certain learning aspects. Once again, this was introduced to us too quickly without giving us enough time to become familiar with this new approach."

In conclusion, the implementation of the Competency-Based Learning approach through the ACDC program within the Transition and Readmission Program for Licensed Practical Nurses undeniably yielded a range of positive outcomes. From fostering engaging and supportive learning environments to enhancing students' real-world application of knowledge, the ACDC approach stood as a testament to the program's commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and student success. While some challenges in integration surfaced, the overall impact of the program remained overwhelmingly positive, underscoring its importance in shaping the future of nursing education and practice.

Student Retention

Students were granted the flexibility to transition between the two programs, SSSI and SIA, through the establishment of a common core for the first semester. This arrangement allowed students who were enrolled in SSSI to opt to continue their studies in SIA after that semester, contingent upon achieving results of 75% or higher. This opportunity was extended regardless of whether they initially met the admission requirements for the SIA program at the commencement of their enrollment in SSSI.

Furthermore, SIA students facing difficulties were provided with the option to transfer to the SSSI program, thereby assuming the role of healthcare givers/attendants. This approach not only bolstered student retention rates but also contributed to an increase in the number of graduates.

Blended Delivery Structure

Student feedback regarding the blended delivery structure indicated a preference for more in-person sessions over virtual classes, with one student acknowledging, "I would have preferred fewer virtual classes and more in-person sessions, but I understand it was due to the pandemic."

Out of the 50 surveyed students, 15 (30%) found the distribution of classroom, virtual, and laboratory sessions to be Excellent, 12 (24%) considered it Very Good, and 15 (30%) rated it as Good. In contrast, only 4 (8%) believed that the distribution needed improvement, and 4 (8%) chose not to express an opinion. This data corresponded with a student's comment on their enjoyment of both in-person and online classes, as well as lab sessions: "I liked the in-person and online classes, as well as the lab sessions."

Instructors generally reached a consensus that the program's delivery structure effectively catered to students' learning needs, although opinions diverged regarding the distribution of courses between classroom or virtual sessions and laboratory sessions. Specifically, one instructor (7.69%) strongly agreed, 8 (61.54%) agreed, while 4 (30.77%) had reservations about the distribution of courses among classroom, virtual, and laboratory settings. An instructor also acknowledged the challenges posed by the virtual teaching dynamics of the ACDC format, stating, "Teaching in the ACDC format through virtual classes is very challenging."

How Did the Program Prepare Students for the Practicum/Internship and Workforce?

Students consistently praised the program's effectiveness and the competence of its instructors. One student remarked, "It was an excellent program with capable instructors. It was ideal for someone who wanted to start and grasp the basics of the profession."

The pilot program aimed to establish a strong connection between learners and employers right from the beginning of the training process, and even before that. After discussions with employers, including long-term care facilities and the Vitalité Health Network, it became evident that there was a significant shortage of labor in these settings. As a result, a very high placement rate was anticipated, especially given that students were required to complete several internships during their training, which facilitated a strong link between students and employment opportunities. In fact, a recruitment strategy for healthcare aides and licensed practical nurses was being collaboratively developed by CCNB and the Vitalité Health Network to bridge the gap between training and available positions. Instructors also reiterated this strategy, emphasizing the collaborative effort between CCNB and the Vitalité Health Network to bridge the gap between training and available jobs.

All 13 instructors who participated in the survey unanimously agreed that the training adequately prepared students for integration into practical environments. According to an employer survey conducted in 2020, it was noted that students lacked sufficient practical experience. The "Approche Centrée sur le Développement des Compétences" (ACDC) addresses this crucial sector need.

A first-year SIA student shared her experience with current hospital employees, stating, "They made me realize how much better prepared we would be for our practicum, as we were learning through scenarios based on real situations and simultaneously acquiring documentation skills." Another student shared, "I thoroughly enjoyed the new course in my first year, and I was very grateful I enrolled in it. I felt well-prepared for my practicum. The instructors were exceptional!"

In the survey, a unanimous 100% (50 students) agreement was observed, with all students affirming that the training thoroughly prepared them for seamless integration into practicum environments. Furthermore, upon the completion of their training, these students expressed a high level of confidence in their ability to practice their profession effectively. One student elaborated, "The hands-on practices and simulations significantly enhanced our readiness to work with actual patients." Another student added, "We truly engaged with material that directly related to our future career."

In conclusion, the project manager underscored how this program had proven highly effective in fostering a robust synergy among stakeholders. Specifically, a strong partnership was established between CCNB, professional associations (AIINB and AIAANB), the Vitalité Health Network, and the Ministry of Health. Ongoing communication was maintained among these entities to ensure a clear understanding of their respective roles and processes. Moreover, the program served as an effective means to introduce new educators to the competency-based approach, allowing them to observe alongside instructors who excelled in this approach.

What Were the Lessons Learned?

The project manager shared that one of the most significant lessons learned revolved around the importance of effective change management. The academic transformation marked a substantial departure from traditional program conception and delivery. For educators, this necessitated a complete overhaul of their instructional methods, resulting in the incorporation of contextualized learning activities woven into authentic scenarios. Consequently, a consistent and robust support system proved indispensable for the successful execution of such a transformative process.

Moreover, communication and collaborative teamwork played pivotal roles in the success of this innovative pedagogical approach. Educators uploaded their learning activities onto the Ardoise platform (D2L), making them accessible across all five campuses. Additionally, opportunities for sharing best practices were provided, fostering a dynamic exchange of exemplary methods. To disseminate successful practices throughout the entire CCNB community, a webinar was conducted. This webinar highlighted specific outcomes and benefits of the ACDC approach to the staff. Evidently, students demonstrated full engagement in their learning journey, with activities seamlessly integrating multiple competencies simultaneously.

What Were the Barriers?

While the program has demonstrated success in various aspects, it has also encountered certain barriers and challenges that have come to light. These challenges primarily revolve around the assessment methods employed within the program and their impact on students, especially those who struggled with reading and comprehension.

One significant concern was raised by a former inclusion coordinator who highlighted that the written assessments, featuring complex scenarios, required a substantial amount of reading. For students facing challenges in reading, this approach added further difficulties, potentially impacting their overall performance. This observation illuminated a barrier that could impede the learning experience for a specific group of students.

In response to this concern, a teacher acknowledged the validity of the issue, recognizing that the practice entry examination at the culmination of the training solely comprised intricate scenarios accompanied by multiple-choice answers. While this format was designed to assess students' comprehensive grasp of the material, it posed a challenge for those grappling with reading and comprehension difficulties. The teacher emphasized the importance of adequately preparing students for such assessments, given their pivotal role in the program's evaluation process.

The CCNB final report noted that, as the first programs to undergo academic transformation, the timeline for implementation was longer than it might have been if the process had been refined by other programs. However, concurrently, the teams were able to glean lasting insights and contribute to enhancing the approach through experimentation, evaluation, and recommendations.

In conclusion, this program's journey has been marked by significant achievements and valuable lessons. The challenges encountered underscore the importance of ongoing adaptation and support to ensure that all students can fully benefit from the program. The commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment and continuously improving instructional methods will undoubtedly contribute to the program's ongoing success. The program's ability to adapt and learn from its experiences reinforces its commitment to excellence and its dedication to preparing students for successful careers in healthcare.

3.5.2 Collège de L'Île Case Study: Early Childhood Education Microcertification - Level 1 Courses

Introduction

The Early Childhood sector in Prince Edward Island encountered a persistent staffing shortage, posing significant operational challenges for Early Childhood Centers. These centers were constrained by limited number of certified staff, affecting the child-to-educator ratio and, consequently, the number of children they could accommodate. Certified staff receive higher remuneration rates, which also contributes to better retention and in turn, enhanced center operations. Recognizing these consequential impacts on child-to-educator ratios and the overall capacity of these centers, Collège de l'Île initiated a strategic response.

Collège de l'Île's overarching goal was to address the staffing shortage by offering an accelerated program that would enable learners to obtain their Level 1, 2, and 3 Certifications in a condensed one-year program, challenging the traditional two-year model. These certifications were designed to prepare students for careers as educators of children aged 0 to 12. The curriculum emphasized the ability to design and implement educational activities that inspire young children, support their holistic

development (intellectual, physical, emotional, social, creative), and promote inclusion while ensuring their safety and well-being.

This initiative, undertaken under the umbrella of the *College Transformation des 18 Collège* Project, represented the initial step in the development of an accelerated program to meet evolving market needs and educational requirements. The focus was on creating a microcredential program, putting the content of the three core Level 1 courses online to offer learners a flexible and accessible way to acquire their Early Childhood Education certification.

Program Description and Partnerships

For the purpose of this project, the first step in this transformative initiative was undertaken. The college focused on converting Level 1 courses into continuous-entry e-learning modules. This strategic decision aimed to provide learners with the flexibility to progress at their own pace, making education more accessible. Non-certified employees of childcare centers could now obtain their initial certification without disrupting work commitments, while local rural learners and newcomers could engage in distance learning, eliminating geographical constraints.

The collaboration with Collège Boréal was instrumental in serving two purposes: content development for microcertifications and the creation of practice frameworks tailored for educators in childcare centers. Collège Boréal's expertise in adapting early childhood education programs for e-learning ensured the project's success. The collaboration also ensured the integration of Prince Edward Island's pedagogical framework and early childhood legislation into the redesigned Level 1 courses.

A dedicated pedagogical engineering team, composed of representatives from both Colleges crafted the content using a microcertification approach aligned with the college's needs. The three foundational Level 1 courses underwent substantial modifications for online delivery through the Brightspace platform. Simultaneously, competency-based learning was introduced to add flexibility to the program. Teachers received training in competency-based delivery through external resources, enhancing their ability to deliver effective instruction.

The culmination of these efforts resulted in three microcertificate courses aligned with the project workplans, ready for launch at the beginning of the 2021 academic year. The college initiated the offering of these courses via continuous entry within a few weeks, catering to both the public and employees of PEI's early childhood centers. Strategic promotion was facilitated through the primary partner, the *Association des centres de la petite enfance francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard* (ACPEFIPÉ), which not only endorsed the new courses but also featured it prominently in media interviews addressing the workforce shortage in the centers.

In 2021, the online program welcomed the first seven learners, including international students which leveraged the newfound flexibility, completing the distance learning program even before physically arriving in PEI. Significantly, all participants represented the equity seeking groups specifically targeted (i.e., women, individuals residing in French-speaking minority communities, and newcomers). This enrollment composition underscored the project's success in fostering inclusivity and reaching its intended audience. Many more have enrolled since the onset of the online delivery.

Participant testimonials underscored the transformative impact of online access, particularly for newcomers, reaffirming the commitment to breaking down barriers.

"Starting the course online before arriving was incredibly beneficial for me." - Participant testimonial.

Strategic partnerships with entities like ACPEFÎPÉ, who represent five of the six Francophone Early Childhood Centres on PEI, transcended financial support becoming integral components in fostering inclusivity. The PEI Department of Education and Early Years as well as the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) also put in place the "Steps for Success" program to subsidise tuition for students who wish to take the Level 1 certification to serve as replacement workers. This would help with the operational needs of the centre and fill the void when employees left to complete their diplomas.

Equity Seeking Groups and Barrier Alleviation

The initiative purposefully aimed at supporting equity seeking groups, addressing the unique needs of newcomers, immigrants, women, and minority language communities. The content design deliberately included elements to strengthen identity, recognizing the diverse requirements of these specific groups.

Participants appreciated the flexibility of online scheduling, but challenges surfaced, highlighting the delicate balance needed to manage work, studies, and family responsibilities. The consistent request for accessible and supportive instructors emphasized the crucial role of ongoing support structures.

"Flexible scheduling and online delivery were crucial for my enrollment." - Participant feedback.

A key objective of this project was to identify and overcome barriers to college education for equity seeking groups (ESGs). From the beginning, the project operated on the belief that its goals and efforts would positively impact newcomers, immigrants, women, and those in minority language communities. Blueprint's Human-Centered Design research project played a vital role in shaping Design Principles which provided insights and guidance. The project revealed the facilitative role of online access in learning, with some newcomers even starting the course before physically arriving in the country. Importantly, content design included identity-building, proving particularly beneficial when delivering these courses to international participants.

Barriers and Success

In its pursuit of breaking down educational barriers, this project empowered learners to engage in courses while simultaneously managing work commitments or even prior to their arrival in the country. The adoption of an online format facilitated a self-paced learning approach.

Challenges surfaced, particularly in regions with limited access to computers and robust networks, notably in rural areas. Recognizing the prevalent use of cellphones as the primary technology, ensuring compatibility and viewability on these devices became a critical consideration.

Learners grappled with common challenges related to time management, striving to complete online modules before transitioning to the accelerated face-to-face program.

Recruitment outcomes fell below expectations, prompting a critical examination of potential causes such as ineffective promotion or a lack of interest in the profession. This underscores the imperative need for a comprehensive assessment of promotional strategies and potential enhancements to ensure future success in student recruitment.

Navigating Challenges, Seizing Opportunities: The Program's Journey

- **Flexible and Accessible Program:** Participants, comprising a diverse group, underscored the pivotal role of flexible course commencement and conclusion options, influencing 90% of their enrollment decisions. While recognizing the availability of course content in multiple formats for enhanced accessibility, 80% stressed the indispensable need for an accessible and supportive instructor. The success of the program hinged on ensuring instructors were not only accessible but also supportive:

"Flexible scheduling and online delivery were paramount for my enrollment." - Participant feedback.

- **Enrollment Motivations:** Factors shaping enrollment decisions included considerations such as cost, online delivery, flexible learning, and the part-time structure. A substantial 90% of participants were swayed by the allure of online delivery and flexibility. Most enrolled with the dual goals of enhancing job opportunities and bolstering professional confidence. However, the need for continuous instructor support emerged as a critical requirement, prompting adjustments in prerequisites and resource allocation:

"Encouraging friends to enroll would depend on accessible and available instructors." - Participant's perspective.

- **Challenges:** Participants encountered challenges in balancing work, studies, and family responsibilities, particularly in managing job commitments alongside college studies. The importance of instructor availability and approachability emerged as significant factors shaping participants' decisions on course selection and recommendations to peers. The recurring emphasis on the value of accessible instructor support was evident in participant perspectives:

Lessons Learned and Follow-up Work

The successes of this initiative were marked by the nuanced influence of flexible course commencement and conclusion options, impacting 90% of participants' enrollment decisions. Online delivery and flexibility were transformative, but the recurring theme of accessible and available instructors underscored the profound significance of ongoing support structures.

"The instructor's availability was crucial; it made a difference in my learning experience." - Participant insight.

The design and delivery of the three foundational courses as e-learning microcredentials, was successful, but participants provided valuable insights, revealing the intricate dance between autonomous learning and the scaffolding of essential support structures. While continuous intake and self-paced learning

proved beneficial, the need for ongoing instructor support did not align with the important goal of delivering autonomous learning. After careful review of the course content and analysis of the support needed, it was determined the courses required significant improvements and refinements.

The Path to Improvements

Funding was received from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC) to bring much needed improvement to the online courses. The three foundational courses were modified to ensure an autonomous self-supported experience for learners. The pedagogical engineering team from Collège Boréal and Collège de l'Île brought many improvements to the course content during this second phase. The quality of the new courses is now far superior, which was confirmed by participants positive reviews during testing. It appears fine-tuning the courses and adding more supporting material paved the way for a self-paced autonomous pathway. On average, learners are now completing all three Level 1 courses in approximately one month. Controls and restrictions were also implemented to ensure academic integrity and readiness for Level 2 and 3 Certifications.

During Phase 1, prerequisites for these courses had been reduced as an attempt to eliminate barriers. Although well intentioned, it resulted in learner struggles and created situations where teachers had to provide additional support and up-grading assistance. The adaptation journey highlighted the necessity for stricter acceptance criteria and additional support resources. Efforts to reduce barriers to education are now directed towards pre-admission interviews to customise individual pathway. For example, a mature student without a high school diploma but having sectoral experience, may start with tailored up-grading in reading and comprehension to ensure their future success in obtaining their diploma.

Next Phases

After successfully developing, delivering, and optimizing the online delivery of Level 1 courses, the efforts were directed towards reformatting the Level 2 and 3 Certifications in a one-year accelerated program. The first cohort will receive their diplomas this year. The next step in this journey with the partners will be to develop a Post-Diploma in Early Childhood Education Leadership and Management.

Conclusion

This transformative initiative has redefined certification processes in early childhood education, providing a more accessible and flexible learning pathway. Level 1 certifications serve as not just academic milestones but also empower centers to facilitate the smooth transition of employees pursuing further studies, strengthening the workforce. It also provides the centres with an accessible training tool for new or replacement staff which helps to maintain a higher child to educator ratio. The lessons learned offer valuable insights for future initiatives, emphasizing a tailored approach to meet learner needs and address industry challenges. The initiative, marked by strategic partnerships, innovative curriculum development, and a commitment to dismantling barriers, serves as a detailed blueprint for reshaping early childhood education in Prince Edward Island. The impact is evident not only in statistical data but also in the voices of participants.

"This project strengthened links with the association of early childhood centers." - Insight from project leads.

Beyond mere certifications, the initiative's transformative potential is highlighted through strategic partnerships, innovative curriculum development, and an unwavering commitment to breaking barriers. It stands as a beacon of progress, offering a nuanced blueprint for reshaping early childhood education in Prince Edward Island. The impact is not confined to statistical data but resonates in the poignant voices of participants who found empowerment and transformation in this educational journey. As we explore the intricacies of this transformative journey, its echoes are poised to resonate far beyond the immediate educational sphere, shaping the future of early childhood education in Prince Edward Island.

3.5.3 College of the North Atlantic Case Study - Information Technology Career Focus (ITCF)

Introduction

The College of the North Atlantic (CNA) initiated a novel pilot program in the field of Information Technology (IT), which was funded by the Future Skills Center of Canada (FSC) and supported by Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA). This project was designed to empower learners belonging to equity-deserving groups, enabling them to cultivate proficient IT skills and discern their areas of interest for prospective education and career pathways within the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) domain. The program's initial promotional efforts were concentrated on the recruitment of individuals with disabilities and women, both of whom have been historically underrepresented in the IT sector. Concurrently, the program strives to forge a conduit between local employers and the local talent pool, with a pivotal emphasis on nurturing a workforce in the ICT sector that is more inclusive, accessible, and diverse.

As per the official CNA website, the fundamental objective underpinning the Information Technology Career Focus (ITCF) pilot program is to dismantle barriers associated with access and support for marginalized groups, specifically targeting persons with disabilities and women. Moreover, the program places significant emphasis on a spectrum of personal development exercises, encompassing self-awareness activities, tactics for efficient time management, and the honing of indispensable interpersonal proficiencies. These proficiencies encompass effective communication, adept teamwork, and the nuanced art of career advancement.

Overview of the Program

The Information Technology Career Focus program is a one-semester introductory, skills-based pilot initiative aimed at equity seeking groups. It was implemented during the Fall 2021 and Winter 2022 semesters. Additionally, participants engaged in a one-week Job Shadow experience, providing them with a personal perspective on opportunities within the information technology sector.

The program's primary focus was on addressing skills gaps in priority sectors that require attention within the region's post-secondary education system. The pilot program was conducted twice. The initial pilot aimed to assist students in cultivating confidence, technical skills, and hands-on work experience, thereby enabling them to construct their career pathways. The second ITCF pilot specifically targeted women; nevertheless, as highlighted on the CNA website, both pilots aimed to "include older workers and indigenous individuals, affording them equal opportunities" (source: <https://www.cna.nl.ca/news/news-article.aspx?messageid=1336>).

The core objective of the ITCF program was to establish a supportive learning environment for students to nurture self-confidence and acquire the technical skills essential for success in training and employment within the information technology sector. The program sought to leverage labor market insights, career planning, and job search skills to facilitate well-informed career decisions, thereby assisting equity seeking groups in making informed choices about pursuing careers in IT.

The program seamlessly integrated design principles and recommendations from the Blueprint needs assessment into its planning and delivery. Blueprint collaborated with Future Skills to formulate a research plan, conducting interviews with employers and equity seeking groups identified by ACA pilot leaders before the pilot program's implementation. These principles centered around prioritizing accessibility over mere accommodation, adopting a proactive rather than reactive approach, emphasizing knowledge-sharing over duplication, reaching out to the target audience, and placing a strong emphasis on employment-centric strategies. A Project Lead remarked, "Our approach was to be proactive, not reactive. The ITCF classroom space was tailored to the needs of students; our Project Coordinator regularly engaged with students; faculty facilitated personalized learning, and individualized interviews were conducted with students both before and after job shadow placements."

The ensuing discussions draw from various sources, including the CNA final report of 2022, classroom assessments, as well as surveys, meetings, and interviews conducted.

What Were the Challenges and Barriers?

As detailed in the "FSC-CCF Project Learning & Reflection – Final Report," (Appendix 2) the project lead highlighted a particular aspect that encountered challenges in its execution: the student recruitment process. The report mentioned that the approach of reaching out to organizations via phone for recruitment proved less effective compared to arranging informational presentations. Upon the appointment of the Project Coordinator, a proactive strategy was employed, involving engagement with diverse community groups to disseminate information about the ITCF program through interactive meetings and comprehensive presentations. This approach not only facilitated the sharing of knowledge but also yielded additional advantages. Notably, one of the organizations even extended scholarships to students, showcasing the positive outcomes of this approach.

Equity Seeking Groups

Target equity seeking groups were identified as encompassing individuals with disabilities and women. Among the student population, challenges have emerged, particularly related to mental health and disability. Instances include struggles with memory due to brain injuries and social anxiety affecting school attendance. The Project Lead from CNA acknowledges that the institution consistently enrolls students requiring accommodations or belonging to equity-deserving categories. Nevertheless, it's notable that not all of these students are enrolled in the same classes. Several ITCF students have necessitated personalized assistance, adapted training approaches, and individualized instruction to thrive (Project Lead). The hurdles encountered by members of equity seeking groups, who expressed interest in pursuing IT training in Newfoundland, have been unveiled through student journals and interviews.

The challenges faced by members of equity seeking groups who expressed interest in pursuing IT training in Newfoundland were revealed through the analysis of student journals and interviews:

- **Self-Efficacy:** Some individuals harbored uncertainties regarding their capacity to succeed. One student shared, "I primarily experience mental barriers; I am highly self-doubtful. If I make a mistake, I tend to doubt my abilities entirely. I tend to spiral into self-doubt, even if I previously performed those tasks proficiently."
- **Mental Health:** A participant disclosed, "I feel that my indecisiveness is somewhat perceived as if I have ideas about what I'd like to pursue, but anxiety and low confidence hinder me from making commitments."
- **Cultural Differences:** One student stressed the importance of instructors understanding their unique circumstances. As an international student, they articulated, "I would appreciate it if my instructors were aware of my status as an international student from India. The education system and the cultural differences here are not entirely familiar to me. I am doing my best to adapt to these differences in culture, weather, and the education system."
- **Distraction:** Several students acknowledged that distractions significantly impaired effective listening. One student remarked, "I become easily distracted by noises, such as when the TV is on or if there's music playing. I find it challenging to give people my full attention. Sometimes, my phone leads to distractions." In a similar vein, another student expressed, "I struggle to comprehend what someone is saying unless the environment is quiet."
- **Fees:** Students commonly concurred that greater affordability would improve program accessibility. A student emphasized, "Financial concerns weigh heavily on me as I need to manage my bills while attending school, and this necessitates a somewhat fixed schedule."

These insights were derived from the CNA final report of 2022, classroom assessments, as well as surveys, meetings, and interviews, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by equity seeking individuals in pursuit of IT training.

Instructors

The primary challenge faced by instructors during Winter 2022 was related to attendance, which resulted in some students falling behind. In such cases, instructors were tasked with customizing learning plans individually to help students keep up with their coursework. The differing rates at which students absorbed information and progressed necessitated instructors to make adjustments to their teaching strategies. This approach enabled some students to advance through the material while providing others with additional time to complete their assignments.

Additionally, instructors grappled with the challenge of accommodating the unique needs of a diverse group of students who shared the same learning environment.

What Worked Well?

The final report, titled "FSC-CCF Project Learning & Reflection – Final Report," shared key insights and learnings generated by the project that have the potential to benefit and inform other peer organizations, sectors, funders, industry stakeholders, as well as policymakers.

When asked to reflect on what worked well in this project, the project lead shared that ITCF excelled in incorporating the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) holistically and "proactively," as outlined in the Blueprint report. This achievement was made possible through the development of individual relationships with the students, making it easier for them to understand and articulate their individual needs. A dedicated Project Coordinator (non-faculty) played a crucial role in interacting with the students throughout the program.

Equity Seeking Groups

The success of ITCF in addressing barriers identified for members of equity seeking groups interested in pursuing IT training in Newfoundland was revealed through student journals and interviews, as well as based on the CNA report:

- **Self-efficacy:** Individuals who expressed doubts about their ability to succeed reported, "[After taking ITCF], I feel more mature in my studies. Because I was interested in the material, I was more inclined to work harder. It also helped me feel more confident." "I have more self-awareness and a better idea of who I am."
- **Mental Health:** Some individuals with anxiety shared, "I was very anxious and nervous going into the job shadow. I chose Empower as the employer on purpose because I knew they would cater to my disabilities. It turned out to be a great experience, and I realized I didn't need to be so anxious."
- **Disability:** "I have ADHD. Sometimes, I have trouble focusing, but I definitely do better than I used to. It just feels like my brain is in a lot of things all at once. I'm definitely way more spacey until my meds kick in in the morning, but I feel like everyone else being tired early in the morning is pretty common anyway. I sometimes feel like I'm a bit of a slow learner and need to repeat tasks multiple times before understanding. Computers come easy to me, so it might not be an issue, but I just wanted to say it takes time for things to click with me, but when things click, they really do."
- **Gender:** "I've also learned about the importance of advocating for women in IT. Even though it's getting better, it's apparent that males are still dominating the industry, and misogynistic attitudes are still around. I've heard some sexist comments from classmates this term – women 'ask too many questions' and are 'crazy' -- which makes me realize this issue is all the more important. When I heard those things, I asked myself, 'Is this what working in IT is going to be like?'"

Student satisfaction surveys, as well as feedback received from student journals, focus groups, and interviews, indicate that overall, students were satisfied with ITCF's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Students were enthusiastic about the way ITCF identified and removed barriers by consulting

with them individually about their own perceived barriers and having instructors and support staff work with them individually to address ways to eliminate barriers (i.e., by pinpointing sources of funding and identifying ways to make the classroom space more accessible).

Flexibility and Accessibility

As previously mentioned, the implementation of design principles in the program allowed the program development team to prioritize accessibility over accommodation. This involved considering a wide range of requirements to create an accessible program, with a focus on factors such as financial costs, digital infrastructure, and available resources. Additionally, the team emphasized leveraging existing communication and service provision channels to support equity seeking groups in their pursuit of education and a direct pathway to employment. To ensure that students' needs were met, regular check-ins with individual students were conducted, and the classroom space was tailored to accommodate their needs. For instance, adjustments included placing tennis balls under table and chair legs and incorporating stimulating and empowering visuals on the walls.

Retention

During the Winter of 2022, 14 students initially registered for the program, with 11 students successfully completing it. Two students withdrew from the program during the course of ICTF. The college's withdrawal process involved exploring all possible avenues and scenarios to help students stay in the program before their departure. The reasons cited for withdrawal included mental health concerns and the realization that the timing of the program wasn't suitable for them. According to the CNA pilot report, one student did not receive a microcredential for ICTF but did participate in various modules. Following interventions from Guidance and Accessibility, as well as support from instructors and the Instructional Coordinator, it was determined that success for this particular student was not necessarily defined by obtaining credit for the program but rather by their active participation when their disability allowed it.

In the Fall of 2021, out of the 8 students who received the microcredential from the ICTF pilot, seven either applied to or were accepted into CNA to commence an IT program in the Fall of 2022. The Project Lead expressed satisfaction with this outcome, stating, "Our goal, of course, was to have students enroll, and we were delighted to have half of the participants register in an IT program."

Awareness

To harness the existing service provision channels for students from equity seeking groups, the Project Coordinator engaged in knowledge mobilization activities, including webinars addressing Inequities in Post-Secondary Education, Atlantic Colleges Atlantique conferences, and workshops. Students gained an understanding of the term 'microcredential' after they had already enrolled in the program. Upon grasping the potential benefits of a microcredential, they expressed satisfaction with the idea that it could enhance their employability. One student noted, "It's great; it gives you an idea of what it's going to be like in the industry." Another remarked, "I would recommend it because it really narrowed down what I'd like to do... You will learn a lot about yourself."

Re-branding School

CNA's accessibility services provided crucial support, including testing accommodations, text-to-speech, and speech recognition technologies. They ensured that the classroom environment was tailored to the specific needs of incoming students and reallocated funding for student tuition to enhance the program's financial accessibility. Instructors facilitated personalized learning opportunities, and the small class size enabled instructors and support staff to effectively cater to the diverse needs of students, thereby boosting student confidence and enabling students to enhance their technical skills. Additionally, students participated in a weeklong job shadow experience to better prepare them for the realities of the job market, offering them practical insights into the various IT career options.

The Project Coordinator maintained regular communication with students, ensuring they received individualized support and connecting them with various support services, including the Campus Nurse, Student Services, Campus Administration, and Guidance and Accessibility. The support and relationships fostered with the Project Coordinator played a pivotal role in improving the experience for the participants having one friendly and helpful person to connect with that was not in a power position (teacher responsible for grades).

To minimize barriers to education, especially for equity seeking groups, project coordinators conducted routine meetings with instructors, Guidance and Accessibility counselors, conducted individual student interviews, and administered student surveys. Additionally, a process was established for students who wished to withdraw from the program. Two students who chose to withdraw met with instructors, as well as a Guidance Counselor/Accessibility Coordinator, to explore whether modifications could be made to their participation in the program to make it more feasible for them to continue.

Employment-Forward

ITCF faculty prioritized education as a clear and direct pathway to employment. They meticulously planned a weeklong job shadow program during which students had the opportunity to observe and actively participate in activities at various IT workplaces. Additionally, they organized a career week where students interacted with key figures, including one of CNA's IT instructors, a technical lead, an Android developer, and representatives from TD Bank. Former IT students who had successfully ventured into the IT sector also participated in these sessions.

Student satisfaction surveys, in conjunction with feedback gathered from student journals, focus groups, and interviews, collectively affirm that ITCF proficiently introduced students to a diverse array of IT employment possibilities. One student commented, "It's helpful if you don't know what area of IT, you're interested in." Another student shared, "I feel like I've broadened my horizons. I've learned that there are more facets to IT than I previously thought, and a broader spectrum of job opportunities in various areas than I had initially considered."

What Were the Lessons Learned and Opportunities?

In the "FSC-CCF Project Learning & Reflection – Final Report," the project lead underscored the significance of initiating personalized discussions regarding training and career paths for equity seeking groups prior to the application phase. This proactive approach aimed to provide applicants with a clear

understanding of expectations and objectives, with the overarching goal of ensuring accessible post-secondary education for all.

Based on insights gleaned from the CNA pilot report, the following lessons emerged:

- **Enhancing the Awareness of Micro Credentials:** The ITCF Program represented the College of the North Atlantic's inaugural venture into microcredentials. A prominent lesson learned was the imperative need for more widespread promotion and socialization of microcredentials. Many students and employers were unfamiliar with badges and microcredentials, emphasizing the necessity of raising awareness.
- **Financial Accessibility:** Waiving tuition fees or realigning funding sources for student tuition could significantly enhance program accessibility. Charging fees or tuition was identified as a potential barrier for prospective students.
- **Educational Resources:** To bolster comprehension of the term "microcredential" among students, faculty, and support staff, the college's Marketing department could play a pivotal role in developing a comprehensive guide to microcredentials. Such a guide would outline the college's approach to microcredentialing, equipping recruiters, and instructors with the requisite tools to elucidate the benefits of this innovative approach.
- **Expansion Potential:** The success of microcredentialing in the ITCF program suggests opportunities for its expansion to other programs within CNA, thus widening its impact.
- **Partnerships with Industry:** Collaboration with industry stakeholders was identified as an opportunity to diversify the Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. A partnership-based approach, involving industry contributions, was seen as a means to foster creativity and responsiveness in recruitment and pedagogical practices.
- **Adaptation to External Factors:** The program's delivery amid the Covid-19 lockdown restricted the organization of field trips for students to career fairs or IT events. An anticipated intervention would involve "Employer Support/Interactions" to mitigate such constraints.

Conclusion

The insights gleaned from the CNA pilot report underscore the importance of proactive approaches in promoting accessibility and awareness, particularly for equity seeking groups in the pursuit of post-secondary education. Lessons learned, such as the need for enhanced awareness of microcredentials and financial accessibility, provide valuable guidance for future initiatives. Furthermore, the potential for expansion and collaboration with industry partners offers promising avenues to diversify workforce opportunities. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, these lessons and opportunities will undoubtedly contribute to more inclusive and innovative approaches to education and career development.

3.5.4 Holland College Case Study - Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Year 2 Blended Program

Introduction

The Early Childhood Care and Education Year 2 program forms an integral component of the *College Transformation des Collèges Project* initiated by the Atlantic Colleges Atlantique. This initiative has received funding from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre. The primary objective of this pilot program is to address the prevailing labor shortages and skill deficits, with a particular focus on enhancing career prospects in early childhood education.

The ECCE Year 2 Blended program has garnered complete support and endorsement from two key stakeholders: the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI (ECDA) and the Education and Lifelong Learning Early Childhood Development Department of the Government of PEI. ECDA stands as a provincial, non-profit organization deeply committed to the promotion and facilitation of high-quality early childhood development programs and services for the children and families residing on the Island. [1]

[1] Reference: Early Childhood Development Association of PEI website (ecdaofpei.ca)

Overview of the Pilot program

The objective of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Year 2 Blended project program was to provide employed Early Childhood Assistants (holding Level 2 certification on PEI) with the opportunity to concurrently continue their employment while pursuing Year 2 of the ECCE program through a part-time, blended learning delivery model. The aim was for participants to earn their ECCE Diploma, thereby elevating their certification to Level 3.

According to the Holland College website, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Year 2 program encompasses 10 credits and adopts a part-time structure delivered through a blended learning approach. This approach involves some components and classes being conducted face-to-face, while others are administered online. Each course within the program is scheduled for evenings or weekends. A key prerequisite for enrolling in this new blended program was that students must have acquired their ECA Certificate from an accredited or recognized institution within the preceding 10 years.

The project was initiated in late October 2020, with the recruitment of an Instructor and an Instructional Designer who commenced course development and design, activities that persisted throughout the duration of program delivery. The first cohort of students was enrolled in January 2021, and these students completed the program by June 2023.

What Worked Well and Why?

The Early Childhood Development Association of PEI (ECDA) identified a critical issue concerning the present and anticipated shortage within the early childhood education workforce. This scarcity was impeding the expansion of the early childhood education system in PEI. Additionally, a considerable number of early childhood educators, who were already employed in the industry, lacked the required credentials and were unwilling to leave their jobs for the training provided in the conventional full-time,

face-to-face format. Moreover, for employers seeking to expand their childcare services, they encountered challenges in recruiting diploma-trained educators, and provincial regulations governing child-staff ratios made it challenging to release staff for conventional face-to-face training.

ECDA PEI Executive Director Sonya Hooper stated in February 2020, "Given the staff shortages licensed centres are faced with, an online or blended post-secondary training model is the most efficient training option for people currently working in the field of early childhood education." She emphasized that this approach allowed participants to study while remaining in the workforce, facilitating the practical application of theoretical knowledge throughout their post-secondary experience. Despite being a more time-consuming method of training, it has proven highly successful in preparing individuals for the field of early learning and childcare. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students trained using this approach exhibit the highest levels of retention in the early childhood education field. The traditional face-to-face model, involving full-time attendance at training, was discouraged because it had negative implications for the children under the care of these educators and significant financial consequences for the students. Provincial legislation mandates child-staff ratios, which must be maintained at all times, and the shortage of trained substitutes further deterred directors from supporting employees leaving the workplace for traditional face-to-face training.

Survey Results and Student Demographics

Following the successful completion of the tenth and final course in the program, the eight participating students received an ECCE Year 2 Blended survey from Holland College's Institutional Research Office. This survey centered on the program's key innovations, including blended delivery, distance learning, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Equity Seeking Groups

The program's target demographic encompassed under-credentialed early childhood educators, women, youth, newcomers, and mid-career workers. In total, nine students initially enrolled in the program, with one student departing for personal reasons, leaving eight students who successfully completed the ten courses and graduated in June 2023.

According to the survey conducted with responses from 5 out of the 8 students, 100% of the participants identified as women, with one of them acknowledging a disability in accordance with the provisions of the Accessible Canada Act.

Flexibility and Accessibility

The primary objective of this program was to provide early childhood educators with a flexible opportunity to pursue their ECCE Diploma while maintaining their employment. This objective was successfully realized by delivering the ten courses in a part-time format spanning 2 years, as opposed to the existing structure, which required completion of the same ten courses on a full-time basis within a 1-year timeframe. The program was led by a dedicated instructor who consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to both the students and the program's goals. Extensive one-on-one interactions took place between the students and the instructor before the program's initiation, allowing the instructor to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the students' prior learning experiences and

their current roles in the workplace. The students consistently reported that their instructor was readily accessible and remained consistently available throughout the program's duration.

Blended Delivery Format

This program adopted a blended delivery format, combining face-to-face and distance learning, in contrast to the existing face-to-face delivery option. Student responses indicated that the availability of the program in a blended delivery format significantly influenced their decision to enroll. Furthermore, they expressed a willingness to choose this format for future learning opportunities.

According to the survey results, 80% (4) of the respondents Strongly Agreed, and 20% (1) Agreed that the blended delivery format played a crucial role in their decision to enroll in the program. Additionally, 60% (3) Agreed, while 40% (2) Strongly Agreed that they would opt for blended delivery for future learning opportunities.

Part-Time Delivery Format: Students also emphasized the importance of the part-time format in their decision to enroll in the program. They conveyed a preference for part-time learning in their future pursuit of post-secondary courses.

The student survey revealed that 60% (3) Strongly Agreed, and 40% (2) Agreed that the part-time format significantly influenced their decision to enroll in the program. Furthermore, 80% (4) Strongly Agreed, and 20% (1) Agreed that they would choose part-time learning for future post-secondary courses.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Course-based PLAR entails the recognition of learning within the context of a specific course. Prior learning is rigorously evaluated against the learning outcomes and competencies associated with the course. The program instructor and the Holland College PLAR Coordinator collaborated to formulate a PLAR process tailored for two practicum courses: PRAC-2020 ECCE Practicum II and PRAC-2025 ECCE Practicum III.

Out of the program's eight students, seven received PLAR recognition for one or both PLAR courses. The results of the student survey indicated a high degree of satisfaction among students who applied for PLAR, with a significant number expressing their intent to use PLAR again and recommending it to others.

Survey results further revealed that 60% (3) of respondents applied for PLAR in relation to PRAC-2020, and two-thirds of these students reported that it took them 3-4 weeks to complete the process. Additionally, 20% (1) applied for PLAR for PRAC-2025, with the majority indicating that it took 1-2 weeks to complete. Moreover, 60% (3) Strongly Agreed, while 40% (2) Agreed that they would consider using PLAR in future learning opportunities, and an equivalent percentage Strongly Agreed and Agreed that they would recommend PLAR to others.

Practicum

Work-integrated learning offers students the opportunity to fulfill practicum requirements and apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-world settings. A substantial majority, 80% (4) Strongly Agreed, and 20% (1) Agreed that there was clear and sufficient communication about the practicum

courses, and that workplace supervisors provided informative feedback on student performance during these courses. Furthermore, 40% Strongly Agreed, and 60% Agreed that the practicum courses significantly enhanced their learning during the program.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

In order to create an inclusive and accessible learning environment, the UDL curriculum design, development, and delivery frameworks were effectively implemented. The primary objective of UDL was to ensure curriculum access for all students and assist instructors in crafting environments that are universally accessible, irrespective of age, skill level, or individual circumstances. Within a blended learning environment, the program instructor and the Instructor Designer collaborated to meet the diverse needs of students by providing diverse avenues for accessing content and facilitating interactive learning activities. A significant portion of the final student survey centered on UDL. Respondents who completed these questions indicated a high level of agreement that the goals and principles of UDL in program design and delivery were successfully met.

Course Content and Delivery

An overwhelming majority, 80% (4) Strongly Agreed, and 20% (1) Agreed that course content was available in multiple formats (audio, video, lectures, text...) and that course activities (such as assessments) were aligned with the course learning outcomes. All surveyed students, 100%, Strongly Agreed that each course commenced with an outline detailing what would be covered, directly tied to the course objectives. They also strongly agreed that they were encouraged to express their comprehension of materials in ways beyond traditional tests and exams, such as through written essays, projects, and portfolios.

Instructor

Among the students who responded to the survey, all Strongly Agreed when asked if the instructor fostered a classroom environment valuing student diversity, was approachable and available, offered flexible formats for student contact outside class time, maintained accessible and well-organized course materials, encouraged diverse modes of comprehension, provided frequent and instructive feedback, utilized technology for student communication, accepted electronic assignment submissions, offered challenging and meaningful activities and assignments, and supplemented lecture and reading assignments with visual aids.

What Were the Barriers?

The program coordinators/team identified several challenges encountered during the project. These challenges are detailed below:

- **Delays in Project Initiation:** At the outset of the project, delays occurred between the receipt of confirmation that the projects were moving forward (FSC notification) and the official media announcement. These delays hindered the program from commencing hiring and marketing efforts until after the public announcement. As a result, the program had to postpone its start date multiple times. These delays had two main consequences:
 - Limited time for the Instructor and Instructional Designer to develop and design the initial courses.

- Restricted time for marketing the program to potential students.
 - Due to these delays and lower-than-anticipated program enrollment, the college extended the program's start date to April 2021, which led to an increase in student enrollment.
- **Long Project Duration and Staffing Impact:** The project spanned a significant length of time, commencing in late October 2020 and concluding in June 2023. Throughout the project, an Instructor and Instructional Designer were hired on contract. While the initial Instructor remained with the project for most of its duration, the Instructional Designer position saw some turnover, with three different designers working on the project. Nevertheless, all designers remained within the college's curriculum division, ensuring continuity between the Instructor and the Instructional Designer throughout the project. The nature of project funding and contract work often leads to staffing changes over the course of lengthy projects. When a change occurred in the Instructional Designer role, faculty and staff from relevant departments collaborated to facilitate a smooth transition.
 - **Unexpected Challenge Due to New Programs:** An unanticipated challenge arose during the project when the college was requested by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) and the province to introduce two additional early childhood programs—an accelerated Early Childhood Assistant (ECA) Certificate program lasting one year and an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Diploma program lasting two years. These programs were launched in October 2022 and February 2023, respectively, with tuition subsidies. These new programs provided an opportunity for uncredentialed or under-credentialed workers in the early childhood field to attain their ECCE Certificate or Diploma in a significantly shorter timeframe. Many of the ECCE Year 2 Blended students were eligible for and could have transitioned to the accelerated diploma program. However, through discussions with students, the province, college faculty, and staff, the ECCE Year 2 Blended students opted to remain in their program. The province also offered some funding support to assist these students with tuition costs.

It's worth noting that, according to the survey results, students did not express any specific comments on barriers they faced. This may be attributed to students having a clear understanding of the program's expectations, course workload, and practicum requirements.

Lessons Learned and Proposed Changes?

When reflecting on their experience with the ECCE Year 2 Blended program, the pilot leads identified valuable lessons learned and potential areas for improvement if the program were to be offered again. Their insights are outlined below:

- **Importance of Timely Marketing:** The pilot leads highlighted the significance of collaborating with industry partners and the province. They particularly emphasized the need to carefully consider the time required for program promotion and marketing in order to meet enrollment targets successfully. In the initial implementation, delays between project approval and official media announcements had repercussions on the program's marketing efforts and ultimately its start date. This affected the program's ability to reach its enrollment goals. Consequently, they

stressed the importance of more precise scheduling and advanced planning for marketing activities to ensure a smoother program launch.

- **Expanding PLAR:** The implementation of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for two of the program's courses was deemed successful. However, the pilot leads acknowledged that if they were to offer the program again, they would incorporate additional funding into the project budget. This funding would be earmarked to facilitate the development of a comprehensive PLAR process for all courses within the program. The success of PLAR in recognizing students' prior learning and experience likely encouraged this consideration as it would further enhance the program's flexibility and accessibility.

Conclusion

The insights shared by the pilot leads underscore the importance of careful planning and collaboration when offering a program like the ECCE Year 2 Blended program. The lessons learned emphasize the critical role of effective marketing and promotion to attract and enroll students successfully. By addressing delays and allocating sufficient time for these activities, the program can ensure smoother and more predictable outcomes.

Furthermore, the intention to expand the use of PLAR across all program courses demonstrates a commitment to enhancing accessibility and recognizing the diverse experiences and skills of students. This proactive approach aligns with the program's goal of accommodating the needs of early childhood educators.

In summary, the lessons learned from the ECCE Year 2 Blended program offer valuable insights for future program offerings, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning, marketing, and the potential benefits of extending PLAR processes to all program courses. These insights contribute to the ongoing improvement and refinement of the program to better serve the needs of students and the early childhood education field.

3.5.5 New Brunswick Community College Case Study - Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Information Technology (IT).

Introduction

Funded by the Future Skills Center of Canada (FSC) and supported by Atlantic Colleges Atlantique, the NBCC's pilot project focused on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Information Technology (IT). The (PLAR) pilot aimed to produce new learning about approaches and innovations in the field of Prior Learning Recognition that could complement or enhance existing services provided by NBCC's RPL team at the Registrar's Office. Pilot participants were offered the opportunity to have their informal and experiential prior learning assessed for first-year courses from two IT programs: IT: Web and Mobile Application Development and IT: Programmer-Analyst.

This report is based on data from multiples sources, the NBCC PLAR pilot final report (NBCC final report, 2022) and feedback from participants (confidential survey).

Overview of the Pilot Program

The primary objective of the pilot program design was to emphasize accessibility and flexibility for participants to reduce barriers to education, particularly for equity seeking groups, and to provide alternate pathways into NBCC based on previous experience and informal learning.

To ensure flexibility and accessibility, no fees were required for participation, and PLAR was open to all learners who could choose to start at any time. The online delivery method, following Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, provided participants with the opportunity to submit work from anywhere at any time while receiving in-progress feedback from NBCC assessors.

Participation was open to all interested learners (not enrolled at NBCC at that time) with applicable prior experiential or informal learning in the eligible Information Technology (IT) programs. Participants were granted access to a series of self-assessment forms that "mirrored the competencies and learning objectives of the associated course, enabling applicants to evaluate their own prior learning with a full understanding of what is typically taught in the course" (NBCC final report, 2022). The survey revealed that 20 participants expressed interest in the web and mobile pilot, and 13 in the IT programmer analyst pilot.

The PLAR process commenced upon participants' first contact. They were provided with a description of the PLAR process and a link to access all the necessary information and forms. Subsequently, coordinators furnished prospective participants with access to a series of self-assessment forms, one for each course/skill area where they indicated prior experience.

What Worked Well and Why?

The data analysis has unveiled several prominent themes that elucidate what worked well within the context of the NBCC PLAR pilot project.

Equity Seeking Groups

The NBCC PLAR pilot project made inclusivity a central tenet, particularly targeting equity seeking groups comprising mature and mid-career individuals, immigrants and refugees, and individuals in rural and remote areas. A survey conducted among the 33 participants revealed a diverse geographical distribution, with seven located in Fredericton, and an astonishing 26 planning to travel internationally to attend NBCC. While only five participants were currently enrolled at NBCC, a remarkable 28 of the 33 had previously attended at least one course at the institution.

Participants in the PLAR program exhibited a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds, experiences, and motivations for seeking credit through PLAR. Notably, one participant was a high school student in New Brunswick, exploring PLAR as a potential avenue to gain recognition for extracurricular learning while contemplating post-secondary education. Another, an international student, aimed to leverage prior learning for credit, with aspirations of embarking on a Canadian education journey. Among the participants, an NBCC student in IT expressed a keen interest in PLAR for Web and Mobile Development. Additionally, some participants were university students in New Brunswick looking to transition to IT from other academic disciplines. Notably, international students with extensive IT work experience also

embraced PLAR, including one who had pursued computer science in the 1990s without completing their degree and another who held a bachelor's degree in Geodetic Engineering with a decade of software development expertise, currently serving as a senior IT manager with a focus on Web and Mobile Development.

To further explore the equity seeking aspect, participants were queried about their self-identification with specific groups, such as newcomers to Canada, mid-career workers, Indigenous/First Nations, 2SLGBTQIA+, and rural or remote learners. Of the respondents, only five participants engaged in feedback surveys, with two identifying as mid-career workers, two as newcomers to Canada, and one as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Flexibility and Accessibility

In pursuit of breaking down barriers to education, particularly for equity seeking groups, and creating alternative pathways into NBCC grounded in prior experience and informal learning, the pilot program integrated several key features. These included online delivery, continuous intake allowing participation at any time, flexible assessment methods, adherence to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles for enhanced accessibility, and access to diverse support resources through customized courses and a comprehensive PLAR handbook.

Participants were granted flexibility in demonstrating their prior learning and competences without the constraints of enrollment or class start dates. The PLAR process unfolded on a fluid timetable, with no two participants progressing in the same manner—some working on different courses with varying workloads, while others remained in the self-assessment phase (NBCC final report, 2022).

In response to inquiries regarding the benefits of PLAR that piqued their interest, two out of five participants cited time savings, one emphasized the ability to work independently, another underscored the importance of receiving credits for existing knowledge and skills, and one participant expressed enthusiasm about gaining a head start in a college program.

Online Delivery

Participants enjoyed the convenience of submitting their work from any location and at any time, accompanied by in-progress feedback from NBCC assessors. In their survey responses, participants universally indicated seamless access to internet services.

In conclusion, the pilot's innovative approach to flexibility and accessibility proved instrumental in accommodating the needs of its participants. The incorporation of online delivery, continuous intake, flexible assessment methods, and adherence to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles not only empowered learners to engage on their terms but also emphasized the importance of personalized learning pathways.

What Were the Barriers?

In the subsequent section, we explore the challenges faced by participants and the factors guiding their decisions within the NBCC PLAR pilot program, drawing insights from their experiences and feedback.

- **Barriers to Higher Education Enrollment:** In accordance with the findings presented in the final NBCC report, participants were surveyed regarding the barriers they encountered in their pursuit of higher education. The results indicated that 57% of the participants perceived these barriers to be linked to work and family responsibilities, while 29% cited language challenges, and 14% identified financial constraints as significant hindrances. Furthermore, when asked if the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process alleviated these barriers, 50% expressed uncertainty, 25% believed it was helpful, and one participant disagreed.
- **Decrease in Participant Numbers:** Out of the initial 33 participants who initially expressed interest and completed a learner information form, only 20 individuals completed self-assessments for their selected courses. Subsequently, 15 participants were offered the opportunity to participate based on their self-assessment results, and eventually, only 5 participants submitted materials for assessment and took part in feedback surveys. Remarkably, only 3 participants successfully demonstrated prior learning for one or more courses.
- **Participant Decision-Making Process:** As discussed earlier, participants underwent a multi-stage process from the pre-application phase to the completion of course assessments. The NBCC final report and survey data reveal a variety of reasons why participants opted not to proceed with PLAR, often at different stages. Participants may have decided that PLAR did not align with their background, interests, or learning style as they gained a deeper understanding of the process. Additionally, some may have assumed that the pilot program would handle credit transfers to other institutions. Programming language requirements emerged as another significant factor, as attempting to advance from an introductory course to intermediate-level courses without language proficiency presented a significant disadvantage. For instance, one participant who successfully assessed for one competency opted out due to a mismatch in programming languages. The chosen language, Lua, was not taught at NBCC, and the course descriptions did not specify programming language requirements. Some participants became unresponsive as assessment deadlines approached during the final month of the pilot.
- **Factors Influencing Non-Participation:** According to the NBCC final report, applicants with high self-assessment scores for a course often chose not to pursue PLAR. Several factors played into their decisions, including workload and time constraints. The report notes, "The PLAR pilot included some natural boundaries for when services could be offered, such as the availability of instructors/assessors. Although participants were given extensions on their original target dates whenever possible, all submissions needed to be received in time to still allow assessment before summer break began" (NBCC final report, 2022).
- **Brightspace Usage:** The project team opted for Brightspace as the platform for collecting participant submissions and facilitating assessments. Feedback from three participants indicated some difficulties in navigating the provided courses, with one participant offering no comments. Further discussion may be necessary to clarify course structures and provide additional guidance.

- **Workload and Time Constraints:** Participants received a PLAR handbook that included general guidance, a list of competencies to address, and rubric explanations for assessing their work. Two out of four participants, who provided feedback on the handbook and course information materials, stated that it was occasionally helpful but left some questions unanswered. One participant found the handbook comprehensive, while another had no specific opinion.
- **Self-Assessment Impact:** Self-assessments were evaluated in terms of participants' confidence in mastering course competencies. Three out of the five participants who submitted materials for assessment found self-assessment tools helpful for identifying and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, while two respondents had no specific opinion.
- **Timelines and Participant Expectations:** Participants were assigned target completion dates for their PLAR submissions, calculated at 4 weeks from their start date, with an additional week per course. Nevertheless, nearly all participants required more time than initially anticipated. Of the four participants who completed the survey, 50% considered the timelines reasonable, while the other 50% were uncertain. One participant felt the allotted time matched their expectations, but three participants believed it took longer than anticipated.
- **Assessment Fairness and Participant Feedback:** Two out of four participants believed that the results of PLAR assessments were fair and accurate, while one disagreed, and one had no response. Despite the mentioned challenges, 100% of participants expressed a strong likelihood of recommending PLAR to others, and 75% considered full-time enrollment at NBCC.
- **Impact on Assessors:** Time constraints and workload also had an impact on assessors in various ways. Instructors had to manage their daily responsibilities alongside increased demands for certain courses. Consequently, some assessors faced a heavier workload in reviewing multiple applications. One assessor declined to participate in assessment due to the volume of work, stating, "The effort for this grading goes beyond what I have time to commit outside of my daily work" (NBCC final report, 2022).

In conclusion, as institutions continue to refine pathways for learners, understanding the nuances of these barriers and participant decisions will be crucial for improving access to education and enhancing the efficacy of PLAR initiatives.

Lessons Learned and Features to Enhance PLAR

In the context of the study on the PLAR pilot program at NBCC, the lessons learned, and key takeaways were the following:

- **Communication:** With regards to prospective students, clear communication is imperative to manage expectations effectively. It is proposed that participation in the PLAR process be extended to include NBCC's current students, as the pilot program excluded them.

- **Coordinators and Assessors:** During the PLAR Pilot, coordinators shouldered the responsibility of overseeing communication, deadlines, and inquiries related to the program. However, it became evident that more comprehensive communication channels were needed among coordinators, prospects, applicants, participants, assessors, and external partners. To streamline these intricate interactions and optimize coordinator time, the introduction of additional communication tools is recommended. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology could serve as an asset, enabling coordinators to efficiently guide participants through multiple stages of the PLAR process and maintain the organization of an entire participant cohort (NBCC final report, 2022).
- **Program, Content, and Assessments:**
 - **More Hands-On Content:** Assessors have emphasized the necessity of incorporating more practical exercises and projects into the IT program, which primarily comprises theoretical knowledge. Among the four student respondents, 75% concurred that the inclusion of practical exercises would be highly beneficial in showcasing their abilities, while 25% expressed a somewhat favorable stance.
 - **Tools to Guide Participants:** Assessors have suggested expanding the handbook used to offer general guidance to PLAR applicants to include more pertinent information on the composition of submissions and what is deemed acceptable. The creation of a dedicated guidebook for each course is considered very beneficial by one participant (50%), somewhat beneficial by another (25%), while one remains undecided. This underscores the need for a structured pathway to ensure participants have a clear and intelligible experience.
- **Automation of the Process:** According to the NBCC research team, which conducted interviews with coordinators and assessors, various pre-registration processes, including self-assessments, email communication, and the distribution of forms, can be partially automated. Such automation would alleviate the workload and pressure on both coordinators and assessors. The report also indicates an interest in exploring automation through artificial intelligence to streamline the assessment process for participant submissions, reducing the burden on assessors.
- **Workload and Time Management:** The pilot model revealed that a single assessor placed a significant workload burden on certain assessors. To alleviate this strain on assessors and instructors, the assignment of multiple assessors to courses with high demand is recommended. As the NBCC report suggests, it may also be beneficial to establish backup assessors for each course, creating a pool of individuals capable of assessing any given course.
- **Fees and Expansion to Other Programs:** Sustaining the PLAR program and facilitating expansion necessitate additional resources, subject matter experts, and an increased number of assessors and coordinators, resulting in higher expenses. Consequently, the introduction of fees is viewed as a requirement to sustain the PLAR model. Although participant fees were waived in the pilot, it was noted that participants should be asked about their motivations for applying if fees were

to be implemented in the future. Notably, none of the participants in the survey selected "saving money" as a motivating factor. In response to questions about potential fees in future PLAR offerings, three out of four participants expressed a somewhat likely willingness to consider paid PLAR, with the option to enroll in other electives to replace the courses completed through PLAR. The fourth participant did not provide a response. Regarding the fee amount, two out of four participants considered a flat rate of \$50 or less as appropriate, one favored a flat rate of \$100 or less, and one participant considered \$100 per course to be a reasonable fee.

Conclusion

In summary, the PLAR project can be celebrated for its achievement in not only attracting a diverse array of participant groups but also in garnering resounding support from these individuals, all of whom expressed a strong inclination to recommend PLAR to others. This resounding success underscores the potential and value of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition as an accessible pathway to higher education.

Nonetheless, it's imperative to acknowledge that the pilot program was not without its share of challenges and complexities. It is through these challenges that we have derived invaluable lessons that now serve as guiding beacons, lighting the way towards more effective and inclusive PLAR initiatives in the future. These lessons underscore the importance of clear communication, hands-on content, enhanced participant guidance, automation, efficient workload management, and the consideration of fees for sustainability and program expansion.

In essence, the PLAR project not only stands as a testament to its immediate success but also as a foundation upon which to build more robust and inclusive pathways to education, ensuring that the benefits of higher learning are accessible to an even broader spectrum of individuals in the future. As we reflect upon the journey of this pilot program, we find ourselves better equipped and inspired to further refine and expand PLAR, making education a more attainable and transformative opportunity for all.

3.5.6 Nova Scotia Community College Case Study - Sustainable Aquaculture/Sea Farm Operations

Introduction

Funded by the Future Skills Center of Canada (FSC) and supported by Atlantic Colleges Atlantique the pilot program emerged in response to industry needs and was meticulously developed in close collaboration with subject matter experts. This innovative program was crafted to provide entry-level training in a comprehensive range of areas, including fish biology and husbandry, the intricacies of the production cycle, feeding and nutrition regimes, site maintenance, regulatory compliance, essential sea farming business principles, and a strong emphasis on both workplace and marine safety. The overarching goal of the program, titled "Sustainable Aquaculture/Sea Farm Operations," was to challenge and overcome systemic barriers that had traditionally hindered access to the Aquaculture Technician profession. A key aspect of this challenge involved reevaluating the conventional belief that a High School Diploma was an obligatory prerequisite for aspiring Aquaculture Technicians. To this end, the program was meticulously designed to accommodate applicants who did not possess a high school diploma.

Furthermore, the pilot program had a broader mission that extended beyond training. It aimed to establish an Occupational-Based Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) process and accompanying toolkit, which would recognize and leverage the valuable skills and experiences of participants. Additionally, the program sought to deliver a Seamanship Skills Microcredential, enhancing the practical capabilities of its participants.

Importantly, this pilot initiative was driven by a commitment not only to test various pathways to accessibility but also to confront head-on the traditional barriers that often deter prospective students. In the words of the project lead, the ultimate intention was clear: "to help industry find the skilled workers they needed while eliminating – wherever possible – any of the traditional barriers potential students typically face." This innovative approach represented a bold step toward redefining access and opportunity within the Aquaculture Technician profession.

Overview of the Pilot program

The Sea Farm Operations program was created to meet the needs of the province, the sector, and the industry. This was a 20-week program designed to teach people the skills and knowledge they needed to start working as entry-level technicians in sea farming. It was open to those who wanted to build on what they already knew and those who were interested in starting a career in the industry. The program covered a wide range of topics, including the biology of fish, shellfish, and algae, how to take care of animals properly, the process of sea farming, how to feed and nourish the creatures, how to keep the farming sites in good shape, safety measures, and sustainable practices. It also included lessons on the business side of aquaculture, like how to run an aquaculture business, and it helped students develop important professional skills.

One important aspect of the program was its strong connection to industry partnerships. This meant that students got to learn by doing real hands-on work, which was a crucial part of their education. The sustainable aquaculture program had several goals. It wanted to make sure that the program was accessible to everyone by including important skills, using Virtual Reality (VR) for training, promoting eco-friendly practices in the industry, and involving both the campus and the industry in teaching.

Equity Seeking Groups

In the context of this program, NSCC placed a strong emphasis on promoting equity by addressing barriers that may have hindered participation. Specifically, the focus was on making the program more accessible, particularly in terms of tuition costs. The program recognized and aimed to remove obstacles faced by certain equity seeking groups, which were identified as Indigenous communities, Black/African Nova Scotians (NS), and women.

When assessing the impact of these efforts, it's worth noting that eight out of the seventeen students who were part of the program took part in a feedback survey. Among these students, three were enrolled in the winter 2021 program, another three in the winter 2022 program, and the remaining two in the winter 2023 program. This data suggests that there was participation from these equity seeking groups across multiple program offerings, reflecting a commitment to diversity and inclusion within the

initiative. It also highlights the importance of ongoing efforts to address barriers and provide opportunities for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in the aquaculture field.

What Worked Well?

The final report "FSC-CCF Project Learning & Reflection – Final Report" served as a valuable repository of key insights and learnings derived from the project. These findings held the potential to benefit and inform not only peer organizations but also various sectors, funders, industry stakeholders, and policymakers.

In response to inquiries about the approach and strategies employed by the organization to address the identified needs and issues, the project lead revealed a number of strategies that contributed to the program's success:

- **Length of the Program:** The 19-week program, offered in a blended format, played a pivotal role in the program's success. An instructor highlighted the significance of this duration, emphasizing that it provided students with ample time to not only acquire essential skills but also actively seek opportunities to apply and enhance their training. The instructor cited examples of former students who had achieved remarkable career advancements within a short timeframe, such as securing supervisory roles in high-tech closed containment salmon farming or launching their own shellfish businesses. This demonstrated the program's capacity to fast-track participants into meaningful positions within the aquaculture industry.
- **Flexible delivery mode:** The program's adaptability was a cornerstone of its success. It offered multiple delivery modes, encompassing face-to-face, blended, distributed, and hybrid formats, effectively catering to the diverse needs of participants. The flexibility was particularly evident in allowing students to remain in their respective communities while participating in the program. The modular delivery approach received praise, as it allowed students to concentrate on core topics relevant to their learning objectives.
- **Multiple Program Offerings:** To accommodate students who couldn't attend in the fall or needed program adjustments, the initiative extended its availability to both winter and fall semesters. Additionally, dual on-campus classes were introduced to meet the unique needs of students, including those from First Nations communities. This flexibility ensured that the program was accessible to a broad spectrum of learners, further enhancing its effectiveness.
- **Condensed Format and Online Delivery:** An instructor acknowledged that, like any program, Sea Farm Operations (SFO) had its strengths and weaknesses. Notably, the condensed six-month format and online delivery emerged as the program's standout strengths. This approach allowed participants from across the province to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for the aquaculture industry in Atlantic Canada without the need for relocation, promoting accessibility and inclusivity.

What Were the Challenges and Barriers?

Throughout the course of the program, several challenges and barriers emerged, impacting both its implementation and the experiences of the students:

- **Tuition Fees:** While tuition waivers were available for eligible students, the project lead noted that financial barriers persisted. These barriers often extended beyond tuition fees and included challenges such as childcare and travel costs. Moreover, some students were ineligible for Employment Insurance (EI), which meant they couldn't participate in work placements and consequently couldn't graduate. These financial constraints, coupled with perceived cultural safety concerns within the industry, served as significant barriers for some participants.
- **Delivery Mode:** The modular delivery format, although beneficial in many respects, posed challenges for students who joined the program later. These students found themselves at a distinct disadvantage in the initial course due to their delayed entry into the program.
- **Industry Commitment:** Despite the industry's significant need for trained workers, the level of support from the aquaculture industry was not as robust as anticipated. Industries often faced staffing shortages and were unable to spare employees for study or work placements. This presented a challenge in aligning industry needs with the program's objectives.
- **Internal Challenges:** Plans to add a campus location to provide on-site support for students who preferred not to attend blended portions from home faced delays due to board approval requirements. The limited time for promotion before the next board meeting proved insufficient. However, these challenges underscored the need for flexibility and adaptability in program delivery to meet diverse industry training goals.
- **Unexpected Factors:** Unexpected external factors, such as housing crises and transportation costs, made it nearly impossible for some students to move or travel for the program. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal operations but, through faculty dedication and student determination, the program managed to adapt and continue, albeit with necessary alterations.
- **Impact of Hiring Crisis:** The unexpected shortage of employees in the industry and a hiring crisis had an unforeseen impact on the program. The ratio of job applicants to positions shifted dramatically, making formal training more challenging to prioritize in a highly competitive job market.
- **Equity Issues:** The project lead discovered that equity seeking groups felt removed from the aquaculture industry due to past governmental regulations. These groups did not feel welcomed in the industry and often perceived it as racially unsafe, highlighting the need for significant changes to foster inclusivity and diversity within the field.

In summary, the program encountered a range of challenges and barriers, including financial constraints, delivery mode issues, industry support, internal administrative hurdles, external factors like housing and transportation, the impact of COVID-19, shortages in employment, and issues related to equity and inclusivity. Each of these challenges posed unique obstacles that required creative solutions and ongoing efforts to improve the program's accessibility and effectiveness.

What Were the Lessons Learned and Opportunities?

Reflecting on the experience, several valuable lessons were learned, and opportunities for improvement and growth were identified:

- **Adaptation of Delivery Methods:** Traditional or in-person delivery proved challenging for students who were already working in the industry or had other commitments. A more asynchronous and flexible approach, possibly off-core time, could yield better results. Nevertheless, those who could join the program expressed overwhelming satisfaction with their learning experience and its relevance to the industry.
- **Practical Learning Environments:** Providing students with access to aquaculture labs, fish farm prototypes, and field trip opportunities would enhance their learning experiences. These practical experiences were unfortunately curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the program's initial deliveries.
- **Industry Support vs. Commitment:** A significant distinction emerged between industry support for the program and industry commitment to sending employees as participants or assisting with recruitment. While many industries supported the idea of the program, their commitment to actively engage with it did not materialize as expected. They continued to recruit individuals without prior training, despite expressing a preference for trained workers.
- **Maintaining Industry Connections:** To foster ongoing relationships with the industry, organizing field trips to aquaculture facilities and inviting program alumni as guest speakers were suggested. These initiatives would provide students with real-world insights and strengthen ties with industry partners willing to host student placements.
- **Engagement with Equity Seeking Communities:** Engaging with equity seeking communities earlier in the program planning phase and expanding financial support options for participants beyond tuition waivers or stipends was identified as a key improvement area. Addressing travel expenses, childcare, and living costs could make the program more accessible.
- **Industry Commitment:** For future project partners with similar goals, it is crucial to secure genuine industry commitment rather than mere support. Engaging with equity seeking communities from the outset and promoting the program to high school students across the province ahead of time can enhance its impact and address misconceptions about the aquaculture industry.

- **Positive Outlook:** Despite the challenges and opportunities for improvement, the program was praised as an incredible resource that has the potential to generate substantial benefits for the province by educating individuals and supplying skilled workers to the growing aquaculture industry.

In conclusion, the program's experiences underscored the importance of adaptability, practical learning, industry commitment, equity considerations, and proactive engagement with various stakeholders. These lessons learned provide valuable insights for future initiatives aimed at bridging education and industry needs.

3.5.7 Université Sainte-Anne Case Study - Foundations in Dialogue Interpreting

Introduction

Funded by the Future Skills Center of Canada (FSC) and supported by Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA), the Microcredential program in Interpretation commenced at Sainte-Anne in Spring 2021 with the Foundations in Dialogue Interpreting online course. A second cohort was formed in Fall 2021. Microcredentials encompass shorter, skills-based courses designed for new workers, professionals, immigrants, and individuals seeking career transitions, emphasizing hands-on, continuous learning in today's rapidly evolving workplace.

Through a virtual Innovation Center and a series of pioneering pilot projects supporting the College Transformation Initiative, member colleges collaborated with a diverse range of partners to introduce high-impact innovations. This program is part of an initiative spearheaded by ACA, which aims to address the evolving needs within the region.

Overview of the Pilot Program

According to the University St. Anne's website, the interpretation profession experienced a significant surge in demand, creating challenges for employers worldwide. This was particularly crucial in countries like Canada, where immigration played a pivotal role, and in the province of Nova Scotia, which continuously strived to increase its immigrant population. Consequently, addressing these shortages became an urgent priority. The initial interpreting program served as a prerequisite for a subsequent specialized course, primarily catering to those wishing to focus on the medical field, which had seen the highest demand in recent times, especially with the COVID-19 situation. Subsequently, courses concentrating on other specific areas, such as legal interpretation, were introduced. The pilot program focused on laying the foundations of interpreting, with a strong emphasis on practical experience. Lectures were complemented by topical discussions, assignments, and regular feedback, along with an industry ethics component, presentations, role-plays, and simulations based on real-world situations.

The pilot program was geared more towards interpreters in the Atlantic region who wanted to enhance their skills while earning microcredentials. However, it was also designed to accommodate individuals with proficiency in both French and English and aptitudes for the profession who desired training. The core, a 10-week Fundamentals course, was a 60-hour program that took place online using the Microsoft Teams platform. The analysis in this report is based on the documents and internal feedback provided

by the University of St. Anne, as well as surveys and telephone interviews conducted with students who responded to requests.

Who Was Interested in the Course and Why?

The course generated considerable interest from a diverse group of individuals, each motivated by distinct reasons. Microcredentials offered a promising avenue for addressing these needs, presenting the opportunity for more comprehensive training in a shorter time frame. The appeal of a condensed, practical course accessible to any qualified student across Canada with a stable internet connection was profound. This accessibility factor extended its reach to isolated communities and individuals burdened by demanding work schedules, effectively broadening access to education. Furthermore, amidst the global pandemic, which led to the closure of many physical educational institutions and businesses, the availability of such a program was particularly valued by our students. Given that many of them had extensive work commitments within the industry, enrolling in a full-time, multi-year course was neither practical nor financially viable.

Equity Seeking Groups

All ten students who successfully completed the pilot course were members of equity seeking groups. This cohort comprised eight women and two men, with one man originating from a linguistic minority background, and the other being the child of an immigrant. Within the class, there were at least four individuals who had immigrated to Canada, one student who reported having a learning disability, one participant under the age of 29, one over the age of 65, and three hailing from rural areas. Three of the students identified as Acadians, and for almost all participants, English was either their second or third language, identifying them as linguistic minorities within the Canadian context.

Notably, the youth demographic was the most underrepresented among these equity seeking groups. Only one student fell within the 15-29 age bracket, prompting an exploration of the reasons behind this shortfall. One student eloquently conveyed, "I believe that a significant challenge in attracting young people to the field of interpretation stems from a lack of awareness. To my knowledge, prior to the introduction of the Sainte-Anne course, no courses on this subject were available in the Maritimes. In contrast to other professions, there were no visits to our French high schools to discuss interpretation as a viable career choice. I believe that the mere presence of such a course lends credibility to the field and contributes to raising awareness about the opportunities it offers."

Online Course

The foremost factor that influenced students' decision to enroll in the program offered by Université Sainte-Anne was the opportunity to undertake an online course, which received the highest rating in terms of attractiveness. Additionally, the association with a respected instructor in the field added to the program's appeal, underscoring the credibility of the credentials and micro-certification.

Based on the collected data, participants found that taking an online microcredential course offered several advantages over traditional college or university programs. It was deemed more accessible, convenient, expeditious, and cost-effective. In this context, microcredentials provided optimism by affording increased training within a shorter timeframe. The ability to provide this course during the

global pandemic, which forced the closure of many physical educational institutions and businesses, was deeply appreciated by our students, as expressed in feedback from Université Sainte-Anne.

Flexible Part-Time Schedule

Another pivotal factor contributing to the success of this course was the provision of part-time classes, allowing students to accommodate their studies within their existing schedules. The majority of students were engaged in full-time employment and labored long hours within the industry. Enrolling in a full-time program spanning several years was deemed impractical, both in terms of feasibility and financial viability, as highlighted in Université Sainte-Anne's feedback. To infuse academic rigor into the course, Université Sainte-Anne mandated regular attendance as part of the assessment criteria and stipulated a minimum grade of 70 percent for obtaining a micro-certification.

The flexibility inherent in a condensed, practical course, accessible to any qualified student in Canada with a reliable internet connection, has notably enhanced the inclusivity of the learning experience. This convenience extends to individuals residing in isolated communities or those facing time constraints after a long day's work, eliminating the need for extensive commutes to attend courses.

How Was the Microcredential Program Perceived?

- **By Students:** The microcredential program garnered highly positive perceptions among students, bringing about a shift in their general opinions about university education. The innovative flexibility offered by micro-certification was seen as a game-changer. Participants who completed the survey expressed that these courses, being shorter than traditional classes, were notably more accessible, expedient, cost-effective, practical, and less intimidating.

One student highlighted the advantages, stating, "There is more flexibility with shorter courses that can provide you with micro-certification. Also, having online options is great, especially for those who work simultaneously and cannot commit to lengthy commutes and multiple hours of on-campus classes each week. Online learning is a fantastic option." Another student noted, "The micro-accreditation course provided a concise yet thorough way of gaining practical knowledge related to a profession. I also found that the course's format, which was scheduled in the early evenings, separate from my regular schooling, worked well."

- **By Students with Learning Disabilities:** Students with learning disabilities found the microcredential courses appealing, even though they acknowledged the rigor and demanding workload. One student, who had a learning disability, highlighted their appeal, particularly when returning to education after a significant hiatus from post secondary institutions. They emphasized the advantages of the microcredential format, stating, "The ADHD often comes with anxiety, so a full-time program offers no respite, and there's no breather in between... returning after years of absence can be intimidating. The microcredential approach allows for a more gradual and accommodating re-entry into education."

Two participants with learning challenges appreciated the shorter nature of microcredentials, finding it conducive to their learning needs. The opportunity to take courses online was rated as the most attractive factor in their decision to enroll in the program at Université Sainte-Anne.

The presence of a highly respected instructor at a post-secondary institution further contributed to the program's credibility.

One student with ADHD noted the professor's understanding of their workload schedules, and another student with a similar learning challenge highlighted that microcredentials align with their personality and boundaries. They noted, "Microcredentials speak to my personality and my boundaries. It's something I gravitate toward more than a full-time course. When you've been away from that style of learning for so long, even skills you acquired can become daunting."

- **By Instructor (Jeff Staflund):** Instructor Jeff Staflund provided valuable insights into the microcredential format. While he noted that the condensed format could limit his flexibility in meeting student needs and adhering closely to the course outline, he emphasized the format's merits. He highlighted that the much shorter duration of microcredential programs allows adult learners to upgrade their skills without committing significant amounts of time and money. He underscored the importance of considering student needs in course design and teaching, regardless of program length.

How Did the Program Prepare Students for the Workforce?

The microcredential program was designed to equip both existing interpreters and prospective ones with the essential skills needed for success in the field. It afforded participants the opportunity to either refine and enhance their existing skills or acquire fundamental best practices from the outset. Students expressed profound appreciation for the initiative undertaken by Université Sainte Anne in developing these microcredentials in interpretation.

One participant highlighted the significance of such programs in light of the increasing number of newcomers to the Atlantic provinces. They noted that funding and establishing high-quality, post-secondary accredited interpretation courses at the local level were essential. These courses not only facilitate the immigration process but also aid newcomers in integrating seamlessly into their new home country, fostering a better understanding of the culture and legal frameworks.

Another professional interpreter affirmed their motivation for enrolling in the course, citing the scarcity of similar offerings for individuals engaged in full-time work. Most students emphasized that a pivotal factor in choosing the course was the instructor's reputation in the field and the course's emphasis on skill-based and real-world practicality. One student eloquently explained, "It was offered by a local French university, and the person who taught the class and created the program is someone whom I highly admire. They have demonstrated excellence as both a teacher and program creator."

How Did the Program Engage Industry Partners?

The program's development involved close collaboration with industry partners. An informal group of three women initially approached Sainte-Anne in 2020 with the vision of creating a program tailored to address the critical needs of their profession. They outlined specific criteria aimed at attracting working interpreters and individuals possessing the requisite language skills to either enter the field or transition mid-career. These visionary women, who were instrumental in advancing the interpretation profession, are now integral members of our working advisory committee.

Among these individuals, one is an immigrant and professional interpreter who also served as the former president of the local industry group and is the proprietor of the largest translation and interpretive company in the province. Another member recently completed her term as president of the Nova Scotia industry group and currently holds the position of president of the Canadian Association of Translators and Terminologists. The third professional is the head of the local chapter of an international language school.

Additionally, three groups with strong affiliations to provincial and national healthcare organizations were enlisted as partners for the new medical course. These strategic partnerships not only bolstered available resources but also facilitated the pooling of talents and ideas, enhancing the overall quality of the program.

What Were the Challenges and Opportunities for the Profession?

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased immigration, and a higher strain on the health-care system, the need for language professionals in the medical domain has become more critical. Yet there are fewer interpreters, and many of them are older and closer to retirement age. As two studies mentioned below as well as comments from some of our students point out, the work can sometimes be on a freelance basis with difficult working conditions and a great deal of pressure, there is a need to attract a new generation to assure succession. The scarcity in medical interpretation can lead to a lack of comprehension, knowledge, and informed consent, and delayed or inadequate treatment options. Given the often-rapid decisions needed for matters such as operations or critical care, the results can be extremely serious.

The challenges facing the interpretation profession among equity seeking groups is attracting young workers, to ensure its renewal and continuity. The youngest students, in the 15-29 demographic, who participated in this course suggested more promotion and training programs. "I think there is definitely room to promote interpretation as a profession for young students in the Atlantic provinces. It is a rewarding potential part-time job for students. I think that a big issue is simply awareness, where most bilingual people do not know about the opportunities when it comes to interpretation." Another participant considered that "There is a severe shortage of interpreters in the Atlantic region and the country at a time when the level of immigration means more newcomers are going without fundamental language services" (Université Sainte-Anne survey).

One professional refers to it as a generational problem because as the Baby Boomer generation ages out of the field, there is a lack of young professionals to take over the succession. One of the most pressing concerns is a dearth of training courses, making it harder for workers to upgrade their skills or to recruit new workers.

The judicial field is another one requiring skilled language interpreters, translators, or clerks. A 2016 study by Prairie Research Associates submitted to the Université de Sainte-Boniface in Manitoba found that there were no national training programs for interpreters. Other problems included pay, working conditions and different standards and equipment among provinces. It spoke of the difficulties in mastering a detailed and specific vocabulary and cited a 2010 study that showed more than 86,000 decisions in the country that had problems relating to interpretation, including 23,000 at the Appeal Court level. It also mentioned a 2014 report by Jeff Staflund, Taking Stock, that noted "Playing the piano

doesn't make you a concert pianist, and it's the same with language. Just speaking a language doesn't make you an interpreter."

In summary, while the interpretation profession faces significant challenges related to workforce demographics and standards, it also holds considerable promise for growth and improvement, particularly with targeted efforts to attract and train the next generation of interpreters.

How is Context a Barrier to the Profession?

The context of being in a minority French-language province has presented certain challenges to the interpretation profession. This context is particularly relevant for the only participant belonging to the 15-29 age group, who has provided valuable insights:

- **Language Comfort in Public Settings:** In a province where French is a minority language, some individuals in the younger age group may not feel entirely comfortable speaking publicly or being in a hospital setting while interpreting. This initial discomfort can serve as a significant barrier to those considering entry into the field. The fear of not being confident enough to engage in interpretation without proper training can deter potential interpreters.
- **Importance of First Language Proficiency:** Participants emphasized the importance of being able to communicate effectively in the first language, which is often French. They noted that providing services in a patient's first language, especially in healthcare settings, holds immense value. In cases where patients are very ill or elderly and may forget their language, interpreters who can communicate in their first language play a crucial role.
- **Generational Succession Issues:** One participant, who works full-time as an interpreter, highlighted the generational challenge facing the profession. With many Baby Boomer interpreters retiring or passing away, there is a significant shortage, particularly in Atlantic Canada. The lack of succession planning has contributed to this scarcity. To address this issue, there is a need for greater awareness and outreach among younger generations, including Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X, to attract them to the profession.

To address these challenges and others, Université Sainte-Anne has taken proactive steps mentioned in its report. The institution has established a working advisory group composed of individuals from minority backgrounds, ensuring that specific needs can be effectively addressed. As part of their forward-looking approach, funds have been allocated for bursaries to assist individuals who may face financial or other challenges, with the goal of retaining talent in the interpretation profession. This demonstrates a commitment to overcoming context-related barriers and fostering a more inclusive and vibrant interpretation community.

Conclusion

The microcredential program in interpretation at Université Sainte-Anne has demonstrated remarkable success, driven by several key factors:

- **Unique Offering in a Minority Francophone Setting:** Université Sainte-Anne's distinction as the only French university in Nova Scotia, set in a minority Francophone environment, played a pivotal role in the program's success. Participants' responses underscored the scarcity of interpretation courses available in Canada. This scarcity attracted a diverse group of French-speaking professionals eager to enhance their skills in medical and legal interpretation. Survey results reflected the program's appeal to French-language and local participants, who expressed strong satisfaction and a desire for further courses. The program provided a valuable opportunity for participants to deepen their knowledge in the field.
- **Instructor's Reputation and Expertise:** The instructor's name and reputation emerged as a significant magnet for participants. The instructor was carefully selected by the working interpreter committee due to their nationwide recognition, prior workshops, and background as the former head interpreter for the government of New Brunswick. This choice ensured a blend of local insights and industry best practices. Many participants cited the instructor's name as a primary reason for their program selection. They also commended the instructor's teaching methods, which they regarded as authentic and effective.
- **Flexibility and Accessibility:** The program's online delivery format was a crucial factor in its success. Participants, many of whom were working full-time, valued the flexibility and accessibility offered by online learning. This approach enabled them to pursue the program without disrupting their professional commitments.
- **Promotion and Awareness:** Participants emphasized the importance of promoting the interpretation field to younger generations. They viewed interpretation as a rewarding career option for university students and stressed the need to raise awareness, especially among bilingual individuals who might not be fully aware of the opportunities within the profession.

In summary, the success of the interpretation microcredential program at Université Sainte-Anne can be attributed to its unique setting, the instructor's reputation, flexible online delivery, and the call for greater awareness and promotion of the field among younger generations. These factors combined with the commitment of Université Sainte-Anne and its working advisory committee, have not only addressed critical needs in interpretation but also paved the way for the profession's growth and continuity.

3.5.8 ACA Innovation Centre Case Study

Introduction

Along with the transformation vision, a strong desire for collaboration across the region was sought as part of the *College Transformation des Collèges Project*. To help coordinate and connect the pilot projects, the ACA Innovation Centre was established to maximize regional learning and growth by increasing collaboration and sharing.

ACA Governance Model

The ACA's Governance Model has served it well since 2018. The ACA Board composed of all seven ACA College Presidents meet monthly to discuss common issues, share successes, collaborate on projects and files, therefore moving the transformation yardstick forward by finding innovative solutions to regional concerns. An Executive Director is employed by the Board to move the regional agenda forward.

The Vice Presidents Academic (*Vice-Présidence à la réussite étudiante*) at each of the seven colleges also form a regional committee. Their monthly meetings provide opportunity for collaboration and sharing while addressing regional files and initiatives. The regional VPA Committee acts as the Advisory Council for the Innovation Centre establishing work priorities and guiding the progress along the transformation continuum, while the chair offers supervisory guidance to the Innovation Center Director. The ACA Executive Director, as a member of the VPA Committee, liaises and reports to the President's table on the activities while also offering a guiding role for the Innovation Centre Director.

Mandate and Primary Responsibilities

The mandate of the ACA Innovation Centre under the *College Transformation des Collèges Project* was to act as an accelerator to mobilize and inform college system transformation throughout the Atlantic Region through four main pillars:

- Facilitating Regional Collaboration
- Providing Oversight and Coordination
- Serving as a Knowledge Hub
- Enhancing Innovation and Cultural Fluency

The Primary Responsibilities of the ACA Innovation Centre were to:

- Offer project management, guidance and foster connections for the pilot projects.
- Creating opportunities for sharing and collaboration across the learning ecosystem.
- Guiding the delivery and nurturing regional communities of practice in innovation capabilities (i.e. continuous intake, microcredentials, PLAR, creative community and industry partnerships, etc.)
- Provide expertise and support to heighten innovation and culturally responsive practices through symposia and other learning opportunities on topics such as change management and ways to achieve equitable access and outcomes for students from equity seeking groups.
- Gather, assess and disseminate information to leverage lessons learned from pilots.
- Developing a hub for regional knowledge sharing (i.e. website, file sharing, networks, etc.) to create and maintain an online presence for ACA members to share information and resources across institutions.
- Develop an evaluation framework for pilot projects.
- Assist with additional collaborative transformation efforts, as identified by HESA and other partners.
- Coordinating the Human-Centered Design study conducted by Blueprint.

Results – Enhancing Collaboration and Sharing while Promoting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The *College Transformation des Collèges Project* was a success. It met its original goals and objectives having most pilot initiatives exceed expectations. For all colleges, this was only a first step towards many other initiatives, working towards a transformed more accessible college system. The Innovation Centre played its role of project management, ensuring reporting requirements and management of larger regional tasks were completed.

Providing support for Blueprint's Human-Centered Design Research was one of the first important tasks to offer the pilots key design principles and to maximize impacts on accessibility for equity seeking groups. The Innovation Centre was the ACA link to the researchers and worked diligently to bring information and products together. Much effort was dedicated to meeting all the requirements of the colleges' Research and Ethics Board and secure approval of the project. Promotion to potential participants and employers was also key. Once the study was completed, knowledge mobilization session with all colleges were organized to present results and subsequent sessions with each college helped identify how Design Principles could be incorporated in the pilot initiatives and more broadly within the system. Once pilot projects were designed and delivery had commenced, an evaluation framework was established, and support was provided to colleges for the design of surveys to capture the project learnings.

The ACA website was created and maintained over the course of the project. Colleges and external partners can find resources at <https://atlanticcollegesatlantique.ca/>. The ACA SharePoint site was also established to provide a central location for files and enhance sharing abilities.

Enhancing innovation and cultural fluency to promote equity, diversity and inclusion was one of the main goals. The Innovation Centre provided support, training and expertise to build high-impact practices enhancing inter-cultural fluency and interaction to help foster welcoming and inclusive learning and working environments.

Five regional webinars were organized bringing speakers to present concepts and models to directly influence inclusion. The sessions were as follows:

- **Exploring an Indigenous Competency-based Framework, Pedagogy of Peace**, with Lindsay Brant of the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queens's who works on decolonizing and Indigenizing education with the goal of liberating learning spaces to create a more inclusive learning environment for all.
- **Approaching Inequities in Post-Secondary Education**, with Dr. Bolu Ogunyemi, a Medical Dermatologist and Assistant Dean of Social Accountability in the Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University.
- **ACA Universal Design for Learning Webinar Series**, with Lindsay Copp, Universal Design for Learning and Accessible Teaching Advisor in the Center for Teaching and Learning at NSCC.
 - Session 1 - **Equitable Teaching: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**
 - Session 2 - **Creating an Inclusive Classroom Community**
 - Session 3 - **UDL in Practice**

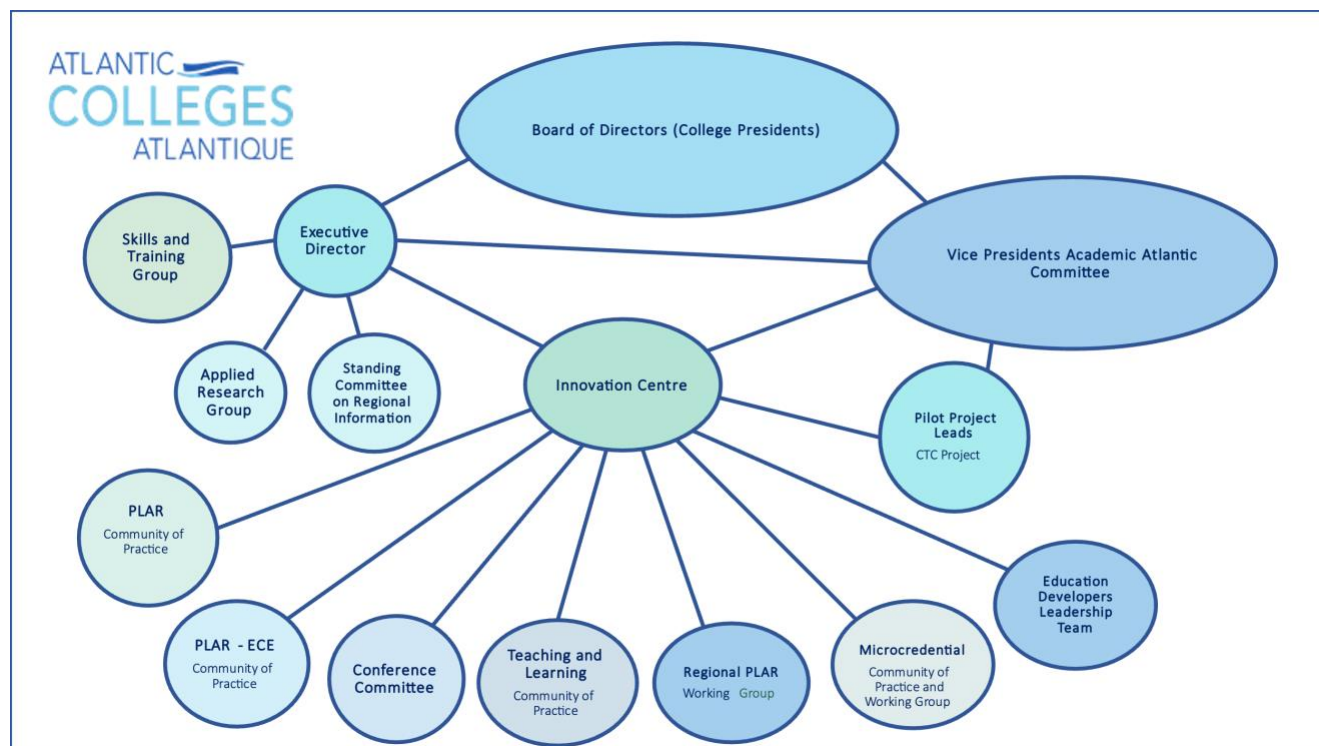
The Innovation Centre also met its goals of fostering opportunities for sharing and collaboration across the learning ecosystem by being the catalyst for the creation of Committees, Working Groups and Communities of Practice. This created regional networks and sharing structures to fuel the college transformation efforts and mobilize knowledge from the pilot projects to foster conversations. By successfully bringing together expert from each college to advance specific topics by sharing practices and inspiring each other, it saw to the formation of the following groups:

- **Pilot Project Leads Team** - Pilot leads from all seven Colleges coming together monthly to share their progress and learnings during CTC Project.
- **PLAR – ECE Community of Practice**- Purpose was to collaborate and share practices in the start-up of ECE based PLAR innovations that would support the implementation of accelerated ECE program to support industry's dire-need for certified workers during the pandemic.
- **Regional PLAR Working Group** - Purpose was to collaborate and share PLAR practices and successes. Created best Management Practice document.
- **ACA PLAR Working Group** - Purpose to bring together representatives from each College to gather information of current PLAR processes and challenges as we well as to have innovative and focused conversations to establish potential next steps with the end goal of establishing a path forward for the revolutionizing of PLAR.
- **Conference Committee** - This group was pulled together to discuss the validity of an ACA-wide conference. Group determined that on-line just-in-time resources would be preferred. From this group emerged the Teaching and Learning CoP.
- **Teaching and Learning Community of Practice** - Teaching and Learning experts coming together to share resources, collaborate and help guide the development of ACA products and tools.
- **Microcredential Community of Practice** - Formed to share progress and lessons learnt while entering into the world of microcredentials. Provided some regional consistency in the development of microcredentials.
- **Microcredential Working Group** formed to work on regional products to support Colleges' microcredential efforts.

Support was also provided for the following regional groups:

- **Skills and Training Group** - Sharing funding and project opportunities for regional collaboration.
- **Applied Research Group** - Come together as needed to discuss funding or collaboration opportunities between Technology Access Centers.
- **Standing Committee on Regional Information** - Committee to determine what information would be useful to collect, analyze and have at our disposal regionally to provide summary reports to College Presidents.

Figure 3: Collaboration Structure Fostered by the *Collège Transformation des Collèges Project* and the Innovation Centre's Efforts.



The project ended on a high note with the **2023 ACA Education Developers Conference**. What started as a discussion between two colleges as to the value of bringing their teams together to share and collaborate, quickly morphed into an ACA-wide conference hosted by Holland College. The ACA Innovation Centre played a role in supporting the organization by assisting with conference organization and logistics (i.e., registration process, lodging arrangements, collaboration activities, graphic design of agenda, preparation of name tags, etc.).

The conference was tailored for education developers from ACA member colleges i.e., curriculum consultants, instructional designers, instructional developers, staff coordinating professional development for instructional staff, and managers/directors of associated departments (*Conseillers à l'enseignement et aux apprentissages, Agents d'ingénierie pédagogique, Technopédagogues ainsi qu'aux gestionnaires ou services de support de ces derniers*). The focus was on providing opportunities for attendees to share roles, structures, practices, and discuss issues, while seeking to find solutions and potential opportunities to share, collaborate and work together.

In total **60 participants** from all ACA Partner Colleges attended the **2023 ACA Education Developers Conference on September 25 and 26th**. (Covid and scheduling conflict prevented some participants from attending).

The energy and level of participation during the entirety of this event was phenomenal. The delegates had an immeasurable thirst for knowledge and sharing. The feedback was extremely positive and

constructive. Participants expressed how they felt energized and better equipped to do their jobs. Many innovative ideas and sharing of practices were brought to light or suggested.

There was an overwhelming interest from the part of the participants and organizers to continue to offer opportunities for learning and connecting. The **Education Developers Leadership Team** emerged as a new committee to lead the charge in seeing to the organization of some of the future activities suggested:

- Organize and deliver “Lunch and Learn” sessions to provide learning opportunities for these job functions and others.
- Maintain a dynamic network of Communities of Practices or committees to address some of the current/emerging topics and issues to support college staff in their work.
- Hold another conference in 2024 to maintain the sharing bonds and opportunities for collaboration.
- Contribute to the ACA SharePoint.

[The Analysis - Collaborative Learning Impact Assessment: Insights from ACA's Community of Practice \(CoP\) Engagement](#)

Introduction

The research delved into the multifaceted impacts and insights garnered from participants' engagement in ACA's Community of Practice (CoP) initiatives, aimed at fostering collaborative learning among partner colleges.

Data analysis created themes that highlighted the diverse engagement patterns, influential impacts, and key insights gleaned from the CoP engagements.

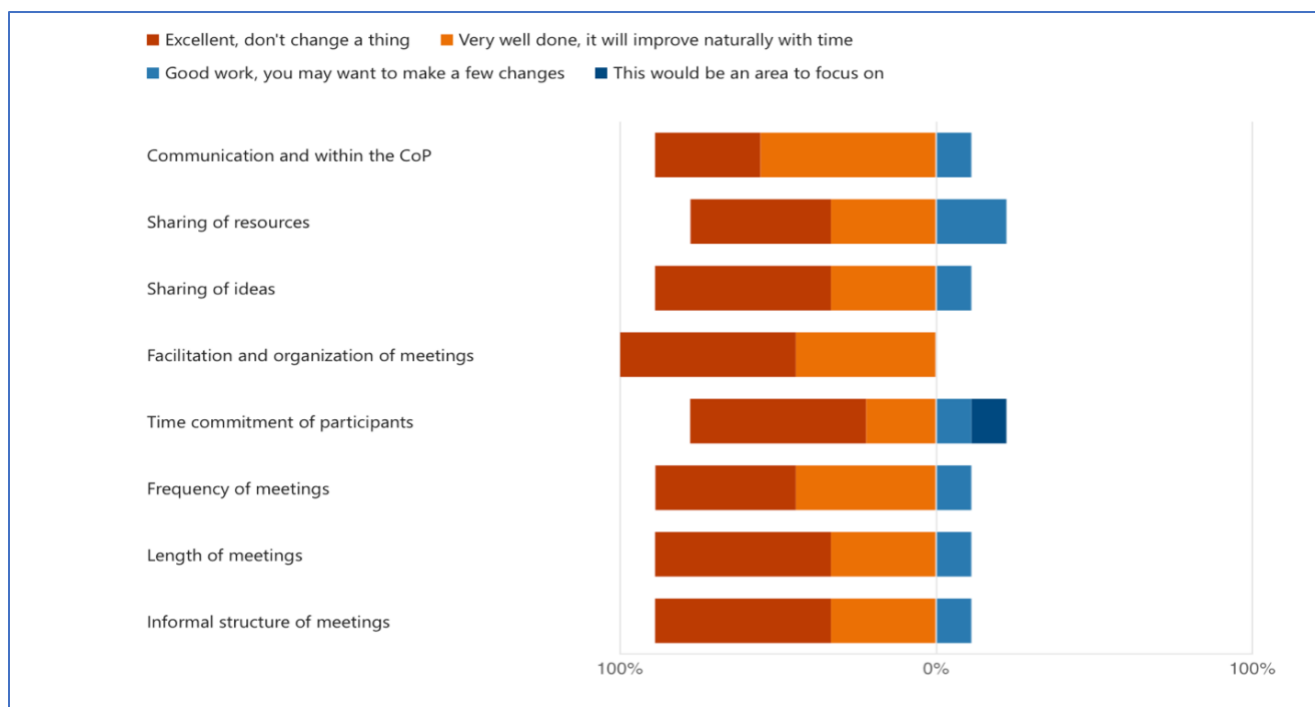
Collaborative Engagement and Representation

Participant responses highlighted the diversity of actively participating colleges, such as CNA, Holland College, NBCC, Université St. Anne, NSCC, among others. "Collaborating with a range of colleges provided fresh perspectives and innovative ideas," expressed one participant.

Graphical representations showcased fluctuations in participation levels across CoPs, reflecting varied levels of inclusivity and specificity in discussions based on college interests. One participant remarked, "Some sessions were more focused on specific projects, which was beneficial, but broader discussions allowed for diverse learning experiences."

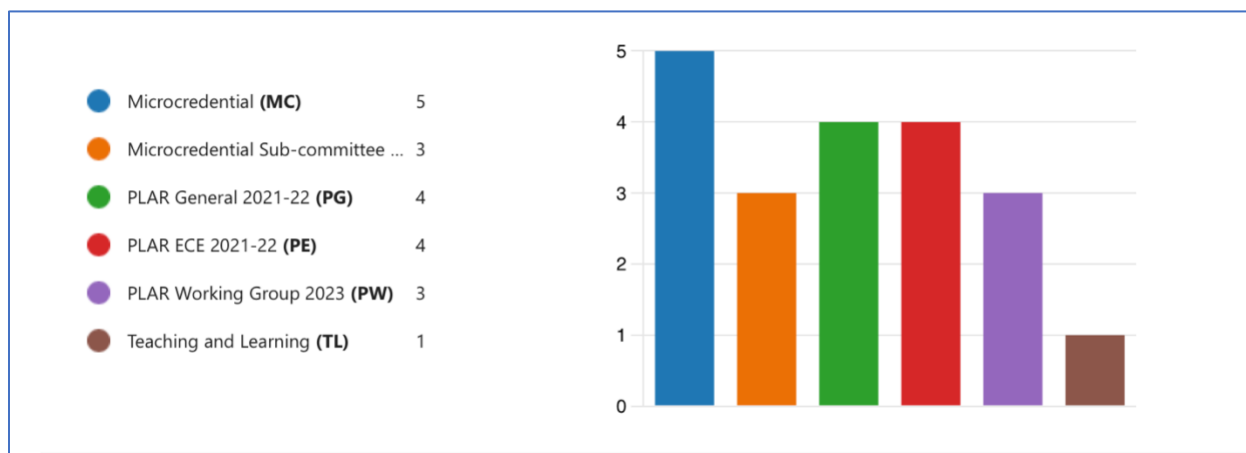
Impact Assessment and Project Influence

Participants emphasized significant impacts across varied project areas. "The CoP discussions were invaluable; they reshaped our project strategies, leading to more effective implementation," cited a respondent. Narrative data highlighted the collaborative benefits and the instrumental role of CoP discussions in launching new programs. "The shared experiences and insights helped us navigate uncharted territories, making our program launch smoother than anticipated," mentioned a participant. An analysis of participant responses provided comprehensive insights into the diverse impact levels experienced across different facets of the project. The following chart illustrates the varying degrees of impact reported in key areas resulting from the Community of Practice (CoP) engagements:



CoP Participation Overview

Participants detailed their engagement across different CoPs, showcasing the breadth of involvement among partner colleges. "I actively participated in the PLAR Working Group and Microcredential Subcommittee, contributing insights and learning from others," stated a respondent. The figure below shows the CoP(s) participants were involved in.



Assessment for Future Improvement:

Participants expressed high satisfaction with session planning and facilitation. "The facilitators effectively guided discussions, encouraging participation from all colleges," commended one respondent. Insights from participants emphasized areas for improvement, particularly in setting clearer session objectives. "Defining specific goals for each session can further streamline discussions and ensure everyone is aligned," recommended a participant.

Factors Affecting Participation

Insights into lower participation highlighted scheduling conflicts and individual role relevance. "Balancing session timings with our institutional commitments proved challenging, affecting regular attendance," expressed a respondent.

Potential solutions proposed early scheduling and clearer session objectives. "Aligning the CoP sessions with our college's strategic goals can help us prioritize and commit more effectively," mentioned a participant.

Acknowledgment and Gratitude

Participants expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts and recommended continuing CoPs for sustained learning. "The CoPs have been instrumental in our growth. Continuing this collaborative environment will further enrich our learning experiences," recommended a participant.

Analysis Conclusion

The research, through data-driven insights and participant feedback, underscored the influential role of ACA's CoPs in fostering collaboration, innovation, and impactful initiatives within partner colleges. Recommendations and participation overviews, coupled with direct participant quotes, provided a comprehensive understanding of CoP dynamics, informing future strategies for enriched learning experiences and shared success.

Overall Conclusions and Learnings

Having an Innovation Centre was pivotal in the success of the project. The focus on regional collaboration and learning maximized the impacts of every pilot initiative and enhance efficiencies by way of sharing material, processes, policies and even curriculum. By having the Innovation Centre as a catalyst, colleges fostered collaborative networks which embodied the spirit of the transformation vision and advancement were made with regards to equity, diversity and inclusion to render college education accessible for all learners. The initiatives facilitated strong connection between colleges leading to collaborative projects and sharing, therefore saving precious time and resources while fostering regional growth.

The activities lead by the Innovation Centre were well received by the college's staff. The following statements are a testament to their impacts:

- *"Enabled change by encouraging colleges to learn from each other, bringing the Atlantic experience with its unique content in comparison."*
- *"It was very extremely beneficial to share challenges, ideas and solutions."*
- *"Created cohesion and feelings of belonging. Helped to understand that we have common struggles which alleviated the element of isolation and created enthusiasm and energy in tackling these challenges."*

During the three-year initiative the colleges saw staff changes or vacancies. Having a strong Innovation Centre Team ensured consistency and smooth transition to new staff. The Innovation Centre Team was well designed, ensuring that all aspects of the work had identified experts to guide it. Having a Regional Curriculum Specialist on-board was advantageous. Their college experience and deep understanding of the system's inner workings was invaluable in supporting colleges to develop resources, in working on supporting products and in the design and deliver sessions to enhance learning. The Web Specialist was instrumental in developing a quality website as well as a SharePoint site to promote sharing and knowledge mobilization. The Research and Evaluation Specialist ensured learnings from the innovations tested were captured and analyzed, providing recommendations to build on the successes and continue moving the yardstick forward.

3.5.9 Cross-case Analysis

In this section, we undertook a cross-case analysis to distill insights from the individual case studies. By comparing and synthesizing the findings from each college's pilot program, we aimed at identifying recurring patterns, variations, and key takeaways. This analysis guided us in formulating comprehensive conclusions and recommendations, grounded in the collective experiences of the participating colleges. The cases include:

- **CCNB Case Study:** Focused on the "Health: Licensed Practical Nurse" program with an emphasis on competency-based learning and catering to various equity seeking groups.
- **CNA Case Study:** Explores the Information Technology Career Focus (ITCF) program targeting equity seeking groups.
- **Holland College Case Study:** Discusses the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Year 2 Blended program, providing flexibility to employed Early Childhood Assistants.
- **Collège de L'Île and Holland College (Prince Edward Island):** Provides an accelerated path to certification in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for francophones on PE.
- **NBCC Case Study:** Examines Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Information Technology (IT) and its impact on equity seeking groups.
- **NSCC Case Study:** Explores the Sea Farm Operations program designed to address workforce needs in the aquaculture industry, with a focus on equity seeking groups.
- **Université Sainte-Anne Case Study:** Investigates a microcredential program in interpreting, particularly in medical and legal contexts, targeting equity seeking groups.
- **ACA Innovation Centre Case Study:** Led the College Transformation de Collège Project with a strong focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. Dedicated its efforts to building collaboration and sharing networks to maximize regional learning and growth in support of the transformation efforts enhancing accessibility to college education for all learners.

After analyzing the seven case studies, several recurring themes, patterns, and gateways emerged that shed light on the effectiveness and challenges of various educational programs. These insights provide valuable lessons for designing and implementing successful educational initiatives.

Context Matters

The concept of context played an undeniable role in weaving through the narrative of educational program development across various colleges. It became evident that each institution strategically navigated its unique contextual challenges and opportunities, profoundly influencing the design and outcomes of their respective programs. One of the most striking aspects of context's impact on education was the consideration of demographics and equity seeking groups. CCNB, for instance, explicitly tailored its programs to address the diverse needs and backgrounds of newcomers and mid-career workers. This level of sensitivity to the student demographic illustrated how understanding and responding to the specific context of the learners played a pivotal role in program development.

Similarly, CNA's attention to mental health and disability challenges among its students testified to its deep understanding of contextual barriers that some learners faced. This acknowledgment emphasized the significance of adapting the learning environment to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, highlighting the direct correlation between context and program outcomes.

Beyond demographics, workforce demands and industry regulations also significantly shaped program design. Holland College's program for employed early childhood assistants served as a prime example of aligning educational offerings with the specific needs of working professionals in the childcare industry. The context of workforce renewal and succession planning further underscored the need for flexible and accessible education in this field.

Moving to the assessment process, the NBCC Case Study's PLAR program for IT recognized the diverse backgrounds and motivations of its participants. This keen awareness of individual contexts and prior experiences underscored the importance of personalization in education. By tailoring the assessment process to suit the unique context of each learner, the program maximized its effectiveness.

In an ever-evolving landscape, responsiveness to external factors was another critical facet of context. NSCC's ability to adapt to external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and industry demands exemplified the institution's agility in navigating changing contexts. This adaptability ensured that education remained accessible and relevant, even in the face of external challenges.

Université Sainte-Anne, operating in a minority French-language province, provided an interesting case study in addressing regional challenges. The scarcity of interpreters and the linguistic context of this province led to the development of an interpreting program tailored to these specific contextual factors. Offering an online format and part-time classes, the program accommodated the unique context of learners with existing commitments.

Having a regional forum to share the context of each pilot program was invaluable. The monthly pilot project leads meetings provided opportunities to share thoughts fueling innovation at the onset.

In essence, while all the colleges in question acknowledged profession-specific challenges, it was essential to recognize that these challenges were profoundly shaped by the unique contexts and demands of their respective regions. Université Sainte-Anne focused on addressing linguistic context and interpreter scarcity, while CCNB responded to the nursing shortage in its region. CNA placed importance on microcredentials and financial accessibility, Holland College and College de l'Île dealt with workforce

renewal and succession planning, and NSCC navigated the intricacies of the aquaculture industry, including hiring crises and equity concerns.

In conclusion, these case studies collectively underscored the critical role of understanding and responding to the unique contextual factors that influenced education. From the demographics of the student body to external challenges and industry demands, context was the cornerstone upon which effective and responsive educational programs were built. The colleges showcased in these narratives exemplified the power of contextualization in program development, with each program reflecting the specific context it sought to serve.

Recognition of Diversity or Equity and Inclusivity

All seven institutions placed a strong emphasis on equity and inclusivity, aiming to cater to underrepresented and equity seeking groups. This reflected a shared recognition of the importance of providing equal opportunities for education and employment to all individuals, regardless of their background. The importance of recognizing and addressing diversity within equity seeking groups was a common thread. This recognition extended beyond linguistic diversity to encompass factors like mental health, cultural differences, and individual learning needs. Programs aimed to create inclusive environments that respected and accommodated this diversity.

CCNB emphasized diversity through its "Health: Licensed Practical Nurse" program, catering to French-speaking newcomers, career changers, LPN program graduates, and mid-career workers. The program's Competency-Based Learning approach, ACDC, acknowledged the diverse backgrounds of its students, ensuring they received tailored education. The college recognized the need for flexibility, allowing students to transition between programs and adapt to changing circumstances. However, challenges in assessment methods and implementation timelines highlighted the need for refinement.

CNA's Information Technology Career Focus (ITCF) program focused on equity seeking groups, addressing mental health, self-efficacy, and cultural differences as barriers. It effectively removed barriers by consulting with students individually, fostering inclusivity. The college's focus on financial accessibility and flexibility through online delivery and part-time schedules made it accessible to a diverse range of students. Successful retention rates and industry-forward planning were clear indicators of their commitment to diversity.

Holland College's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Year 2 Blended program aimed to empower employed Early Childhood Assistants, addressing a workforce shortage in a flexible, part-time format. It actively targeted equity seeking groups, including women, youth, newcomers, and mid-career workers. The college's blended delivery, focus on accessibility, and recognition of prior learning through PLAR demonstrated a commitment to diversity. However, they faced delays and challenges due to external factors and new program introductions.

NBCC's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Information Technology (IT) pilot project showcased a commitment to equity by targeting mature and mid-career individuals, immigrants, refugees, and rural residents. Flexibility in demonstrating prior learning and online delivery ensured

accessibility. Challenges such as low participant numbers and workload constraints highlighted the need for better communication and automation of processes.

NSCC's Sea Farm Operations program promoted equity by focusing on tuition accessibility and offering multiple program delivery modes. It addressed the workforce shortage in a province where French is a minority language and prioritized practical learning environments. Challenges included financial barriers and industry commitment, underscoring the need for financial support and stronger industry partnerships.

Université Sainte-Anne's interpreting program attracted a diverse group, mainly motivated by the opportunity to learn online. Its microcredential format was well-received, changing students' perceptions about education. Equity seeking groups, including linguistic minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities, were well-represented. Challenges included language comfort in public settings and generational succession issues in the interpretation profession.

The ACA Innovation Centre played a pivotal role in keeping all these initiatives connected to ensure good knowledge mobilization internally during the development and delivery of the pilot initiatives. Supporting and coordinating the Blueprint research by engaging colleges and subsequently promoting the recommendations maximized the use of the Design Principles.

In summary, while all these colleges prioritized diversity and inclusion in their programs, they employed distinct strategies to achieve their goals. Common themes included flexibility, industry collaboration, feedback-driven improvements, financial support, and a focus on inclusivity. However, each college faced unique challenges and opportunities specific to its context and program offerings.

Adaptive Pedagogy

Adaptive pedagogy, the ability of educational programs to adjust to the diverse and evolving needs of learners, emerged as a recurring theme across the case studies. All programs demonstrated a commitment to innovative and adaptive pedagogical approaches. This commitment spanned various dimensions, including equity and inclusion, flexible delivery models, and lessons learned from challenges faced.

A common thread among the case studies was a commitment to equity and inclusion. CCB, CNA, and NSCC tailored their programs to address the unique needs of equity seeking groups, including newcomers, career changers, and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. These initiatives aimed to eliminate barriers and promote inclusivity within the educational landscape.

Université Sainte-Anne and Collège de l'Île, on the other hand, adopted a different approach by offering online course formats, making education accessible to a diverse group of students, including those with learning disabilities. Additionally, NSCC's Sea Farm Operations program focused on equity seeking groups, such as Indigenous communities, Black/African Nova Scotians, and women, by addressing tuition costs, providing part-time schedules and moving the course delivery location to accommodate their needs.

Flexibility in delivery models represented another crucial aspect of adaptive pedagogy. These institutions understood the importance of accommodating various learning preferences and life circumstances. CCNB implemented a blended delivery structure, responding to student preferences while navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic.

CNA offered flexible program start dates and formats, enabling students to choose what suited them best. NSCC provided multiple delivery modes, catering to the diverse needs of participants in the Sea Farm Operations program. Université Sainte-Anne's online course format was particularly beneficial for working professionals who sought education while maintaining employment.

Challenges were an inevitable part of implementing adaptive pedagogy. CCNB underscored the importance of effective change management and collaboration, with challenges including assessment methods and implementation timelines. CNA highlighted the need for more widespread promotion of microcredentials and financial accessibility. The Sea Farm Operations program faced challenges related to tuition fees, delayed project initiation, and industry commitment, underscoring the importance of timely marketing and maintaining strong industry connections. NBCC's PLAR pilot project encountered barriers related to higher education enrollment and decreasing participant numbers, leading to lessons about clear communication and the need for more hands-on content. Université Sainte-Anne addressed challenges related to language comfort, first language proficiency, and generational succession, emphasizing the importance of attracting young workers and providing effective training programs. In summary, these case studies collectively emphasized the significance of adaptive pedagogy in tailoring educational approaches to individual learner needs and specific program contexts. Through flexible delivery models, a commitment to equity and inclusion, and lessons learned from challenges, these institutions demonstrated their dedication to innovative approaches in education to meet the evolving demands of their students and industries. Furthermore, the challenges faced underscored the necessity of ongoing adaptation and improvement in the pursuit of effective and inclusive pedagogy.

Industry Engagement and Partnerships

Engaging with industry partners was a recurring theme, emphasizing the importance of aligning educational offerings with industry demands. Collaboration with employers and industry stakeholders was essential for ensuring that graduates were well-prepared for the workforce. Programs actively sought input from industry experts to shape curriculum and learning outcomes.

In all the case studies, collaboration with industries played a pivotal role in shaping the educational programs and ensuring their relevance to workforce needs. Each college recognized the importance of engaging industry stakeholders to identify specific challenges and opportunities within their respective sectors.

CCNB's Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program in healthcare demonstrated a commitment to equity by catering to various groups, including newcomers, career changers, LPN program graduates, and mid-career workers. The program closely collaborated with healthcare facilities, such as long-term care facilities and the Vitalité Health Network, to address the significant labor shortage in healthcare. This collaboration emphasized the importance of effective change management and communication in program success.

CNA's Information Technology Career Focus (ITCF) program identified skills gaps in the IT sector through collaboration with industry partners. The program's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion was driven by industry collaboration, focusing on removing barriers to participation. Students benefited from job shadowing opportunities and the alignment of the program with industry needs.

CNA's ITCF program in information technology engaged with industry stakeholders to ensure its relevance. The program promoted microcredentials and financial accessibility, with industry collaboration highlighting the need for raising awareness. Collaborative efforts with IT workplaces provided students with real-world insights and strengthened ties with industry partners.

Holland College's and Collège de l'Île's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program collaborated with provincial governments, the strong sector organizations and employers in the childcare sector to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators. The program's flexibility, allowing students to work while pursuing their ECCE Diploma, was a result of industry input and support, ensuring its success in meeting workforce demands.

NBCC's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) pilot program for Information Technology (IT) recognized prior learning through collaboration with industry stakeholders. Industry partners contributed to innovative approaches to prior learning recognition, leading to improvements in the program's communication, automation, and expansion.

NSCC's Sea Farm Operations program worked closely with the aquaculture industry to develop entry-level technicians. Industry partners shaped the program, providing practical experiences and insights into the aquaculture industry. The program's flexibility in delivery met the scheduling needs of students, enhancing its appeal.

Université Sainte-Anne's interpreting program closely collaborated with industry partners, including working interpreters and professionals in healthcare and legal fields. These collaborations shaped the curriculum and practical components, making the program industry relevant. The online delivery format and having a respected sector expert as the teacher attracted students interested in interpreting careers.

In summary, industry collaboration was a common thread across the case studies, leading to the development of educational programs tailored to industry needs. While the specific approaches varied, each college recognized the importance of engaging industry stakeholders to address workforce challenges and ensure program success. Collaboration fostered diversity, equity, and inclusion, while also promoting awareness and accessibility in education and career pathways.

Overcoming Financial Barriers

Financial barriers were a shared concern, and programs recognized the need to address these barriers to ensure equitable access to education. While tuition fees were a part of this discussion, programs also acknowledged the broader financial constraints that students faced, including additional expenses like childcare and travel. Across these diverse college case studies, a common theme emerged—the recognition of financial barriers and the implementation of strategies to overcome them. CCNB's ACDC

program prioritized flexibility, catering to various equity seeking groups, reducing financial obstacles for newcomers, career changers, and mid-career workers. CNA's ITCF program tackled financial accessibility through tuition subsidies, part-time schedules, and a focus on inclusivity for marginalized groups, allowing students to manage finances while studying. Holland College's and Collège de l'Île's ECCE program addressed financial challenges by offering a part-time, blended format as well as on-line delivery with continuous entry, enabling working early childhood assistants to advance their careers without significant financial strain. NBCC's PLAR program took a flexible, self-paced, and online approach, reducing financial burdens for mature students, immigrants, and rural residents. NSCC's Sea Farm Operations program emphasized accessibility through online delivery, part-time options, re-location of in-person delivery and considerations for tuition costs, ensuring equitable opportunities. Université Sainte-Anne's interpreting program promoted financial accessibility via online courses and part-time schedules, accommodating diverse students, including those with disabilities and linguistic minorities. In all cases, these colleges' strategies aimed to minimize financial barriers and foster inclusive access to education and career advancement.

Navigating Unforeseen Challenges

All programs faced unforeseen challenges, such as delays, unexpected external factors (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), and shifting industry landscapes. The ability to adapt and find solutions in the face of these challenges was crucial for program success. It highlighted the need for resilience and flexibility in educational initiatives.

For instance, CCNB's Competency-Based Learning program encountered assessment-related challenges, but it gleaned valuable lessons in change management and teamwork. This experience underscored the significance of effective communication and collaboration to overcome unforeseen hurdles.

Similarly, NSCC's Sea Farm Operations program had to make significant adaptations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These adaptations showcased the institution's ability to navigate unexpected obstacles and prioritize the safety and learning experiences of its students.

Across these diverse cases, the institutions consistently demonstrated their capacity to adjust course and address challenges creatively. This collective experience reinforces the importance of adaptability as a critical factor in the successful implementation of educational programs in the face of uncertain and dynamic circumstances.

For Collège de l'Île, there were significant realizations that required a shift in the model and more work to address the challenges. Although the course was designed to be self directed, they quickly realized that it needed refinements due to the number of questions that resulted. It was also quickly identified that having reduced the entry requirements was not a service to the student as they needed extensive assistance to grasp the course content. By wanting to reduce barriers to entry, it caused significant challenges for the participants and was extremely time consuming for the supporting faculty.

In summary, this cross-case analysis of educational programs within diverse colleges underscored the intricate interplay of contextual factors, adaptive approaches, industry collaboration, inclusivity, financial accessibility, and adaptability. These elements collectively contributed to the effectiveness and success of the educational initiatives. Throughout the analysis, it became evident that institutions that

acknowledged and responded to their unique contexts, while remaining adaptable to changing circumstances, were better positioned to provide valuable education and workforce development opportunities for a wide range of students. The lessons learned from these case studies offered valuable insights for institutions seeking to excel in today's dynamic educational landscape.

4. Lessons Learned and Future Recommendations

The analysis of seven case studies has revealed pivotal lessons that serve as a foundational framework for the future of educational programs. Furthermore, we have outlined future recommendations to serve as guiding principles for educational institutions aiming to design and implement programs that are effective, inclusive, and adaptable.

- **Prioritize Equity and Inclusivity**

One overarching lesson is the paramount importance of prioritizing equity and inclusivity within program development. These pilot programs have demonstrated the significance of breaking the mold of traditional post-secondary education and tailoring educational offerings to cater to diverse groups, including newcomers, career changers, graduates of relevant programs, and mid-career workers. They have also highlighted the need of implementing targeted strategies to support underrepresented groups and address potential barriers to participation. To build upon this crucial lesson, it is recommended that institutions adopt a proactive approach in identifying and supporting underrepresented groups, conducting regular assessments of program inclusivity and making necessary adjustments.

- **Flexible Program Delivery**

The flexibility of program delivery has proven to be a key element in meeting the varied needs and schedules of learners. The success of part-time, blended, and online formats as well as continuous entry and self-paced programs highlights the importance of maintaining a range of delivery options and regularly assess and adapt these options to meet changing learner needs.

- **Financial Accessibility**

The recognition of financial barriers as substantial obstacles to education is an invaluable lesson. These programs have demonstrated an acute awareness of the necessity to confront these barriers, which encompass not only tuition costs but also ancillary expenses like childcare and transportation. It is recommended that institutions continuously explore financial support options, such as tuition subsidies and assistance with additional expenses like childcare and transportation, to make education more accessible to a broader demographic. Considering the location of course delivery to provide a range of options to folks in rural areas would also play an important role in rendering education not only accessible, but financially manageable for participants.

- **Industry Engagement**

Industry engagement has been a common thread, emphasizing the vital role of collaboration with industry stakeholders in aligning program content with industry needs and providing real-world

insights to students. To enhance this engagement, institutions should ensure to foster strong partnerships with industry experts and employers. Regular reviews of program content should be standard practice to ensure that curricula remain relevant to the ever-shifting demands of the industry. Connection with industry through work integrated learning and practicum can also be an important factor to successful employment following graduation. This will help both industry in finding qualified skilled workers and students in fostering a relationship with future employers, this may be especially true for international students or members of equity seeking groups.

- **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)**

The streamlining of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) processes has significantly enhanced efficiency and accessibility for participants. Future recommendations include prioritizing investments in automation and streamlined communication to further simplify PLAR procedures. This will elevate the participant experience and contribute to even greater accessibility while enabling new-Canadians and mid-career workers to more easily pivot in their careers.

- **Awareness Building**

Effective communication, marketing efforts, and collaboration with industry partners and educational institutions have been instrumental in promoting program benefits. To sustain and build upon this momentum, institutions must persist in their awareness campaigns. Exploring diverse channels to attract potential participants, while emphasizing diversity and inclusion as key selling points, is essential. Additionally, institutions should make concerted efforts to develop and maintain clear and timely communication channels among stakeholders. Investing in comprehensive change management plans for program implementation is strongly recommended.

- **Practical Learning**

The incorporation of practical exercises and projects into programs has significantly enhanced students' preparedness for the workforce. To maintain this focus, institutions should continue to provide practical learning experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Regular updates to practical components are necessary to ensure alignment with ever-evolving industry requirements.

- **Equitable Teaching - Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**

Using principles of UDL and CRT was highlighted as one of the important keys to creating inclusive, safe classrooms. Many of the pilot projects included UDL in the design of their offerings from curriculum development and lesson planning to evaluations techniques. UDL and CRT are foundational to equitable teaching in post-secondary, fostering safer spaces by creating an inclusive classroom community and learning culture. UDL provides multiple modalities for learning and assessments, ensuring that students' strengths are showcased, therefore improving student success and faculty wellness. The Innovation Centre supported the delivery of a webinar series on the subject, the recordings are accessible on the ACA Website.

- **Mental Health Support**

The introduction and expansion of mental health support services and resources for students have emerged as essential to address the challenges of stress and workload within demanding programs. As such, institutions should prioritize and continue to expand mental health support services and resources for students. Ensuring their well-being throughout the duration of demanding programs is essential.

In conclusion, these recommendations, derived from the in-depth analysis of diverse educational programs, offer a holistic approach to creating programs that are responsive, inclusive, and effective in meeting the evolving needs of students and industries alike.

Recommendations for Future Research

While these lessons and recommendations provide a solid framework for the development of effective, inclusive, and adaptable educational programs, there is still ample room for further research. Future research in this area could delve into the following areas:

- **Long-term Career Trajectories:** Conduct long-term studies tracking the career trajectories of program graduates over several years or even decades. This would provide valuable insights into how these adaptive programs influence graduates' professional development, job satisfaction, income levels, and contributions to their respective industries.
- **Employer Feedback:** Gather feedback from employers and industry stakeholders who have hired graduates from these programs. Assess whether graduates possess the skills and competencies needed in the workforce, and how their performance compares to non-program graduates. This data can inform program improvements.
- **Economic Impact:** Evaluate the broader economic impact of these programs on the regions they serve. Assess factors such as increased employment rates, contributions to local economies, and the attraction of new businesses or industries due to the availability of well-trained graduates.
- **Industry Adaptation:** Explore how industries have adapted to accommodate graduates from these programs. Has industry culture, practices, or expectations evolved as a result of a more diverse and skilled workforce? Understanding the impact of adaptive education on industries can inform educational institutions and policymakers.
- **Inclusivity and Diversity Outcomes:** A deeper dive to explore how to further eliminate barriers to education and promote inclusivity within colleges would be helpful, ensuring to engage members of equity seeking groups in identifying solutions. Studies could assess the extent to which the pilot programs have contributed to greater inclusivity and diversity within industries. Have they helped to break down barriers for underrepresented groups, promote gender equality, or enhance cultural diversity in workplaces? Understanding how colleges could better prepare students from underrepresented groups for the workplace could be instrumental to support their transition and success in finding employment.

- **Program Evolution:** Study how these programs evolve over time in response to the changing needs of both students and industries. How do ongoing refinements and adaptations impact program effectiveness and student outcomes?
- **Global Perspectives and Innovative Pedagogical Approaches:** Explore international research to gain insights into how diverse cultural contexts influence program development, equity considerations, and inclusivity. Additionally, conduct research on innovative teaching methods that can enhance the adaptability and inclusivity of educational programs in an ever-changing world. This combined effort will enable educational institutions to better cater to the needs of diverse student body and remain responsive to evolving educational challenges and opportunities. Help bring principle of UDL to every curriculum and classroom to ensure inclusiveness.

By conducting research in these areas, educational institutions can gain a deeper understanding of the long-term effects of adaptive educational programs, enabling them to refine their offerings and better prepare students for success in evolving industries and workplaces.

Conclusion

The cross-case analysis of these seven educational programs has provided valuable insights into the complexities of program development, adaptability, inclusivity, industry engagement, financial accessibility, and the ability to navigate unforeseen challenges. These insights collectively highlight the critical role of understanding and responding to contextual factors while remaining adaptable to changing circumstances. The lessons learned from these case studies offer a strong foundation for shaping the future of educational initiatives.

To build upon these lessons, it is recommended that institutions prioritize equity and inclusivity, maintain flexible program delivery options, address financial barriers, foster stronger industry engagement, streamline prior learning assessment and recognition processes, invest in awareness building, promote practical learning experiences, and expand mental health support services for students. These recommendations aim to ensure that educational programs remain responsive and effective in meeting the evolving needs of students and industries.

Finally, this report serves as a comprehensive guide for educational institutions seeking to excel in today's ever-changing educational landscape. It is a valuable roadmap for the future of educational institutions to thrive in a dynamic world, promoting inclusive education and workforce development.

APPENDIX 1

Needs assessment for equity seeking groups - Human-centered design research for the *College Transformation des Collèges Project*

APPENDIX 2

FSC-CCF Project Learning & Reflection – Final Report