

# **Trading for Experience Project**

## **Final Report**

By Betsy Trumpener  
Preparatory Training Programs of Toronto  
May, 1999

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### **Summary**

The Preparatory Training Program's Trading for Experience Project, funded by the Ontario Women's Directorate, was a four month pilot initiative. Operated at PTP's two Toronto training centers in Etobicoke and North York, the project ran from January to April, 1999. The project generated great interest and enthusiasm among PTP's women students about the possibility of working in non-traditional areas. A project evaluation over the coming months will determine the Project's quantitative impact on student re-employment outcomes. In addition, PTP staff will continue to operate an ongoing speakers and workshop series component of the project, for adult students from PTP and other literacy programs, on an unfunded basis.

The Trading for Experience Project provided PTP with a unique opportunity to respond to changing program demographics. Currently, 60% of PTP's adult students are women. Although many are their family's sole support or main income earner, anecdotal and statistical evidence told us that they tended to set re-employment goals in the traditionally female and low-paying clerical, retail, and community service sectors. We felt it was vital that our program move from a focus on developing literacy skills for an employable future, to consider what kind of employment -- and wages—we were preparing our women students for.

The goal of this pilot project, therefore, was to encourage PTP's female literacy and upgrading students to learn about and consider the full range of jobs available to them when they graduate from the program, including work in the higher-paying blue collar and trade sectors. The project encouraged both male and female PTP students to rethink what they consider to be appropriate "women's work", both in their own working lives and when advising their children and grandchildren. Through the use of role models, workshops, and site visits, the project provided PTP students, instructors, and assessor/counsellors with the opportunity to study the wage gap between men and women's earnings, and to learn more about higher-paying, non-traditional jobs for women in the blue collar and trade sectors. To facilitate this process, the Trading for Experience project coordinator researched community resources, designed and delivered participatory workshops and video seminars, established a role model speaker series, and arranged site visits. I also documented our work to develop resource materials for use by PTP assessors/counsellors, instructors, and students. Through the project, PTP's male and female students and instructors participated in workshops to learn about the gender wage gap, identify transferable job skills, and research non-traditional jobs. Women students at PTP learned about a training program for forklift operators, visited a

construction labour training center and learned from community volunteers who are women working as carpenters, painters, electricians, and millwrights. They also participated in video seminars on women in the trades and opportunities in the auto parts industry.

As an ongoing component, PTP staff will continue to facilitate the role model speaker and workshop series. Women from other local literacy programs will be invited to participate. In the coming months, speakers from Home Depot and Magna will talk to these students about employment opportunities for women. Former PTP women students working in non-traditional jobs will also be invited to speak. In addition, the Trading for Experience workshop will be integrated into ongoing vocational assessment/counselling work at the PTP centres.

### **Voices of Project Participants**

*(from Project Evaluation)*

#### **What did you learn?**

- ❖ *That women and men can do anything you put your mind to*
- ❖ *Some of the job paying very low income, like the office work. I thought it paid good money*
- ❖ *We learn what ladies can do in these days, like carpentry, plumber and many good information that can help us in looking for a job*
- ❖ *I learn it is possible I can learn carpenter although I wasn't young anymore. The possibilities are endless*
- ❖ *I learn about new trades, how much they pay and that it is never too late to learn a new trade*
- ❖ *That we ladies can do any job that a man can do*
- ❖ *It give inspiration to people to go with the trades*
- ❖ *More and more women are doing work that was once considered men's work only*
- ❖ *There are more opportunities for women than we realized*

Trading for Experience Project  
**Summary of Project Activities**  
 Preparatory Training Program

<i><b>Project Activity</b></i>	<i><b>Description</b></i>	<i><b>Participants</b></i>
<b>Research /Community Scan</b>  January, 1999	Project coordinator researched people, programs, print and online resources that would assist PTP's women students learn about, train for, and access non-traditional jobs. See appendix for summary of the Community Scan.	More than twenty agencies and key informants were informed about the project and interviewed.
<b>Orientation Workshops</b>  February, 1999	The workshop introduced students to the concept of non-traditional employment and prepared students for the speaker series and tour which followed. The workshops also provided the project worker with an opportunity to meet students, learn about their work experience and aspirations, and share information about non-traditional jobs and the gender wage gap. Literacy activities were included. See appendix for workshop outline and evaluation.	In total, 110 people participated in these workshops, including PTP's male and female adult literacy students and their instructors.
<b>Construction Training Site Tour</b>  March, 1999	Students toured the Construction Labourers' training centre, spoke to construction workers, and learned about opportunities for women in the construction trades. See appendix for documentation of the site tour.	Thirty female adult literacy students and one male student, as well as several instructors participated in this tour. Students who participated shared information with an additional seventy students through presentations and poster displays.
<b>Role Model Speaker Series</b>  March, 1999	Female students had the opportunity to meet with and learn from community volunteers who are	Six community volunteers met and spoke with seventy

	women working as carpenters, painters, electricians, and millwrights. They also learned about a training program for forklift operation. See appendix for documentation of several speakers.	female students over the course of a month. Students who participated shared information with an additional thirty students through presentations. In addition, fifty students did literacy activities based on transcribed text from the speakers' talks.
<b>Video Seminars</b> April, 1999	Male and female adult literacy students and their instructors viewed and discussed videos about women in trades and opportunities in the auto parts sector.	In total, 50 people participated in these seminars.
<b>Resource Development</b> January – April, 1999	Project coordinator produced information displays and built a resource collection of appropriate materials. Resource reference binders were developed for instructors, for students, and for counsellor/assessors.	This component builds PTP's capacity to promote non-traditional jobs in the long-term. Resources will be used by 100 students and 15 instructors a year.
<b>Project Promotion</b> January – April, 1999	Project coordinator promoted the project during the Community Scan interviews and documented the project in an article for the literacy community newsletter. Information about the project and project reports will be posted on PTP's website.	The project was promoted to thirty agencies during the community scan. The information in the newsletter article will reach 55 literacy programs in Toronto.
<b>Recommendations</b> May, 1999	In consultation with PTP staff, project coordinator developed a series of recommendations for ongoing work and strategies to address barriers.	
<b>Capacity Building &amp; Ongoing Component</b> January, 1999 - Ongoing	Project coordinator developed documentation, models and protocols for an ongoing speaker and workshop series. PTP staff were trained to take over the ongoing component.	Over the course of the year, 200 PTP students and 50 students from other literacy programs will participate in this

		ongoing component
<b>Evaluation</b> Ongoing	In response to OWD's request, a system for evaluating the quantitative outcomes of the project was developed.	

## Trading for Experience Project

### **Recommendations**

#### **A. Ongoing Work**

1. That PTP facilitate an ongoing component that encourages women students to consider the full range of job options and broadens the thinking of all students about choosing work based on transferable skills, aptitude and interest, not on gender.
2. That PTP work to integrate the project's concepts, information, and approach in all PTP activities, including assessment, vocational counselling, and classroom work.
3. That PTP advocate for continued funding for the vocational counsellor position and expand the services to cover both centers.
4. That PTP develop and maintain a system to collect data about the re-employment and wage status of PTP's female graduates and compare outcomes over time and between PTP's male and female graduates. This includes the development of measures to document student employment outcomes by gender, including documentation of job titles (not just sector of employment) and wages, and annual analysis of the data

#### **B. Role Model Speaker Series and Tours**

5. That PTP continue to operate a role model speaker series and industry tours.
6. That the opportunity to participate be made available to all PTP students, but role model selection and discussion continues to promote women's participation in a full range of jobs
7. That literacy students and instructors from other programs be invited to participate in PTP's speaker series and industry tours, when possible.
8. That opportunities be provided for PTP's women students to try hands-on activities in non-traditional areas

#### **C. Outreach and Advocacy**

9. That PTP offer workshops on non-traditional jobs for women and the gender wage gap, on a fee for service basis to other literacy and community training programs, Ontario Works staff, HRDC staff, and others
10. That PTP lobby Ontario Works and HRDC caseworkers and policy makers to address some of the structural barriers to women seeking employment in non-traditional areas
11. That PTP investigate the development of a women friendly pilot project, in conjunction with a union or community skills training partner, that incorporates job skills training in a non-traditional area combined with literacy instruction.

# **The Need for the Trading for Experience Project**

## **Overview of the PTP Program and Issues Arising**

### **The Preparatory Training Program**

The Preparatory Training Program is a full-time, job-oriented literacy and upgrading program. Each year, we provide literacy training for about 400 adults. When they enter our program, almost all of PTP's students have less than 9 years of formal education. Most are on social assistance or Employment Insurance. On average, they spend 5 – 6 months studying in our program. Three quarters are employed within three months of leaving PTP.

### **A History in Labour Adjustment**

Operated out of two Toronto centres in Etobicoke and North York, our non-profit program has grown into the largest community-based literacy program in Canada. Our origins, however, are in labour adjustment. PTP was launched by the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy as a community response to the needs of laid-off workers. The year was 1992, and manufacturers and garment factories across Toronto were closing down or shedding staff. Many of the workers that were displaced had years of work experience, but very little formal education. Many spoke English as a Second Language. Few had more than 9 years of schooling; some had never been to school. The factory closures of the early '90s marked the end of an era for many of these displaced workers. They entered a new kind of job market that demanded higher level literacy skills and often computer skills, even for entry-level positions. These workers needed to improve their literacy skills before they could even think about accessing job skill retraining or becoming re-employed.

### **Setting Employment Goals – by Gender**

PTP made its mark by developing an individualized and employment-focussed approach to literacy work. Right from our beginnings as a labour adjustment program, we provided literacy training focussed on the specific reading, writing, math, and communication skills that each individual needed to enter retraining or find work in a specific sector. This approach required us to develop retraining plans for displaced workers. A key part of training plan development was the initial assessment of literacy skills by PTP assessors. During the initial assessment, workers were also asked to identify a specific re-employment or retraining goal that formed the focus of their literacy training.

Anecdotal reports from PTP assessors from this labour adjustment period indicate that employment goals typically followed traditional gender lines. Displaced workers who were male set retraining/re-employment goals like Computer Numerical Control, carpentry, and computer repair. Displaced workers who were female set re-employment goals in the traditionally female sectors of child care, office work, and food preparation.

At that time, PTP's student demographics were representative of workforce participation in the manufacturing sector. Eighty per cent of PTP students were men. Because of

labour adjustment funds, many of the students from this era were able to access job skill retraining. Thus, many of them were able to imagine new career directions and actually retrain for a new kind of job. Often, our program helped them to achieve the pre-requisites required for job skill retraining courses.

**New Realities: Shortest Route to a Job**

Seven years later, PTP has evolved and changed. While our focus is still on job-oriented literacy, we work only occasionally with students from large closures or layoffs. We are no longer concerned with where students are coming from (ie – plant closures) but only with where they want to go -- to work. Previously, most PTP students were referred by HRDC or plant closure committees. They were usually on severance or unemployment insurance and had long work histories. Now PTP’s student body includes many people on Ontario Works. Some have been out of the workforce for long periods; many are single mothers. While men used to make up 80% of our student body in the labour adjustment era, women now make up 60% of the program.

Funding sources and retraining policies have also changed. Case workers almost invariably encourage students to utilize their literacy training to pursue the “shortest route to a job”. The skills training system is a patchwork. The opportunity for individuals to access jobs skills retraining in a new area varies between regions and is often based on the source of income support. Some individuals can get support for literacy training OR job skills training, but not both. Many PTP students do not have access to funding for job skills training. Most now leave our program for employment or to search for a job. Often, they return to work in a similar position or sector.

**What kind of work? What kind of wages?**

These new realities bring new challenges. Many studies, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey, have demonstrated the clear link between low literacy skills and unemployment or underemployment. Thus, PTP’s main focus has always been “basic skills for an employable future” – the provision of literacy skills needed for employment. But with our changing demographics, we became aware of the need not only to get people back to work, but to consider what kind of work they are getting, and at what wages. These kinds of questions led to PTP’s current research analyzing the economic impacts of PTP’s literacy training on participants’ earnings after program completion. They also led to the identification of the need for the Trading for Experience Project.

**Re-Employment Goals of PTP’s Women Learners**

Although many of PTP’s female learners are their family’s sole support or main income earners, the vast majority set training and employment goals (during initial PTP assessment) in the low-paying clerical, retail, and community service. These are traditionally female-dominated sectors.

<b>Re-employment goals of PTP’s women learners (Dundas West Centre) in February, 1999 in order of frequency</b>	<b>Average hourly wage, according to NOC</b>
1. Computer / office work	\$8.00

2. Unsure of job goal	N/A
3. Food prep / kitchen help	\$7.66
4. Childcare / daycare	\$8.35, but often part-time
5. Retail sales	\$ 7.68
6. Room attendant	N/A
7. Bookkeeping	\$10.45
8. Sewing / dressmaking	\$7.25
9. Manufacturing	\$8.00
10. Manicurist	N/A

Women students' goals are in marked contrast to those of male PTP students with similar levels of education. The men aspire to higher paying positions as forklift and machine operators, assemblers, drivers, etc.

### **Gender Wage Gap**

Considerable research has already documented the wage gap between male and female earnings. In 1993, Canadian women working fulltime earned on average 72% of what their male counterparts earned. (Women in Trades and Technology National Network website.) As well, “women are much more likely than men to be found in the lowest end of the earnings range.” (Scott and Lochhead, 1997. Canadian Council on Social Development). Studies show that women who choose non-traditional careers, those in which women make up less than 25% of the total workforce, can expect to have earnings that are 150% higher than those in the traditionally female job sectors. These non-traditional jobs include not only the apprenticeship trades (many of which, with their grade 12 pre-requisites, are inaccessible to PTP’s literacy learners) but also machine operators, couriers, welders, construction trade jobs, forklift operators, security guards, retail workers in automobiles and parts, etc.

### **Labour Market Trends and Wages**

It is interesting to note that office work remains the most popular re-employment goal for PTP’s women students. A 1997 report by the Clerical Workers Center, Occupational Analysis: Clerical Occupations in Metropolitan Toronto, by Pat Bird and Alice de Wolff, reports that “office support workers have been the hardest hit of any occupational group by the restructuring and technological change of the 1990s. In the last 8 years, 92,600 clerical jobs have been lost in Metro Toronto, a loss of 35%. This is by far the largest job loss experienced by any occupational group in the region.” There is also a huge transformation in the nature of office work. “The work is often more intense and more complex, sometimes requiring continuous learning of new technical systems. There are fewer workers and their tasks have multiplied. Frequently, clerical workers do more direct customer service, involving the need for enhanced communication skills. It is a hard labour market for both new and experienced workers.”

PTP’s assessor Aleksandra Popovic confirms that many women she assesses want to work in an office “without knowing what skills are required. They believe that it is

easier, better, and pays more money than factory work.” Employment Resource staffperson Robin Hoffman works with job-ready students at the end of their PTP studies. “ Many women who worked in manufacturing do go back to a similar job. If they want a change, they talk about wanting “a clean job”, getting out of the dirt and noise... they think about office work. Sometimes they say they want a “clean job” even if it’s less pay. They just want out of manufacturing. But, for example, one woman researched the opportunities and discovered that office work is mostly part-time and doesn’t pay that well. “

In the Trading for Experience orientation workshops, it was clear that many students, both male and female, were misinformed about labour market trends and had unrealistic ideas of wages. In a post-workshop survey, one woman said her re-employment goal was cashier, and that she would like to make \$15 an hour. Another hoped to earn \$20 an hour as a cook, although she is more likely destined in the short term for an entry- level food prep job.

### **Barriers to Women entering Non-Traditional Jobs**

The goal of the Trading for Experience Project was to better assist and encourage female learners to explore non-traditional skills training and employment options. This was not a simple task. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to women entering non-traditional jobs. Given the short-term nature of this project, our focus was on addressing knowledge and attitudinal barriers through workshops and a speaker series. As well, we worked to build the program’s capacity to address this issue in the long term by developing resources, knowledge, and models for an ongoing component.

#### **Knowledge Barriers**

- Lack of awareness of non-traditional jobs and women’s ability to perform them
- Lack of role models
- Lack of knowledge of the job market and wage levels
- Lack of orientation programs (After a decade of growth in programs promoting women and non-traditional jobs, few programs remain in this province. Please see Community Scan in the appendix for more information.)

#### **Attitudinal Barriers**

- Traditional ideas of gender roles and femininity
- Employer attitudes and refusal to hire women
- Negative attitudes of husband/boyfriend/children/parents/community
- Fear of injury
- Desire to work in a “clean” environment
- Cultural or class aversion to certain kinds of work

#### **Other Barriers**

- Lack of education (prevents access to many trades)
- Physical limitations
- Lack of money to pay for training and living costs during training

- Lack of child care
- Lack of car or reliable transportation
- Ontario Works, HRDC, and WSIS policy that clients take the shortest route to a job
- Employment counsellors and OW case workers may discourage women from changing their initial job goal
- Counsellors and official policy may discourage women from entering job skills re/training programs
- Women may be asked by counsellors to choose between literacy training and job skills training

### **Literacy Levels and Trades**

A major barrier to PTP women interested in non-traditional jobs is their literacy and formal education level. Most apprenticeships require a grade 12 level education, and this requirement is strengthened in the current provincial Apprenticeship Reform. The former WITT coordinator at George Brown College stressed that women need very strong English, math, and computer skills to succeed in a non-traditional area. She stressed that there are no short cuts. Although they no longer exist, most of the Women into Trades and Technology (WITT) orientation programs in colleges were geared to women with high levels of formal education.

Some construction trades, including carpentry and brick laying, however, have lower entrance requirements. In our workshops and speaker series, we have therefor focussed on learning about these more accessible trades, as well as non-trade blue-collar jobs which don't always require a high school education.

### **Shortest Route to a Job**

A major challenge to the Trading for Experience project are the current policies of Ontario Works, HRDC, and WSIB, which urge clients to pursue the shortest route to any job. Through the Trading for Experience Project, learners may be exposed to new information or inspired to try for non-traditional jobs. But existing policies, as well as individuals such as employment counsellors and case workers may discourage women from changing their initial stated job goal. They may discourage women from pursuing a "riskier" route to a job or job skills training in a new area.

### **Trading for Experience Project Addresses Barriers**

The project developed a number of interventions to address these barriers. These included workshops and discussions, a role model speaker series, and the development of resources and program capacity. These activities are discussed in greater detail in the appendix, which follows. It should be noted that despite the project's considerable successes, women in PTP's literacy programs continue to encounter structural barriers to gaining employment in non-traditional jobs.

