

# **FINAL REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF TRAINING MATERIALS FOR PLAR FOR MATURE STUDENTS**

**JANUARY 16, 2004**

## **BACKGROUND**

In June, 2003 the Ministry of Education awarded a contract to the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA) to

- develop materials and
- develop and deliver training sessions

for adult education administrators and teachers to support the implementation of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 132, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students: Implementation in Ontario Secondary Schools. This contract did not include the development of French-language materials and training.

The coordinating team of Audrey Amo, Brenda Protheroe and Patricia Shaughnessy was contracted on July 4, 2003 by CESBA to manage this project. A meeting of the President of CESBA, Brenda King, the Executive Director of CESBA, Dave Neumann, and the coordinating team was held shortly thereafter to set the parameters for the project.

This report summarizes the project and includes the following:

- Writing Team Process
- Training Binder
- Training Sessions
- Recommendations

## **WRITING TEAM PROCESS**

### **THE WRITING TEAMS:**

Prior to the engagement of the coordinating team, CESBA sent emails to their members and to provincial subject associations informing them of the project and asking practitioners interested in participating on summer writing teams to complete an application form. These forms were made available to the coordinating team for follow

up. The coordinating team decided, in consultation with CESBA and Ministry of Education personnel, that the writing teams should incorporate as many subject areas and represent as many regions of the province as possible. The coordinating team also did outreach within the adult education community to identify additional writers.

Four writing teams were then hired. Team One was to produce 16 sample individual assessment guides in four core subject areas for grade 9 and 10 equivalency. Team Two was to produce eight grade 11 and eight grade 12 sample challenge assessment guides based on the Ontario School Counsellors' Association (OSCA) template designed for PLAR for Adolescent Students. Team Three was to produce a sample template for grade 11 and 12 equivalency assessments and apply that template to 16 different mature student scenarios. Team Four was to produce PLAR information materials suitable for use in schools and/or boards.

The two writing teams charged with developing assessment guides were made up of currently practicing teachers (with only one or two exceptions who were recently retired teachers) with expertise in Mathematics, English, History, Geography, Science (including Biology and Chemistry), Family Studies, Communications Technology, Computer Science, International Languages (Cantonese) and Music.

Teams Three and Four included Business, English, Mathematics and Media Arts teachers, Guidance counsellors, Guidance specialists, Adult/Continuing Education principals and members of the CESBA Board of Directors.

The members of the four teams represented boards from across the province, boards of varied sizes and offering varied types adult/continuing education programs and boards operating in rural, suburban and urban areas.

#### WORK OF THE TEAMS:

Prior to the beginning of the writing teams' work, the coordinating team met with Ministry of Education personnel to discuss issues related to the interpretation of various parts of PPM 132. These discussions included clarification of aspects of the Grade 9 and 10 Individual Assessment/Equivalency Process, the details of which appeared to be less fully articulated in the PPM than was the case with the other two processes.

Teams One, Two and Three met during the week of August 17, 2003. Prior to meeting as a group, all writers received an information package that included detailed instructions outlining their responsibilities and the expectations of the coordinating team. Writers also signed a contract that outlined the payment process, the expense guidelines and the timelines.

Team Four met after Teams One, Two and Three had completed their first drafts as it was felt that they could not design the promotional materials without seeing the materials produced by those teams.

The writers submitted their drafts by email and in many cases lengthy telephone conversations and email exchanges were held to discuss revisions.

#### THE VALIDATORS:

Thirteen validators were contracted to review and critique the writers' work during the week of September 14, 2003. The coordinating team ensured that the validators had expert knowledge of the subject areas and programs in question and that they represented many areas of the province. The CESBA executive validated the Team Four materials.

The coordinating team made changes to the writers' work where appropriate based on the validators suggestions and on their own professional judgment. These changes brought more clarity and consistency to the sample assessment guides and to the scenarios. The coordinating team then met with the CESBA executive at their September meeting to share the draft materials.

#### **TRAINING BINDER**

The coordinating team then began submitting drafts of approximately 50 documents to Ministry of Education personnel for input. Mary Smart, Sylvia Larter and Jane Foster reviewed all documents in a thorough, thoughtful and timely way. During this time, Mary Smart communicated with the coordinating team on a daily basis, having secured answers to many of the technical questions posed by the coordinating team by consulting with the appropriate Ministry officials and having drawn upon her own comprehensive knowledge of the PPM, its interpretation and the implementation issues it presented. These included difficult questions related to funding, home schooling and special education. The answers in turn necessitated more re-writing and further changes in order to bring accuracy, consistency and clarity to the entire document.

The coordinating team created many additional support materials for the training binder. For example, three separate implementation charts, a PLAR/OSIS comparison chart, information sheets for students, Q & A's, sample letters and tracking forms, outlines of the funding process and diploma requirements and a sample application form for the grade 9 and 10 Individual Assessment/Equivalency Process were developed.

Drafts were also submitted at this time to the coordinator of the French-language writing team. This team is translating much of the material developed by the coordinating team and will be offering their own training sessions.

The coordinating team developed a comprehensive binder containing the following sections for use in the training sessions:

- Introduction
- Orientation Materials
- Grade 9 and 10 Individual Assessment/Equivalency Process
- Grade 11 and 12 Equivalency Process
- Grade 11 and 12 Challenge Process
- Other Resources

As well, a PowerPoint presentation was prepared and included in the binder in order to accommodate boards that wished to use the training sessions as “train the trainer” sessions. A CD-ROM was prepared for distribution at the sessions to allow boards to insert their own contact information and dates onto various forms and download them for their own use and to adapt sample forms to their own needs.

These materials were submitted to the Ministry for comment prior to the production of the training binder.

Descriptions of the training sessions were written and submitted to the Ontario College of Teachers for approval to grant Professional Learning Program credits to the participants. This approval was received and the College assigned course codes.

## **TRAINING SESSIONS**

Training sessions were conducted in seven locations across the province:

- |               |             |             |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| • Thunder Bay | November 20 | 23 attended |
| • Sudbury     | November 24 | 24 attended |
| • Ottawa      | November 27 | 34 attended |
| • Toronto     | December 3  | 48 attended |
| • London      | December 8  | 36 attended |
| • Barrie      | December 10 | 30 attended |
| • Mississauga | December 12 | 44 attended |

There was a Ministry representative and a CESBA Board representative at each training session.

The 239 people in attendance at the sessions included:

5 Superintendents, 53 Principals, 20 Vice Principals, 77 Central Board Office Coordinators/Managers, 81 Teacher Counsellors and 3 representatives from the Independent Learning Centre.

The training sessions were approximately 5 hours in duration. The participants had received some information about PPM 132 prior to the sessions and some had been involved in discussions of implementation issues and came to the sessions prepared to discuss their implementation concerns. Many had found the PPM quite complex and appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify ambiguous areas.

The most commonly asked questions centered on the issues of funding, staffing, workload and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. Following is a summary of the policy and implementation issues identified by the participants:

#### POLICY ISSUES:

- ❖ There is concern that funding is not adequate to reflect the labour-intensive nature of the process
- ❖ The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test needs to be available more frequently than once a year to accommodate mature students with time constraints such as those on income support as well as others who would benefit from accelerating their high school programs.
- ❖ The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course needs to be offered and accepted as meeting the requirement even to those who have not yet written the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test as the content is useful to them and they would benefit from the experience of taking the course. This course should be considered as a substitute for the literacy test, for adult students, at the discretion of the principal.

#### IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES:

The need for:

- ❖ A process to share equivalency information, new sample assessments and other support materials
- ❖ More sample assessments to be produced (participants did not feel they have the human resources necessary to develop their own)
- ❖ Further training sessions for adult and day school principals and supervisory officials
- ❖ A comprehensive summary of credit course descriptions from other provinces and countries to ease the equivalency determination workload and to ensure consistency across the province
- ❖ Samples of transcripts from other countries for which equivalencies have been determined
- ❖ Strategies to assist ESL learners as they encounter the new process

In discussing implementation with the participants some interesting ideas were presented. For example:

- Some Boards are planning to possibly form consortia to develop more challenge assessments
- Some Boards are putting thought into finding creative ways to address the funding shortfalls which are significant considering the time and effort necessary to prepare to administer, develop materials beyond those provided, assess, evaluate and conduct assessments.
- Some Boards are investigating the usefulness of the Designing Your Future course for mature students

The evaluations from all sessions were excellent and the binder was especially well received. People frequently commented that it will be an invaluable resource and that it will most definitely be used. It was further stated that the sample challenge assessments may also be useful in the PLAR for Adolescent Students process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. The Ministry investigate issues related to the funding of all three PLAR processes and the possible fiscal impact at the provincial level of the number of assessments that will need to be done – and charged back to the Ministry. The possibility of returning to the former process should be explored in the interests of reducing time and fiscal restraints. The quality assurance remains the integrity of the principal and the rigour of the new curriculum and other OSS requirements.
2. The Ministry consider offering the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test twice per year OR allowing mature students to take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course without having taken the test in order to fulfill the graduation requirements. This would allow mature students to accelerate their program and enter or re-enter the job market in a timely fashion.
3. CESBA investigate strategies for members to share equivalency information, new sample assessments and materials, ask implementation questions and propose solutions.
4. The Ministry and CESBA provide follow up sessions on PLAR for mature students for adult and day school principals and supervisory officials.

5. The Ministry continue to encourage boards to form consortia to develop more sample assessments and information about equivalent credits granted for grades 9 to 12 by providing funding resources for professional meetings on this topic.
6. The Ministry fund CESBA to write a course profile and support materials for the Designing Your Future (GWL30) course geared specifically towards mature students.
7. The Ministry consider funding CESBA to produce further support materials to include: 1) a summary of credit course descriptions from other provinces and countries 2) compile samples of transcripts from other countries for which equivalencies have been determines 3) develop strategies to assist ESL adult learners.
8. The Ministry revisit its decision that cooperative education credits are ineligible for consideration in the grade 11/12 equivalency process.
9. The option of developing a video to be used as training/professional development tool for educators be explored by CESBA and the Ministry. This video would be an important resource for educators in the continuing education environment where staff turnover is problematic and professional development is limited

In conclusion, the success of this project is in no small part due to the dedication of the CESBA Board Members and to the co-operation of the Ministry of Education staff, including the regional representatives. In addition, the writers and validators made a valuable contribution to the contents and quality of the binder which remains, after the sessions and for the foreseeable future, an excellent resource to inform and guide those charged with the implementation of PPM 132 in schools and boards across the province. Finally, the commitment and goodwill of those in attendance at the train the trainer sessions must be acknowledged. They provided evidence of the fact that the mature students of this province are in capable and dedicated hands.