
Youth Apprenticeships in Canada: Context, Structures and Apprentices' Experiences

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Introduction

Apprenticeship training in Canada has always been a relatively marginal form of Vocational Education and Training (VET) or school-work-transition pathway. According to Canada's 2007 National Apprenticeship Survey (Menart et al., 2008), only 12% of the Canadian labour force is certified in a skilled trade. The same survey shows that less than 2% of the total labour force were registered in an apprenticeship in 2007. Similarly, less than 1% of a graduating secondary school cohort continues their education in an apprenticeship. The few Canadians who find their way into apprenticeships generally do so years after having left secondary education. In fact, the average age of apprentices in Canada was 30 in 2007 (Menart et al., 2008).

Yet, interest in apprenticeship training in Canada has increased substantially in recent years. This increased interest is related to two issues: 1) the labour market problems of young people who do not continue to post-secondary education; and 2) the lack of skilled workers and the parallel aging of the workforce in the trades. Unemployment rates for Canadians without a secondary school diploma in recent years have been twice as high as for all Canadians. These problems are even more pronounced for young people. Employment security, benefits, and income levels of Canadians with low levels of formal education are equally problematic.

Apprenticeship training is seen as an alternative pathway into fulfilling and rewarding employment for young people who are considered at risk of not completing secondary education or who are generally more interested in applied, rather than academic learning.

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At the same time, Canada, as all other industrialized nations, is faced with an ageing workforce and predicted labour shortages in all industrial areas. Given earlier retirement ages, these concerns about workforce aging and labour shortages are considered more immediate and pressing in the manual trades (Construction Sector Council, 2004).

As a consequence, the Canadian provinces have, in the past two decades, introduced programs aimed at attracting high school students into apprenticeship training programs, in order to expose them to alternative career paths earlier and to increase the profile of occupations in the skilled trades as a career possibility (see e.g. Lehmann, 2005; Taylor, 2007). The following paper presents research on one such program, the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) in the Western Province of Alberta. Before discussing RAP, it might be instructive, however, to briefly review the structures of Canada's education system and labour market, and the school-work pathways these structures create.

Education Systems and Labour Market Structures in Canada

Most Canadian children and youth attend public elementary and secondary schools, which is mandatory until the age of 16 or 18, depending on province.¹ An important feature of Canadian education is the relative lack of streaming. All Canadian public schools are comprehensive schools, although some form of ability tracking begins to take place in Grade 7, when students are placed, based on tests and teacher recommendations, in a range of academic or applied courses or streams. The only school leaving certificate is the high school diploma, which students obtain at the end of Grade 12. Depending on the level and range of courses students completed successfully during high school, they will be able to enter university, community college, apprenticeship, or other, often private, training institutions. A significant percentage of a high-school cohort also enters the labour market without any post-secondary education. Table 1 provides an overview of educational attainment in the Canadian population. The table confirms the marginal status of apprenticeship training, especially amongst younger Canadian. It further documents the recent shift toward university as the preferred post-secondary education option. Com-

¹ Education in Canada is the mandate of the provinces. There is no coordinating federal ministry of education. Although the different provincial education systems are remarkably alike, given the lack of a coordinating ministry, there are nonetheless distinct differences. One of these differences is the mandatory schooling age, which was recently raised to 18 in Ontario.

Table 1 Population of Canada, 15 years and over, by age group and highest level of educational attainment, 2007 (%) (Source: Adapted from 2006 Census Highlight Tables (Statistics Canada, 2009))

Age group	All levels of education	Less than High School	High School	Apprenticeship/ Trade	College	University
15 and over	100	24	25	11	17	23
20–24	100	14	43	7	19	17
24–35	100	11	23	10	23	33

munity colleges in Canada are hybrid institutions that are currently in a state of transition. In some provinces, community colleges have become applied universities, similar to the new, post-1992 universities in the UK. Traditionally, however, Canadian community colleges offer applied training in many occupations for which young people would be trained, for example, in Germany's dual system.

The insignificant number of young people in workplace-based VET and the relatively large number of young people choosing university has a few of explanations. There is, for instance, no history of extensive employer involvement in the education and training of young people. Most education, whether in VET or not, is school based. Furthermore, the few occupations for which individuals can become certified through the apprenticeship system are concentrated in the skilled, manual trades. Yet, Canada's economy is largely a service economy, with 75% of the workforce employed in the service sector. Finally, politicians, policy makers, and educators have for some time engaged in a very visible public discourse that positions Canada as a knowledge economy and equates vocational and life course success with high levels of formal, post-secondary education.

It is also important to note that there is a relatively low level of vocational specificity between the education system and the labour market (Hamilton and Hurrelman, 1994). Few occupations in Canada specify educational pathways or credentials as an entry requirement. Instead, educational credentials are seen as evidence of skills and employability in a more general sense. Furthermore, the expansion of universities in the past three decades and the concomitant rise in enrolment have led to significant credential inflation, as increasingly high levels of formal post-secondary credentials have become entry requirements into positions and occupations, regardless of the skill content of these occupations (Brown, 2003; Collins, 1979). Despite

documented evidence of rising levels of underemployment² in Canada (see e.g. Li et al., 2004; Livingstone, 2004), this type of credential inflation has further increased the attractiveness of a university degree over other forms of post-secondary education or training (see e.g. Lehmann, 2009).

Apprenticeship in Canada

According to a recent study of Canada's apprenticeship system (Menart et al., 2008), only 12% of the labour force in 2007 was employed in the skilled trades, although many of these workers might have been trained outside the apprenticeship system (e.g. at community college) or outside Canada. If we look at actual apprenticeship registrations, we can further see that the number of Canadians trained in the apprenticeship system in a given year is very low. For instance, 358,555 men and women were registered as apprentices in 2007, which represents less than 2% of total labour force. Even lower are the number of people who complete their apprenticeships. In 2007, only 24,495 of apprentices completed their apprenticeships and became certified. In most trades, certification is based on the completion of a set number of hours in the trade while registered as an apprentice, plus attending vocational schools (usually in blocks) and the passing of examinations.

The staggeringly low number of apprenticeship completions is due to the fact that certification is not mandatory for employment in a high percentage of occupations in which apprenticeship training is possible. While individuals wishing to pursue a career as automotive technicians or electricians, for instance, will need to be certified, those seeking employment as carpenters, bricklayers, machinists, or cooks, for example, do not require formal certification. This creates completion and certification disincentives for both workers and employers. Workers can usually realize higher salaries as semi-skilled workers than as apprentices. The salary and employment penalty for not being certified is also relatively minor. Furthermore, during the technical, in-school portion of their apprenticeship, apprentices are not paid by their employer. In fact, employers usually terminate the employment relationship and apprentices receive unemployment insurance benefits while attending the in-

² Underemployment defines a situation in which a job incumbent has higher levels of formal credentials than the job content demands. It is also a rather difficult concept to measure. Livingstone (2004) relies to some degree on subjective, self-reported evidence of underemployment. Statistics Canada considers a person underemployed who has a university degree but spends at least one month in a given reporting period in a job requiring only high school education (see Li et al., 2004).

school portion of their training, which usually takes place once a year in a block and requires the payment of tuition. For employers, non-completion can be beneficial as they can employ a near-certified, but essentially skilled worker at a salary substantially lower than that of a certified journeyperson. Many apprentices who have completed the majority of their requirements in non-mandatory trades remain uncertified, or certification drags on for many years (Laporte and Mueller, 2010). The last point also helps explain the high average age of apprentices. In 2007, the average age of Canadian apprentices was 30 (Menart et al., 2008). More important, however, for the explanation of this high average age is the fact that many workers in the trades only decide to begin an apprenticeship after having worked as unskilled trades workers for often many years.

There are a number of other factors that contribute to the marginal status of apprenticeship in training in Canada. Historically, Canada has relied on immigration to fill its needs for skilled manual labour. Immigrants from across Europe have been essential in building the country's infrastructure throughout the twentieth century. This reliance on immigrant labour has meant that Canadian employers have been relatively lacklustre in their support of and direct involvement in training and education. Furthermore, employers generally expect Canadians to assume individual responsibility for employment readiness, at university, community college, or private training providers, often at a high cost. The already low involvement of employers in the training of young people is exacerbated by a fear of poaching. In other words, if only few employers invest in the training of their workforce, this investment can be easily lost if the trained employee leaves to assume employment with a different employer, likely one that did not invest in training. The employer who lost the initial investment is unlikely to recoup the loss, because of the scarcity of workplace-trained employees. Such a situation creates powerful economic disincentives to invest in the training of your own workforce. Finally, a hodgepodge of provincial regulations has made apprenticeship training relatively difficult to understand and hard to access for young people who might be interested in employment in the trades, while at the same time restricting mobility of credentials across the country. Coupled with the aforementioned disincentives in occupations that do not require certification, it is not surprising that high school students either are unaware of apprenticeship opportunities or forego them for other post-secondary education options that are more culturally established and understood.

Interestingly, however, the past two decades have seen a renewed interest in apprenticeship training as an alternative post-secondary pathway (see e.g. Lehmann, 2007; Taylor, 2007, Taylor and Lehmann, 2002). As mentioned earlier, this renewed interest has a two-fold basis. First, labour market data show that young people without post-secondary education are most likely to be affected by unemployment,

contingent employment, low income, and a host of other labour market problems. Apprenticeship training is seen as a potential to attract young people who might not otherwise continue their education or are even at risk of not finishing high school. The combination of school and work is seen to be particularly attractive to young people whose talents and interests are in conflict with the academic-abstract demands of the education system. Second, renewing interest in apprenticeship training is seen as an essential way to address looming labour shortages in the skilled trades in Canada. As in most (post-)industrial countries, Canada also has a rapidly aging workforce. This problem is even more pressing in the skilled trades because workers tend to retire earlier than in other industries, due to the physical demands of employment in the trades (Construction Sector Council, 2004). At the same time, an oil boom in the Province of Alberta has created above-average demands for skilled manual workers. The most promising, oil-rich deposits in the Northern Alberta oil sands not only require a very labour-intensive process of extraction and refining, the exploitation of these deposits has also created an associated employment boom in the construction of industrial facilities, highways, other forms of transportation, housing and so forth. Yet, few young people and their families appear to be aware of training and career options in the skilled trades. Finally, for the past two to three decades, immigration to Canada has shifted away from former source countries with strong traditions in manual, skilled labour. Instead, the majority of immigrants now enter Canada with a university degree from their home countries, while less than 10% of newly arriving immigrants are experienced or certified trades workers (Statistics Canada, 2008), which further exacerbates the need for a 'homegrown' solution to the projected labour shortage in the trades.

In an effort to address the dual challenge of labour market shortages and school-work transition problems of non-academically oriented young people, provinces have established various forms of apprenticeship programs aimed at high school students. Alberta's RAP will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Registered Apprenticeship Program in Alberta

Alberta's RAP was introduced in the early 1990's as an alternative form of vocational education aimed at young people with an interest in a career in the trades. Although modelled after Germany's dual system, participants in RAP are still active high school students. RAP is therefore not a post-secondary program, but a high school initiative. It is aimed at students in the final two years of high school (Grades 11 and 12, when the student is 15 or 16 years old). Students enrolled in RAP re-

ceive dual credits for their participation: hours spent in the workplace count toward their high school completion, as well as apprenticeship requirements. Most students alternate between high school and workplace on a term basis. For instance, they will spend the winter term at school, taking their required courses, and the fall term at work. In occupations with more flexibility, students might also spend the morning at school and the afternoon at work. The former arrangement, however, is more common. During their time in the workplace, RAP participants are fully registered apprentices. This means that formally their on-the-job learning falls under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and the regulations governing general apprenticeship training in Alberta. If a RAP student drops out of high school or fails to graduate, the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board voids his or her accumulated work hours. This policy is considered an essential element of RAP's stay-at-school strategy, at once attracting non-academic students to a more experiential alternative to completing high school, and providing an incentive for sticking with the program. The program has seen significant growth in enrolment since the first five students started in RAP in 1991. For instance, 980 students were enrolled as RAP apprentices at the end of 2001 (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, 2002), when the data for this study were collected. By 2009, enrolment had further grown to 1,700 (*ibid.*, 2010). Yet, these numbers still comprise less than one per cent of all high school students and about 2.5% of all apprentices registered in the province.³

Methodology

Between November 2001 and October 2002, 29 RAP students in Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) were interviewed, using either one-on-one semi-structured interviews, or focus groups. The sample was drawn from four different schools which were chosen because of their above-average enrolment in RAP. All interviews and focus groups were carried out at the individual school site, usually in a conference room or available classroom. Participants were either in their first or second year of RAP (Grade 11 or 12), which means they were between 16 and 18 years old. All interviews and focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed.

The vast majority of RAP students participating in the study were male. The sample included only five women, all of whom apprenticed as hairdressers. Although efforts were made to include young women apprenticing in traditionally

³ For a more detailed description of RAP, see Lehmann (2005, 2007).

Table 2 Trades/Occupations of youth apprentices, by location

Edmonton	N
Automotive, Motorcycle & RV Technicians Heavy Equipment Technicians	8
Electrician	3
Carpenter	2
Welder; Millwright; Pipefitter	6
Hairdressers	5
Chefs	4
Landscaping	1
Total	29

male trades, there were none in the schools selected for this study.⁴ As Table 2 shows, the RAP students in this study apprenticed as car mechanics, millwrights, heavy duty mechanics, pipefitters, carpenters, electricians, welders, chefs, landscapers and hairdressers.

The interview quotations in the following analysis reflect the actual transcripts as closely as possible, with a few minor editorial changes to make them more readable. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants. Finally, I wish to stress that it is not my intention to generalize from this data to the experiences of all youth apprentices or conditions in all youth apprenticeship programs across Canada, but to offer insights and interpretations to stimulate further study and investigation into an important, yet under-researched (at least in Canada) policy issue.

Findings

In the following sections, I will present and discuss a number of key analytical themes that emerged from the data analysis and relate them to the potential of

⁴ There are few efforts in Alberta to increase female participation in traditional male trades. There are no equality of opportunity programs or diversity initiatives (at least at the high school level) that try to increase participation of women in male-dominated apprenticeships. Generally, it is seen as sufficient to ensure that young women are aware of the opportunities in the trades (Taylor and Lehmann, 2002). More research is needed to investigate why, for example, so few women choose careers in the trades, to what extent this gender imbalance is related to gender role socialization or hostile workplaces (see Gaskell, 1992), and how cooperation with different partner groups might redress these imbalances.

youth apprenticeships like RAP to address labour shortages and create school-work-transition alternatives for young Canadians. I have organized the data into four analytical themes: 1) the marginality of apprenticeship training; 2) the lack of corporative structures and supports, which includes the conflict between RAP as a learning program for students and a source of cheap labour for employers; 3) the relationship between responsibilities and rights of the different partners involved in such programs, and 4) the potential of programs like RAP to create meaningful PSE alternatives for non-academic young people.

Apprenticeships as Marginal Pathways

Despite the efforts undertaken in initiatives like RAP, apprenticeship training continues to exist at the margins of high school programs. Few teachers, parents and students have personal experiences with apprenticeships. In the schools where the research took place, usually only one teacher had responsibility for all forms of programs involving work placements, including RAP. Given the low profile of apprenticeship training both in schools and outside, the majority of participants had little understanding of the principles of apprenticeship, the rules and regulations guiding apprenticeship training, and what being involved in apprenticeships beyond high school meant:

It was kind of difficult at first, because talking to some of the people at school [teachers and counsellors] about it, they kind of were talking to me up at their level. And I did not really understand what they were talking about. ... I wasn't really sure on what to do because I had never done something like this before. ... And it was kind of hard to get information from them (Tim).

As the quotation above shows, in addition to Tim's lack of knowledge about the program, neither were the teachers and counsellors at Tim's high school well informed about these options. In fact, many of the participating students mentioned that most of their teachers were unaware of their involvement in RAP and the fact that they spent significant amounts of time outside school in a workplace.

Furthermore, decisions regarding students' involvement with RAP, such as deciding on an occupation or finding employers, were often made without their direct involvement. None of the students in this study had found their own employer. Instead, matching of students with employers willing to accept students was done by the schools:

'Well, I actually wanted to do three things. Automotive mechanic, heavy duty mechanic or auto body repair person. And the one that I decided on was heavy

equipment mechanic ... [because] that's where the employer was found [by the placement coordinator]' (Max).

This matching may at first seem like a useful service provided by schools on behalf of students. Nonetheless, it is rather problematic as it limits the agency of young people entering apprenticeships and interested in future employment in the trades. More importantly, it also means that many schools are more interested in maintaining good relationships with the few employers willing to participate, rather than looking out for the learning needs and interests of students. In order for apprenticeship training to be a positive experience, it is necessary that the apprentice has some amount of control over the decision-making process and that decisions about occupations and employers offer a fit with the apprentice's interests and talents.

In addition to the limited control RAP students have over the terms of their participation, students also have to negotiate the potential disadvantages that arise from the negative images and stereotypes associated with apprenticeship training and employment in the trades more generally, as the following two quotations show:

'I think the reason more people aren't going after this is that they think it's more like a lower-class type job, because it's labour. It is a lot of physical work, and they're thinking that people who are doing that don't have the brains. ... Some people do, they think, ah, you're a tradesperson, you know, you're not that smart. That's why you're doing it' (Nathan).

'We're stereotyped as stupid people. It's because we don't go to university or something like that. So, it's kind of like ... well, you're not going to university, so you're not going to make anything out of your life' (Joelle).

These negative stereotypes stem from a pervasive public discourse that equates life course success with high levels of formal education, preferably at university. The marginal status of apprenticeship training and the lack of understanding about the income and employment possibilities exacerbate these misconceptions. Finally, most teachers in high school are themselves academically trained and likely lack understanding of this specific pathway, which in turn limits their ability to understand the problems of and support students in programs like RAP.

Lack of Corporative Structures and Supports

The last point raised above is also connected to the fact that youth apprenticeship programs like RAP (or apprenticeships in Canada generally) lack the corporative structures and supports that are such an integral part of Germany's dual systems. Unions, for instance, are rarely involved in matters concerning youth apprenticeship training and the learning that takes place in the workplace is largely deregulated.

Furthermore, the relatively low profile of apprenticeship training in Canada not only means that few employers participate, but that those who do tend to do so with varying degrees of enthusiasm. This often means that young apprentices encounter negative attitudes of employers and colleagues, who perceive of them as an intrusion into the workplace order, as Tim's experience illustrates:

'There's times when we go to our boss and ask questions and he looks at us like 'You should know what to do'. He looks at you like you're dumb. ... But we're supposed to be learning. ... Some of the older people look at you different. Because you're such a young kid and they think that you shouldn't be in there or something.'

Tim's problems with his employer are especially problematic, as this highlights the tensions between students' learning needs and employers' labour needs. Both apprentices and employers suffer from a lack of structures and regulations that define this employment relationship and guide behaviour and learning.

Tim's second concern, about the reaction of his co-workers, is echoed by Scott:

'I am the youngest person there. It can be hard sometimes; like the way people talk to you at the worksite, like you're younger and they don't expect you do know as much. You're like 'downsized'.

As with Tim's employer problems, these types of workplace tensions are to be expected if young people in the workplace are an oddity, rather than the norm. Considering that the average age of apprentices in Canada is 30 and that programs like RAP still only attract a small minority of high school students, the presence of very young co-workers is likely to create problems of the kind described by Tim and Scott.

An essential aspect of the corporative structures of, for instance, Germany's dual system, is the school. In apprenticeship programs like RAP, participants do not yet attend technical training for their occupation. Instead, they are still formally enrolled as secondary (high school) students. Unfortunately, unlike the vocational schools in a dual system, the high schools tend to remain rather removed from the apprentices once they have been placed with an employer. As I have shown earlier, schools do take an active role in placing students in employment situations. They do, however, not take an active role in supervising and monitoring the actual employment experiences of participants. This is especially problematic considering that programs like RAP are partly mandated to offer work-school experiences that make learning more meaningful for students who might otherwise struggle in an all-academic environment. Ted's reasons for participating in RAP confirm this concern:

'It was more or less, I guess, that I didn't have to go to school for a full year. I just had to go half a year [laughs] and that sounded kind of interesting to me.'

Rather than seeing the connections between learning at work and learning in the classroom, students in programs like RAP are at risk of experiencing a profound disconnect between the two locations and their respective modes of learning. None of the apprentices in the study had a proper learning or lesson plan that guided their experiences in the workplace. Liz' comment below reflects this reality rather succinctly:

'[There is no learning plan], you just kind of watch and learn. Watch what they do and you just kind of pick it up.'

Furthermore, none of the schools offered any kind of 'course' or 'debriefing' for the apprentices to discuss and share their workplace experiences. For apprentices like Bonnie, such a debriefing would be essential in alerting the school's workplace coordinator to her lack of learning in the workplace:

'I'm still scrubbing the floors [at the salon]. I'm still not getting clients. And if a walk-in comes through the door, the other apprentice gets them, because she's just been there longer, it's just seniority.'

Not only does this waste the learning potential of RAP, it also makes these young people vulnerable to being exploited as a source of cheap labour.

Responsibilities versus Rights

In contrast to many European countries, Canada's labour market is relatively deregulated. Young people especially, during high school and post-secondary education, are both beneficiaries and victims of a low-salary, low-stability and low-protection labour market. Young people actively seek out these types of jobs as they are flexible enough with low levels of commitment to fit a school or university/college schedule. Employers benefit as they can hire young workers with very little commitment to long-time employment and at relatively low labour costs. If we add to this tradition of contingent youth employment the above-mentioned concerns regarding unregulated and un-monitored youth apprenticeships, it is little surprise that these placements can lead to various forms of exploitation, which are not recognized by students as such (see first quotation) and continue without interference by the schools (see second quotation):

They ask you to do something, you do it, like, as fast as you can, as good as you can ... be nice to them. If you sweep the floor, put some effort into it, make it look like you care about what you're doing, then they'll be like 'oh, this guy actually cares, he's doing something ... anything he does, no matter if it's a good job he likes to do, or a shitty job like taking out the garbage. He still puts the same effort into it (Riley).'

'No one ever really talks to me about the work I do, here at school' (Debbie).

What the students learn then is a focus on their responsibilities in the workplace, as defined by employers, but little about their rights, as set out in labour laws or in agreements between the school and the employer (which, as I have shown, rarely exist) or in apprenticeship regulations.

Positive Pathways

The concerns raised in the above findings notwithstanding, most students spoke very positively about their experiences in RAP and what participation means to them. For some students, RAP was indeed the reason they stayed in school and found some renewed meaning that ultimately could help them graduate, as this quotation by Nathan shows:

That's half the reason I took the RAP program. I was getting bored with school. I had no initiative to be here, I had no want to be here, to do anything. For me school was becoming a joke. And I decided that, listen, I'm doing nothing here. I mean I might as well do something with myself. At least do something that's doing something for me. And that was going out and getting a job. And I thought, why not go out, if I'm getting a job, why not let it have more than one benefit to myself. I'm getting paid, I'm getting credits [toward high school completion]. I mean, how can I complain with something like that?

In addition to making school more meaningful, participation in RAP also helped students thinking of their lives and careers beyond high school:

'Ever since I went into RAP, everything's been really good for me. ... I'm the only one going somewhere in my life right now, out of all my friends' (Debbie).

'Life in general became more meaningful. I just got the overview of what life is gonna be, you know, I really wanna get out of [school] and just start my life, start a career, get going' (Brent).

As the final quotation shows, RAP not only offered an educational alternative to those less academically inclined or interested, it also was attractive to those who have an aptitude and interest in manual work:

'I've always been good with my hands, I've never been book smart at all. I've always been fascinated with watching things get done. Like, you sit there and you watch them pour concrete foundations for your house, and watch them frame it, and you watch them put the plywood on and drywall it' (Dean).

Precisely because of the hopes and expectations these young people invested into apprenticeship training, Canadian educators and employers have a responsibility to provide young people with better and more meaningful vocational education experiences.

Conclusion

Given the continued marginal status of apprenticeships in Canada, both in high school and outside, there is little chance that programs like RAP can seriously address current or looming labour shortages in Canada. They can, however, offer alternative post-secondary education pathways to students who might be at risk of dropping out of high school or would otherwise enter the labour market without any further education or training. Herein lays the biggest potential strength of programs like RAP: that they are situated in a comprehensive system of secondary education that potentially offers the opportunity of entry into vocational training, without automatically precluding access to more academic forms of post-secondary education. Rather than the more restrictive streaming in tripartite school systems like Germany, those who participate in RAP or similar programs in Canada are left with the option to complete enough academic-level high-school courses to keep open a range of post-secondary alternatives. In this sense, they are closer to young people in Germany with *Abitur*⁵ who choose to complete an apprenticeship rather than enter university (see e.g., Pilz, 2009). In fact, the policy underlying the development of RAP is based on principles of new vocationalism, which aim for a stronger integration of academic and vocational learning (Benson, 1997; Grubb, 1996). Hamilton and Hurrelman (1994), for instance, argue that what makes youth apprenticeship programs (and other workplace-based learning programs) attractive is the fact that learning is integrated into everyday processes of the workplace, rather than constituting a 'total pedagogic interaction', as is the case with school-based learning.

In reality, as I have shown throughout, many students enter programs like RAP as a form of escape from the perceived drudgery of academic learning. Furthermore, schools and employers do little to provide students with the opportunities and the tools to develop the skills for the integration of academic and applied forms of learning. At the moment, there is an almost exclusively one-sided adjustment (the student adjusting to the culture and discipline of the workplace), lacking any form of integration into curriculum (Lehmann and Taylor, 2003). But it is exactly this integration that would be extremely useful for dealing with new conflicts, understanding new social relations, and being aware of one's rights in the workplace (Hamilton and Hurrelman, 1994). Related to this problem of integrating academic and vocational learning is the lack of learning objectives in RAP. What RAP students do at work does not seem to be regulated by any lesson or learning plans that the school may have discussed with employers. This makes it particularly difficult for

⁵ Abitur is the German secondary education certificate required for admission to university.

youth apprentices to come to terms with their new roles as employees and workers. The rather uncritical acceptance of power relations at work outlined in the findings section of this chapter raises serious concerns about the value of a program that is essentially part of the students' high school education and should therefore have some pedagogical value. However, students usually are not given a chance to discuss and reflect on these workplace social relations at school. Neither are they always aware of their rights at work.

At this stage, programs like RAP are not short of ambition and good intention, but in need of a stronger regulatory framework, which includes proper learning plans that guide the activities apprentices encounter in their placements and help employers be prepared to receive young people. It further requires a form of collaboration between schools and employers that extend beyond the development of amicable relationship to guarantee the continuation of placements, and instead involve mechanisms for schools to intervene on behalf of students when problems during placements occur.

This last point, the relative lack of placement opportunities offered by employers, also highlights the need for the development of a stronger infrastructure that creates incentives to offer placements.

More concretely, RAP students need to be provided with a venue in which to 'debrief' their workplace experiences with teachers and other RAP students. This could be achieved in regular classes they attend during their placement period, where they receive information about their rights in the workplace, labour laws, apprenticeship regulations, unions, and workplace safety. Furthermore, schools and employers (together with provincial regulatory body responsible for apprenticeship training) could draw up more detailed learning plans for the time students spend in the workplace. This would not only help teachers/work experience co-ordinators supervise and follow students' progress at work, but also formalize employers' commitment to entering into a work and learning/teaching relationship with students and help them develop strategies to manage the presence of very young workers in their workplaces. For participating students, such learning plans would be essential in highlighting the connections between the different forms of learning they encounter at work and at school.

Programs like RAP offer tremendous opportunity for alternative and meaningful educational and career pathways for young people. The students in this study indeed viewed their participation in RAP as a positive experience. Teachers, counsellors and employers, too, are sincerely concerned with the wellbeing of young people and the development of a skilled workforce. Yet, in their current form, programs like RAP are limited by exploitative workplace practices and unfulfilled learning potentials. Educators and policy makers need to be more aware of these educational

contradictions in order to develop youth apprenticeship programs that provide students with truly meaningful learning experiences as well as necessary workplace skills.

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