

The Canadian Learning Index (CLI)

A Brief Analysis

June 2006

On May 15, 2006, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) released its Composite Learning Index (CLI). The index is being characterized as an “innovative and powerful tool to inform Canadians about their progress in learning”.

The CLI is composed of 15 different indicators providing information about the different ways Canadians learn not only in school, but in the home, at work and in the community. In a nutshell, the statistics generated from the surveys used are combined to produce a single score reflecting lifelong learning in Canada. It is not unlike other indices in structure and proposed use. In fact, the CCL uses the CPI as a parallel example in explaining the CLI.

CTF had opportunity for input to the development of the CLI through meetings hosted by CCL prior to the public release of the index. In our press release on May 16, President Winston Carter stated “the index has the potential to enrich the debate on public education outcomes and move it beyond the narrow scope of school rankings and standardized test scores... CTF recognizes there are weaknesses and limitations in obtaining quality data on a number of the outcome indicators in the CLI. Although more research is required to improve the index, we are encouraged that the CCL has recognized the importance of producing and publicizing a balanced education index that values and measures outcomes that go beyond standardized test scores.” This analysis does not alter the supporting statements made in the initial press release.

The index takes as its conceptual framework, the four pillars of learning developed by Jacques Delors and his work with UNESCO through the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century . The four pillars are:

- Learning to Know
- Learning to Do
- Learning to Live Together
- Learning to Be

Specific indicators were identified and categorized under the pillars where appropriate. One of the difficulties with an index of this nature, as noted by CCL, is the availability of reliable pan-Canadian data. The research used as the indicator base is essentially the best available. It may be, over time, that new pan-Canadian research will provide information that would be added to the index to provide a stronger profile of the specific categories.

Each of the “pillars” was given a weighting based upon their relationship to select social and economic outcomes. The social outcomes are: adult literacy, voter participation, and population health. The selected economic outcomes are: unemployment rate and income.

To arrive at the weighting, a method known as structural equation modeling was used to build a link between the indicators and their actual impact on the economic and social outcomes of learning. This approach enables a more accurate analysis of learning using the index.

Table A attached, gives a breakdown of the four pillars, and the indicators used under each heading. The weighting is also provided as a percentage of the total index values in brackets after each heading.

While there may be debate over why certain indicators were used and questions over the methodology of determining the weighting, the index appears to have been developed with reliability and credibility as key priorities. This is an instrument that attempts to quantify the degree to which lifelong learning is fostered. In other words... if you were creating a healthy environment for lifelong learning, the index shows which location is likely to be better at it than others. It is helpful in drawing valid connections between education and prosperity and provides a much more balanced approach to identifying learning outcomes and their impact on society than reliance on test scores.

The use of the index by those in a position to act on the findings are most important. CTF and Member organizations could use the results to support objectives we are pursuing within provincial/territorial jurisdictions, and the issues we are trying to address at the federal level. One of the biggest difficulties may lie in getting people to understand the index properly. The news reports generated by the launch, very quickly settled on the easy game of rating and comparing the “scores” of one city or community with another. The CCL makes valiant attempts to downplay the ranking function of the index. It states in its web material that “learning is community-based, so comparisons of communities are more useful than comparisons of provinces. The purpose of the index is to monitor the progress of learning over time and to demonstrate the state of learning in communities across Canada. ... Although scores for communities and regions are available, the purpose of the index is not to rank one against the other.” The fact that the released material contained a table comparing large Canadian cities did little to help this contention.

The backgrounders, fact sheets and results and tables pertinent to understanding and interpreting the CLI, were extremely thorough and comprehensive (see <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/CompositeLearningIndex2/Resources.html>). Specifically, the fact sheets, which provide a summary of the results of each pan-Canadian indicator examined separately, are resources that may prove just as valuable as the index itself. The CCL has made great effort to educate stakeholders and the public about the CLI and this is evident through its website (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL>), with information on the index ranging from basic to increasingly detailed and complex.

The CLI is the first of its kind and therefore, is a “work in progress”. No doubt, the index will be subject to ongoing analysis and revision. Consequently, CTF’s interest in and monitoring of the index and its implementation will continue to ensure that teacher views are considered as the initiative matures.

TABLE A

Learning to Know (34%)	Data Source
Literacy (reading, math, problem solving)	Programme for International Student Association (PISA)
Dropout rates	Labour Force Survey
Participation in post-secondary education of 20- to 24-year-olds	Labour Force Survey
University attainment	Labour Force Survey

Learning to Do (17%)	Data Source
Participation in job-related training	Adult Education and Training Survey
Availability of work training	Workplace and Employee Survey
Access to learning institutions	InfoCanada data (geographic data)

Learning to Live Together (26%)	Data Source
Charitable giving	Longitudinal Administrative Databank (LAD)
Volunteerism	National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participation
Participation in clubs, associations	Survey of Household Spending
Access to community institutions (churches, clubs)	InfoCanada data (geographic data)

Learning to Be (23%)	Data Source
Exposure to learning media	Survey of Household Spending
Exposure to performing arts, museums and cultural venues	Survey of Household Spending
Exposure to sports and recreation	Survey of Household Spending
Access to cultural resources	InfoCanada data (geographic data)