

Preliminary Interim Report 1:
ESPORT-PLATO Project Evaluation

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Table of contents

Table of contents.....	2
List of Tables.....	4
Preliminary	5
Project background and overview	5
Partners	7
Project direction: The Advisory Group	10
Evaluation process	12
Background to the model – participatory action research (PAR).....	12
Data collection – principles and strategies	12
Role of the evaluation consultants	14
Scope of the evaluation (initially proposed).....	15
Occasional Reports.....	17
Overall chronology of the project	18
Project evolution.....	20
Saskatchewan Penitentiary	20
Virtual community initiative.....	20
Project outcomes to date.....	22
Cape Breton	22
Cape Breton results	26
Cape Breton – status, planning.....	35
Other projects	35
Community of Practice (CoP) - Virtual Community initiative.....	40
Project plans, observations	43
REFERENCES.....	44
ATTACHMENT 1	45
Evaluation Framework (Summary): ESPORT Demonstration Project.....	45
ATTACHMENT 2	49
Readiness Check.....	49
ATTACHMENT 3	50
Extracts from communications with project participants	50
ATTACHMENT 4	51
OCCASIONAL REPORT #1, February 4, 2005.....	51
ATTACHMENT 5	54
OCCASIONAL REPORT #2, February 22, 2005.....	54
ATTACHMENT 6	56
OCCASIONAL REPORT #3, March 18, 2005	56
ATTACHMENT 7	62
OCCASIONAL REPORT #4, April 8, 2005	62
ATTACHMENT 8	63
ESPORT team meeting notes, Ottawa, April 27, 2005	63

ATTACHMENT 9.....	69
OCCASIONAL REPORT #5, May 17, 2005.....	69
ATTACHMENT 10.....	70
OCCASIONAL REPORT #6, June 21, 2005.....	70

List of Tables

Table 1: Chronology of major project events.....	19
Table 2: Results of Readiness Questionnaire (ranked from most to least agreement).....	29

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Project background and overview

The ESPORT (*Essential Skills Portfolio*; initially, *ESCORT*) project formally commenced on October 17, 2004. The purpose of the ESPORT project was described as follows:

The ESPORT Demonstration Project will evaluate, enhance, and promote an Internet-delivered, computer mediated process designed to assist low-literate adults in choosing, qualifying for, and obtaining entry-level employment consistent with their interests and abilities. The project targets two of the groups identified in *Knowledge Matters* [<http://www11.sdc.gc.ca/sl-ca/doc/report.shtml>] as sources of workers for the knowledge economy: youth and Aboriginal people, and a third group – displaced workers. (“Report to Advisors,” November 7, 2004).

The project, consisting of four phases, was to be conducted over the period October 2004, to May 2006. Participating programs, through funding provided by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC), were to be located in Cape Breton, Newfoundland, and in selected aboriginal communities in the West (Alberta, B.C.). The four phases of project were as follows (“ESPORT Demonstration – Gantt Chart,” 2004):

1. Phase 1 (October 2004 to March 2005): Concept refinement and project development
 - 1.1 Integration of software
 - 1.2 Development of an evaluation plan, framework
 - 1.3 Development of a communication plan
 - 1.4 Development of workshop content
 - 1.5 Website development
 - 1.6 Integration (articulation, alignment, testing) of PLATO with ES profiles.
2. Phase 2 (October 2004 to April 2005): Preparation for implementation
 - 2.1 Review of LDA implementation and evaluation plans.
 - 2.2 Creation and revisions of facilitator training materials.
 - 2.3 Creation and revisions of user documentation.
 - 2.4 Training of ESPORT hotline analysts.
 - 2.5 Training of ESPORT technical support staff.
 - 2.6 Development of Web support utilities and content.
 - 2.7 Internal training of PLATO education consultants.
 - 2.8 Implementation of design recommendations.
3. Phase 3 (October 2004 to May 2006): Project implementation
 - 3.1 Workshops with LDAs.
 - 3.2 Finalization of evaluation framework.
 - 3.3 Data-gathering.
4. Phase 4 (June 2005 to May 2006): Reporting and dissemination of results
 - 4.1 Data-analysis and vetting with participants.
 - 4.2 Draft final report.
 - 4.3 Meetings with participants, stakeholders, re final report content.
 - 4.4 Final report submitted.

Partners

The parties collaborating in the project consisted of the planning and funding partners, and the programs (“Report to Advisors,” 2004).

Planning and funding partners. The following contributed to the planning and/or the funding of the project.

- Cummins EP Consulting, Inc. (CEP). Patrick Cummins, president. Developers/owners of ESPORT (Essential Skills Portfolio), an Essential Skills assessment, documentation, and career planning tool. Prepared the proposal to HRSDC that resulted in funding for this project. Early stages of ESPORT were proposed through and developed in cooperation with TVLT New Media Language Training, Inc.
- PLATO Learning (Canada), Inc. Grant Bishop, general manager. Provides targeted remediation – discrete skills assessment and online adult basic education courseware articulated to Essential Skills Profiles.
- TVLT New Media Language, Inc. Rob McBride, president. Communications and Web-design consultants, designing and disseminating a “public face” for ESPORT. TVLT, with funding from the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT), developed the initial website incorporating most of the important elements of the current ESPORT. This resource was offered to the public by TeleEducation N.B., and further developed by with funding from CanLearn (including provision of a French version). After the termination of TeleEducation NB, the product was moved to a server at CEP, and an agreement was reached between TVLT and CEP to continue development of the package. At this point, the support of HRSDC allowed CEP and PLATO Learning (Canada) to partner with other agencies to plan demonstration projects, including the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC), the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL), and the Cape Breton Education Consortium.

- P. Fahy Consulting (PFC). Patrick J. Fahy, PhD, president, project lead evaluator. The external evaluator of the project, represented by its president (and the writer of this report, Patrick J. Fahy. To assist with evaluation activities, PFC retained the services of Ingenia Training, of Vancouver (Ramona Materi, president).
- Wallace Educational Research and Consulting. Mark Wallace, principal consultant. Database and information management. Designed the databases underlying the ESPORT system; articulated Essential Skills Profiles with PLATO learning materials and assessments. Currently encouraging information sharing through dynamics of “community of practice”; managing internal communications and FAQs.
- Activoweb. Peter Merritt, principal consultant. Technical management, Web construction and maintenance for ESPORT system.
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). Annette Huton, Program Analyst. This federal government department funded development of the basic skills assessment and planning tool, ESPORT, to help learners prepare for entry-level employment. Also funded the later applications of ESPORT with the partners listed above. In the project, HRSDC was also represented by Suha Taissi, Labour Market analyst, and Colleen Meloche, Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative.

Programming partners. The partnering organizations where ESPORT-PLATO programming was to be introduced and evaluated were chosen for their ability to provide access to clients and programming conditions consistent with the project purpose:

Evaluation, enhancement, and promotion of Internet-delivered, computer-mediated process that assists low-literate adults to qualify for and obtain entry-level employment consistent with their individual interests and abilities. (*Logical Framework Analysis*)

Each programming partner was to provide clients with access to ESPORT-PLATO, and to evaluation processes, in locations where services were delivered to clients (these were called *local delivery agencies* [LDAs] in the project's terminology). The original project identified three programming partners (from the *Proposal Template for Proponents [HRP 1.1.1]*):

1. The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council Of Canada (AHRDCC); a pillar of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy. Working through strategic public and private sector partnerships, they developed innovative employment solutions for Aboriginal people. Their mission is to see full participation of Aboriginal people in Canadian labour markets. Through partnerships with corporate, educational, government, and aboriginal leaders, the Council pioneers ways to increase skills and training opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada.
2. The Cape Breton Education Consortium is an umbrella group that represents employment service providers in the former industrial Cape Breton region. It is comprised of the North Side Economic Development Assistant Corporation, the Glace Bay and Sidney YMCA, and the Horizon Achievement Centre. These are organizations funded through joint contracts with HRDC and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services to provide employment counseling services and/or employment readiness services to individuals facing multiple barriers to employment.
3. The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labor (NLFL) is the main umbrella organization for the labor movement in Newfoundland and Labrador with a mandate to promote the interests of its affiliates, to generally advance the economic and social welfare of both unionized and non-unionized workers, and to advocate on behalf of workers and the general public in such areas as economic development, social programs, equality, and human rights. The NLFL currently represents approximately 50,000 workers

in 25 affiliated unions across the province, in a both the public and private sectors.

As noted elsewhere in this report, these proposed to partners joined in the project at different times and in different forms, as their funding and operational circumstances permitted.

Project direction: The Advisory Group

The Advisory Board comprised volunteer members knowledgeable about and interested in the project, who have advised and supported ESPORT during earlier stages of its development. The core members of this group were (“Report to Advisors,” 2004):

- Brigid Hayes – Director, Labour, Canadian Labour and Business Centre, Ottawa.
- Bonnie Kennedy – Executive Director, Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment, Ottawa.
- Craig Hall – Director of Corporate Strategy, Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC).
- Annette Huton - Program Analyst, Skills Information, Human Resources Partnerships, Human Investment Programs, Human Resources Development Skills Development Canada, Ottawa.

Other advisors who attended the first meeting of the Advisory Group, November 9, 2004, in Ottawa, included:

- Patrick Cummins, President, Cummins EP Consulting, Inc. (project manager).
- Patrick J. Fahy, President, P. Fahy Consulting, Edmonton (lead evaluator, and author of this report).
- Trina Maher, Manager, Aboriginal Skills and Learning, AHRDCC, Ottawa (representing Craig Hall).
- Ramona Materi, President, Ingenia Training, Vancouver (evaluator).
- Colleen Meloche, HRSDC, Ottawa.

- Suha Taissi, Policy Advisor, HRSDC, Ottawa.

Originally, four meetings of the Advisory Group were envisaged: the first, prior to implementation, to look particularly at the evaluation plan and the communication plan (this occurred in Ottawa, November 9, 2004); the second, during implementation, to consider emerging formative recommendations of the evaluation; the third, following the major implementation, to consider the Interim Report (this document), and recommend follow-up; and the fourth to advise and reflect on the content and structure of the final report (due May 2006).

The role of the Advisory Group (AG) was described as follows in the Evaluation Plan:

The AG will be the initial source of guidance on the evaluation plan for this project. As part of the face-to-face meeting with the Advisory Group, work will begin on core elements of the *Evaluation Framework*, including development or review of such evaluation components as the following:

1. Persons to be involved.
2. Schedule of key events.
3. Philosophy guiding the project and the evaluation (proposed is PAR).
4. Specific objectives of the project and the evaluation.
5. Observation and data-gathering processes, and data to be gathered.
6. Communication plan, methods, and schedule.
7. Reflection and (re)planning processes.
8. Reports to be produced; vetting and dissemination process.

At the meeting of the AG in Ottawa (November 9, 2004), those in attendance endorsed the above as the role for this group.

Evaluation process

Background to the model – participatory action research (PAR)

The evaluation of the project was based upon principles of *participatory action research* (PAR), described as follows (“Evaluation proposal: ESPORT Demonstration Project, Draft 5” 2004):

PAR is a method of research where creating a positive social change is the predominant driving force. PAR grew out of social and educational research and exists today as one of the few research methods which embraces principles of participation and reflection, and empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation (Seymour-Rolls & Hughes, 1998).

In PAR evaluations, the focus is on production of results useful to the participants in making better decisions about possible action. *Meaningfulness* and *usefulness* are the crucial criteria for judging PAR results; participants must be able to understand and use evaluation findings. Through reflection and dialogue – the opportunity to think and talk about the results – everyone concerned should have the opportunity to understand what is being discovered, and to express their views about its implications. The purpose of the evaluation was to assure that the project’s lessons were absorbed in a meaningful and collaborative fashion, and that the project benefited from its discoveries.

The evaluation was designed to apply PAR principles to assure that all parties to the project had input, received information, and shared in decisions about the project’s development. An iterative process of *observation, reflection, planning, and action* was used to give all participants input into project development and implementation.

Data collection – principles and strategies

Various methods of collecting evaluation data were identified, based on core principles:

- Anyone asked to participate in any evaluation activity could decline to participate, or could withdraw from any activity, at any time, without explanation, and without prejudice to their ongoing involvement.
- Those wishing to remove themselves and/or their input from the study could do so at any time.
- Any information collected during the evaluation process was kept completely confidential and secure at all times. No one who participated in the project was ever identified in any report or publication, unless they expressly agree to be identified. Written permission was requested from anyone for use of any information which might identify them personally.
- All information generated or data collected during the evaluation was to be destroyed at an agreed upon date after the end of the project.

The principal data-gathering methods and strategies proposed for the evaluation included the following:

- **On-site or online interviews.** Wherever possible, the evaluators visited all sites personally, and meet with and interviewed directly as many participants as possible. The evaluators also conducted interviews using various technologies (telephone, computer conferencing, VOIP), or posted messages or questions on the project website for general comment and discussion by participants. The evaluators explained their intentions regarding any information generated by any of these methods.
- **Questionnaires, opinionnaires.** These surveys were administered in various forms, including face-to-face, oral or written, or electronic. Participants were asked to express their opinions, or describe their views or experiences, on these. Surveys were completed by an interviewer taking down the subject's comments, or by the subject directly.
- **Direct observations.** Evaluators, when present at learning centres, observed (with permission) operations and interactions directly. The evaluators made notes of their observations.

- **Records (system-generated and paper-based).** Program records of clients' activities, and personal, work-related, and academic histories, were accessed. Informed consent and confidentiality were assured in any such secondary usage of these data (Medical Research Council of Canada, 1998). Any reports kept the identities of participants confidential, and no one other than the evaluators saw information containing identities of individuals.
- **Document analysis.** The evaluators used reports and other documents that added useful information to the evaluation. Before any documents were used, names and other identifying information were removed, and any identifying information retained in the reports was kept strictly confidential (seen only by the evaluators).

Role of the evaluation consultants

The evaluation consultants were involved in a variety of tasks during the project, including:

- Helping to identify and contact anyone who should be included in the evaluation.
- Explaining the evaluation to anyone involved or interested in the project.
- Assisting participants to state their views and suggestions about various questions the project was intended to address.
- Helping participants to communicate with each other, and monitoring the overall interaction process.
- Summarizing the results of discussions for participants, and asking them to clarify or comment on any questions arising from the ongoing discussions and planning.
- Monitoring progress toward answering important project questions; writing reports to summarize what the results seemed to indicate regarding the project's important questions.

- Reporting the findings and conclusions reached by the project, and helping to make various identified stakeholders aware of the project's results.

The overall goal of the evaluation was to help the participants to achieve their goals for the project. The PAR model regarded all participants as “researchers,” each playing a key role in the evaluation process, “including, but not limited to, [producing] information relevant to making decisions, judgments, comparisons, or goal attainment assessments” (Patton, 1975). All participants were asked to regard themselves as responsible for helping the evaluation to be successful in achieving its various goals (Masters, 1995), and the evaluation consultants’ role was described as supporting the participants, especially in communications, data gathering and analysis, recordkeeping and monitoring, and reporting (including dissemination of results).

Scope of the evaluation (initially proposed)

The following questions were initially identified as proposed as legitimate for the evaluation. Under the PAR model, these were subject to review, reflection, and adoption/modification by the participants. These questions suggest the kinds of data the evaluators felt would be needed to address the fundamental project goals. This report will show, in the following sections, the questions that were ultimately identified by the participants, and addressed in the evaluation.

1. Participants
 - 2.1 Definition of “participant,” “participation”
 - 2.1.1 Roles, types
 - 2.1.2 Relationship to the project
 - 2.1.3 Inclusion in the evaluation
 - 2.2 Employment history of learners
 - 2.3 Training history of learners
 - 2.4 Details of participation (per PC, 11/24/04):
 - 2.4.1 Time-on-task before first resume?
 - 2.4.2 Total time from commencement and first resume?
 - 2.4.3 Time spent on each section (Home, Interest, Inventory, Assessment, etc?)
 - 2.4.4 Time spent on each of the skills in the Assessment section?
 - 2.4.5 Number of sessions spent per section, and in Assessment?

- 2.4.6 Recurrency: participants working again on previously mastered material?
 - 2.4.7 Activities followed by long periods of inactivity? (“Discouraging” activities?)
 - 2.5 Personal characteristics of learners (relevant to training or the project)
 - 2.6 Personal goals, objectives of participants
 - 2.6.1 Listing of these (taxonomy)
 - 2.6.2 Consistency and compatibility of these among stakeholders
 - 2.7 Barriers (experienced or anticipated)
 - 2.7.1 For all: type, severity, origin, possible solutions
 - 2.8 Overall assessment of the experience of participating
2. Programs
- 2.1 Enrolment history:
 - 2.1.1 Numbers and types of clients (classifications to be developed in consultation with AG, LDAs)
 - 2.1.2 Summary personal characteristics of clients
 - 2.1.3 Success/completion/retention rates
 - 2.1.4 Relationship to employers, other agencies, community
 - 2.2 Programming history
 - 2.2.1 Courses offered
 - 2.2.2 Relationship with other training agencies
 - 2.2.3 Impact of ESPORT on training program
 - 2.3 Counseling history
 - 2.3.1 Employment counseling: career planning
 - 2.3.2 Personal counseling, advising
 - 2.3.3 Relations with other agencies
 - 2.4 Employment history
 - 2.4.1 Employability of graduates (anecdotal and objective, if available)
 - 2.4.2 Employment rates of graduates: immediate, long-term
 - 2.4.3 Relationship with employers
 - 2.4.4 HRSDC benefits usage after graduation
 - 2.4.5 Views of HRSDC counselors, case workers
 - 2.5 Relation of project to above
 - 2.5.1 Impact of ESPORT project on relationships, perceptions
3. Technology
- 3.1 Technologies used
 - 3.1.1 Delivery
 - 3.1.2 Support

- 3.1.3 Planning, administration, management, recordkeeping, reporting, assessment, etc.
- 3.2 Success indicators (measures of mastery, competency)
 - 3.2.1 Tests
 - 3.2.2 Practica, internships, apprenticeships
- 3.3 Adaptation indicators (satisfaction, usage, proficiency, persistence/retention, perceived value-adds)
- 3.4 Program impact
 - 3.4.1 Role of technology: former, present, possible (or expected) future
 - 3.4.2 New or potential capabilities of programs with ESPORT available to them
- 4. Outcome assessments
 - 4.1 Sustainability
 - 4.1.1 Of the pilot
 - 4.1.2 Beyond the pilot phase – all parties (especially those expected to adopt the model)
 - 4.1.3 LDA ongoing sustainability needs
 - 4.2 Adaptation to ESPORT
 - 4.2.1 User comments, experiences, suggestions
 - 4.2.2 Delivery and support provisions, issues
 - 4.2.3 Delivery agency experiences, requirements, acceptance
 - 4.2.4 Learner experiences, observations, suggestions
 - 4.2.5 Professional development requirements
 - 4.3 Community impact
 - 4.3.1 Employers
 - 4.3.2 Support agencies
 - 4.3.3 Referral agencies
 - 4.3.4 Funding agencies
 - 4.3.5 Others
 - 4.4 Learner impacts
 - 4.4.1 Learning
 - 4.4.2 Employability
 - 4.4.3 Attitudes (“incipient action”) – plans, intentions
 - 4.4.4 Further training activity, plans

Occasional Reports

In order to help the project management monitor adoption and progress of the project, *occasional reports* were provided from time to time based on emerging data or

conditions noted as part of the evaluation process. These were issued to project management as follows:

- February 4, 2005: Occasional Report #1 (based on results of the *Readiness Survey*, Sydney centres).
- February 22, 2005: Occasional Report #2 (a two-question check-in with the Sydney participants, regarding present usage of ESPORT-PLATO, and any issues that may have arisen).
- March 4, 2005: Occasional Report #3 (on a technical problem/question that had arisen in one centre in Cape Breton, which had both a training and a technical implications for the project) was commenced. This report was completed and submitted on March 18.
- April 8, 2005: Occasional Report #4 (describing usage of ESPORT-PLATO in Cape Breton, over the period January 24 to April 1).
- May 17, 2005: Occasional Report #5 (an update to Report #4, showing usage in Cape Breton to mid-May).

Copies of each of the occasional reports are provided in the attachments to this report (see Table of Contents).

Overall chronology of the project

Table 1 shows the major events of the evaluation process, in chronological order.

Table 1: Chronology of major project events

Date, location	Event
October 17, 2004	Contract signed, project officially commences.
November 2	Evaluation plan, version 1.
November 9; Ottawa	Advisory Committee meeting.
December	Version 1, evaluation <i>Framework</i> .
January 18 – 21, 2005; Cape Breton.	Workshop, Cape Breton LDAs.
January 24	Check-in questionnaire, by e-mail, to Cape Breton group.
February 4	- CMC conference announced on Alphanet. - <i>Occasional Report #1</i> .
February 7 (week)	Software problems cause delay implementation; some sites wary (see Denis e-mail, 2/9/05, Attachment 3).
February 9	Sydney group advised that Manager Employment Delivery Support, Employment Programs, Halifax should be contacted re project.
February 14	Proposal for expansion to Corrections Services Canada (CSC), Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Prince Albert, submitted. [Note: this proposal was not subsequently approved. Despite the fact that CSC is not part of the project, data from this site may be included here, for comparative and descriptive purposes.]
February 22	<i>Occasional Report #2</i> .
February 28	Report from Sydney (NEDAC) of a problem for students migrating from ESPORT testing (questionnaire and quizzes) to PLATO exercises. Response from S. Kimner.
March 1	E-mail from T. Clahane re work on NEDAC migration problem; promised solution or plan for one by March 4.
March 2	Estimates submitted for addition of four sites: London, Ont. (80 clients); Vancouver Immigrant Services (60), SUCCESS (60), and MOSAIC (60).
March 3	CSC advises it will not proceed with the project as proposed (see <i>note</i> , Feb. 14).
March 18	<i>Occasional Report #3</i> .
April 8	<i>Occasional Report #4</i> .
April 20	Suggestion by Steven Kimner of further training for Cape Breton sites.
April 22	Cape Breton training scheduled by S. Kimner for June 8 – 9.
April 27	ESPORT Team meeting, Ottawa.
May 17	<i>Occasional Report #5</i>
May 18	<i>Interim Report #1</i> (draft) to project manager.
June 8 – 9	Cape Breton re-training session; Stephen Kimner.
June 21	<i>Occasional Report #6</i>
July	<i>Preliminary Interim Report #1</i> (this document) released.

Project evolution

Saskatchewan Penitentiary

Subsequent to the above activities, expansion of the project was considered in early 2005, with the potential addition of three new partners: Corrections Services Canada (CSC), Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Prince Albert; a site in London, Ontario (80 clients); and three sites in Vancouver, each with 60 clients (Immigrant Services Society, MOSAIC, and SUCCESS). (As noted in Table 1 [February 14], CSC subsequently decided to proceed with a trial of ESPORT without an external evaluation; nevertheless, results from the CSC site may be included in this and subsequent project reports, for comparative and descriptive purposes.)

Expansion of the project in these sites was based upon the original proposal, with scaling of the budget to permit travel to and contact with the new participants. In the case of CSC, there were some differences in focus, as follows:

- The project was to be for six months, to end by September 30, 2005. [The term of the trial was subsequently set at nine months.]
- CSC wished to focus only on ESPORT for this assessment.
- There were to be two matched groups of 50 inmates per group in the evaluation: inmates who were tested educationally on intake, and those who were not. The purpose was to determine whether untested inmates (those who, for various reasons, were not initially deemed candidates for education) might gravitate or be referred to ESPORT for employment-related purposes as their sentences advanced, as compared with those who were tested and placed in an educational program from the start.

Virtual community initiative

On April 27, 2005, a meeting was held in Ottawa to discuss implementation of a “virtual community” for facilitators and users. Under the coordination of Mark Wallace, the meeting was intended to introduce some new members of the ESPORT team, to

review project plans and processes, and especially to discuss the implementation of a virtual *community of practice* (CoP) in the project, an online community intended to provide support and communications for all participants, especially facilitators. At that time, Mark described his intentions: "My current work on the project is to develop a 'virtual' community for our facilitators, and for our learners. This community will fulfill a vital help-desk function, but the objective is that it will also serve to connect and support ESPORT users – and not just when they run into problems."

Five objectives were stated for the meeting:

1. Greater understanding of the whole project, not just our own role;
2. Less need to use [the project manager] as chief conduit, when it is more efficient to communicate directly with team members;
3. More opportunities for synergy through the increased project awareness and the increased contact;
4. Chance to work towards the development of a corporate identity/vision;
5. By encouraging the options and feedback of all ESPORT members, the sense of ownership and pride in product is increased.

The agenda discussed at this one-day meeting included the following:

1. Communications
 - a. "Filtering" communications
 - b. Team intercommunications
 - c. Archiving important communications
 - d. Media for communications (discussion boards, web pages)
2. Terminology and common language
3. Roles and responsibilities in decision-making
4. Project milestones – review and mapping procedures
5. Name change – "ESPORT"
6. Publicizing and "marketing" the community of practice (CoP) concept to project participants
7. Stock-taking and planning review, next phases

Prior to the meeting, background readings were circulated to provide participants with information on the CoP concept, and to generate initial thinking. The meeting was attended by eight individuals, one of whom served as scribe. See *Community of Practice – Virtual Community*, below, for the present status of this initiative.

Project outcomes to date

Cape Breton

Initial Workshop (January 18 – 21, 2005). At the conclusion of the initial training workshop, an assessment was made of the outcomes. The following is a discussion of the results.

This workshop was the first to be conducted; it was held in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, and was attended by representatives of the local delivery agencies:

- Cape Breton Black Employment Office (CBBEO)
- YMCA – Sydney
- Work Activity Centre
- The Entrepreneurial Centre
- YMCA – Glace Bay
- New Waterford Employment Outreach

The agenda for the workshop was as follows:

- Introduction – what is ESPORT?
- Portfolio building practice
- Introduction to administration software
- Essential Skills (ES) introduction
- PLATO participant process
- PLATO management
- Evaluation – introduction
- Administration – introduction
- Evaluation – part 1
- Administration – part 1

- Recruitment
- Delivery
- Recordkeeping
- Communication
- Evaluation – part 2
- Presentations by LDAs
- Draft memoranda of understanding (MOUs)
- Communications

The workshop allowed participants to meet one another, receive training, practice initial ESPORT and PLATO implementation procedures, and make plans for the further conduct of the project. Consistent with the *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) model, the focus was on the first three phases of the cycle of observation-reflection-planning-action. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were asked to generate a list of the important questions they felt the project should strive to answer. The following were the questions listed:

Training and preparation/recruitment

1. How well did staff training prepare the facilitators?
2. How useful were the handouts and other documents?
3. What number of clients (optimum and minimum) should be recruited?
4. What types of clients should/should not be recruited?
5. How did clients find out about the program?
6. What were the most effective ways of publicizing the program?
7. What motivated clients to enroll in the program?

Client and facilitator

8. How did ESPORT-PLATO training affect client employability?
9. How did the training affect clients' skill levels?
10. Did the training affect clients' learning directions, plans?
11. Did the training affect clients' career path development?
12. How many portfolios and resumes were generated?

13. What were the views of clients regarding the portfolio development process and results?
14. How many resumes were sent out?
15. How did the training affect clients' abilities to identify skill deficiencies?
16. What was done to keep resources in place at the end of the project, so clients could complete their programs?
17. What were the characteristics of the clients who benefited most?
18. What communications needs were identified, and how effectively were these met?
19. What changes in client self-perception or confidence resulted from the project?
20. Did the project reduce incidents of out-migration from the region or the province?
21. Did the project change the perceptions of the clients about their personal and employment options in Cape Breton?
22. What life changes resulted from participation in the project?
23. What motivated clients to complete the program?

Program, Administration

24. What administrative support or management needs were identified, and how effectively were these met?
25. Did participants feel the project and the PAR evaluation incorporated their concerns and viewpoints?
26. How well did the PAR model succeed in achieving its objectives for collaboration, iteration, participation, empowerment, and effectiveness?
27. How did the facilitators' time commitment compare with other delivery mechanisms?
28. What is the optimum number of ESPORT-PLATO licenses for the region?
29. How were ethical concerns addressed related to the project evaluation (especially informed consent)?

Stakeholders

30. What long-term social, economic, or educational benefits were likely to result from the program?
31. What were the results of the labour market analysis in each region?
32. What effect did the project have on referrals to the program from outside agencies?
33. How did costs of the program compare with other delivery mechanisms?
34. What were the views of stakeholder groups or individuals?

Technical

35. How user-friendly was the ESPORT-PLATO system?
36. How effectively was user technical support handled?
37. How adequate and useful was client tracking?
38. How well was client tracking used to help clients work effectively with the ESPORT-PLATO system?

The above questions formed the basis for further discussion of the project's goals. From the initial list, 15 questions were identified, and related data-gathering processes and timelines were developed. In the process of identifying these key evaluation questions, the following issues were identified and resolved:

- Target numbers of clients to be enrolled in the project.
- Special focus on youth.
- Importance of monitoring time requirements for management and conduct of the project, including evaluation duties.
- Importance of recruitment strategies, to assure sufficient numbers of appropriate enrolments in the project.
- Achieving comfort with the ESPORT and PLATO systems; need for practice to achieve proficiency.
- Monitoring client adaptation to the systems involved, especially regarding literacy and computer skills requirements.

By the end of the workshop, the participants were able to articulate the key research questions, requiring development of the following research tools:

- Access to confidential client intake information, via an informed consent and release of information form, to be developed in consultation with HRSDC.
- Paper files
- Online information
- ESPORT and PLATO system-generated information
- Client survey procedures and tools.
- Facilitator (instructor) survey procedures and tools.
- ESPORT Administration Form

At this time, the decision was made to modify the ESPORT Administration Form to permit noting how the client heard about the project, or how the client was referred to the project.

Cape Breton results

Observer's report. During the first two days of the workshop, an observer attended, to note the interaction and provided her personal assessment of the group's response to training events and topics. The observer was an experienced adult educator and graduate student, who was contracted for this purpose by the project manager; she was introduced to the group as an assistant to the project manager and the evaluators. The observer appeared to be well accepted by the group, as it turned out that she worked in a job similar to that of the facilitators, and she was a local Cape Breton resident. (The following draws heavily on the observer's notes and report.)

The observer's comments were recorded chronologically in her report. The following is taken verbatim from the "summary / themes" section of her report, completed shortly after the workshop was completed.

Literacy issues

The issue of literacy levels and plain language was raised continuously by participants on days 1 and 2. It was agreed care must be taken to select

appropriate clients or client self esteem could be damaged. Participants who work exclusively with clients with lower literacy levels were especially concerned, wondering if clients would have the concentration required to move through the exercises, even if the facilitator assisted.

Technical issues/glitches

All participants are seeking a user friendly system. Noted glitches must be corrected. This is particularly important when working with clients with lower literacy levels. Participants want to be confident in the system before they present it to clients and they want to know the technical support will be there when they need it.

Facilitation/evaluation time required

Time is always a factor in a client centered environment. Participants noted they will have to be on hand while clients are completing the exercises and as facilitators, they will still need to bring information/resources to the process. No one program does it all. The fact that the participants asked many questions about the logistics of recruitment, facilitation, evaluation and the time involved, indicates commitment to the project

Relationship between programs

During day 2, it was obvious participants were making the connection between ESPORT and PLATO and were becoming excited by the potential opportunities for clients. Comments indicated the participants saw a concrete link to the labor market and felt the essential skills pieces would allow them to guide clients with unrealistic career aspirations gently into reality.

In addition to the above, the following observations recorded by the observer pertained to various elements of the workshop:

- A spell-checker needed for the resume program.
- Clients not likely to type long answers; facilitators may need to assist with fill-in items, especially for marginally literate, and those lacking typing skills.

- Amount of assistance (“hand-holding”) needed is a potential concern, should be monitored.
- Knowledge of PLATO is important background.
- Participants commented that the program is more concrete than CHOICES and occupations are realistic in relation to labor market.
- Presentation by Annette Hutton (HRSD) on Essential Skills was viewed as very useful.
- By day 2, participants were becoming obviously excited as they moved through the training. Comments were made that they “could see the potential,” especially for career development. One commented that clients will be encouraged if they can see a direction, see where they are going, toward a real job; this may motivate previously unmotivated clients. Several other participants noted the program is a good introduction to reality for clients with unrealistic career goals.
- The PLATO trainer showed the ability to remain unobtrusive while being quickly available when needed.
- During day 2, it was obvious participants were making the connection between ESPORT and PLATO and were becoming excited by the potential opportunities for clients.
- By day 2, notably fewer concerns were being expressed about the time required by the program.

Readiness questionnaire. In the week immediately following the workshop, facilitators were asked to provide feedback on their feelings of readiness to proceed with the elements of the project (Attachment 2). The survey asked facilitators to rate elements on a scale from 0 (completely frustrating and totally unproductive) to 10 (completely successful and fully productive). The following table summarizes the results of this survey.

Table 2: Results of Readiness Questionnaire (ranked from most to least agreement)

Questionnaire item ¹	Mean	S.D.
9. Contact the project administrator (Patrick) when necessary.	9.5	0.84
13. Know where to go for assistance if needed.	9.5	0.84
11. Contact the project evaluators (Pat & Mona) when necessary.	9.3	1.03
14. Have the right technology for the project.	9.2	0.84
10. Contact the PLATO trainer (Stephen) when necessary.	9.2	0.98
8. Recognize outcomes or findings important to the evaluation.	8.3	1.75
15. Be able to use the project's technologies.	7.5	1.76
5. Explain the evaluation model (PAR) to clients.	6.8	1.94
6. Participate in the evaluation process.	6.7	2.07
7. Communicate using various technologies.	6.7	1.51
3. Explain PLATO to clients.	6.5	2.26
4. Show clients how to get started with PLATO.	6.5	2.07
2. Show clients how to get started with ESPORT.	6.3	1.97
1. Explain ESPORT to clients.	6.2	1.94
12. Make time for everything the project requires me to do.	6.0	1.26

¹Scale: 0 = I am not at all ready; I am very uncomfortable with this
10 = I am completely ready; I am perfectly comfortable with this

Probably one of the most interesting findings from the survey was that all of the scores were six or higher, and five (one-third) were nine or higher (on the 10-point scale). This suggests that all of the objectives of the workshop were at least minimally met. It was probably not surprising that the item that received the lowest readiness score had to do with making time for everything (#12).

Among the lowest scores were those related to using ESPORT and PLATO (items 1, 2, 3, and 4). Given this finding, it was recommended (in *Occasional Report #1*) that calls to support staff be monitor carefully calls to you and to Stephen for help.

CMC discussions. Two weeks following the Cape Breton workshop (commencement was delayed somewhat by technical problems with the conferencing system), the evaluators attempted to begin a CMC-based conference on the following aspects of the project:

- ESPORT and PLATO training
- ES background presentation
- Evaluation background and process presentation
- Facility and environment
- General readiness assessment

The conference was intended to allow participants to share their experiences, consider each other's results, review and attempt to achieve consensus regarding project outcomes, and collaborate overall in developing solutions to emerging problems. However, for various reasons (centres moved at different rates toward implementation of ESPORT-PLATO, and usage levels differed widely in the early stages), CMC was not initially used by the group. The concept of CMC as a tool for collaborative interaction remains valid, but the circumstances of potential users are critical in the timeliness and appropriateness of this tool. Further efforts will be expended to assess the usefulness of CMC in the role in the project in general, and in the evaluation in particular.

E-mail and telephone contact. The project evaluators established communication with individuals using e-mail and telephone. These permitted gathering of basic project information, although they did not facilitate collaborative sharing and reflection, as CMC would have done.

Findings. In the first weeks of the project, usage of ESPORT-PLATO in Cape Breton was low, a pattern that persisted into the initial months of the project. Reasons included setting up and becoming familiar with ESPORT-PLATO, the need to recruit appropriate clients for the program, including determining the suitability of the program for higher-ability clients (discussed further below).

Set-up and familiarization issues. Early in March, in one of their first uses of the system with clients, one site experienced a problem that affected their ability to move clients from ESPORT assessment testing to PLATO activities. Upon examination, the problem was found to consist of two elements, one related to training and the other technical. The training problem concerned the most efficient way to group students in commonly used curricula, and was relatively quickly dealt with by telephone and e-mail consultation. The technical problem arose from the fact that certain National Occupational Catalogue (NOC) codes were not being recognized by the ESPORT-PLATO server then in use. A switch had been made after training to a new server on the PLATO Web-Learning Network (PWLN), which somehow did not have the current version of the NOC alignments; after switching to a Paradox-type server, the problem was corrected. In future, a note was made to assure that servers were current and maintained.

March 15, 2005, review session. As a result of the technical problem described above, the perceived slow start of the Cape Breton centres, and some concern about the level of comfort the instructors might have over their training, the PLATO trainer, Stephen Kimner, returned to Sydney on March 15, 2005, to meet for a day with any staff of the region who might wish to do so, regarding questions or issues that had arisen since the initial training session. The meeting occurred at The Entrepreneurial Centre (TEC) site in North Sydney. In his report of the visit, Mr. Kimner noted:

- Technical and training problems were addressed, specifically in relation to the potentials of ESPORT, and linking to PLATO from diagnostic test results.
- There might be a lack of incentive to use the system; however, “The more they discuss it amongst themselves and really digest the program, the more likely they are willing to try it out.”
- “The biggest draw to the program is the portfolio builder and how to use it effectively.” (In the initial Cape Breton training, trainees did not appear to be impressed with the potential of this feature, making this an issue for future training. **Steve: did this come up in the recent training?]**

- Links to other sites, especially those related to high-employment demand trades, would be useful, and motivational to students. [These exist, according to Patrick. Stephen, are these being used?]

The report concluded, "I think they are ready to get moving on this now that they feel a bit more comfortable with it after discussing it amongst themselves."

As a result of Mr. Kimner's visit, and comments of one of the trainees at TEC who met with him, the following observations were made by the evaluator (*Occasional Report #3*):

1. The problem appeared to have both technical and training implications. Steve Kimner is now aware of the training implications, for future reference, and the technical issues have also been apparently dealt with, according to Charlie's comments. (The lessons from this event will be applied to all future planning.)
2. Charlie's comments seemed to suggest that he appreciated ESPORT more after Stephen's visit, and would make some changes to his usage in the future. His reference to the expected additional youth users suggests he continues to see utility in the system.
3. TEC seems to have firm ongoing plans for usage, which should only be augmented by the additional training received from Stephen. The efforts and experiences of TEC will be monitored closely.
4. The implications of Stephen's comments about the rate of adoption, and the need for some incentive to increase activity, should be considered, both in relation to Cape Breton and to future sites.
5. The comments in Stephen's report about the greater flexibility and utility available in ESPORT, over what the trainees may have supposed after the initial training, should influence future training. (Whether these greater potentials result in more use will continue to be monitored, by reference to the usage records.) [changes observed in usage = Stephen & Charlie.]

6. The value of the return visit to Cape Breton by Stephen should be assessed. (If these visits turn out to be valuable, the project manager has commented that the cost can be accommodated in the budget.)
7. Overall, all parties seemed to respond to the reported difficulties quickly and effectively, from the point of view of the Cape Breton clients (as judged by Charlie MacLellan's responses). There is no indication in Charlie's comments of frustration directed at the project or its personnel over this problem. On the contrary, Charlie's continued "pitching" of the system to others indicates his belief in its potential value.
8. The impact of the additional material Stephen plans to send out to all Cape Breton users in response to his present analysis of their needs will be monitored.

Identifying appropriate clients for the program. In April, one trainer posted the following by e-mail, in preparation for the training that was scheduled to occur in June:

I thought I would throw this question out to all of you because I'm not sure whose area this would be. We have [put] about a dozen people through the system with most still doing the self assessment and making portfolios. But we have a few people that have scored all fours and fives on the essential skills and they basically don't have anywhere to go with the program.

They can construct 5 portfolios and some resumes but then there isn't much interest in doing anything else. If someone has low essential skills, then obviously we can assign lessons in Plato to address that, but if their essential skills meet or exceed every occupation in the inventory is there any place for them to go with this program? We have a couple of bright young guys who scored high on the essential skills and there doesn't seem to be anything for them to do other than browse the occupations and the EARAT stuff but that stuff doesn't keep their interest for very long.

I guess my biggest question is: Is there any place to go with ESPORT-PLATO that would interest these guys or is this program not really applicable to them?

The question was directed to the group, but was dealt with by the trainer and the project manager. In April, a review of activity in the Cape Breton sites was conducted, considering usage levels and reported questions and issues (see *Occasional Report #4 and #5*). As a result, the decision was made to send the trainer back to Cape Breton to review all issues, provide further additional training and advice, and to generally assist the facilitators in adapting ESPORT-PLATO to their sites. The date of June 8 - 9 was set for these activities.

June 8 – 9 session, Cape Breton. This session in Cape Breton, conducted at The Entrepreneurial Centre, June 8 – 9, 2005, was attended by eleven instructors. Two trainers, S. Kimner (primary) and D. Grant, provided the training. The purpose behind this session, as stated by the primary trainer, was “to give more hands-on experiences with the Essential Skills Portfolio website involving the interest inventory, career exploration, self-assessment tools, and PLATO courseware, and to clarify the role facilitators will play in deciding who will and will not use this tool, thus increasing the participants’ comfort level with the product so they will use it with more clients.”

There were some technical problems creating a new learner profile in ESPORT, which were reported to and resolved by technical staff. (The project manager later [June 24, 2005] wrote about these technical issues: “Right in the middle of a training in Cape Breton, the server that serves up ESPORT went belly-up. Peter has devised an emergency **server-crash solution**, should this ever happen again. A fully-functioning ESPORT system is now up and waiting on another server. Trainers will be able to switch and continue.”) Despite these, the primary trainer reported that the first day “ended with the participants feeling much more comfortable with the tools....”

On the second day, the intent was to practice creating new learners in ESPORT, using some of the skills from day one. Again, some technical problems were encountered, this time with accessing the ESPORT administration server. While these problems were being addressed, the trainers had the trainees access PLATO, to see

firsthand the structure and look-and-feel of PLATO. These objectives were affected, the trainers reported, by “pop up blockers and slow workstations.” Nevertheless, the trainers reported, “During the wrap up, many of the comments were positive about how to best use the system and when to use it.”

The trainers concluded their report with somewhat mixed feelings about the retraining session:

The biggest hindrance to our time there in North Sydney was the technology not working correctly on the ESPORT site. There was the programming error from the first day and the collapse of ISP ESPORT uses on the second day. I was frustrated with what was taking place and I am sure some of the participants were feeling the same way.

I would have to say that the overall feeling from the participants was positive and they are much more comfortable using this tool than when they left on the site back in January despite the technological issues encountered.

(See *Occasional Report #6*, Attachment 10, for a report of enrolment numbers following this retraining session.)

Cape Breton – status, planning

[Any comments about CB, including plans for the next few months, here. Patrick checking with Donald G.]

Other projects

Occasionally, reports were received that showed how the ESPORT-PLATO system was working in other environments. While these projects were not officially part of the ESPORT-PLATO project, their results are included here as salient in regard to the project’s objectives.

Western Canada at-risk youth project. The following was received from the coordinator of a project piloting ESPORT with an at-risk youth population in western Canada. These comments were contained in an e-mail dated April 25, 2005, addressed to the project manager, who passed it along to the project Team under the title, “ESPORT – the way it’s ‘spoused to work”:

I have all my kids up and running in the ESPORT program. Everything seems to be running smoothly. We met as a group last week to discuss our experiences to date. Interestingly, the Skills Centre group is having a different experience than the school based group, especially with respect to the Interest Inventory and Self Assessment. The Skills Ctr. clientele basically present "at the door." This means that skill ctr. personal do not any background info on their client, therefore, the Interest Inventory and Self Assessment are very valuable and valid tools to begin the employment process. From my school based perspective, I have a complete history of a student (academic, behavioural, psychometric, etc.), so I am finding the Interest Inventory and Skills Assessment as more of an interest based (as in less formal) exercise for my students. Once the skills ctr. has completed the Interest Inventories and Skill Assessments, I will send you their feedback. I have not ventured into the Resume builder etc. As for the PLATO NOC based learning paths. I love it. Student engagement is already up. Kids who would not normally buy in academically, are buying in. Our program is set up in such a way where kids have to do a predetermined # of PLATO hours to be paid out for work experience hours completed. Now that a student who is working as a trades labourer, can go home and log into a course which directly reflects his work experience, there is an immediate relevancy. What we are trying to do now, is kind of break apart the ESPORT steps into requirements for our future "Career Explorations" course.

Kindest Regards

Saskatchewan Penitentiary. As noted above, although this site was not part of the ESPORT-PLATO project that is the primary focus of this report, CSC commenced an internal pilot project with ESPORT in April 2005, evaluated internally. On May 27, 2005,

one of the staff at the site submitted a report of their experiences to date, which came to the attention of the project manager. Because the experiences of CSC are potentially useful, they are discussed here. (It should be noted that the writer of the comments discussed here had, at the time of her writing, not completed basic ESPORT training. As noted below, it was concluded that some of the problems encountered may have been due to lack of training.)

The report, entitled *Preliminary evaluation of the ESPORT program*, began with the following list of “positives”:

- Assess user interests.
- Assess user in ten essential skill areas.
- Use assessments to suggest career choices that correspond with skills and interests.
- Provide a “gap analysis” that tells the user how his skill/interest profile matches a career choice and point out skills that need upgrading to increase probability of success in the career choice.
- Assist the user in writing a learning plan to improve skills.
- Provide materials to assist the user to improve skills.
- Assist the user in writing a resume that can be used to apply for a specific job/position.

The comment following this list was, “Essentially, the ESPORT program does all of the above. Some components of the program are quite good.” Specifically, the report cites the following strengths of ESPORT:

- The InterOPTIONS Interest Survey is simple to use and provides a good appraisal of user interests. The Interest Profile generated is clearly explained and easy to understand. Most users agree that the profile describes them well.
- The Gap analysis is a useful and interesting feature of the program. It clearly informs the user where he is deficient in essential skills required for a specific career. This helps the user concentrate on areas of weakness to upgrade

specific skills. This provides focus and motivates the learner.

(Unfortunately, most of the jobs in the job bank require skill levels of only 1 – 3. Since many of the users score 4’s or 5’s, the gap analysis feature has not been a well-utilized feature.) [*This issue is addressed below.*]

- The “Essential Skills” underpinning of this program [makes] it compatible with HRSDC research and the trend toward recognition of and focus on the importance of transferable essential employment skills. As such, it shows potential as a program that users could begin to work with in an institutional or school setting and then continue to access the program at HRDC sites so that they can continually check their compatibility with new types of jobs, upgrade essential skills, update resumes, etc.

The following were issues or questions raised in the report. The project manager’s comments are provided in brackets and italics.

1. “The acronym of the program is rather unfortunate given the setting of this demo.” [*The name of the project, and of the software, was changed within the week, and the new name, ESPORT, was installed on the server.*]
2. Some aspects of the program were not user-friendly: at log-in, some inmates sometimes confused the letter “l” and the numeral “1”, or the numeral “0” and the letter “O.” [*The log-in was never case-sensitive, but potentially confusing letters and numerals were eliminated when this problem was reported.*]
3. “The program format lacks variety and is monotonous. Tests, information, etc. consist of page after page of reading text... same size print, same font, etc. There are no pictures or even much variation in color to make the program more visually appealing and less tedious.” [*...it may be that she is looking for the bells and whistles that didactic material uses to attract attention or help memory. If this is the case, we’ll work on showing that this is a different kind of activity.*”]
4. “There is no way to “save” a student’s work if they are half-way through a test and need to stop or exit the program by mistake.” [*The InterOptions “test”*

is fifty questions that must be done at one sitting. There shouldn't be a problem with this one. The Skills assessment "tests" can be done one skill at a time. As recommended in the Facilitator Guide, the facilitator may want to print out the questions for the three IALS assessments (text reading, document use, and numeracy). [The instructor] doesn't appear aware that there is a Facilitator Guide, so this may help.]

5. *"Operation of the program requires technical support. This is sometimes difficult to come by in Corrections" [There were two or three initial technical glitches having to do with installation. These have been repaired, so things may now run more smoothly. ...We will be meeting with ... the head tech guy from Saskatoon, and we should be able establish a system for technical support, including a schedule for database revisions on perhaps a quarterly basis. {See below.}]*
6. *"Since there is no access to Plato or the internet, most of the tools to help the user improve skills are unavailable." [Since Sask Pen does not have PLATO, there is little that can be done on that part. However, [we] will communicate with HRSDC to try to obtain the Authentic Materials database. It will be a relatively simple matter to install this on the server.... After a recent meeting with CSC regional technical personnel, the project manager commented that there appeared to be growing appreciation of each organization's needs and capabilities, and a increasing willingness to collaborate.]*

One specific observation had to do with the entry-level jobs available in the job bank:

The careers in the Job Bank of this program are all entry level jobs. One offender put it this way, "These are all bottom-feeder jobs."

This profile of jobs is too narrow to meet the needs of this population. Many offenders have grade twelve or better. Some have training in a trade or profession. If the user scores mainly 4's and 5's on the Self Assessment, (especially if their Career Interest Quiz Assessment shows strength in the

Directive and Social interest areas) there are very few job suggestions and most of those are inappropriate....

According to the HRSDC website, 'close to 200 Essential Skills profiles have been developed for various occupations of the National Occupational Classification. To date, profiles have been completed for all occupations requiring a high school education or less. Research is ongoing to complete occupations requiring university, college or apprenticeship training.'

I suspect that the reason this program lists only entry-level jobs (or jobs that require a high school education or less) is because these are the occupation profiles that have been completed by Human Resources and Skills Development of Canada.

Is there a plan to add higher level jobs as the occupation profiles are completed? Will this program be upgraded regularly?

The project manager replied as follows to the above: "Directive and Innovative interests are not highly represented in C & D level occupations – those that are currently Profiled. It will be interesting to know how representative these are of the general prison population. (If more individuals were attracted from the general population, they might more often fall into C & D level occupations.) There IS a plan to add higher level jobs as the occupation profiles are completed. These will be upgraded as they become available."

There were some other comments about specific elements of the program, some of which the project manager reported were referred for review by programmers and managers. Others were designated to be addressed in training to be provided to the instructor.

Community of Practice (CoP) - Virtual Community initiative

Development of a virtual community of practice (CoP) was one of the purposes of the April 27, 2005, ESPORT team meeting in Ottawa. Other fundamental priorities of this gathering were related to fine-tuning communications procedures, including a

channel over which team members might interact. Another was addressing the possibility of changing the project name.

Since the meeting on initiating a VC, the priority has become improving channels of communication for ESPORT team members. (The five other objectives from the Ottawa meeting [see *Virtual community initiative*, above] also continue with the work Mark Wallace is doing.) Developing a common method of communication, and fostering the habit of using it among team members, has been identified as a key priority as training sessions continue, and new people are exposed to the ESPORT system. Mark Wallace anticipates that the virtual CoP for facilitators will be initiated eventually, but it is not the most pressing need, especially as it adds to the amount of new information the facilitators are expected to process, and as such might be counter-productive while other learning is demanded. It will also help to have worked out some of the bugs about the virtual CoP structure internally, before launching with facilitators. At the time of this report, efforts at ESPORT team communications are chiefly designed to provide timely and helpful responses to facilitators' queries.

To promote and facilitate team interaction in early May a new contact site was established (INFO@esportfolio.com), for project inquiries and questions. (Almost immediately, an urgent inquiry from a facilitator about how to print portfolios was received and answered at this new address.) Addresses at @esportfolio were provided for all team members, and an alias (team list) was established, to permit easy group inter-communications.

A new logo and name were also chosen at this time, to replace *ESCORT* (*ESPORT* was the name chosen). Issues related to the name change included a change of the logo and title graphic, and a suitable French equivalent. A version of the redesigned logo and project graphic were developed and circulated May 2, 2005.

As noted above, an outcome of discussions led by Mark Wallace at the Ottawa meeting was identification of the need to develop support systems for project participants. The group concluded that the virtual CoP could provide a broad help-desk function, allowing the widespread and prompt sharing of the project group's expertise

and suggestions. As a source of timely information, the CoP would supplement whatever other support systems were available, as well as providing a forum for peers to exchange information and ideas. The use of technology and online interaction methods would be core to the CoP concept, as is developed over the course of the project. These would be among Mark Wallace's ongoing objectives for the virtual CoP.

In an e-mail sent May 3, 2005, Mark Wallace, as Community Development Coordinator, identified three priorities:

There are a few issues I want to cover right from the get-go:

1. *Our urgent issue of how to handle any queries from facilitators.*
2. *Deciding who else constitutes this Team group, and should receive mailings.*
3. *Get a paragraph from each of you on your role in the program.*

Two days later (May 5, 2005), he sent another e-mail to the Team, requesting role descriptions and inviting opinions about how information should be routinely circulated among team members, including PLATO contacts.

As of mid-June, 2005, the key development with CoP is the use of the common email address for all ESPORT team members, using YAHOO group. This email address delivers mail to all team members. It is ideally suited for several priorities:

1. Responding to emergencies.
2. Facilitator queries.
3. Providing a constant picture of the issues that are being worked on every day.
4. An archive of all mail sent and received.
5. A forum for a weekly newsletter, which the project manager is writing to keep the team aware of events (upcoming and past), with some comments about team members, which aid in community building. (In fact, the intention is now to use the YAHOO group email address for *all* ESPORT communication, unless there is a compelling reason not to use it.

At this point, further tasks involving Mark Wallace include solidifying the communication between ESPORT team members through usage and as-needed

tutorials. Once this takes hold, and concurrent with technical challenges being overcome, the objective will then become to make a similar community available to the facilitators of ESPORT. The lessons learned in establishing the ESPORT team CoP are expected to be invaluable here.

Project plans, observations

Based on experiences, observations, and evaluation findings to date, the following are issues to be addressed, and opportunities to be explored, as the project continues.

[discuss here ideas, revisions to the original plans, expansions, etc.]

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ATTACHMENT 1

Evaluation Framework (Summary): ESPORT Demonstration Project

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Introduction

This paper presents an overview of a recommended evaluation process for the ESPORT Project. It describes an evaluation approach, an overview of the proposed approach (including some general data-gathering principles and methods), the role of the evaluation consultants, and the focus of the Advisory Group in the evaluation process.

Proposed evaluation approach: *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

The ESPORT evaluation will incorporate principles of *participatory action research* (PAR), as follows:

PAR is a method of research where creating a positive social change is the predominant driving force. PAR grew out of social and educational research and exists today as one of the few research methods which embraces principles of participation and reflection, and empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation (Seymour-Rolls & Hughes, 1998).

PAR evaluations focus on results useful to the participants. *Meaningfulness* is the crucial criterion for judging PAR results; participants must be able to understand and apply evaluation findings. Through reflection and dialogue – the opportunity to think and talk about the results – everyone concerned should have the opportunity to understand what is being discovered, and to express their views about its implications.

PAR recognizes that evaluation is always subjective to some extent. Rather than denying subjectivity, PAR research accepts that participants have biases and points of

view based on their experiences, which should be acknowledged in dealing with the evaluation findings. At the same time, PAR evaluation attempts to be systematic, using methods which the participants (and others) will accept as legitimate for producing useful results. Patton (1982) defined the essential characteristics of this type of evaluation as follows:

The practice of evaluation involves the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, personnel, and products for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programs, personnel, or products are doing and affecting. This definition of evaluation emphasizes (1) the systematic collection of information about (2) a broad range of topics (3) for use by specific people (4) for a variety of purposes.

The proposed system consists of a cycle of four stages: *reflection, planning, action, and observation*. These four stages form a cycle, involving all participants in an ongoing process of identifying and thinking about a problem or opportunity, developing and putting into operation a plan of action, and again observing and reflecting on the results, leading to another iteration of the cycle.

Overview of the proposed evaluation

The principal methods of collecting data for this evaluation may include the following:

- Interviews
- Questionnaires, opinionnaires
- Observations
- Records (system-generated and manual)
- Document analysis

An *Evaluation Framework* will be collaboratively produced with the partners, project management, funding agency, and other stakeholders as appropriate. The

Evaluation Framework will specify the sources and the methods to be used for data collection (see “The role of the Advisory Group (AG),” below).

The evaluation consultants

To manage the evaluation process systematically, evaluation consultants will be employed. (The evaluation consultants will be available at the initial AG meeting in Ottawa, to introduce themselves and to answer questions about and lead a discussion relating to the proposed *Evaluation Framework*.)

Examples of specific tasks of the evaluation consultants include:

- Assistance in identifying those who should be included in the evaluation.
- Assistance to all participants in stating their initial views and suggestions about the project (*reflection*).
- Assistance to participants in communicating with each other, and monitoring the interaction process.
- Notes on and reports of the results of collaborative interactions, for use by participants (*planning*).
- Monitoring of progress toward answering important questions, or addressing central themes arising from collaborative planning discussions (*action*).
- Reports of the findings and conclusions reached by the participants in the project (*observation*).

The overall purpose of the evaluation consultants is to assist the participants to achieve the goals they have set for the project. PAR considers all participants “researchers,” with a key role in producing a systematic and useful evaluation process, “including, but not limited to, information relevant to making decisions, judgments, comparisons, or goal attainment assessments” (Patton, 1975). All participants are responsible for helping the evaluation to be successful in achieving its goals (Masters, 1995); the evaluation consultants’ role is to support the participants in various ways,

especially with communications, data gathering and analysis, recordkeeping, and reporting.

The role of the Advisory Group (AG)

The AG will be the initial source of guidance on the evaluation plan for this project. As part of the face-to-face meeting with the Advisory Group, work will begin on core elements of the *Evaluation Framework*, including development or review of such evaluation components as the following:

9. Persons to be involved.
10. Schedule of key events.
11. Philosophy guiding the project and the evaluation (proposed is PAR).
12. Specific objectives of the project and the evaluation.
13. Observation and data-gathering processes, and data to be gathered.
14. Communication plan, methods, and schedule.
15. Reflection and (re)planning processes.
16. Reports to be produced; vetting and dissemination process.

As part of the initial meeting in Ottawa, additional tasks or elements of the *Evaluation Framework* may be identified. A draft *Evaluation Framework* document will be produced after the Ottawa meeting, for review by the AG (via e-mail or other technologies – to be discussed at the meeting). A working *Evaluation Framework* should be in place by mid-November, prior to any evaluation activities involving the LDAs, the project partners, or other potential participants.

ATTACHMENT 2

Readiness Check

(E-mailed to participants the week following the initial training workshop.)

After the workshop last week in [location], we are interested in how ready you now feel to proceed with the ESPORT-PLATO project and the evaluation.

To help assess readiness and confidence/comfort with the project's main elements, please rate each of the following on a scale from 0 to 10, where:

0 = I am not at all ready; I am very uncomfortable with this

10 = I am completely ready; I am perfectly comfortable with this

1. Explain ESPORT to clients:
2. Show clients how to get started with ESPORT:
3. Explain PLATO to clients:
4. Show clients how to get started with PLATO:
5. Explain the evaluation model (PAR) to clients:
6. Participate in the evaluation process:
7. Communicate using various technologies:
8. Recognize outcomes or findings important to the evaluation:
9. Contact the project administrator (Patrick) when necessary:
10. Contact the PLATO trainer (Stephen) when necessary:
11. Contact the project evaluators (Pat & Mona) when necessary :
12. Make time for everything the project requires me to do:
13. Know where to go for assistance if needed:
14. Have the right technology for the project:
15. Be able to use the project's technologies:

Comments:

ATTACHMENT 3

Extracts from communications with project participants

Start-up problems:

Denis, 2/9/05, by e-mail:

... I've have started the project with a couple of participants, however, i have been instructed to discontinue temporarily until I get the go ahead from my managers. Apparently the local HRSDC office knows nothing about the project here so i have to wait until my executive director approves the project before i begin. I will register for the conference as you have requested. Thanks...I will let you know how things are going.

Problems logging-in to CMC

Mona, 2/9/05, by e-mail:

Rob:

Thanks for checking in. They did get back to my e-mail later in the day on Monday...I think they're a Monday to Friday group, so participants should be made aware that weekend technical help is unavailable, at least for password problems.

As well, they told me I should have been more specific about which application I was writing about...but failed to mention that you had to do this on their web site instructions. I haven't had to do this on other sites, so was caught unaware.

They also told me that they don't support FireFox, and it's better to use IE as my browser. Again, participants should be advised accordingly.

Interestingly, the password they sent was the one I had written down.

I will try to get in again, and hope my asking had them reset my login so that the password works.

Thanks.

Mona

ATTACHMENT 4

OCCASIONAL REPORT #1, February 4, 2005

Patrick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Readiness questionnaire. In the week immediately following the workshop, facilitators were asked to provide feedback on their feelings of readiness to proceed with the elements of the project (Attachment 2). The survey asked facilitators to rate elements on a scale from 0 (completely frustrating and totally unproductive) to 10 (completely successful and fully productive). The following table summarizes the results of this survey.

Table 1: Results of *Readiness Questionnaire* (ranked from most to least agreement¹)

Questionnaire item	Mean	S.D.
9. Contact the project administrator (Patrick) when necessary.	9.5	0.84
13. Know where to go for assistance if needed.	9.5	0.84
11. Contact the project evaluators (Pat & Mona) when necessary.	9.3	1.03
14. Have the right technology for the project.	9.2	0.84
10. Contact the PLATO trainer (Stephen) when necessary.	9.2	0.98
8. Recognize outcomes or findings important to the evaluation.	8.3	1.75
15. Be able to use the project's technologies.	7.5	1.76
5. Explain the evaluation model (PAR) to clients.	6.8	1.94
6. Participate in the evaluation process.	6.7	2.07
7. Communicate using various technologies.	6.7	1.51
3. Explain PLATO to clients.	6.5	2.26
4. Show clients how to get started with PLATO.	6.5	2.07
2. Show clients how to get started with ESPORT.	6.3	1.97
1. Explain ESPORT to clients.	6.2	1.94
12. Make time for everything the project requires me to do.	6.0	1.26

¹ Scale: 0 = I am not at all ready; I am very uncomfortable with this
10 = I am completely ready; I am perfectly comfortable with this

Comments of Sydney workshop participants:

Syd1: I haven't been able to do anything yet as we had another snow day yesterday. I think I am ok but if I need help I will let you know. Thanks for all your help and I look forward to speaking with again.

Syd2: I was a little familiar with aspects of both plato and ESPORT before this training. I found the format for training disorganized. No-one was really clear on who from the organizations should be attending and what days they should be there. I would have like to see the computer hands-on training done as a client simulation so we could all walk through the entire process together. The schedule for training that was sent in advance was too vague.

Hope this information is helpful

Syd3: It will take me a little time to become familiar with the system. I hope to learn from Michelle and Jenny as they take clients through the process.

Syd5: Other than being perfectly comfortable contacting all those involved with the project it is difficult to give a rating for the other questions. With more hands on contact using the program with clients I will be better able to respond. Our discussion on making the hands on training component longer and separating it from the evaluation component would be a good suggestion for future workshops. Overall I enjoyed the training and meeting all those involved.

Syd6: To be very brutally honest, the training session for ESPORT definitely should have been longer. The training for Plato could have been longer as well and the Evaluation process much shorter. I don't know if its important that we understand WHY the type of evaluation is being used. I think it is more important to clearly understand HOW to use the software programs with our clients properly.

ATTACHMENT 5

OCCASIONAL REPORT #2, February 22, 2005

Parick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Quick check-in. During the week of February 14, 2005, the following e-mail was sent to each of the Sydney trainees by the evaluator:

This is a 2-question check-in with you about the ESPORT-PLATO project to date. Can you briefly tell me:

- *How many clients do you have in the project as of TODAY?*
- *Do you have any problems or questions about any aspect of the project that you would like someone to contact you about?*
 - *If so: briefly, what is the problem or question?*

Thanks. As always, please let me know if you have any questions, or want to chat about the project or the evaluation.

The following were the responses received:

# in the project	Problems/Issues
0	I haven't had a chance to even use this program as of today's date. We have been involved with a local program and their screening process. I will be able to give this project some sort of attention next week.
0	<p>I don't have any clients yet and really didn't use the program. Our youth group is just starting up so I will be using the ESPORT-PLATO project with them in the next few weeks. Be in touch then.</p> <p>=====</p> <p>Steve just sent me an email, I thought I would reply to all. We have 1 participant so far and we were all falling over ourselves to get him on the system. We got him on the ESPORT system and he went through the questionnaire and then the tests for essential skills, and was in the process of looking at jobs when we closed for the day. He is supposed to come back but we told him he can sign up at home so he may be doing that. We are in the process of showing the program to reps of the Department of Community Services. If they think the program would be a benefit to their clients they will refer people to us.</p>

	<p>We also have a youth group coming in next month 10 participants to try the system. Their facilitator would like to incorporate the system into her program.</p> <p>One problem we had was signing someone on the system. they couldn't activate their account from the email that is sent to them when the administrator adds a new client. We got it working after several tries, you might want to have a look at that. Things are slow starting off but I expect to have some clients using ESPORT soon.</p>
1	No, not at this time.
0	<p>I'm sorry for the delay...its been a bit of a hectic time here...and since I'm working an additional job.. it's even more busy. I'm sorry to inform you that I have not been able to begin the project...as I was hoping to. My managers have not given me the go ahead...and it's a shame considering that I'm already for it and that I have worked a bit with Patrick and the web designer for the ESPORT website as there have been many glitches to workout...anyway...when I am able to begin... you will know...I will be meeting with my managers this week and they will let me know the status of the situation.....thank you for your enduring patience.</p>

The finding that few students have yet been registered is consistent with the numbers appearing in the online administration summary. It is surprising that one potential site is inactive because of a lack of local HRSD approval. The slow start is, in some cases, explained by circumstances, and the expectation appears to be that numbers and usage will rise shortly; another survey will be conducted in the next two weeks to assess how well these expectations have been met.

ATTACHMENT 6

OCCASIONAL REPORT #3, March 18, 2005

Patrick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Summary

On February 28, 2005, Charlie MacLellan wrote the following by e-mail:

Hi guys,

Just want some assistance and I will throw it out there to everyone. We have a client on the ESPORT system and we are all a little frustrated as to where we are going. The client Darrell Young has done the questionnaire and answered the quizzes and now knows where he stands in relation to the occupation he has chosen. He knows he is weak in document use so he would like to improve that. Our dilemma is we cannot get him to the exercises that will facilitate that. I tried to set that up in PLATO but I cannot figure out how he can access the system. I can go on as administrator but I can't find any information on how Darrell signs in himself to do the lessons I have assigned for him. Another problem was when he chooses a different occupation it is not coming up, it just refreshes the page and says choose another occupation.

Some Questions:

Can you link from ESPORT to PLATO directly or must a user leave ESPORT and enter PLATO? If Darrell is successful in upgrading his skills in documentation will that show up in ESPORT as say " changing his rating from a 2 to a 4"?

The time commitment to figuring out these problems is very large, perhaps when we become more familiar with the system it will be quicker.

Later that same afternoon, Stephen Kimner replied:

Charlie,

I will investigate what is going on here and will get back to you ASAP. I am doing some professional development days in the states and will see what I can find out for you.

Stephen Kimner

On Tuesday, March 1, this was received from Tom Clahane:

Hello Charlie,

Thanks for the update and bringing the issues out on the table where we can address them. There has been a flurry of e-mails in the last day as we try to determine the best way to address your issues and communicate a working solution to you.

It's not uncommon to have issues that were not foreseen come up in a pilot and we appreciate your patience as we find the best solutions. I expect we'll have a plan to help by Friday, if not sooner.

Thanks,

Tom Clahane,
PLATO ESPORT

On March 8, the evaluator wrote to Charlie MacLellan, who responded the next day. The exchange was as follows:

Charlie,

Did the problem you reported with PLATO-ESPORT get resolved? I understood Steve would be visiting - did that help?
I can call if you prefer...

Pat

Hi Pat,

I talked to Stephen he will be here Tuesday Mar. 15, to go over some stuff with us. He emailed me some possible problems and solutions with what I was doing. We have only done the one client so far and he has not been in since we had the problems with his account.

But I am looking forward to seeing Stephen Tuesday because we are having 10 people from a youth group coming in Wed. and Thurs. We intend to introduce all of them to the system and hope some of them will stick with the program.

Charlie MacLellan
Manager, The Entrepreneurial Centre

On March 18, Charlie MacLellan sent the following e-mail to the evaluator, in response to an inquiry sent the day before about the March 15 meeting:

I had a good visit with Steve, cleared up a few things. I took the ESPORT manual home the weekend before so I had some good questions for him as opposed to the stupid ones I usually ask. We were too hung up on how to apply the PLATO learning plan for the client after ESPORT told them where they needed to upgrade their essential skills. We should be concentrating on getting them to fully utilize the ESPORT system and trying to prepare portfolios and resumes. And he did show me how to link to learning plans in the PLATO system in the nine essential skills categories.

We have only had the one client so far, but we are expecting to run 9 people from a youth group project through the system. We will be getting two of them at a time on Fridays for the next few months. I have been in touch with Community Services (Social Assistance) pitching the system for their clients but I have only got the one client from them so far. I expect some response there.

In talking with some of the other partners in the area on my travels, I don't get a sense that there is much activity in the ESPORT-PLATO area.

Finally, the "Site Visit Record" (Attachment A) was produced by Stephen Kimner, based on his Cape Breton visit. He sent it to the evaluator on March 18.

Analysis

The following observations are related to the situation described in the above exchanges:

1. The problem appeared to have both technical and training implications. Steve Kimner is now aware of the training implications, for future reference, and the technical issues have also been apparently dealt with, according to Charlie's comments. (The lessons from this event should be applied to all future planning.)
2. Charlie's comments seemed to suggest that he appreciated ESPORT more after Stephen's visit, and would make some changes to his usage in the

future. His reference to the expected additional youth users suggests he continues to see utility in the system.

3. TEC seems to have firm ongoing plans for usage, which should only be augmented by the additional training received from Stephen. The efforts and experiences of TEC will be monitored closely.
4. The implications of Stephen's comments about the rate of adoption, and the need for some incentive to increase activity, should be considered, both in relation to Cape Breton and to future sites.
5. The comments in Stephen's report about the greater flexibility and utility available in ESPORT, over what the trainees may have supposed after the initial training, should influence future training. (Whether these greater potentials result in more use will continue to be monitored, by reference to the usage records.)
6. The value of the return visit to Cape Breton by Stephen should be assessed. (Should a return visit be a planned event following initial training, in the future?)
7. Overall, all parties seemed to respond to the reported difficulties quickly and effectively, from the point of view of the Cape Breton clients (as judged by Charlie MacLellan's responses). There is no indication in Charlie's comments of frustration directed at the project or its personnel over this problem. On the contrary, Charlie's continued "pitching" of the system to others indicates his belief in its potential value.
8. The impact of the additional material Stephen plans to send out to all Cape Breton users in response to his present analysis of their needs will be monitored.



ATTACHMENT A

Site Visit Record

Consultant: Stephen Kimner
Account Manager: Tom Clahane
Patrick Cummins, Donald Grant

Date: March 15, 2005

Arrival Time: 9:00AM **Departure Time:** 12:00PM

Site: The Entrepreneurial Center

Project: Cape Breton ESPORT

Participants: Charlie MacLellan

PLATO Participants: Stephen Kimner, EC

Type of Session: Follow up/ clarification

Session(s) to be deducted: 1 day

Program Goal: Using the Essential Skills to improve worker entry into the job market. PLATO courseware is used to fill the gaps of knowledge for the Essential Skills.

Session Summary:

I went over some items with Charlie on how to get into the ESPORT administrative side and how to create and make assignments in the PWLN site. Charlie wanted to be able to only assign certain elements of the NOC code alignment so I showed how each code was broken down into seven Essential Skills and that each skill had levels which in turn contained activities. I also left the hard copy of the document created by Mark Wallace that explained this break down. He was glad to see that he could break this down to its parts and only assign what he felt the client needed instead of the whole code and all the skills.

We also went about changing the account to the paradox server (www.platoweb.com; account 50124) and showed him what was there. I also explained

that the new account would not have any student data on it and that moving forward, all learners need to be on the new account.

Comments/Concerns:

Usage is a bit light at the moment for as Charlie mentioned, there is no carrot out there to get the people to change habits. I am not sure if the people are willing to go out and do something new and leave what they are comfortable with for this program. The more they discuss it amongst themselves and really digest the program, the more likely they are willing to try it out. There is interest but they are slow to bring clients on board. The biggest draw to the program is the portfolio builder and how to use it effectively. Yet, Charlie was not impressed with the samples shown at the initial professional development for they did not contain many of the things they work on with their clients. He felt these examples were too simplistic and did not have the best terminology so his impression was the resume builder was weak. I explained that the facilitator and the client would work on choosing the best items to include in the portfolio and that the words were not dependent on the ESPORT system but were user created.

Charlie did mentioned that he would like to see some links to other sites that would explain what someone could do to get into a trade. For instance, we talked about becoming an electrician. What programs are available to become an electrician, such as trade school, apprenticeships, work experience, and how long of a commitment would it be to see through to completion. He felt it would help facilitators explain what it takes to fulfill a commitment in a chosen field.

Next Steps:

I will be sending out an email to the group explaining the change in PWLN accounts and how to log on to the new site. I will also be sending out the hard copy of the essential skills alignment guide.

Added, by e-mail: Here is the report I wrote up after my visit with Charlie earlier this week. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with me. I think they are ready to get moving on this now that they feel a bit more comfortable with it after discussing it amongst themselves.

ATTACHMENT 7

OCCASIONAL REPORT #4, April 8, 2005

Patrick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Summary

Usage of ESPORT-PLATO in the Cape Breton project was monitored from system-generated data, accessed via the Internet using a data-summarization facility developed by ESPORT staff. The following shows usage of ESPORT-PLATO in the nine Cape Breton sites from January 24 to April 1, 2005, as of the dates shown.

Table 1: Cape Breton activity levels 45 days after project commencement

Activity	2/28/05	3/10	3/22	4/3
Has Learning Plan(s)	1	1	1	1
Has Complete InterOptions	3	3	3	3
Has Registered PLATO	2	2	2	2
Has Completed Self-Assessment	2	2	2	2
Total learners	21	17	25	25

Detailed examination of all sites shows very similar levels of activity. One site, TEC, claims 17 of the 25 total learners, but the level of actual activity (in terms of learning plans, self-assessments, and PLATO activity) does not differ from the other sites.

ATTACHMENT 8

ESPORT team meeting notes, Ottawa, April 27, 2005

In attendance:

Mark Wallace (chair); Patrick Cummins; Pat Fahy; Donald Grant; Rob McBride; Peter Merritt; Kate Parry

Agenda:

1. Who we are
2. What is happening/Where are we now
3. Milestones (Where are we going/What are the delays)
4. Roles/Responsibilities
5. Communication Flows
6. Name Change
7. How to set up community of practice
8. Common Language
9. Miscellaneous
10. Follow-up

1. Who we are

Mark started working with ESPORT 1999 when he looked at what essential skill profiles were available at the time. He worked with Charles Craig to evaluate programmes and later worked for another learning provider which went out of business. He then moved over to PLATO where he worked on developing learning materials and creating curriculum for 211 occupations. He is now trying to develop a virtual community for the facilitators and learners of ESPORT.

Patrick developed ESPORT with Rob, through HRSDC funding. The original ESPORT belongs to Rob's company, but an agreement exists that it is CEP's property with Rob's company still getting a benefit. ESPORT has moved from an assessment tool to a real tool. ESPORT began working with PLATO around 2001.

As of 2001, Peter has been the web developer and project administrator for ESPORT. His deals with technical problems and integrates new ideas into the existing technology.

Rob is now working on the project website, a newsletter and communications.

Kate worked as an academic advisor with Patrick when he was designing LSCAT. Kate stated that the project could have great potential for development in Africa, but noted

that if this product is to be sold in an academic setting the term 'literacy' needs to be clearly defined.

Pat is working as an evaluator for ESPORT. By journaling what is going on and reflecting on practices, his long term objective is to be able to provide insight to funding agencies and client groups. He sees the Community of Practice as a way of focusing reflection and reconsidering practices.

Donald represents PLATO and provides day -to-day project management and synthesizing what is going on.

2. Where we are/What is happening now?

Active Sites: (learners and trainers using ESPORT)

*The Cape Breton Group

Holland College Group, Prince Edward Island

School District (SD) 20, Greater Trail Community, British Columbia

Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Prince Albert

Pilot Projects:

*Newfoundland/Labrador

*ACCESS - An umbrella organization for aboriginal organizations in the downtown east side of Vancouver, British Columbia

Under Negotiation:

GREAT – An aboriginal group

*These are the sites Pat is evaluating. May 2006 is the deadline for the pilot sites to be completed for evaluation.

Note: some of these are group sites, not individual sites. For example, the Cape Breton Group is composed of more than one group.

Steve Kimner and Kathy Crawford provided training for the active sites and could possibly be available once a week to provide advice on the product.

Cape Breton

- Has 180 learners (learners being defined as people who are using the product)

- To be a learner, one just has to be registered as a learner. To register, a facilitator uses the learner's name, e-mail and then activates the account.

- Pat will subtract the number of dummy accounts to get an accurate picture of the number of actual users

3. Milestones (Where are we going/what are the delays)

- There is a funding problem with the Newfoundland/Labrador project and without the funding the project will not be carried out.
- With respect to the ACCESS project, Memorandums of Understanding are being returned and once they are completed training can be scheduled in a couple of weeks.
- Everything else is on track.

4. Roles/Responsibilities

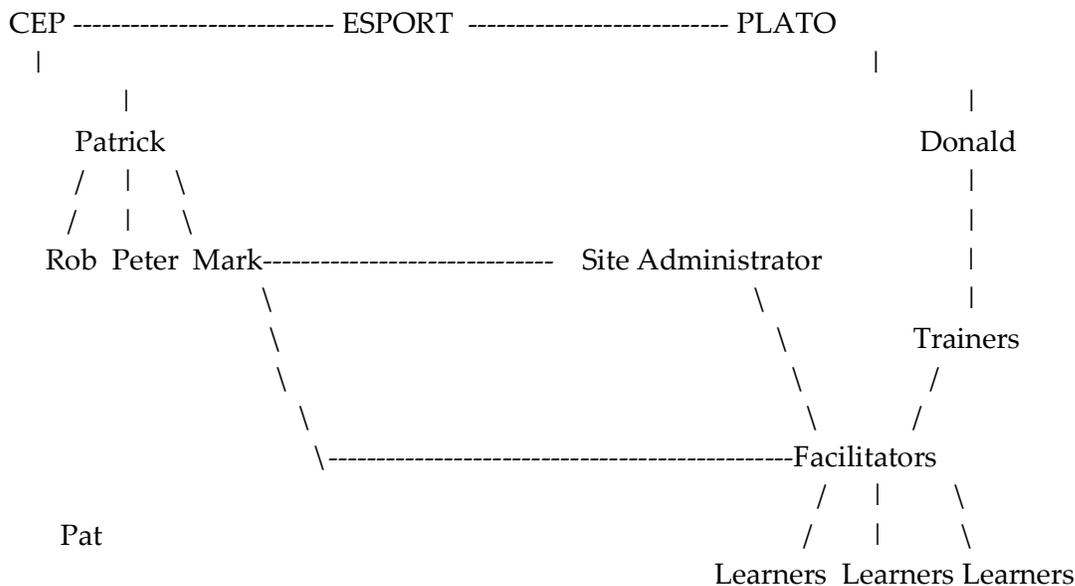
- Everyone is to write up a paragraph on who they are and what they do and give it to Mark.

5. Communication Flows

Three levels of communication exist:

1. Internal communication: i.e. among the ESPORT team
2. Communication with "non-learner users" i.e. the facilitators, site administrators
3. Learners => to be further developed at a later stage

Communication flow for queries:



- As a temporary solution, Mark will serve as a central filter for all queries.
- An 'info@ESPORT' account will be set up whereby queries will be directed to Mark.
- All e-mails will receive a general response indicating that a response will be provided within a certain time frame

- Every member of ESPORT will receive the message, but Mark will indicate in the *heading* OR in the *TO:* line who the message is addressed to.
- A brief subject heading will also be included for future referencing OR a numerical code will be developed i.e. 1. common problems; 2. technical problems
- In order to archive the messages a YahooGroup will be set up. Everyone will be able to access this.

- Donald will respond general and technical questions about PLATO
- Steve Kilmer (or maybe Kathey Crawford) will respond to PLATO training issues
- All decisions will go through Patrick even if it just to rubber stamping it
- Peter will deal with ESPORT technical issues
- If there is something of great importance Pat should be notified.
- Ultimate objective is to have this all on the website

6. Name Change

The need to change the current name, ESPORT, was recognized.

- esportfolio is currently the domain name
- a suggestion was made to put a contest on the website to come up with a new name
- 'skillsportfolio'; 'skills to work' were suggested
- if going to carry out a media campaign this needs to be done as soon as possible

7. How to set up community of practice

In order to keep the ESPORT team, facilitators and learners informed, a community of practice will be set up in the form of a website. The ESPORT team, facilitators and learners will have their own website with user specific information included under the headings outlined below.

Website Layout:

1. Breaking News

- Serves as a 'check-in' of what's happening
- Example: for ESPORT members it could include what people working on; if going on holiday; if emergency; big meetings => this is for ESPORT team members
- Archive news by month, but within month can look it by day
- Anyone could post it or it goes to someone
- Everyone check in bi-weekly to say what's going on/ what doing

2. Who's Who

- Who we are; contact info
- Lists facilitators and their e-mails
- May include a suggestion box

3. Help

- Recorded solutions to problems that have come up
- Similar to a FAQs but for our own use

4. Of interest

- General information; success stories; problems; results of the evaluation

5. E-mail/Communication [really an invisible section]

- Record of all e-mails and replies
- Want the ability to delete these e-mails, but generally it is a full archive of all communications

Suggestions:

- At some point, a facilitator could serve as a guest editor to write up success stories, etc. They would be paid small fee.
- Create mentoring for new facilitators; virtual check-ins; instant messages; *job listing for facilitators
- Site administrators may want to have their own sub-group
- Want people to go to the site to get useful information and ultimately want users to continue the momentum of the site
- Key is to make it user friendly
- May want to put up information for a short time period to generate more interest but the challenge would be in moderating what comes in and the incubation period between putting stuff up.
- It will have to be determined who can post information on the site, how it will be posted and how it will be monitored.

8. Common Language

- Donald, with the input of others, to develop of list of common words and definitions to ensure all ESPORT teams are using the same language.

9. Miscellaneous

PLATO

- It is unsure if there is a way to track how far a user goes in PLATO, however, the system generated information is more than sufficient. The trick is to export the information (i.e. to Excel) to get the specific information you want.
- Pat is assessing the success of PLATO by talking to both minor and major users of the product. HRSDC has verbally committed to getting people (learners, facilitators, etc) together physically (i.e. symposium).

Website

How facilitators dealing with web interface?

- The site needs to be simplified.
- This is a training issue. It was suggested that the facilitator only learn one/two things and upgrade their skills through webcasts (within PLATO). The possibility of moving up from Facilitator One to Facilitator Two status was also suggested.

Funding

- Projects are no longer funded after the pilot period ends. It is hoped that after this period ends the sites will get their own funding. The funding will not be through HRSDC.

Password Issues

- Issues of security regarding passwords were raised i.e. when moving from PLATO to ESPORT
- Issues of privacy were also raised
- Donald and Peter are working on this issue

10. Follow-up:

- Everyone: Provide Mark with a brief paragraph on their roles/responsibilities; Give Donald any terms that need clarification; Discuss name change (?).
- Mark: Draft organizational chart; Put together roles/responsibilities; Set up YahooGroup (with Peter?); Set up Community of Practice
- Patrick: To provide Donald with the LFA (it outlines what is going to be tested i.e. the results based framework); Get business cards made
- Donald: Develop list of common language and definitions; Send Anne Marie contact information for Grant Bishop, Tom Clahane, Steve Kimner and Kathy Crawford; Work with Peter on password/security issues.
- Peter: Set up method for team members to contribute to site adjustment list; Set-up YahooGroup (with Mark?); Set up an info@ESPORT account; Look into retrieving specific data from the website; Work with Donald on password/security issues.

ATTACHMENT 9:*OCCASIONAL REPORT #5, May 17, 2005*

Patrick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Summary

A previous Occasional Report (#4; April 8, 2005) reported on usage of ESPORT-PLATO in the Cape Breton area. The following is an update of that report, showing accumulated total levels of usage of ESPORT-PLATO in the nine Cape Breton sites from January 24 to May 17, 2005, as shown below.

Table 1: Cape Breton activity levels periodically after project commencement

Activity	2/28/05	3/10	3/22	4/3	5/17
Has Learning Plan(s)	1	1	1	1	1
Has Complete InterOptions	3	3	3	3	17
Has Registered PLATO	2	2	2	2	2
Has Completed Self-Assessment	2	2	2	2	8
Total learners	21	17	25	25	30

As reported previously one site (TEC) claims 21 of the 30 total learners (the second highest number of learners for a site nationally, according to the online records facility at <http://www.esportfolio.com/ESPORT/admin/reports/>), but the level of actual activity (in terms of learning plans, self-assessments, and PLATO activity) remains similar (low) across the sites. The TEC site now has 8 facilitators (the third highest number of facilitators on a site nationally), but records for 3 of these show the notation, "There are NO Learner Accounts created for this Facilitator!" Only one other facilitator (at the Glace Bay YMCA) has no learner accounts.

ATTACHMENT 10

OCCASIONAL REPORT #6, June 21, 2005

Patrick J. Fahy
Lead Evaluator

Summary

Previous Occasional Reports (#4; April 8, 2005; #5; May 17, 2005) presented information on levels of usage of ESPORT-PLATO in the Cape Breton area. The following update shows accumulated total levels of usage, and mean levels of use, in the nine Cape Breton sites, for the period February 28 to June 21, 2005. The purpose of this report is to monitor changes in usage patterns following the additional training provided in North Sydney to the Cape Breton users (June 7 – 9, 2005), by S. Kimner, ESPORT-PLATO trainer.

Table 3: Cape Breton student activity levels

Activity	2/28/05	3/10	3/22	4/3	5/17	6/21	Avg.
Learning Plan(s) created	1	1	1	1	1	2	1.2
Completed InterOptions	3	3	3	3	17	19	8.0
Registered in PLATO	2	2	2	2	2	0	1.7
Completed Self-Assessment	2	2	2	2	8	12	4.7
Total students	21	17	25	25	30	34	25.3

Usage has increased only slightly since the retraining conducted in early June; however, the fact that little time has passed, and the time of year, undoubtedly at least partially explain this fact.

The Employment Centre (TEC), North Sydney, still has the largest number of users (20). As previously, the largest part of the observed activity continues to be in the InterOptions and the Self-Assessment activities.