

Learning together

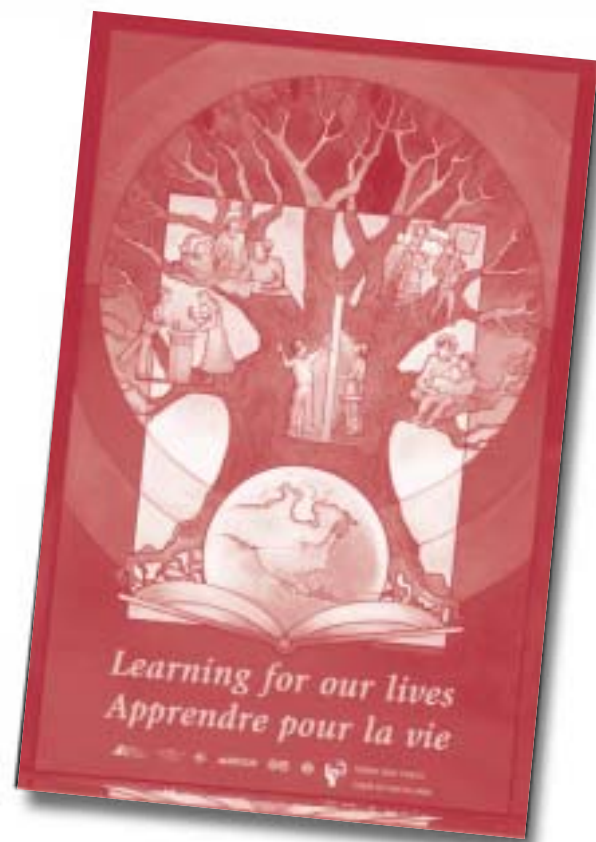
Solidarity at work

Vol. 5, number 12, Fall 2004

Learning for our lives

The Canadian Labour Congress is pleased to announce the issue of its new literacy poster on September 8th, 2004, International Literacy Day. The bilingual poster depicts a tree rooted in “reading the world”, embracing the many ways learning and literacy can touch our lives: at work, in the community, with our families and in our unions. Illustrated by Edmonton artist Barbara Hartmann in shades of blue, green and gold, the message *Unions and Literacy: Learning for our Lives* says that unions and literacy are about both learning for our whole lives and learning for the many parts of our lives. Several affiliates contributed to the CLC poster project, including CUPE, CUPW, USWA, PSAC, CAW and the AFL.

The poster is available in two sizes, 15” x 23” and 10” x 15” and as a bookmark. For more information about ordering the poster, please contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca.



UFCW Canada goes the distance with online course

Blend some expertly developed UFCW Canada courseware with the latest in on-line learning and what you get is a Safe Food Handling (SFH) course that could soon be delivered to just about anywhere in Canada.

UFCW Canada's National Training and Education Department created this "digital" distance education *SFH to Go!* course with funding assistance from the National Literacy Secretariat.

SFH to Go! combines the best of two earlier National Training and Education initiatives: a 2002 on-line project offering introductory distance education computer courses to Ontario members of UFCW Canada and a classroom-delivered SFH course developed in 2001. The classroom SFH course was developed using clear language to make it more accessible to a wide range of members.

"The goal is for *SFH to Go!* to be available to any member who needs it".

Clear language was also a priority in the year-long development of *SFH to GO!* This newly developed course is now being piloted on-line with a cross-section of UFCW Canada members working in hospitality, retail food, and institutional kitchens to evaluate the effectiveness of on-line distance education for students with literacy and/or ESL challenges. Feedback from the pilot phase will be used to enhance the new course and allow the project team to evaluate how to best deliver an on-line course made up of sector-specific content.

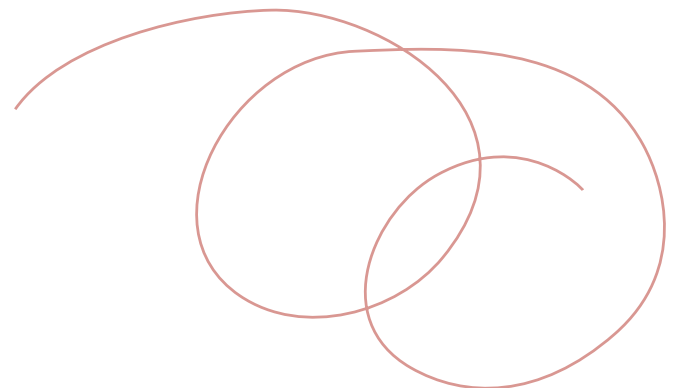
"The goal is for *SFH to Go!* to be available to any member who needs it," says UFCW Canada's national director Michael J. Fraser. "The course



gives our members all the fundamentals of safe food handling and it will be a tremendous resource for our members preparing for their Food Handler certification test."

Bryan Neath is the co-ordinator of UFCW Canada's National Training and Education Department. "The convenience of the course is a big plus", says Neath. "Students can connect to it any time of day to suit their own schedule. For members in remote areas where there is no training centre, *SFH to Go!* will give them equal access to great training about a subject everybody is concerned about these days."

"Following the pilot phase," says UFCW Canada Training and Education representative Susan Jones, "we'll be using the feedback from our pilot participants to make *SFH to Go!* even more user-friendly and effective. The experience," says Jones, "will also be used to help us develop other on-line courses for UFCW Canada members working in other sectors."



Reading Your Rights: A Clear language health and safety course



Reading Your Rights, a new pilot project of the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) of Manitoba and the Winnipeg local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is taking steps toward a safer and healthier workplace. Launched in January 2004, the project is making an important link between clear language and health and safety.

Designed to involve CUPW members who face language and literacy challenges, the project includes “translating” article 33 on health and safety of CUPW’s collective agreement with Canada Post into clear language.

Over the eight months leading up to the agreement with the WCB, a series of focus groups was carried out by CUPW to find out the health and safety concerns of its rank and file members. The feedback was clear:

- the collective agreement was full of legalese,
- the safety signage in the workplace was inappropriate for the type of work taking place in the various areas, and
- the Employer’s safety bulletins were too wordy and filled with acronyms.

The focus groups brought out the need to make clear language a priority when developing the project. It became clear to the union that the pilot had to be inclusive and representative of the whole membership: it would not only include workers with English as a second language, but also workers with low literacy levels and Deaf workers.

An advisory committee was set up with representatives from the labour health and safety, education, and special needs communities in Manitoba to provide input into the development of the curriculum for the project. A certified teacher was hired to develop and deliver the project curriculum.

To address the many barriers that might be encountered by participants, funding was secured to address the costs of child care and Deaf interpretive services during the delivery of the course. Since Canada Post is a 24 hour operation, co-operation from the Employer was sought to facilitate the enrolment of students and the rescheduling of shifts so that they could participate in the project.

The *Reading Your Rights* project is now underway, scheduled to last for 16 months. Participants will be required to take one of the three twelve-week sessions being offered.

“CUPW knows that Canada Post is ultimately responsible for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace. At the same time, the union and WCB Manitoba are committed to strategies to help reduce injury and prevent accidents, and know that making things clearer can only make life better for the postal worker on the shop floor,” says Bob Sample, Winnipeg CUPW local Compensation Officer.

By Bruce Tascona
Winnipeg Local, Canadian Union of Postal Workers

A Necessary Partnership

A historic moment in Whistler on May 16th and 17th, 2004 found community college instructors joining labour activists to explore the development of partnerships to support worker-centred literacy in British Columbia.

The *Conversation on Literacy* was sponsored by the *Working Together* project, a partnership between the British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL) and Capilano College in North Vancouver, with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat. It preceded the Annual General Meeting of the College and Institute Educators' Association (CIEA), which represents many college instructors in BC. College instructors from the British Columbia Government Employees' Union (BCGEU) also participated.

“This is the first time I have seen where my literacy work and my union activism can meet”.

The *Conversation* marked the first time in BC that literacy activists have met under labour's tent with their sisters and brothers from educational institutions. The assumption behind the *Conversation* was that a key to the sustainability of workplace literacy programs lies in colleges and labour unions finding ways of working together.

Jim Dixon, CEP National Representative, called it a “necessary partnership.” Brother Dixon went on to explain that labour needs the expertise, credibility and resources of the public education system to create sustainable literacy programs in the workplace. At the same time, colleges need labour partners to help them set up responsive programs, connect to potential learners and build learning communities within workplaces.

Irma Mohammed, BCFL Director of Education, opened with an overview of the events leading up to the *Conversation*, making the link to the valuable contribution of the CLC. Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Co-ordinator, talked about labour's vision and practice of literacy, and how the integration of literacy and clear language into the mainstream work of the union has become an increasingly important goal for this work.

Tom Dawson and Hopeton Hague (CEP) and Corky Kelley (PPWC) spoke eloquently about their experiences as union champions of worker-centred literacy. A surprise attendee was Robert Wedel, award-winning workplace educator from Capilano College, whose work has strongly contributed to the development of union-based literacy programs in health care and the pulp and paper industry in BC.

The group was rich with suggestions for how to improve labour-college partnerships. Among the many ideas that came forward were:

- College instructors could work with their own unions to bargain ways to make it easier to partner with other unions in delivering literacy in the workplace.



Facilitators of the “Conversation” from back row left to right: Hopeton Hague (CEP), Tamara Levine (CLC), Jean Connon-Unda, Diana Twiss (CIEA, Capilano College), Tom Dawson (CEP), front row left to right: Corky Kelly (PPWC), Jim Dixon (CEP), Irma Mohammed (BCFL), Rob Wedel and Sarah Evans (CIEA, Capilano College).

- Unions could develop a protocol on being informed consumers of college services.
- Unions could bargain training funds to access college assistance in creating literacy programs for their members.
- College instructors could allocate Professional Development time and funds to access labour literacy training, such as the CLC's *Seeds for Change* and *Clear Language for Union Communications* workshops.
- College instructors could develop literacy programs within their own workplaces in partnership with college staff unions.

The *Conversation* brought a labour focus to the literacy work of many college participants. As one BCGEU participant summed up, “This is the first

time I have seen where my literacy work and my union activism can meet.”

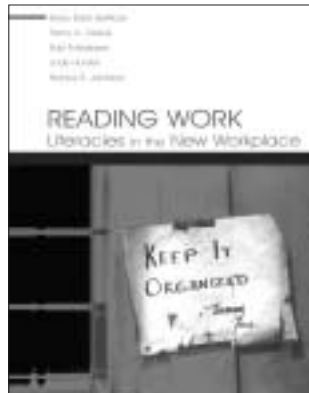
Following the *Conversation on Literacy*, CIEA delegates went on to their Annual General Meeting, while many of the other participants stayed on to join the *Seeds for Change* workshop sponsored by the CLC and the BCFL. The workshop was facilitated by Jean Connon-Unda, longtime labour literacy educator and author of the CLC's *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide to Worker-Centred Literacy*.

by Sarah Evans, CIEA member and workplace education instructor with Capilano College.

New Resources

1. *READING WORK: LITERACIES IN THE NEW WORKPLACE*

by Mary Ellen Belfiore, Tracy A. Defoe, Sue Folinsbee, Judy Hunter, and Nancy S. Jackson, 306 pages.



Reading Work explores changing understandings of literacy and its place in contemporary workplace settings. It highlights questions and dilemmas to consider when planning and teaching workplace education and challenges traditional thinking about workplace literacy as functional skills. Taking a social perspective on literacies in the workplace, this book enables readers to see the complexity of literacy practices and their embeddedness in culture, knowledge, and relations of power. A mixture of ethnographic studies, analysis, and personal reflections makes these ideas accessible and relevant to a wide range of readers in the fields of adult literacy and language education and helps to bridge the divide between theory and practice in the field of workplace education.

Available from Grassroots Press Literacy Services, \$46.95, www.literacyservices.com/EandW.htm.



2. *BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE: A UFCW LOCAL 832 TRAINING CENTRE VIDEO, 18 MINUTES*

The UFCW Local 832 Training Centre in Manitoba has produced a DVD that chronicles the evolution of the Centre. Since 1998, the Training Centre has been providing high quality, accessible adult learning programs for the members of UFCW Local 832 and their families. The video includes moving testimonials from learners, staff, educational partners and employers talking about the benefits of their experience with the Centre.

For more information or to get a copy, please call Tammy Sigurdur at (877) 775-8329.

A clear language film project

The CLC is pleased to announce its collaboration on a clear language film project with the National Film Board (NFB). Animated films 3 to 3½ minute in length in English and French are being developed by award-winning film-makers Michael Fukushima and animator Janet Pearlman.

“The NFB is delighted to work in partnership with the CLC and its member unions on this literacy project”, says Tom Perlmutter, NFB Director, English Programs Branch. “Clear Language is a wonderful example of how the artful use of media can inform, educate and entertain and work for social change by improving communications and promoting social discourse. Art for social change is at the heart of what the NFB does. We look forward to future collaborations on projects where we share similar ideals and goals”.

“The potential for this is enormous”, says Barb Byers, CLC Executive Vice-President. “We’ll be able to build discussion guides and other resources around the film, which could have an important impact not only on labour education but on how



we run meetings, write and design our communications, etc. The partnership between labour and the NFB means that we are building a relationship with an organization that has similar goals, loads of creative talent, and a distribution system with enormous capacity.” The target date for completion of the films is the CLC Convention in June 2005.

To date, CAW, CUPE, CUPW, USWA, PSAC, UFCW and the AFL are participating in the film project.

Upcoming courses:

Literacy and Clear Language: Tools for Solidarity will be offered at the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Fall School in Jasper, December 5th to 10th, 2004. Cost \$960 before October 1st based on double occupancy. To register contact Linda Robinson at the AFL at (780) 483-3021, lrobinso@afl.org.

For more information contact Tamara Levine, CLC at (613) 526-7437, tlevine@clc-ctc.ca. Participants from all regions welcome.

Clear Language for Union Communications: Train-the-Trainer is currently being developed with plans to offer it in 2005. Contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca for more details.



Help welcomed by Toronto hospitality workers

The Hospitality Workers' Resource Centre (HWRC) is a place where workers from the hospitality industry in the Toronto area can go to get support. Peer counsellors, who have been in the same position as the workers they see, are the heart of this support.

The HWRC provides employment counselling, job search, help with résumé writing, and job placement.

It also provides referrals to community services. This includes Rent Bank assistance and food vouchers through the Molson Hospitality Employees Relief Fund. English upgrading and computer training are offered to laid off workers to prepare them to re-enter the workforce equipped with better skills.

The industry was turned upside down when SARS hit. There were cancellations in hotels, convention centres, and banquet halls. Restaurants were empty. Tourists stopped coming to the city. Workers were devastated. Many who had been working in the industry for up to thirty years and more found themselves without work.

A survey was done with laid off workers from the industry. The survey results showed that there was a need for more support for hospitality workers than was originally believed. The results confirmed that these workers needed financial and emotional support.

Without jobs, many people were not able to pay their bills. It was heart-wrenching. Some lost their homes and others could not buy food for their families. In spite of all these setbacks, they wanted to remain in their industry.

The Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees union (H.E.R.E. Local 75), along with hotel industry employers lobbied the government for help on behalf of the workers. A special program, a joint labour management partnership funded by the federal and provincial governments, was launched. The HWRC officially opened in November 2003.

The industry is slowly turning around, but a centre like HWRC is very important for hospitality workers. As a shop steward I hear and see the problems and hardships that these workers go through daily. When a laid off worker who has used the services of HWRC calls and says, "I have found a job," it proves the centre must stay open.



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By Zeleda Davis, Peer counsellor
Hospitality Workers' Resource Centre, Toronto

The CLC Literacy Working Group

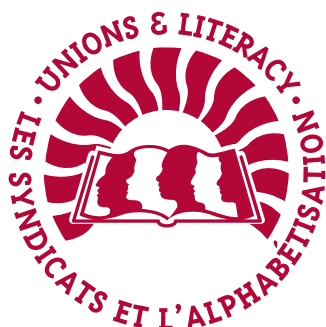
The CLC Literacy Working Group is composed of affiliates and federation representatives with an interest in union-based literacy and clear language. The Working Group meets twice yearly to share information and resources, learn from our collective

experiences and advise the CLC on its Workplace Literacy Project. Contact your Literacy Working Group representative for more information about what's going on in your organization.

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