



## A clear message to the CLC

"Clear language is remembering what it is like not to understand." This was a theme of the awareness workshop Clear Language: It's a Matter of Rights held on May 6 - a historic event attended by officers and staff at the Congress in Ottawa.



"If the labour movement is truly committed to social justice and participation, then we have to ask ourselves: who are we including?" said Ken Georgetti, CLC President. "Who are we leaving out? Is there a way to communicate our messages more effectively?"

Respect your reader and know your audience were among the main workshop messages. For example, writers should always consider the educational background, and the literacy and language skills of their readers. This is not about simple-minded writing, but about getting our message across.

Readers have the right to receive information that makes sense to them; otherwise, they won't read our newsletters, brochures and other documents. After all, most of us find complicated written material a challenge to read. And all of us are drowning in reading material competing for our attention!

Workshop participants learned about some of labour's clear language successes: rewriting a union constitution, annotating collective agreements, creating clear language companion contracts, and passing policies to encourage convention resolutions written in clear language. They drew up a list of the clear language opportunities and challenges at the CLC and discussed ways to move forward.

"This session is the first step in a process that will offer support, encouragement and further training as we embark on this bold endeavour in clear language," Georgetti said.

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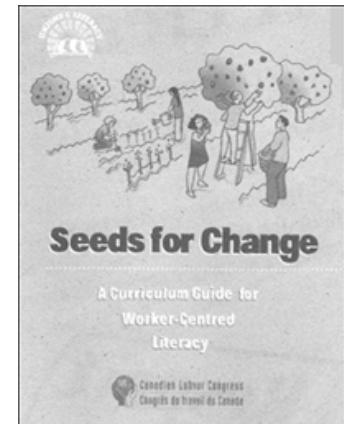
Canadian Labour Congress  
Congrès du travail du Canada

# Seeds for Change: Educating the Educators

By Margerit Roger

Adult educators don't often get a chance to inspect their personal philosophies about teaching and learning. Usually we take part in workshops that give us information or help us develop new skills. Only rarely do we get prodded into thinking critically about why we do what we do in the classroom, and the impact that might have on the learners, on us and ultimately on the community we live in.

A diverse group of Manitoba literacy educators had a chance to stretch and struggle during a workshop led by labour educator Jean Connon Unda in the Fall of 2002. We learned about emergent curriculum and the problem-posing approach to teaching outlined in the CLC guide *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-centred Literacy*. We learned how to work with authentic materials and action-based exercises in the classroom, making instruction more learner and worker-centered. But most importantly, we experienced a significant shift in our understanding of our role as educators, and the role learning can play in social change. We came to learn about transformative education, and came out transformed ourselves.



## Powerful connections

The workshop began with a self-assessment of our views, assumptions and strengths and weaknesses as educators. We found ways to integrate the problem-posing approach into our classrooms, and how to identify "teachable moments" and expand them into opportunities for a better understanding of the systems and beliefs that underpin our society. Making this connection was powerful, because it showed us how our work as facilitators could help create change on an individual, community and political level.

*"The workshop ... inspired us to trust our instincts as progressive educators and to keep working for positive change in the classroom and in the community:"*

The workshop confirmed what we knew about learner-centered instructing. It also inspired us to trust our instincts as progressive educators and to keep working for positive change in the classroom and in the community.

Margerit Roger is the Program Developer for the UFCW, Training Centre in Winnipeg. The Seeds for Change workshop was sponsored by the CLC and the Manitoba Federation of Labour with financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat. Participants were labour educators, teachers instructing in union settings and curriculum developers. A similar workshop took place in Halifax, April 28-29, 2003.

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To order *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-centred Literacy*, contact [clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca](mailto:clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca)

## **CLC: Literacy Project gets high rating**

An evaluation undertaken in the Fall of 2002 has given the CLC Workplace Literacy Project an excellent rating. Carried out by Bev Burke and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, the evaluation affirms that "the CLC can be justifiably proud ... the project plays a key role in labour literacy. All aspects of the project have been very successful."

Based on interviews, focus groups, observation, document review and case studies, the evaluation looked at the project's objectives, the strategies used to achieve them and the indicators of effectiveness. These resulted in a series of "lessons learned" and a set of recommendations.

The CLC Literacy Working Group is highlighted as a key mechanism for co-ordination, initiation of new ideas, ongoing support and professional development for labour literacy activists. The recommendations include putting a priority on 1) the integration of literacy and clear language into all aspects of union work, 2) the need to financially sustain union involvement in literacy, and 3) advocacy for provincial support and a national system for adult learning.

To see the summary report of the evaluation, see the literacy page at [www.clc-ctc.ca](http://www.clc-ctc.ca).

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## **Spreading the word about union-based literacy**

*By Nancy Jackson*

Making sure we get the message out about labour's worker-centred approach to literacy is the aim of the action research project of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and the CLC Literacy Working Group.

The project has three main priorities:

- Building a database of worker-centred and union-friendly literacy programs, policies, materials, funding models, contract language and other resources.
- Exploring successful strategies to integrate literacy awareness and activities into union life and culture.
- Improving awareness of barriers to participating in union-based literacy.

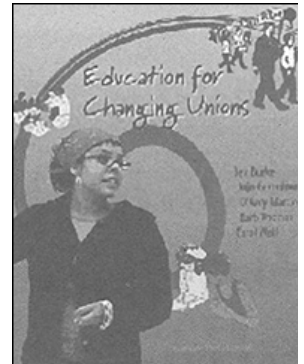
As it enters the second half of its term, the project's emphasis will shift from gathering information to developing educational materials and activities

*Nancy Jackson teaches at OISE's Department of Adult Education.*

# Training that works

By Karen Lior

*Is Training Working for You?* The CLC wants to help unions get a positive answer to this question. So it started a three-year project in October 2002 to develop tools and information on labour adjustment, apprenticeship, sectoral approaches to human resource planning and lifelong learning.



The project will involve the following work:

- Creating a guide and holding a working session on labour adjustment.
- Developing a manual and organizing a conference on sectoral human resources planning.
- Producing a report on school-to-work transition.
- Studying union mechanisms to support lifelong learning.

Panelists at a labour adjustment session held in Winnipeg, March 23-24, stressed the importance of "reading the early warning signs" to anticipate change, making and maintaining links to community networks and services, and staying involved in shaping the legislative, political and social agenda. Participants appreciated the opportunity to hear what is happening across the country, to gain expertise and to be part of an interactive session.

*Karen Lior is the CLC National Representative, Training*

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## An inspiring tool for union educators

*Education for Changing Unions* is a must-have for union educators. The book is chock-full of ideas and practical exercises, is clearly written and designed to stimulate working people in many settings and locations. Other union educators have called it "insightful," a "terrific resource," and "an inspiration."

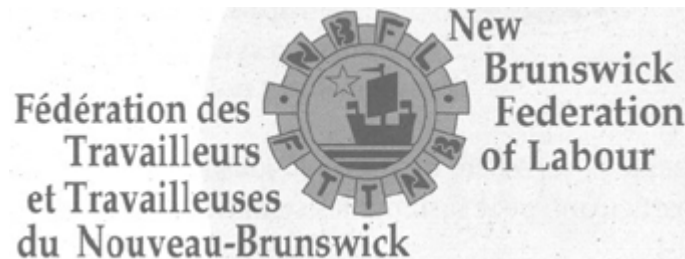
*Education for Changing Unions* was written by seasoned labour and community educators Bev Burke, Jojo Geronimo, D'Arcy Marti, Barb Thomas and Carol Wall.

To order contact: *between the lines*, 720 Bathurst Street, Suite 404, Toronto, On, M5S 2R4.  
1-800-718-7201. (416) 535-9914 (Toronto). Fax: (416) 535-1484. [www.btlbooks.com](http://www.btlbooks.com).  
Cost: \$24.95\$, with special discounts for bulk orders.

# Unions take up literacy challenge in NB

By Jason Carney

It's sobering to know the Atlantic provinces have the lowest literacy levels in Canada. The situation needs to change, and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (NBFL) is leading the way by helping unions address the basic skills and other learning needs of their members.



The NBFL literacy project sprang to life in December 2002. As the newly hired literacy project coordinator, I have to admit I was somewhat sceptical about whether New Brunswick unions would heed the literacy call. With so many pressing issues, how could I persuade them to make literacy a part of their agenda? Faced with the stark reality that almost 60% of the New Brunswickers aged 16 and over have relatively low literacy skills, the province's unions answered the call to action enthusiastically.

On March 14th, 24 participants gathered in Fredericton for what turned out to be an uplifting example of union solidarity.' The participants were open, frank and trusting in discussions, which included sensitive topics such as a person's level of education. They put forth a huge effort to make the workshop a success.

*"The NB FL is leading the way by helping unions address the basic skills and other learning needs of their members."*

Are we making a difference in New Brunswick? Will unions adopt a literacy agenda? Are our members concerned with literacy issues in their workplaces? These questions ran through our heads as we looked at the participant evaluations at the end of the workshop. But when asked how the course could be improved, 88% said it wasn't long enough! They felt they had only scratched the surface. They wanted more information and better strategies on how to deal with such a big issue in our province - a need we'll try to meet in the next phase of our project.

*Jason Carney is the NBFL's Literacy Project Coordinator*

# Solidarity Forever / Solidarité

*By Jorge Garcia Orgales*



A sunny week in March at Hockey Highlands in Orangeville, Ontario. Melting snow. Great weather for smokers to enjoy a break from a workshop without shivering.

But nobody spent much time outside. They were too busy sharing experiences and laughs, great and embarrassing moments, looking at how to be better instructors for the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). The 15 union facilitators were participating in a workshop on "integrating literacy into union education." It was an opportunity to review instructing methods, look at teaching styles and examine materials from a literacy and clear language perspective.

"Common language to me may not be common language to someone else," is how one participant put it, summing up the feelings of the group at the end of the week-long session.

*"Common language to me may not  
be common language to someone else"*

## Seeing things differently

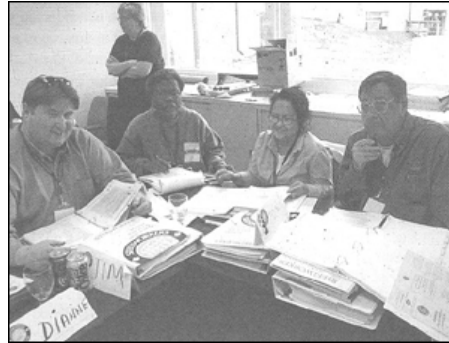
With the guidance of adult educator Jean Connon-Unda, the facilitators evaluated all aspects of the three key courses they instruct in the union and discussed ways to improve them. The courses included: "You and your union," "Steward Level 1" and "Healthand Safety Level 1" Participants were ready, willing and excited to look at these courses from another perspective.

"I learned that when I have to re-explain things I need to focus on why," explained instructor Roxanne Bond, from Brantford Local 733.

Said instructor Sherry Charette from Windsor Local 9597: "This workshop has made, me aware that I should not assume everyone is literate. Also, there is a need to be conscious of the signs to look for when some may be uncomfortable with their abilities."

This workshop is a keeper for the USWA. It is good for the union and its members. More important, the instructors want it to continue. "I hope this program takes off and I'm part of it," said Steve Dobson, from Oshawa Local 9185.

*Jorge Garcia Orgales is a staff representative for the Research and Bargaining Department of the USWA*

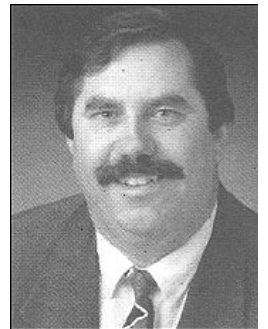


*USWA participants (from left to right) Corey Brookings, Marion Morgan, Toni Eyre and Don Lutes*

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## **A good contract workers can read**

"In 2003, it's not acceptable that we have a collective agreement that has evolved over 60 years, where a worker can't identify what their rights are because it's full of legalistic crap by employers. One of the objectives that we've set down...is that we wanted to have enhanced rights for our members written in clear, understandable English and ID the end, we want that agreement to be better for our members.



"Do things have to change? When you have 28 pages of language to schedule two weeks' vacation, damn right they have to change. Those were all traps put in there for 60 years by employers so that every time you wanted to do something they'd have something to say no to. We cleaned all that up."

*"When you have 28 pages of language to schedule two weeks vacation, damn right they have to change:"*

*Leo Gerard, President of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) at a news conference on January 29, 2003, outlining the details of a then-tentative agreement with International Steel Group (ISG). The agreement was ratified in February.*

## 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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