

Learning *together*

Solidarity at work

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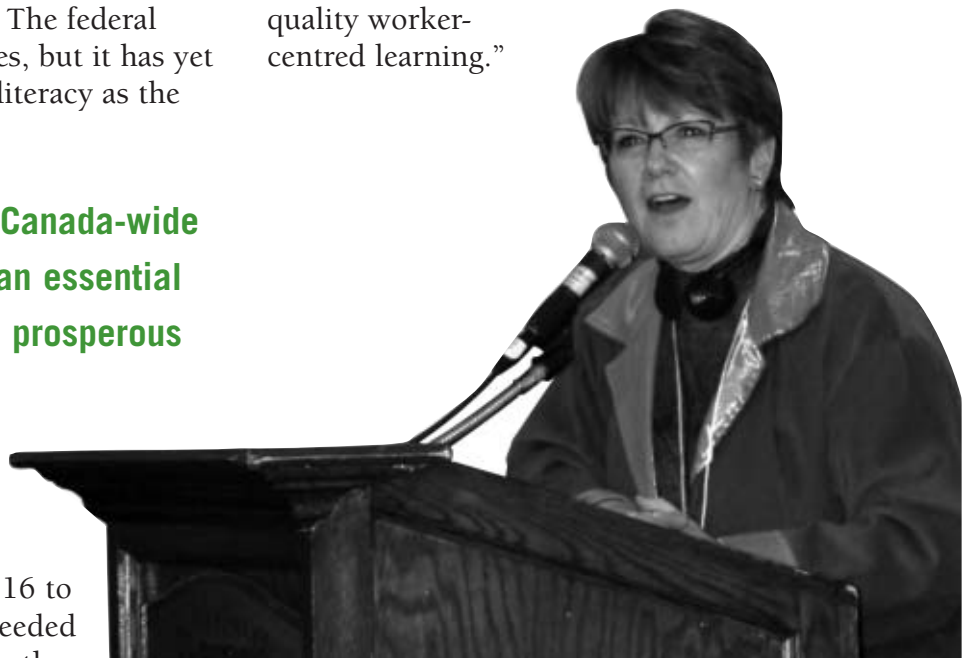
Trying Times for Literacy

“These are trying times for literacy in Canada”, says Barbara Byers, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Executive Vice-President. “The literacy community and adult learners across Canada are still reeling from the cuts to federal literacy funding announced last September. Along with the cancellation of the Labour Market Partnership Agreements with the provinces that would have supported workplace training, the cuts don't make sense. The federal government bemoans skills shortages, but it has yet to make a national commitment to literacy as the foundation for learning.”

“A well-funded, co-ordinated Canada-wide system for adult learning is an essential step to a more inclusive and prosperous society”.

The research is clear: the recent International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey found that 42% of working age Canadian adults aged 16 to 65 do not have the literacy skills needed to succeed in today's society. This is the same figure as in 1994. “A well-funded, co-ordinated Canada-wide system for adult learning is an essential step to a more inclusive and prosperous society”, says Byers.

“If there is a silver lining, it's that the literacy community has become politicized in new ways in response to the cuts,” says Byers. “We'll have to stay vigilant. Together with the literacy community, labour will have to put pressure on the provinces to make sure some of the Labour Market Training Transfer dollars announced in the March 2007 federal budget go to quality worker-centred learning.”



Barbara Byers, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
Executive Vice-President.



Moving in from the margins: A CUPE Case Study on Integrating Literacy

The CLC has completed a new case study on how Canada's largest union has taken steps to integrate literacy. It tells the story of how a literacy project grew to such depth that it has had a significant influence on many aspects of CUPE's work.

Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Coordinator, explains. "Literacy is about trying to make everything we do more accessible to workers. The case study is about how CUPE has taken the tools of literacy and clear language and applied them to other parts of the organization. In sharing this case study, we hope it can serve as a practical example to other unions with similar goals."

Bev Burke, co-author of the case study with Jean Connon Unda, says, "The goals of integrating literacy and clear language are two-fold: 1) to strengthen the union, and 2) to build commitment within the union to sustain this work. Integration means working towards a time when a literacy and clear language lens is applied to everything the union does."

For example, most CUPE schools now include literacy and clear language workshops, and literacy has become part of the responsibilities of CUPE regional educational staff. CUPE has completed a clear language edit of its steward's course. Its women's leadership program includes clear language awareness. In addition, CUPE has integrated clear language into other national departments

and its convention. It has provided support for bargaining clear language in collective agreements.

In order to move towards integration, literacy first had to "register" on CUPE's radar screen. Only after this groundwork was laid could the goal shift to include integrating literacy into the agenda and culture of the union.

"It's amazing," says Burke. "There is awareness and support for literacy and clear language throughout CUPE. All 600 people within CUPE surveyed for the 2006 evaluation said that literacy and clear language were important union issues".

"There is still work to be done to integrate literacy and clear language into other union priorities. We want to develop practical tools for integration that will support the work of CUPE staff and activists," says Sylvia Sioufi, CUPE's National Literacy Coordinator.

By Sue Folinsbee



For a copy of *CUPE Integrates Literacy*, contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca or go to canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy_en.

Breakthrough for Postal Workers

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has announced that a tentative agreement reached with Canada Post includes a union-management committee to work on making the collective agreement clearer and more user-friendly. The employer will pay the costs of release time for two union members and two management representatives to work on the project over a four year period.

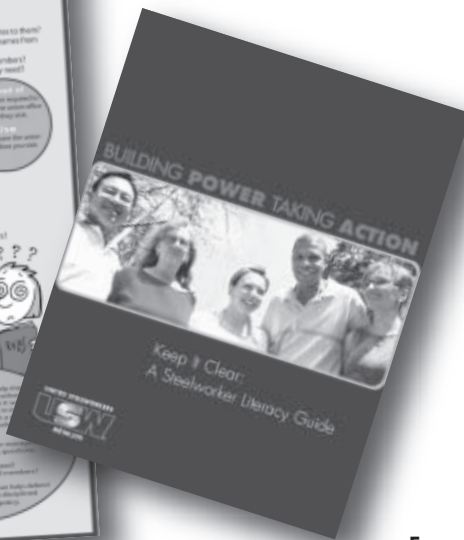
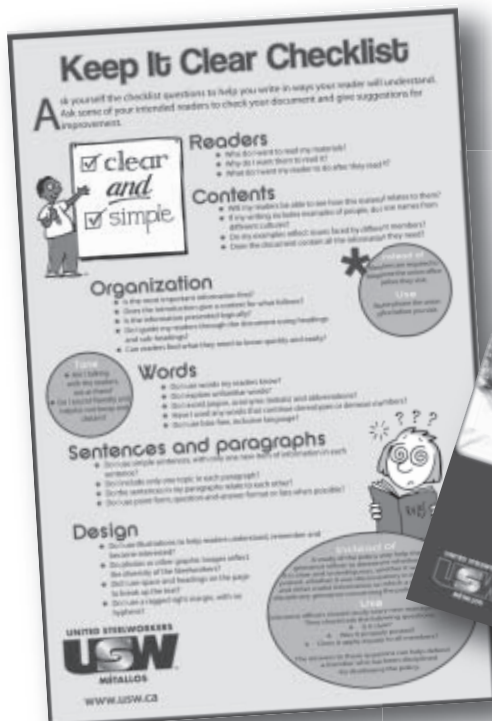


“We believe that if our members understand their rights they will be empowered. Too often, collective agreements are written by and for lawyers. But it is our members who work with it everyday and many can’t understand why it’s written in such complex language. We are hoping to change that.”

If ratified, the tentative agreement covering 48,000 members across Canada will be available in English, French, American Sign Language and Québec Sign Language.

"This is an exciting breakthrough", said chief negotiator Pat Bertrand. "We've worked hard in our union to make our own communications more accessible to our members over the past few years. But we needed to get the employer on side to tackle the collective agreement. It's a huge project, but we'll take it one step at a time."

USW showcases new clear language resources



Check out the new clear language resources from the United Steelworkers in English and French!

For copy contact Sue Milling at smilling@usw.ca.

CLC Literacy Forum inspires action and reflection

Barbara Byers, CLC Executive Vice-President, talked about "the best of times and the worst of times" as she welcomed 200 delegates to the CLC Literacy Forum with co-chair Monique Joly, CUPE. The Forum, the first event of the recent CLC Education Conference, took place in Ottawa on November 30, 2006.

"It is the worst of times," she said, "because the recent cuts to the federal literacy budget are hurting the literacy community and adult learners across the country. At the same time, the cuts have politicized the literacy community in new ways. It is the best of times because a growing number of unions, federations of labour and labour councils are now committed to literacy. We are using the tools of literacy and clear language to make the work of the labour movement stronger and more inclusive."

Towards more inclusive conferences

Barb explained that the CLC took steps to try to make the Literacy Forum and Education Conference as accessible as possible from a clear language point of view. The CLC will publish a guide on how to plan conferences in clear language based on the experience. (*You're Welcome! A Guide for Planning Union Conferences in Clear Language* is now available.)

Scenarios and stories

Forum participants experienced first-hand some of the ways unions are involved in literacy and clear language through scenarios and stories performed by CLC Literacy Working Group members and other activists.

In *New Member Orientation*, a shop steward meets with a new worker to explain how the union works. The steward, who is obviously rushed, uses a lot of acronyms, jargon and language short-cuts that the new worker does not understand. After the new worker repeatedly asks her to explain what she means, the steward eventually "gets it," slows down and explains things to him in clear language.

In *Learning for Our Lives*, a group of workers is meeting with a peer tutor in their workplace literacy class when one of the workers arrives at class with an injured hand. The tutor encourages the workers to take action. Over the next few classes, they write a letter to their union health and safety committee and participate in other literacy activities that relate to this situation. Their actions result in management replacing the rusty garbage cans that had caused the injury.

After the scenarios, "actors" told stories about real-life experiences of integrating literacy and clear language into their organizations. The stories, gathered through interviews with members of the



Scenario *New Member Orientation*. Left to right : Mary Shortall, CLC, Karen Kennedy, AFL and CUPW, and Bob Hatfield, CEP

CLC Literacy Working Group and others, came out of a long process of action and reflection.

Following the scenarios and stories, facilitator Jean Connon Unda explained that the stories are powerful and lend themselves to an analysis of the dynamics and patterns at work. The stories are both political and personal. By listening to them, we are able to learn more about what's involved in making change.

Jean then invited delegates to discuss what they had seen and how it related to their own experiences. Roving reporter Terry Downey, Executive Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Labour, sampled participants for their responses.

Dig where you stand

CLC Literacy Working Group members Jorge Garcia-Orgales (USW) and Sylvia Sioufi (CUPE) facilitated this session in English and French. They started out in Spanish to demonstrate what it is like to "parachute into a world where people speak a language you don't understand". The session was a chance to discuss ways for participants to encourage their organizations to take the next steps around literacy and clear language. They were invited to consider how to be catalysts for this kind of change by "digging where they stand", thinking about a concrete action they could take to make the change happen. Participants were then asked to consider "who participates in the union", "who is left out", and to think about the role literacy and clear language can play in reaching out to equality-seeking groups.

Taking It Home

Sylvia and Jorge invited participants to name two things they would like to encourage their organization to do next around literacy and clear language. Here are some sample responses:

Use the same clear language filters on releases and information going out as we use to look at equality issues.

Bring the union to the membership rather than expect people to come to formal meetings. Find opportunities to explain the collective agreement and how it works as well as what the union does outside of the workplace.

Develop a new delegates' kit that explains the acronyms and other terms that we use in the labour movement.

If we went back to the workplace and explained clear language to our leaders and to our members and then started using it and leading by example, that would be a good first step.

My personal goal is to see if we can get our bargaining bulletins to go out in clear language both provincially and locally.

We need to have clear language courses available to the executives in our locals and in our labour councils.

Barb Byers and Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Coordinator, closed the Forum, noting the rich experience, enthusiasm, and passion in the room. They encouraged participants to take the ideas from the Literacy Forum into the upcoming CLC Education conference and to build on the momentum to take literacy and clear language back to their organizations.

The Forum closed with a literacy, clear language and sign language version of *Solidarity Forever*.

The CLC Literacy Forum report, including scripts of the scenarios and stories, and *You're Welcome! A Guide for Planning Union Conferences in Clear Language* are available through the CLC at clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca or canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy_en.



Eilene Gan, member of the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) and the CUPE Literacy Working Group.

With thanks to members of the CLC Literacy Working Group and to Nancy Jackson, Jean Connon Unda and Lynette Plett of the OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) project *Workplace Literacy: Labour Contributions to Principles and Practice*.

Solidarity Forever / Solidarité

A literacy and clear language version / Version sur l'alpha et le langage clair

As workers we must understand the struggle we are in
 To speak in ways that mystify it really is a sin
 If unions write more clearly we can only stand to win
 Clear language makes us strong!

*Solidarity forever
 Solidarity forever
 Solidarity forever
 For the union makes us strong*

Les cours d'alpha des employeurs pourraient nous diviser
 Mais si le syndicat s'engage, nous pouvons avancer
 Nous accroissons la force de la collectivité
 Ensemble nous apprenons

*Solidarité mes frères et mes soeurs
 Solidarité mes frères et mes soeurs
 Solidarité mes frères et mes soeurs
 Ensemble nous vaincrons*

We're workers and we come from many places 'cross this land
 We're forging ways to help our members better understand
 With labour education, we are learning hand in hand
 Our learning makes us strong

*Solidarity forever
 Solidarity forever
 Solidarity forever
 For the union makes us strong!*

12 Steps to Adopting the CLC Clear Language Constitution

Since the CLC adopted its constitution in clear language at its convention in Montreal in June 2005, there have been many requests for information about what was involved in the process. Here is a summary of the Twelve Steps to Adopting the CLC Clear Language Constitution.

The project took place in a context in which clear language was "in the air"

In the summer of 2004, the CLC began the process of rewriting its constitution in clear language in English and French. It was initiated in response to a resolution adopted at the 2002 convention that required the CLC to rewrite its constitution in clear language and bring it to the next convention.

The project took place in a context in which clear language was "in the air" for the CLC and many of its affiliates: a wide range of initiatives were underway to make union communications, courses and events clearer and more accessible to members. The CLC 2005 Convention Call, for example, encouraged unions to submit their resolutions in a clear language format and included a "how to" example.

For a full copy of *Twelve Steps to Adopting the CLC Clear Language Constitution*, contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca or go to canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy_en.

The 12 steps

1. Learn from the experience of others.
2. Set up a committee that fits your organizational and political context.
3. Understand that the goal is access, not changing "intent".
4. Get skilled and experienced help.
5. Include a reorganization of the material.
6. Create an open and transparent process.
7. Build in a safety net.
8. Design an accessible document.
9. Set the stage for success.
10. Encourage dialogue.
11. Decide to adopt the clear language constitution.
12. Carry the clear language theme forward.

New Clear Language and Design Screen



The CLC has developed a new clear language and design screen to help make union communications more accessible to our members. It is both a tool for self-editing and a clear language and design checklist. The new screen is available in English or French in 3-hole punch format for easy access in course binders and conference kits.

"We hope the screen will be a tool for unions and other social justice groups to communicate and organize more effectively as we work toward building a more just and inclusive society", says Ken Georgetti, CLC President.

Price: \$2.00 each, \$1.50 each for orders of 25 or more. To order your copy of the screen, contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca

Invasion of the Space Lobsters

A CLC Discussion Guide for Union Audiences

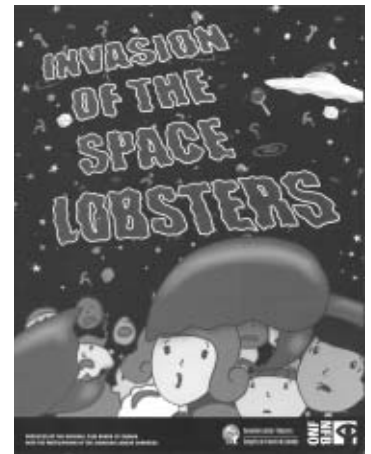
Invasion of the Space Lobsters is a 7 minute 'fun' animated film that encourages discussion about clear communications. *The space lobsters land in a backyard where a family is struggling with the assembly instructions for their new barbecue. The lobsters try to help, but the family can't understand the lobsters' translation machine. It spews out incomprehensible jargon. And then it gets complicated...*

A discussion guide for union audiences

A new CLC discussion guide for union audiences suggests some questions to prompt discussion about the film. Guides for facilitators and participants invite viewers to reflect upon what is going on in the film and relate it to their own experience. It encourages them to think about communications in their union and about what action they might take to make them more effective.

Where the film comes from

A collaboration between the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and several unions and federations of labour, the film is part of an effort to promote greater access and participation in unions through clearer communications.



Want a copy of the guide?

Contact clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca or go to: www.canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy.

Want to order the film?

Go to: www.nfb.ca

NALD @ work

The National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), based in Fredericton, NB, provides on-line information and resources to the adult literacy community in both of Canada's official languages.

NALD is pleased to announce the establishment of its sister website to serve the workplace literacy community across Canada. NALD@Work will be an on-line library of information and resources for practitioners, researchers, educators, employers, unions and other stakeholders.



For more information, see www.nald.ca

New Beginnings

Tamara Levine started a new job as CLC Education rep in April, 2007. Since she began as CLC Literacy Co-ordinator in 1996, Tamara has staffed the CLC Literacy Working Group, developed literacy and clear language resources, and developed and facilitated courses and workshops across Canada.

Her new responsibilities will include developing and piloting labour education courses and workshops. "It will be a chance to practise popular education in new ways", says Tamara. "I hope to bring a literacy and clear language lens to everything I take on in education . . . it's an incredible opportunity to practise integration."

"I want to thank Tamara for her commitment and tenacity on behalf of all learners. She has been our 'heart and soul' for literacy and clear language and militant about ensuring our movement is always striving to become more inclusive and accessible to our membership," says Barbara Byers, CLC Executive Vice-President.

"She is an inspiration to all who are committed to learning which is worker-centred and empowering. We will miss her skilled focus on literacy and clear language. However, we know she will take her skills, knowledge and enthusiasm into her new position".



Tamara Levine, Literacy CLC Co-ordinator.

The CLC Literacy Working Group

The CLC Literacy Working Group brings together union and federation representatives with an interest in union-based literacy and clear language. The Literacy Working Group shares information and resources, learns from our

collective experiences and and advises the CLC on its literacy work. Contact your CLC Literacy Working Group representative for more information about what's going on in your organization.

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