

# the bottom line



WWESTNET - Western Canada Workplace Essential Skills Training Network No 10, September 1998

## Assiniboia Downs Holds Barbecue for Literacy

On July 7, 1998, the Assiniboia Downs Research Project Committee hosted a promotional barbecue for literacy for all Assiniboia Downs employees. Approximately seventy people attended. Special guests included Lillian Thomas - City Councilor (Elmwood) and John Harvard - MP (Winnipeg-St. James.)

Guests enjoyed a variety of activities and entertainments while munching on free hot dogs, hamburgers, chips and drinks. Highlights included a silent auction and face-painting for children by Carrie Edison. Gordon Corrigan acted as DJ and set the mood with recorded music. Internationally acclaimed hoop dancer Ryan Runearth provided the featured entertainment with help from his cousin Ronald Marlin. After the performance of traditional first nations singing and dancing, Runearth led a 'friendship dance' and many of the guests joined in.

The goals of the barbecue were to raise awareness of the on-going learning resource centre research project and to generate interest for workplace education and training in general. In a brief address to guests, Sharon Gluting, the workplace education consultant for the project, outlined the goals and objectives of the research: to determine what the education and training needs among racetrack participants are, and to design an educational model, such as the learning resource centre, to meet those needs.

Sharon also stressed that it is becoming more and more important for people to continuously upgrade and improve their skills in order to keep pace with changes in workplace technology. "Thinking has shifted," she noted, "education is no longer a process that we complete in high school or college. Today, learning is a life-long process."

The Assiniboia Downs Research Project is the first of its kind in Canada. However, it is not the first workplace training initiative that has been implemented at the racetrack. There have been workplace education programs at Assiniboia Downs racetrack since 1996. Programs have been delivered to help people prepare for GED exams, polish business writing skills, or learn basic bookkeeping procedures and accounting principles. Interest and participation have increased since that time; however, when the people at the track were surveyed, they indicated that the committee still needs to publicize the research project and the concept of continuing education.

A number of Manitoba employers offer workplace education and training programs. Employees who invest the time in training benefit by improving their job skills and opportunities. The research committee is committed to finding ways of providing these same opportunities at Assiniboia Downs.



Many people and companies contributed to the barbecue. Organizations that donated prizes for the silent auction were acknowledged in the Assiniboia Downs race program. The Manitoba Jockey Club provided the use of the grandstand main level area and staff to assist with the food service as well as a place for the silent auction. City Bread Ltd. provided hot dog and hamburger buns, Best Direct - Maple Leaf provided hot dogs and hamburgers, and Old Dutch provided the potato chips. The backstretch kitchen staff assisted the committee with the planning and preparations for the barbecue, and provided dinner for two as a prize. Monies raised at the barbecue will be used to purchase materials for the learning resource centre.

If you would like to know more about the research project, contact Hazel Bochindri, Executive Secretary of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association Manitoba Chapter. Phone (204) 832-4949. The project is also seeking help in the form of financial support or donations of books or equipment for the racetrack learning centre. ❁

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# WWESTNET Training: The Politics of Practice

WWESTNET has been committed to advancing workplace essential skill education for nearly five years, and does so primarily by hosting events for business and industry which provide education and awareness about the issue. In August, however, the group focused its attention on the professional development needs of experienced practitioners in Western Canada, the coordinators and instructors who respond to the requests from industry and labour organizations that offer essential skill programming.

This event was distinct from other kinds of professional development offered to practitioners in each province because instead of focusing on the “how-to” of workplace education instruction, it centred on the political issues that underlie the development and delivery of programs.

The two and a half day event addressed the politics of collaboration, the politics of assessment, and the politics of evaluation. The event opened with a panel of speakers representing business, labour, government and education’s perspective of the issues and values around collaboration. Several other expert speakers, such as Dr. Eunice Askov, shared their insights into the issues around assessment and evaluation throughout the two and a half days. However, recognizing that because of their experience many of the participants carried an expertise in one of these topic areas, they were invited to double as speakers and share their knowledge. This strategy both reduced costs and engendered a more participative spirit that promoted a rich discussion of the issues.

One theme that emerged is that education providers must understand the various stakeholder values and positions around workplace education, and that working collaboratively to develop, deliver and evaluate programs is the best way to gain that understanding and provide effective programs. Another theme emerged from discussions of assessment. Participants believed that proper research prior to the selection of an assessment tool and a code of ethics surrounding the use of tools was imperative. A third theme was that the evaluation process must respect the specific goals and values of each stakeholder group, and that on-going monitoring could ensure that those ideals were addressed.

This event served several purposes. It reinforced the principles of good practice that practitioners generally agree upon; it provided the opportunity for seasoned practitioners from across

Western Canada to share and debate the hidden influences behind their practice; and it demonstrated that in Canada there is a level of expertise in the workplace education field that is impressive. ❁



*Practitioners from across western Canada gathered this summer for the WWESTNET workshop.*

## ABC Canada Changes Focus

ABC Canada has recently approved a new strategic plan that will guide the organization over the next few years. Along with a renewed emphasis on developing public awareness around literacy issues and the promotion of ‘family literacy,’ the plan will see a move away from the provision of consulting services directly to business and labour clients. Rather, ABC Canada’s workplace education services will support the efforts of a range of local educational providers.

For several years, the Workplace Education Centre, under the leadership of Sue Folinsbee, provided consulting services, such as organizational needs assessments, program planning, and evaluation, directly to a variety of clients across Canada. However, the workplace education field has evolved and is now populated by a greater number of local educators who are ready and well-equipped to offer such services. It was felt that ABC Canada could best serve the field by supporting these local educators. Nancy Steel, in Calgary, will head up the workplace education support services arm of ABC Canada.

ABC Canada also has a new interim executive director at the helm. After four years of dedicated leadership, Colleen Albiston has stepped down as Executive Director. Tracy Westell, familiar to many in the workplace education field, will assume the position of interim executive director. ❁

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# Alberta Forms Essential Skills Steering Committee

In Alberta, business, labour and government representatives have come together to form the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Steering Committee (AWES). The purpose of the group is to participate in the promotion and development of a highly literate, effective, confident and innovative workforce in the Province of Alberta. AWES will also strive to reinforce the vital role workforce essential skills can play in the lives of Albertans by providing increased educational opportunities which will enhance personal growth, career advancement and community involvement. Through these objectives, AWES hopes to contribute to the strengthening of Alberta. The AWES steering committee consists of Dave Morris, Canadian Labour Congress; Judi Armstrong, CUPE; Lloyd Campbell, Syncrude Canada; Lucille Stephenson, formerly of Alberta Power; and Carolyn Dieleman, Advanced Education and Career Development.

AWES has received funding from the National Literacy Secretariat to proceed with several projects in 1998.

- A practitioner training event designed to share information and expertise among practicing workplace literacy professionals was held in Edmonton August 16 - 19.
- Research is being carried out with the agribusiness sector to identify associations and networks and develop contacts. AWES will then establish guidelines for a sectoral needs assessment, which will in turn lead to a process model for pursuing other sectors. AWES is also planning to implement two demonstration projects targeted to agribusiness.
- IALS/SIALS presentations are being planned for a variety of audiences to raise awareness of workplace literacy issues.
- A collection of instructional resources is being gathered which will be available to workplace practitioners.

For further information about AWES, contact Karen Bennet at Alberta Vocational College - Edmonton, phone (403) 481-2541 or e-mail [kbennet@powersurfr.com](mailto:kbennet@powersurfr.com) ❁

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## AWES Hosts Workplace Practitioner Training

In August, Workplace education practitioners from all around Alberta met in Edmonton for four days of sharing and networking. The training event, a first for Alberta workplace practitioners, was housed at the university residence complex, a short walk away from Edmonton's 'Fringe' festival.

The four day event featured presentations by local practitioners and demonstrated the range and depth of the workplace education field in the province. Members of the newly-formed Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Steering Committee (AWES) sat as an opening panel and reflected upon the various interests and agendas which drive workplace education in the province.

Dawn Seabrook de Vargas related her experiences at the AltaSteel learning Centre and the continuing development of this particular type of workplace program. She pointed out that 43% of employees at the facility have been involved in one or more of the courses offered at this highly successful centre. Karen Hammond unveiled *Language at Work*, a new job analysis manual written by Julie Lockhart (See the resources section on page 4 for further details), and also presented a model for using the HRDC Essential Skills Job Profiles in the course of an organizational needs assessment. Sonia Ostashevsky from Alberta Vocational College - Edmonton gave participants insight into 'content based ESL,' an approach to adapting content-based curriculum for English as a Second Language learners (See the resources section on page 4 for further details).

Tamara Topolnisky and Sandra Campbell reviewed the history and development of the

ERIC (Effective Reading in Context) program at the Syncrude facility, and more recently at Alberta Power. Workshop participants were given the opportunity to try out some of the reading activities from ERIC, and experience the rigours of 'technical reading' firsthand. Ron Torgerson and Marilyn Luft discussed 'one to one' tutoring programs and practices. Finally, Nancy Steel gave participants some further information about the International Adult Literacy Survey and suggestions for sharing this information with a variety of interest groups.

At the wrap-up, there was a consensus that this type of workshop was a good way to bring together workplace practitioners who too often are working in isolation without much contact with colleagues. ❁



Enjoying a break during the AWES workshops, left to right, Tamara Topolnisky, Karen Bennet, Dawn Seabrook de Vargas, Lloyd Campbell, Nancy Steel, and Marilyn Luft.

## Resources

Lockhart, J. (1998). *Language at Work—A Job Analysis Guide*. Calgary, Alberta: Bow Valley College.

Julie Lockhart at Bow Valley College has developed a well-organized manual for analysing language skills requirements in occupational settings. *Language at Work* should be of special interest to anyone who has experience or interest in employee development, essential skills analysis, consulting, needs assessment, adult education, ESL instruction, training, training design or essential skills development.

The content of *Language at Work* is divided into four main sections. The 'Introduction' provides a rationale for analyzing job language tasks and discusses two recent Canadian studies which contribute an understanding of job-related communicative competence. 'Putting the Guide to Work' sets a framework for applying the information and techniques in the guide. The process of 'Assessing Language Tasks' walks the reader through seven stages of assessing language tasks and suggests strategies and techniques for each. Lastly, the 'Information and Forms' section includes resource materials, related Web sites, sample reproducible forms, a feedback request form and an order form for purchasing further copies.

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*Marketing Workplace Basic Skills*. (1997). Peel Adult Learning Network (PALN).

This manual is designed to provide a practical guide to what literacy service providers need to know and do to market basic skills programs and services effectively. Topics include: Demystifying Marketing and Sales, How to Plan and Implement a Marketing Strategy, and Administrative Support to Marketing & Sales. Available from PALN, 5940 Wallace Street, Mississauga, On, L4Z 1Z9. Phone (905) 507-8457. E-mail [paln@idirect.com](mailto:paln@idirect.com)

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**AlphaPlus Centre** - <http://www.AlphaPlus.ca>

The face of Canadian literacy changed recently, as both AlphaCom and Alpha Ontario amalgamated to become the AlphaPlus Centre. The centre hopes to become an information gateway for resources on adult literacy and language training in Ontario and beyond.

The merger of the two services came about after years of users confusing the literacy services offered by AlphaCom, which were mainly electronic and Alpha Ontario, which was primarily paper-based. The confusion was mainly due to the similarity in names and the specialized literacy services provided by both organizations. (The name 'AlphaPlus' offers little hope of ending confusion, since Literacy Learning New Zealand and several private companies already use the 'AlphaPlus' name.)

ABC Canada has recently announced that its resource collection will be made available nationally through the AlphaPlus Centre. The collection covers many aspects of literacy and adult basic skills, but its particular strength is in the area of workplace education. Many of the workplace literacy documents are one-of-a-kind items, such as reports on workplace education initiatives in Canada and the US.

**Center for Applied Linguistics** - <http://www.cal.org>

As well as having a really short and snappy web address, the Centre for Applied Linguistics also houses the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education and the Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. The CAL site offers the workplace education practitioner a wealth of current information, links to related sites and the ability to carry out a search of the ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) database on-line. Also available from CAL is a quarterly newsletter called *The Connector* which includes project updates, model program profiles, and articles on topics of interest to workplace and vocational ESL educators.

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Ostaszewsky, S. (1997). *A Process for Adapting Content-Based Curriculum for English as a Second Language Learners*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Vocational College.

*A Process for Adapting Content-Based Curriculum for English as a Second Language for Learners* should be of special interest to instructors who deliver 'content' curriculum to ESL learners.

This publication is born from research indicating that academic language is "more difficult and later in developing than social language." As Sonia Ostaszewsky points out in the introduction, "social language proficiency can be developed in two years, while academic language proficiency may take five to seven years." By providing courses which combine content and ESL instruction, learners can access the educational programs they require to achieve their personal and professional goals. The manual offers two approaches to content-based instruction and suggests a detailed three-step process consisting of instructor collaboration, adaptation of curriculum and the development of supplemental materials for authentic textbooks. The screening and testing of ESL learners is also discussed.

The manual is well-written and designed to effectively assist and inform instructors. If you are interested in receiving a copy, please contact the Alberta Vocational College-Edmonton, Curriculum Design and Development, 10215 - 108 St., Edmonton, AB, T5J 1L6.

## Coming Up

**Canadian Lifelong Learning Lyceum '98**, Victoria, British Columbia, October 15-18, 1998. For information about the program and registration procedures contact the Canadian Link to Lifelong Learning, 400 First Edmonton Place, 10065 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, AB, T5J 3S9. Phone (403) 421-7141.

This newsletter is funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. Submissions to *the bottom line* should be sent to WWESTNET:

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