



Training for the High Performance Workplace

On November 25, only a week after the Grey Cup, some 200 business and labour representatives met in Winnipeg for a day-long conference focused on training and its role in the high performance workplace. *Making Training Work: The High Performance Workplace* was an opportunity for employers, workforce trainers, and human resource specialists to discuss current issues in training and development. "In Manitoba there are numerous examples of innovative, effective workplace programs which have resulted in both economic and social gains," said Sue Turner, a Coordinator with Manitoba Training and Continuing Education. "Until this conference, there have been limited opportunities to broadcast these success stories and share the learning that has come from them."

The conference was a first for Manitoba and the product of cooperation across several government departments and an enthusiastic response from a host of Manitoba businesses and labour organizations. It reflects the belief that rapid technological change, a competitive global marketplace, economic restructuring, and the switch to an information-based economy demand a workforce which

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Jim Lippert, SkillPlan, and Brigid Hayes, NLS, were in Winnipeg for the workplace training conference; caught here at the TOWES advisory committee meeting the next day.

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UPCOMING

February 14 - 17

Banff, Alberta

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is highly-skilled, adaptable, and committed to continuous learning. The development of such a workforce is dependent on high quality, results-oriented training and education practices, and partnerships between industry and government which facilitate the process.

Planning for the event began a year earlier when provincial government program coordinators and representatives from business and labour met to discuss the viability of hosting a made-in-Manitoba workplace training conference. Seed funding was secured from two provincial government departments and the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee through National Literacy Secretariat funding. A steering committee was assembled with representation from Manitoba business, labour, sector councils, post-secondary institutions and the provincial government.

The conference committee decided that the conference would highlight both external and internal examples of good practice in a number of current hot areas such as, technology assisted learning, PLAR, aboriginal employment, and essential skills training. The committee also added a pre-conference event which focused on *Hiring, Training and Maintaining Today's Workforce: Who is Responsible?* This event had 60 attendees with a keynote address from Dr. Michael Bloom, Conference Board of Canada, and a panel presentation by Lisa Elliot-Pitz, Royal Bank; Paul Moist, C.U.P.E. Manitoba; and Rod Leduc and Bill Fraser from Gerdau MRM in Selkirk, Manitoba.

In the essential skills session, Jim Lippert from SkillPlan noted that "essential skills are the Velcro™ to which other training sticks. Presenters in this session were Cynthia Selley, Manager of Training and Development, Boeing; Florence Marquez, President, UNITE Local 459; Pat Peters; Labour Education Coordinator, MFL; Jonas Sammons, Vice President & GM, Alliance of Manufacturers and Exporters; Paul Moist, President, C.U.P.E. Manitoba; Chris Trory, Director of Education, Palliser Furniture; Rob Despina, Manager, Special Projects, Standard Aero. They noted that workers need essential skills reading, writing, math, and oral communication to cope with changing workplace demands and with the increasing need to re-train for new technologies. They then went on to provide an overview of four successful workplace essential skills programs at Boeing, the UNITE Learning Experience Centre, Palliser Furniture, and the Manitoba Federation of Labour. *



Sue Turner, Coordinator of Workplace Education, Manitoba Training and Continuing Education

TOWES Trials Underway

Test sites across Canada have been busy administering the first sets of questions for the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES). Before the test becomes an accurate measuring instrument, the test developers have to establish difficulty levels and reliability scores for each of several hundred questions. This requires that large numbers of people (about 500) have to write each question in order to generate the necessary statistics. The project has been fortunate in being able to involve businesses, unions, and post-secondary educational institutions across Canada in the test trials.

Despite the best efforts of the test writers and numerous edits, the actual administration of the test usually reveals problems with a few of the questions. It is an exacting task to write an item that can be read with only one unequivocal meaning. "Real world testing identifies the troublesome questions, which can then be fixed or rejected as fatally flawed," said Lynda Fownes, manager for the project. "Project staff are extremely pleased with the quality of the feedback they are getting from industry and educational partners."

The scores from the trial tests are used to determine the difficulty level for each question. When the trial tests are completed and the scores have been analyzed, each question will test an identified skill at a known difficulty level. These questions can then be assembled to create any number of 'custom' assessment instruments to fit the various groups of workers or contexts where TOWES will be used. Preliminary results from the first thousand trials were highlighted at an advisory committee meeting in Winnipeg before Christmas. *

New Software Assists Learners with Disabilities

PAT COLPITTS

For many adults with physical disabilities who are unable to hold a pencil or turn pages in a book, access to literacy education has been an unfulfilled dream. Since many individuals with significant physical disabilities may not speak clearly, or are nonverbal, not having the literacy skills to effectively read and write has left them out of regular schools, with little control over their own lives. Imagine wanting an education and not being able to fulfil that dream because of something beyond your control.

Speech Assisted Reading And Writing (SARAW) is a talking computer program produced by the Neil Squire Foundation to respond to the needs of students with physical disabilities. Don Bentley and Pat Hodgson of Capilano College, the software's developers, designed the program to help teach basic reading and writing skills to adults. The software can be used by students even if their physical disabilities make it impossible for them to use a standard computer keyboard.

SARAW has three major parts: reading, word-activities and writing. The reading section can read stories aloud: one word at a time, a sentence at a time, or all at once. The stories can be the participant's own stories, other individual's stories or stories from other sources (i.e. magazines, newspapers etc.) that can be added. The Word-activities section has two different word games, each with different levels of difficulty and a *sounding board* for phonics. The Writing section is like a talking word processor. The computer speaks as the participant types, giving immediate feedback about the word just typed. It also has a word predicting function, making typing much faster.

The Neil Squire Foundation in Regina, wants to provide the first step toward some independence and success in participants' lives, apart from their family, hospital or group home environment. Participants come to the Neil Squire Foundation to upgrade their reading, writing and math skills so they can enter other Adult Basic Education programs. The organization would also like to encourage all agencies in Saskatchewan that work with people with physical disabilities to start their own SARAW programs, as well as continuing to develop a centre of excellence and a demonstration site for organizations interested in acquiring their own SARAW programs. Lastly, and perhaps best of all, participants using SARAW can work independently, but know that a teacher or tutor is there to give them help if they want or need it.

For more information about the SARAW program in Regina, contact: SARAW Program Director, Neil Squire Foundation, Suite 100, 2445 - 13th Ave. Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 0W1 *

Essential Skills Key to Jobs in Manufacturing Plants

LONA TARNEY

In Calgary's booming economy, manufacturing companies are struggling to recruit and retain skilled production workers. Many employers are concerned about the lack of basic manufacturing skills that some new production workers bring to the job; other employers are uncertain about the ability of current workers to adapt to changes in technology and processes. In response to these concerns, Bow Valley College and Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, have been conducting a needs assessment to determine the essential skills needed by these production workers. When completed, this study will have identified the specific requirements for literacy and numeracy skills across a broad range of manufacturing applications. The study also shows that computer awareness; knowledge of measuring systems and instruments; and ability with hand tools are also important entry-level skills for workers in manufacturing plants. Another aspect of this study will be to identify some of the barriers faced by workers who need training and those faced by the instructors who have to deliver workplace training to workers with limited English skills or other essential skills deficits. Once the needs assessment is completed, Bow Valley College hopes to develop and deliver a custom-designed training program in Calgary to address the needs that have been identified. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact Pat Martin, Skilltest, Bow Valley College at 297-2628 or e-mail her at pmartin@bowvalley.ab.ca. *

RESOURCES

Hoddinott, S. (1998). *Something To Think About - Please Think About This*. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

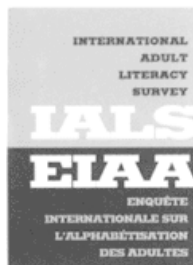


Something to Think About is the final report on a study undertaken in January 1996 by the Ottawa Board of Education (now the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board) under the direction of Joyce White. The study was funded by the National Programs of the NLS, Human Resources Development Canada. Following the preliminary research phase, which had clearly indicated the need for a re-assessment of current

approaches to literacy and adult basic education, the second phase of the research focused on conducting a thorough examination of literacy policy and practice in Canada. The key questions guiding the research were whether Canadian adults in need of literacy upgrading have reasonable access to programs and whether they can be assured that the programs they have access to can enable them to achieve their educational goals and thus better prepare them to pursue their employment aspirations. The research process combined a detailed study of a number of regionally distributed literacy and adult basic education programs with a general survey of literacy policy and programming environment in each province and territory. The report tells the story primarily from the point of view of those living the challenges on a day-to-day basis. It analyzes current social policy in relation to their experiences. The title of this report, *Something to Think About - Please Think About This* is taken from the composition of a student at one of the local research sites.

To order, contact the NLS 5 Eddy St, Rm. 10E10, Ottawa, ON K1A 1K5. Phone: (819) 953-8076

Statistics Canada/Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (1998). *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*.



The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) is the first multi-country and multi-language assessment of adult literacy. IALS has developed scales of literacy performance so that literacy among people with a wide range of abilities can be compared across cultures and languages. The first survey collected data in seven countries: Canada, Germany, the Nether-

lands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. The results were published in 1995 in a ground-breaking report called *Literacy, Economy and Society*. Canadian results were published in September 1996 in *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*. Both reports shed light on the social and economic impacts of different levels of literacy, the underlying factors which cause

them, and how they might be amenable to policy intervention.

Since then, five more countries have joined the survey, bringing the total number of countries in IALS to twelve. Survey results from all twelve countries are now being released in the second international publication entitled *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*.

The last decade has seen political and technological shifts that have caused social and economic upheaval. The economies of the OECD countries now face large, well-educated and relatively low-wage labour forces in newly competitive nations. At the same time, they are being presented with a limitless range of possibilities for co-operation and a wealth of fresh opportunities.

For copies of this and other books in the IALS series, contact Statistics Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba. 1-800-263-1136, or (204) 983-4020

Hautecoeur, Jean-Paul (Ed.). (1998). *ALPHA 97: Basic Education & Institutional Environments*. Toronto: Culture Concepts



This volume is one of the UNESCO Institute for Education's ALPHA series in international research in literacy issues (ALPHA 94, 96, ALPHA 97). The series presents a

broad view of literacy and social issues with topics such as managing resources intelligently; human rights as a minimum condition for education and training; and bringing educational initiatives back to the local level. For information contact: Culture Concepts (416) 245-3383, www3.sympatico.ca/cultureconcepts

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