
“WORKPLACE LITERACY” OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

**Research undertaken for
First Contact Communications, Inc.
for the
WORKPLACE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

Final Edited Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Scope of Research

The purpose of this research was to review other public awareness campaigns throughout Canada for Workplace Literacy programs.

These programs ranged from formally planned and orchestrated campaigns with collateral materials, to informal networking and partnership building.

While all provinces and territories were researched, only those with active campaigns were included in the final research document. cursory research was also done on the US, but only a small amount of relevant information is included.

This information was obtained from industry sources (journals, web sites, and email interviews with project coordinators).

There are many other excellent literacy organizations and initiatives which are not included in this research as they are either beyond the scope (not workplace based) or they were focused on the initiative (training workplace based tutors, for example) vs. on the public awareness campaign itself.

Finally, several other sources were found that the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador may wish to review because of their relevance to their work. These are appended.

1.2 Definition

For the purposes of this research, the term "Workplace Literacy " has been used to capture the programming in question. Please see the section below on Definitions for a larger discussion of the nuances of selecting a term which accurately captures the concept while still being respectful to participants.

1.3 Report Outline

The report covers the public awareness activities of:

- Western Canada
- BC
- Saskatchewan
- Manitoba
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island
- Nova Scotia
- Canada
- USA

Each sectional overview contains information gleaned from various sources on their public awareness initiatives.

The second section contains the recommendations for the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador based upon the best practices of the other jurisdictions.

Finally, references and further reading are appended.

2 Western Canada (WWESTNET)

WWESTNET (Western Canada Workplace Essential Skills Training Network), has representation from business, labour, government and educators, from all regions of western Canada. Its purpose is to inform an ever-increasing network of interested individuals from business, education, government and labour about key issues and activities in the field of workplace education.

Their public awareness activities are aimed at keeping stakeholders informed through a quarterly newsletter and hosting symposia and conferences.

The quarterly newsletter **The Bottom Line** is available online at the WWESTNET web site.

(Source <http://www.nald.ca/wwestnet/index.html>)

3 British Columbia

The BC Workforce Literacy Initiative raises awareness about workforce literacy among employers, unions and educators; develops and promotes workforce literacy information and services; and helps develop partnerships to upgrade the literacy skills of B.C.'s workforce. In 1998-99, work included:

- developing an Alliance for Learning made up of business, labour and education organizations in BC
- public education work, including a Learning Curves bulletin for insertion in business, labour and education newsletters
- incentives to business for leadership around workforce literacy
- promoting cooperation between management and labour around workforce basic education and other training
- professional development for workforce literacy practitioners
- support and consultation for new workforce literacy programs
- developing a strategy for accredited training for workforce literacy practitioners

The initiative also publishes the newsletter "Working on Literacy" and a Workforce Literacy Information Kit.

It is funded by the National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources Development Canada and acts in consultation with an Advisory Council representing business, labour, educators, and government. The BC Workforce Literacy Initiative projects are designed to:

- develop strong and active partnerships to upgrade the literacy skills of BC's workforce
- help employers, unions, and educators to recognize their direct stake in and responsibility around workforce literacy

- increase the demand for and the usefulness of the workforce literacy information and consultation services that are available to employers, unions, and educators.

It is a project sponsored by Literacy BC, the provincial organization focused on all literacy issues.

The bulletin of the BC Workforce Literacy Initiative, Learning Curves, includes articles about the views and activities of business, labour and educators as they relate to workforce training issues; information about workforce literacy programs, resources and events; and provocative facts and quotes designed to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

(Source: <http://www.nald.ca/Province/Bc/Lbc/Workfrce/main.htm>)

BC has focused its public awareness campaign into three separate targets, the public, labour and business. Further information on how they did in the initiative is appended.

After working with the BC literacy Initiative, the B.C. Federation of Labour has adopted the following policy on literacy:

1.The Federation and its affiliated unions shall work to eliminate societal barriers to accessing and participating in basic skills training – be they economic (e.g. costs of tuition, training materials, transportation and/or childcare) or psychological (e.g. negative social stigma, employer intimidation and/or lack of confidentiality).

2.Affiliated unions shall seek to entrench opportunities to workforce basic skills upgrading through collective bargaining such that:

- a. Employers assume the responsibility and bear the costs of developing and supporting basic skills upgrading programs;
- b. Workers shall be entitled to paid time off during training; and
- c. Union control and participation in the development and delivery of literacy programming shall, at a minimum, be equal to that of management.

3.The Federation and its affiliated unions shall advocate basic skills upgrading initiatives that are:

- a. Labour-based and further the values and principles of the labour movement; and
- b. Learner-centered and sensitive to their needs, aspirations and prior learning.

4.The Federation and its affiliated unions shall support the delivery of basic skills upgrading initiatives by unionized public institutions and labour-based training centres.

(Source: Adopted in Convention, November 1998, B.C. Federation of Labour)

(A full speaking presentation as well as a report on their public awareness activities are appended.)

4 Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) Learning At Work Project launched its Guide to Essential Workplace Skills at a news conference in Swift Current on February 6.

Developed in consultation with business, labour, agriculture, and other Reference Groups of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, the Guide is a tool to help employers, unions, and employees investigate how essential workplace skills are used in their own jobs and workplaces.

Their definition of essential workplace skills are the effective and functional use of: Reading, writing, numeracy, computers, oral communication, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. (Source: <http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/index.htm> The Manual can be downloaded at this web site)

The objective of the SLFDB Workplace Literacy Initiative is to investigate workplace learning/literacy and to formulate an industry vision, because there is no generally accepted vision, and therefore no effective industry strategy. There are 3 goals that stem from needs identified by the SLFDB:

1. To discuss workplace learning/literacy issues with sector councils throughout Saskatchewan because there is no firm understanding of what the issues are, especially in the small business sector.
2. To create links for Business and Labour with practitioner/trainers and colleges, and also with provincial, regional and national organizations, which are all stakeholders in the formulation of this vision.
3. To promote lifelong learning and raise awareness of workplace learning/literacy through one-on-one contact with industry and small business, and through pilot projects.

The SLFDB also hosts an annual "Excellence in Training Award" which recognizes excellence in many types of training, including Basic Workplace Skills.

(See <http://www.nald.ca/AWARDS/Prov/sk/trainexce.htm>)

The Learning at Work Initiative had two Phases –

Project Phase One Goal - Create an industry vision of workplace literacy through:

1. Awareness Building
2. Building Communication Networks
3. Practitioner Professional Development

Objective One - Awareness Building

- Consultations, interviews, meetings and surveys throughout the province
- Resulted in a needs assessment

- Identified barriers of **accessibility to** and **applicability of** training

Objective Two - Communication among workplace literacy stakeholders

Participatory Website with discussion fora, chat rooms, event listing, reports, contacts, resources

Objective Three – Practitioner Development

- “Practitioners” redefined to include: Co-workers, supervisors, owners, unions, community groups, private consultants, and educators
- Introductory module for workplace literacy developed.

Project Phase Two Goal - Include the industry vision in the Provincial Training Strategy through:

1. Awareness Building
2. Practitioner Professional Development
3. Regional Planning and Delivery Mechanisms

Objective 1 – Awareness Building

- Inclusive, broad-based strategy
- Activities: meetings, articles, TV/Radio ads, community fora, and focus groups

Objective 2 - Practitioner Development

- Create opportunities to learn about the workplace and approaches to workplace literacy training
- Share training, resources, and activities
- Consult on need for practitioner certification

Objective 3 - Regional Planning and Delivery Mechanisms

- Overcome obstacles to **accessibility to** and **applicability of** workplace literacy training.
- Share/organize resources regionally to ensure sustainable programs

Role of the Learning@Work Project is to be a facilitator, catalyst, liaison, advocate for workplace literacy issues and training and not a service provider

(Source: PowerPoint presentation from the web site)

On the same initiative, Saskatchewan has an excellent web-based tool for Employee assessment found at <http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/assessment.htm>

Assessment & Evaluation Tools - Netscape

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Learning @ WORK

[Learning@WORK home](#)

Assessment & Evaluation

(from "A Report on the WORKER ASSESSMENT THINK TANK for ABC CANADA and The National Literacy Secretariat" - March 1999)

WHY ASSESS?	WHY NOT?
<p>Employer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivate people to learn Define needs Define a starting point Set goals Facilitate change Make decisions re: who gets trained, promoted, a raise, fired Determine training path Identify barriers Make better use of resources Increase bottom line Plan training strategies 	<p>Employer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costly, time consuming Don't have the resources The fear and anxiety created might outweigh any benefits Could affect morale negatively Might promote unwanted equity No plan or preparations for follow through Might make us change and we don't want to Might demonstrate a need for an expensive service
<p>Worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve employee retention by demonstrating commitment to development Justify worth of training Collect data/undertake research Improve systems Make a case for change Provide format for equality Pre-screen potential new entrants <p>Worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is my learning style? goals? Is this where I want to be? Build positive self-image <p>All:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and acknowledge skills Determine better ways of learning Help individuals improve their responsibility at work, in the community, and at home Facilitate communication among groups involved Demonstrate progress 	<p>Worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety of being tested and "found out" and consequences of that What might happen to me? What I might have to do It's not always voluntary What might be expected of me? If there's no benefit If there's no opportunity for support If there's a hidden purpose - negative impact If it excludes me from training/education <p>Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Might demonstrate need for an expensive service Might show unflattering results <p>All:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test tools inappropriate to needs Fear of the results - no confidentiality No plan for using assessment data Only used for window dressing Assessment results may be impacted by bad timing, labour/management relations, organizational restructuring

5 Manitoba

In Manitoba, workplace education is coordinated by the province and has a significant partnership with the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC).

The coordinator and the committee oversee each workplace education initiative and monitor the quality of the programming.

The WEMSC is a model of a cooperative partnership which has created the framework to guide the development of workplace literacy/numeracy in the Province of Manitoba. The committee works within industry sectors to develop innovative workplace education projects. Sectors targeted by the committee reflect the industrial makeup of Manitoba and have included projects in a number of sectors such as: agriculture, garment, aerospace, mining, construction, and the manufacturing sectors. In addition, the committee has facilitated the initial and ongoing development and delivery of workplace instructor training.

The National Literacy Secretariat provides funding for the activities of the committee.

(Source: <http://www.wem.mb.ca/whois.html>)

The WEMSC is a five-member partnership made up of:

- Two business members, selected by the Alliance of Manufacturers' and Exporters' Canada,
- Two labour members selected by the Manitoba Federation of Labour, and
- One government member:

WEMSC has published a number of sectoral literacy reports. Selections of these reports are available through the web site.

In addition to the reports, WEMSC has produced promotional items such as:

- sweatshirts,
- t-shirts,
- lunch bags and
- baseball caps.

The committee has also produced two videos:

"Keeping Pace With Change," an eight-minute video which can be used to promote and recruit participants for Workplace Education Programs, and

"Essential Skills for Lifelong Learning", which illustrates Principles of Good Practice to follow when setting up a workplace program.

Free copies of these videos may be obtained from: WEMSC 505-138 Portage Avenue East
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0A1

WEMSC also offers a Summer Institute in concert with the University of Winnipeg to train practitioners of workplace education.

The 5 day course is designed to address the increasing demand by business, labour and industry for qualified instructors and trainers in a variety of workplace settings. The course is intended to give participants an overview of the steps involved in planning and delivering education and training in the workplace.

- promotion and marketing
- conducting needs assessments
- developing workplace specific curriculum
- delivering on-site programming,
- evaluation of the goals and objectives.

It explores “good practice” in workplace programming:

- applying adult education principles
- understanding learning styles
- using plain language
- conducting prior learning assessments, and
- working in partnership with all stakeholders.

The course is delivered through lectures, guest speakers, panel discussions and presentations, workplace and learning centre tours, case studies, and group discussions.

Participants successfully completing the course receive credit with the University of Winnipeg.

6 Ontario

“The Ontario government has not had a centralized public awareness campaign. Individual agencies have marketed their programs to business and labour. We began a workplace literacy initiative in September 2000 which includes the Ontario Literacy Coalition working on a marketing and public awareness strategy.” (Source: Florence Guy, Dept of Education, government of Ontario).

A sample of some of their Workplace Education initiatives include:

- **Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST)**, a project of the Ontario Federation of Labour and its affiliated unions, is designed to help workers improve their skills in reading, writing, math and communications. BEST programs are offered in the workplace, in small groups of six to twelve participants, with a co-worker as instructor. BEST Program Administrator, Deborah Hutcheon, 416-443-7654. (In Ontario, 1-800-668-9138) (<http://www.literacy.ca/litand/employ/orgexp.htm#project>)

- **Sector Initiatives Fund** The Sector Initiatives Fund provides assistance to industry sectors and organizations, helping them develop their own training programs, standards, and materials for the workforce. This approach encourages sector-wide research and planning in order to address skills gaps.

Sectoral collaboration enables many firms to contribute to and benefit from training beyond the capacity of an individual company. It also encourages accreditation for skills training and the development of provincial and national training standards. (Source: government of Ontario, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/tr_overview.html#Sector)

- **Funded by the Government of Ontario**

Adult Basic Education Association

To develop a framework for implementing and delivering literacy services in the workplace.
\$50,000

Mid North Network for Coordination and Development of Adult Learning

To help agencies providing literacy and basic skills services in the North provide services in the workplace.
\$20,000

(Source: <http://mettowas21.edu.gov.on.ca:80/eng/document/nr/00.11/support.html>)

- **The Metro Labour Education Centre** is a special project of the Labour Council of Toronto and York Region. They are a non-profit, integrated workers' education centre providing education and training services to employed and unemployed union members. Staffed by experienced union educators, advocates and counselors, they are affiliated with George Brown Community College.

(Source: http://www.mlec.org/centre/centre_main.html)

- **Ontario Literacy Coalition** The Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) is a provincial umbrella group established in 1986 to advocate on behalf of literacy across the province, to be involved in literacy field development, and to support and represent all regions of the province, delivery sectors (school boards, colleges and community agencies), and perspectives involved in literacy. (Source: <http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/ONT/wnont/2001/review.htm>)

7 Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education is a joint labour/management/government group that also does direct delivery.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education Workplace Education Initiatives presently include more than 80 projects in various sectors. A program with Adult Learning and Innovation, Workplace Education Initiatives provides funding, coordinates facilitation and professional development in the workplace.

In addition, the Nova Scotia Government has Workplace Education Field Officers employed by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture. The Learning Development and Resources Section is involved in the development of most workplace education programs in the province. Its role is to initiate, develop, broker and generate funding assistance to promote sustainable workplace education in Nova Scotia.

The Departmental Business Plan (2000-2001) includes Workplace Education:

“The Workplace Education Program will continue to expand its program and service to meet the skill needs of the current work force to promote labour market attachment and to assist workers in transition.” (Source: Business Plan, 200-2001, p. 12, Nova Scotia Department of Education, <http://www.ednet.ns.ca>)

They have a video as a tool: Workplace Education : Making It Work V2022 \$14.95 (18 min t 1996 available at <http://rt.ednet.ns.ca>

This video produced for the Adult Learning & Innovation Division, explains the features, requirement and advantages of the Workplace Education program of the Nova Scotia Department of Education & Culture. The video is punctuated by comments from program participants who represent student, union and management points of view. The Workplace Education program provides employees with on-side, customized education upgrading. Also available in French (V2021).

An analysis of the Workplace Education services provided by the provincial government can be found at http://www.abc-canada.org/workplace_education/maritimes_04.asp

8 Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island, with its small, geographically dispersed population, has an impressive tool-kit for Workplace Literacy programming. Workplace Education-PEI, a joint initiative of business, industry, labour and government, has been developed in response to the changing needs of employees and employers on the Island. It is governed by a board that has representatives from business, labour and government and employs three field officers who are responsible for initiating, monitoring and evaluating programs Island-wide.

Their resources (3 field workers) a central organization, and a methodology which goes from needs assessment through to evaluation provides the needed tools for the workplace.

This is backed up by their one-on-one approach to employers and unions to “sell” their services. Workplace Education PEI, a solid web site and newsletter that are reference materials for potential clients.

Pieces of their approach include:

- Workplace Education uses a partnership model to fund programs up to a maximum of three years at each work site.
- Classes are small (maximum of 12) and may be held on-site, fully or partially on work time.
- Materials from the work site are used to develop curriculum.
- Participation in both the organizational needs assessment and programs are voluntary.
- Curriculum is designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers.
- Individual employee progress and results are confidential.
- Programs are available during lay-off periods for seasonal workers.

Field officers work in all areas of the province who can:

- assess organization's learning needs - at no cost
- recommend the kind of programs that would benefit employees and the organization
- help apply for funding to implement these programs
- offer support to while the program is on-going.

More specifically, the field officers undertake the following steps in setting up a program for your organization:

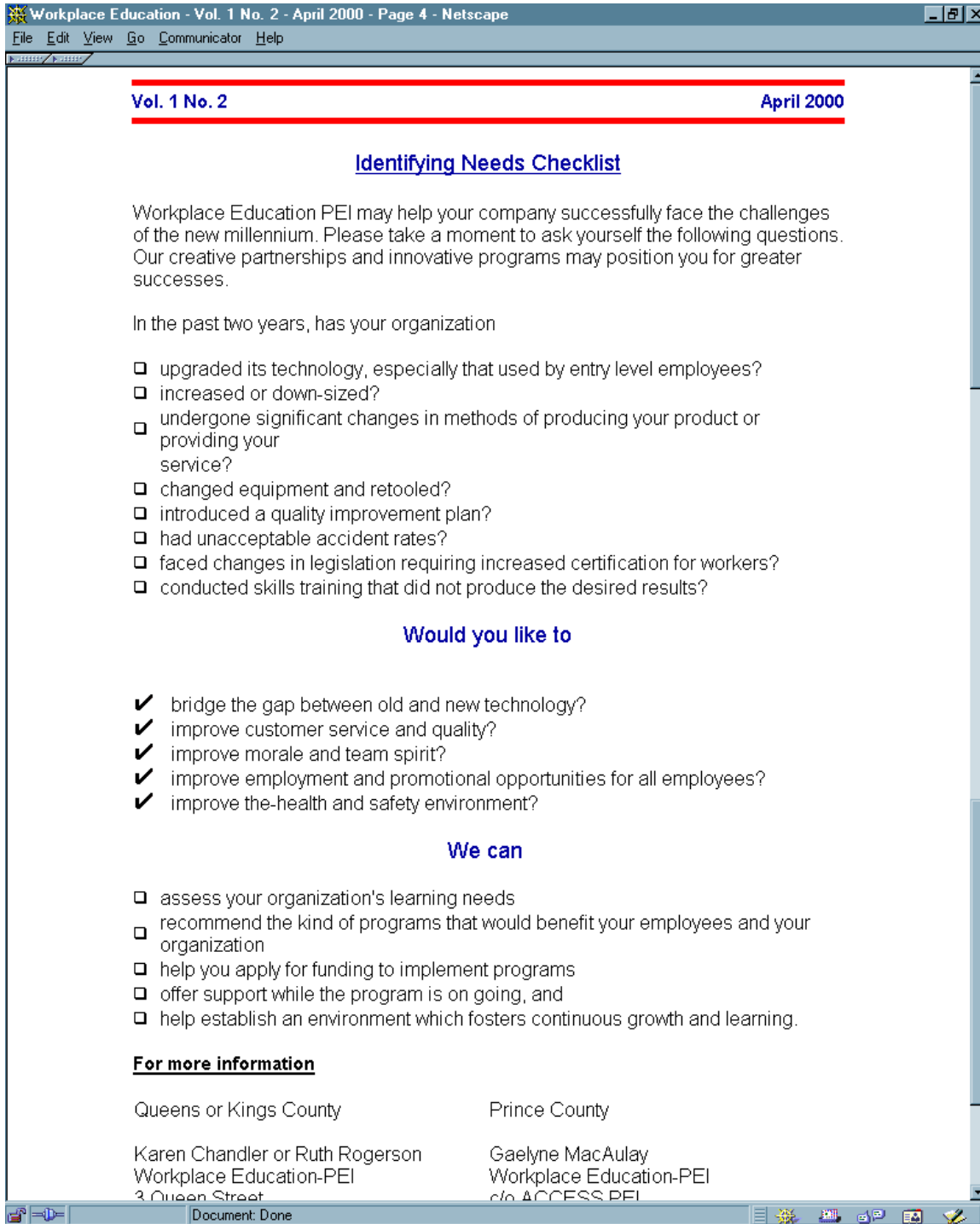
- Review the organization
- Schedule an information session for employees
- Form a company project team
- Conduct a workplace needs assessment

- Develop a learning plan for employees based on the results of the needs assessment.
- Develop a communication strategy to recruit learners
- Implement, then monitor the plan.

(Source: <http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/PEI/wepei>)

They provide a very good Public Awareness Tool in the Newsletter: "Identifying Your Needs Checklist" as well as their web site.

<http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/PEI/wepei/newslet/apr00/page4.htm>



9 Canada

9.1 General

Experts in literacy program delivery all agree that the most successful workplace literacy enhancement programs use workers' own interests and experiences as the source material and context for learning. Contextual instruction, in the workplace, is most effective. There are examples of Canadian firms that have built literacy programs into their workplace training strategies (Syncrude, in Fort McMurray, Alberta is an excellent example), but we need more initiatives of this type (Krahn: <http://www.hssfc.ca/PolicyIssues/Breakfasts/KrahnEng.html>)

9.2 Frontier College

Frontier College offers a variety of Workplace Learning Services. The following is excerpted from their web site.

1. Executive Briefings

An executive briefing can be a half-day or day-long session which addresses the issue of literacy and how it influences a specific company or industry. We can help you do a quick assessment to determine if there may be a literacy problem within your area of responsibility. We can discuss options available and make suggestions for follow-up.

2. Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA)

An ONA provides vital information about the organizational climate. We talk to approximately 10% of the workforce, from all areas and levels of the company, and collect data related to a variety of issues. These include:

- a) major issues affecting the company and changes anticipated over the next 3 to 5 years*
- b) type, method and frequency of training*
- c) perceived training needs*
- d) areas where lack of basic skills have an impact*
- e) reading, writing and math requirements for specific jobs*
- f) issues which influence the incentive for training such as promotion*
- g) issues which influence communication within the organization such as multicultural climate and reading levels of company documents*

We present the results of the assessment to the company along with recommendation for action.

3. On-site Tutoring Programs

If the ONA indicates that a literacy-upgrading program is needed in the workplace, Frontier College you set up an in-house program. It work like this:

Potential students from the company are recruited and interviewed by Frontier College representatives. Potential volunteer tutors from the company are recruited and interviewed by

Frontier College representatives. Suitable tutors are then trained to work with someone on basic literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace environment.

A staff person from the company is trained at the same time in how to organize and manage the in-house program. We are available for ongoing support and consultation. An alternative to having tutors from the company is to have a Frontier College instructor come in and work with small groups (3 to 4 people).

4. Train-the-trainer Sessions

These are sessions for company trainers or human resource personnel who want to learn how to set up and operate their own in-house learning programs.

A two-day session on the "design and implementation of workplace learning programs" includes:

- *overview of statistics and implications*
- *assessment tool for diagnosing learning needs*
- *developing and launching a literacy campaign*
- *implementing a volunteer tutoring program*
- *developing learning material from the workplace*
- *evaluating and maintaining the program.*

5. Develop Learning Materials

When introducing new products, technology, statistical process control or new management approaches, it may be necessary to develop learning material that will help teach specific tasks. We can develop learning activities and material from a wide variety of materials relevant to the workplace such as:

- *training manuals*
- *forms*
- *health and safety information*
- *product information*

(Source: <http://www.frontiercollege.ca/english/programs/wkplace.htm>)

9.3 ABC Canada

Involvement in Workplace Education

ABC Canada has developed some excellent public awareness tools and campaigns in the workplace education field. The following is excerpted from their web site.

Since 1990 ABC CANADA has worked with the private sector to promote literacy in Canada. Over the years we have fulfilled our mandate in various ways. We became seriously involved in promoting workplace education through our Workplace Advisory Service in 1991. In 1995, with help from HRDC, we opened the Workplace Education Centre (WEC) which expanded and deepened the services of our Workplace Advisory Service. Our goals in workplace education were clear. At the beginning there was next to no literacy education or awareness in Canadian

workplaces. We set out to raise the awareness of the private sector, increase the capacity of the field and raise the level of workplace education activity. By early 1998, with the help of the burgeoning workplace education field, we had succeeded in raising the awareness of the private sector. This awareness was reflected in the growing demand for workplace education programs and the development of significant capacity in the field to deliver these programs. The Workplace Education Centre had fulfilled its mandate and was closed in the summer of 1998.

Our Directors were and are committed to keeping the pressure on the private sector to stay involved with this issue. Awareness of the need for workplace education is one way we will continue to encourage the private sector to be involved. As well, we want to continue to support the field in developing and honing their capacity to deliver workplace education. In a nutshell, we envision that our role in workplace education is to:

- *promote the involvement of the private sector through public awareness projects and campaigns*
- *support the development of the field with an emphasis on awareness raising projects*
- *provide opportunities for the sharing of ideas and concerns in workplace education through literacy at Work, conferences and think tanks*

(Source: www.abc-canada.org)

The following are portions of their various campaigns.

Free advertising support

ABC CANADA receives millions of dollars of donated advertising and production support for our public awareness campaigns each year.

These bilingual campaigns enjoy tremendous support from publications belonging to the Southam, Sun Media Corp., Torstar, Rogers Media and Transcontinental Publishing chains, and many other publishers. The literacy awareness campaigns also receive generous support from leading radio stations, out-of-home advertising companies and many major TV broadcasters and cablecasters.

They also work with corporations in social marketing partnerships to raise funds and awareness for literacy efforts across Canada. (http://www.abc-canada.org/public_awareness/index.asp)

In the summer of 1998, ABC CANADA worked with provincial literacy coalitions across the country to distribute nearly 500 "Literacy Awareness Media Kits" to interested literacy groups. This media kit contains posters, electronic and camera-ready art from our LIVE & LEARN print campaign, the complete inventory of ABC CANADA television and radio psas, as well as a media handbook loaded with tips on preparing media releases and working with the media, tips on producing a successful special event and handy literacy fact sheets. Media Contact lists are available from ABC CANADA.

Newspaper ads

Macintosh-formatted disks that contain different sizes of newspaper ads (as digital art) from our LIVE & LEARN Campaign, which encourages readers to support local literacy organizations. The ads are designed to accept the name and telephone number of a local literacy organization. Most newspapers and other publications that use a Macintosh platform will be able use the art on this

disk should they agree to add your contact information and run the ads when space becomes available.

Posters

A limited number of posters are available to local literacy organizations.

- The LEARN Campaign
- The LIVE & LEARN Campaign
- Read With Your Children

The full contents of the handbook included in the Literacy Awareness Media Kit, can be found in our Public Awareness section. (http://www.abc-canada.org/public_awareness/materials.asp)

Web site Based Awareness

ABC Canada has an excellent web site support tool (although it is a bit “buried on its site”) which is aimed at answering many of the questions small business owners may have about the “why” and “how” of Workplace Literacy.

9.4 National Literacy Secretariat

The [National Literacy Secretariat](#) was established by authorization of Cabinet in 1987 and has been actively involved since 1988 in working with its partners to promote literacy in Canada. The NLS is administratively part of the federal department Human Resources Development Canada.

The NLS works to promote literacy as an essential component for a learning society and to make Canada’s social, economic and political life more accessible to people with weak literacy skills.

The NLS has forged significant partnerships with business and labour to promote literacy practice in the workplace and to encourage the support of workplace literacy programs.

The NLS works in partnership with the provinces and territories to promote workplace literacy in their own jurisdictions, and with ABC CANADA, a private sector organization that speaks out to business and labour on literacy issues. The business community has shown its support to literacy through such activities as the LEARN page that lists literacy programs in every Yellow Pages directory in the country and the PGI Golf Tournaments of Literacy, begun by Peter Gzowski and now continued through volunteer effort and national corporate sponsorship.

9.5 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Workplace Literacy Project

According to CLC’s pamphlet, “Unions and Literacy”, federations of labour, labour councils, affiliates and local unions are getting involved in basic skills and literacy training for their members by negotiating with employers for quality, accessible training; planning and coordinating literacy training in the workplace and the union hall; participating in joint training committees; developing collective agreements and publications that are easy to read; and building links with college and school board unions and programs.

The Project Coordinator is Tamara Levine (tlevine@clc-ctc.ca). Contact the Canadian Labour Congress Workplace Literacy Project at 613-521-3400 X 437, or contact the CLC Training Advisor

in your region (Atlantic: 506-858-9350, Ontario: 416-441-3710, Prairie: 403-448-2057, Pacific: 604-524-0391).

9.6 *Canadian Business - Education Network*

A project of the Conference Board of Canada, the CBEN refers to examples of research conducted by The National Business and Education Centre include: The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace.

9.7 *Conference Board of Canada*

The Conference Board of Canada has done extensive work in the research of workplace education and its impact on productivity and economic growth in Canada. While it does not conduct public awareness campaigns, it is one of the most relevant secondary research tools that exist for the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador.

10 United States of America

10.1 Workplace Skills.com

Workplace Skills.com is an initiative of the Conference Board of Canada (yes, of Canada) and has an excellent web site aimed at business owners who are interested in learning more or implementing a Workplace Literacy program. They also maintain the web site on a weekly basis. http://www.workplacebasicskills.com/non_frame/advice/advice.htm

From an email with the Conference Board of Canada:

We also conduct research on workplace literacy for the United States Department of Education. Our research report, [Turning Skills into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pubs.htm) (<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pubs.htm>), gave rise to the development of a free web site containing advice, links and tools for employers. This site, aimed primarily at US employers, can be found at <http://www.workplacebasicskills.com>. The site was launched in January, 2001, and is updated on a weekly basis. Our feedback so far is that a free web site is very popular with employers, although it is expensive to develop and maintain.



10.2 Best Practices in Selling Workplace Education ESL Programs

Workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) educators from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Texas, and Virginia were asked how programs can best sell their services to businesses (Burt, in press). These practitioners were from educational institutions, community-based organizations, volunteer organizations, union consortia, or from within the business itself. Three were independent consultants who had started their own companies to provide workplace ESL instruction.

The following themes surfaced, many echo the conclusions drawn from the survey data listed above.

1. Start out with a better chance of success by contacting companies with a history of offering training for employees at all levels, not just as perks for executives.
2. Don't promise what cannot be delivered. It is not likely that a workplace ESL class of 40-60 hours will turn participants with low-level language skills into fluent speakers of English. Educate all the stakeholders—the general managers, the frontline managers, the human resources department, and the prospective learners themselves—about the length of time needed to achieve proficiency in a second language.
3. Offer short courses, or "learning opportunities" (Jurmo, 1995, p. 12) with a few specific, attainable goals. Discrete, highly targeted courses such as accent reduction, teamwork skills, and pre- total quality management (TQM) are saleable and give learners skills to use in any job or workplace.
4. Seek ways to maximize resources and personnel already at the workplace. Programs can schedule a one-hour class/one-hour study time match at work sites where there are learning centers for individual, computer-assisted instruction. Instructors can team with job skills trainers to offer vocational English as a second language (VESL). The program can require home study to match workplace course hours. This is especially important when offering instruction to learners with low-level English skills who may not yet have the language proficiency necessary to access the more specialized courses listed above.
5. In addition to providing instruction on American workplace practices and values to ESL learners, offer cross-cultural courses to both native and nonnative English speakers at the workplace. This may help dissipate feelings that the language minority workers are getting special treatment and can directly address the need for better communication at the workplace.
6. Develop realistic ways of documenting how instruction has improved performance at the workplace. Promotions due to improved skills are very impressive; however, in many companies, downsizing is occurring, and no one, native or nonnative speaker, is being promoted. Instead, educators can cite other indicators of improvement, such as increased number of written and oral suggestions made by learners at meetings or other appropriate times; increased number of learners expressing the desire to be promoted; and increased number of learners asking to be cross-trained. (See Mikulecky & Lloyd, 1994; and Mrowicki & Conrath, 1994, for discussions of measuring and documenting improvements at the workplace.)

7. Make certain that general managers actively support the program. They authorize the classes and their authority is necessary to ensure that their frontline managers (the participants' direct supervisors) strongly support the classes. The supervisors will arrange schedules so that workers can attend classes, provide opportunities on the job for them to use what they are learning, and encourage them to attend classes regularly. (See Kirby, 1989, for a discussion of the role of frontline managers in ESL instructional programs.)
8. Don't insist on teaching language for the workplace only. Although the workplace is the core of and the backdrop for instruction, workplace instruction does not need to be connected exclusively to workplace skills. Educators know that learning means transfer of skills to other life situations and learners have always sought this link. Many educators interviewed said that company management asked them to teach life skills and general communication skills as well as workplace skills, especially to learners with minimal English.

(Source: Selling Workplace ESL Instructional Programs (Dec., 1995) by Miriam Burt Center for Applied Linguistics <http://www.cal.org/ncle/digests/SELLING.HTM>)

11 Campaign Suggestions Based upon Best Practices

The following are “public awareness campaign suggestions” for the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador. They are based upon the best practices found in the research on developing public awareness campaigns for Workplace Literacy programming on a provincial scale.

11.1 Come to a Consensus on the Definition of Workplace Education

There are many definitions of workplace based and delivered programming which improves peoples skills in communicating, reading, problem solving and math. The following is a synopsis of the different approaches to the topic. It is important the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador come to a definitive term that captures their definition of the term.

Based on the meeting held April 18, 2001, the following definition is recommended (as developed by the Conference Board of Canada and adapted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Workplace Education Committee):

Workplace Literacy is defined as the fundamental skills, attributes, attitudes and behaviours relevant to literacy that enable people to effectively:

- speak,***
 - read and write prose and documents,***
 - use numbers, and***
 - work alone or in teams***
- in the workplace.***

Other examinations of Definitions include the following:

“Basic workplace skills” or “workplace literacy” refer to those generic skills all employees need at work. They include the following (List from ABC Canada):

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Math
- Problem-solving

The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board uses a slightly broader definition: “A common definition of literacy: Literacy includes the basic skills of reading, writing, and numeracy as well as computer skills and the 'soft skills' of leadership, problem solving, critical thinking, conflict resolution, and communication with co-workers and customers in the workplace.”

"There are no assistants anymore; foresters have to be able to use computers, write reports, and give presentations at conferences."

"The owner of a stereo equipment franchise said problem-solving was essential. Staff needed to know what to do when someone came in with \$500 to spend on stereo equipment."

<http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/index.htm>

In the past, early in this century and up until several decades ago, there was much more emphasis on "illiteracy," on the complete absence of basic reading and writing skills. It was widely recognized that people needed at least a minimal level of reading and writing skills to cope successfully in an industrial and resource-based economy. In some respects, Canada was a leader in addressing the problem of "illiteracy." For example, Frontier College was, and remains, an innovative educational institution that sent teachers out to where people worked, to help those with limited or no skills to learn to read and write.

But today, in an information-based global economy, the issue is seldom one of complete illiteracy. Most Canadians have at least some reading and writing ability. The benchmarks today are higher ñ one needs to be able to process more complex textual information in more diverse settings. The premium on communication skills has risen as a service-dominated economy has evolved. And the need for quantitative skills, in work and in everyday life, has also increased. Consequently, the definition of "literacy" has been broadened at the same time as the benchmarks have risen.

(Workplace Literacy Issues in Canada Dr. Harvey Professor of University of Alberta February 12, 1998 <http://www.hssfc.ca/PolicyIssues/Breakfasts/KrahnEng.html>)

On one hand, the word "literacy" has, in the past, ensured that the need to provide opportunities for working adults to upgrade their reading, writing and math skills gets the special attention it deserves...both in raising awareness about the issue and providing dollars by both the public and private sector. Using "literacy" ensures that the issue doesn't get lost under the label of other training and education conducted at the workplace by employers.

On the other hand, experience shows us that if "literacy" is used in a work place context, employees feel the negative connotations of the word and are reluctant to get involved. People tend to associate literacy with "deficiencies" no matter how positively it might be defined. In addition, people tend to associate the word with a narrow definition that focuses on those who cannot read and write at all...a very small percentage of the population.

OTHER EMERGING DEFINITIONS

There are many other terms used to refer to programs that focus on reading, writing and math upgrading at the workplace. For example, two common ones are "basic skills" and "workplace education".

Basic skills, which is used widely to refer to reading, writing and math upgrading at the workplace also has its drawbacks. For example, basic skills have many different meanings, especially at the workplace. Moreover, it may still have a negative meaning for some. However, it seems to more acceptable to employees. "Workplace education" is a generic expression that educators have begun to use to refer to workplace programs that focus on reading, writing, math and related skills. One advantage of this phrase is that it has positive overtones. (Another advantage is that it infers a broader definition where literacy is seen as more than just a discrete set of narrow skills.) Unfortunately, even with careful, clear definitions, "workplace education" also has its drawbacks. Some may view it as too broad, one where foundation skills get lost among the smorgasbord of other workplace training and education.

We recognize that different terminology will be used depending on the context. In order to be respectful of context, various ways of talking about reading, writing and math upgrading have been used in this document.

(Source: Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills, <http://www.nald.ca/nls/inpub/worklit.htm>)

According to Workplace PEI, Workplace Essential Skills include:

- the ability to read and interpret workplace information to effectively perform job tasks
- the ability to speak clearly and to understand co-workers and clients
- the ability to use the principles of math to perform job tasks
- the ability to solve the problems that arise in the course of a job, and
- the ability to use the foundational skills that are necessary for technical training.

(Source: <http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/PEI/wepei/newslet/aug99/page1.htm>)

According to the Conference Board of Canada:

Literacy, in this sense, is defined as the fundamental skills, attributes, attitudes and behaviours that enable people to speak, write prose, use documents and numbers, and work responsibly, alone or in teams, in the workplace. Literacy includes the sets of prose, document and numeracy skills defined by the ground-breaking International Adult Literacy Survey (1995), which sees literacy more broadly as using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

(Source: *Breaching the Barriers to Workplace Literacy*, Jan, 2001, Conference Board of Canada, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pubs.htm>)

11.2 Include a Representative of Business on the Committee

For credibility when going to the business community the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador should have participation from the business sector, probably the Newfoundland and Labrador Chamber of Commerce, or the St. John's Board of Trade.

11.3 Be Plan-Based

The Public Awareness Campaign must be plan-based: i.e., it must have a vision, mission, phases and objectives. The most effective Public Awareness Campaigns are directly linked to key points in the organizational development plan of the equivalent of the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador itself.

11.4 Forge Long term Partnerships with Business, Labour and the Voluntary sector

It is critical that the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador seek out and forge long term relationships with business and labour throughout the province in order for the collateral materials to work and to be used at all. Similar to the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, the partnerships need to respond to and underline the needs for Workplace Literacy.

11.5 Answer the Key Questions

As posed by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) in its discussion paper on Workplace Education, the key questions on the Marketing and promotion challenge are:

- How do we raise awareness of literacy as a priority for labour?
- How do we raise awareness of literacy as a priority for business?
- How do we foster and encourage sustainable commitment to workplace literacy by business and labour?
- What will this look like?

(<http://www.nald.ca/nls/inpub/consultation/english/page5.htm#national>)

11.6 Have Clear and Concise Arguments and Rationale

It would be useful to have the research and the arguments about Workplace Literacy outlined in a format similar to the Saskatchewan example at <http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/assessment.htm>. It is important to reflect the arguments for and against as well as the different perspectives under each as is done in the Saskatchewan example.

Another excellent “Benefits to Employers” analysis can be found at http://www.workplacebasicskills.com/WEP/employer_benefits.htm

Discussion of the following “Benefits to Employers” would also be useful:

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace by the Conference Board of Canada reports that: - Employers believe literacy training improved employees’ ability to learn and to work together as a team; and improved labour-management relations - Employees with higher literacy skills earn more, are less likely to become unemployed, have more opportunities for job mobility, are more likely to find full-time work and are more likely to be given further training.

The Writing’s on the Wall: Investing in Municipal Workforce Literacy by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators reports that: - Workplace literacy programs benefit employers through improved health and safety, better management of change, a more adaptable workforce, better ability to acquire additional skills, less supervisory time, smoother-functioning internal systems, better customer service, and better labour relations. - Workplace literacy programs benefit employees through better chances for promotion, access to further training, more self-confidence, more effective union involvement, empowerment to resolve workplace issues, and better labour relations. (both referred to @ <http://www.literacy.ca/litand/employ/overview.htm>)

11.7 Ongoing Access to ROI Research

The committee and the Public Awareness Campaign (PAC) should be continually aware of and pushing out new research on the returns on the investment of Workplace Literacy. This information needs to be presented clearly and without jargon. For example, on the ABC Canada web site, they refer to:

Two recent research studies have documented the overwhelming positive impacts of workplace basic skills training. One such study was commissioned by ABC CANADA and conducted by Ellen Long consisted of in-depth phone interviews with 86 individuals from 53 workplaces that had basic

skills programs for at least one year. Sixty percent of the individuals interviewed were employer representatives and 40% were employee representatives. The key findings from the ABC CANADA's study were:

- 79% of the respondents reported that they have observed increased productivity because of the basic skills programs.
- 84% of respondents reported that they have observed improvements in quality of people's work.
- 73% of the respondents reported that they have seen an increase in work effort.
- 87% of respondents say that programs impact positively on participants'; ability to use workplace-based technology.

So, the evidence is clear — workplace basic skills program work.

(http://www.abc-canada.org/workplace_education/success.asp)

The Conference Board of Canada, [National Adult Literacy Database](#) and others also have excellent materials on this.

11.8 Do sector based specific research

In order to convince industry about the importance of Workplace Literacy programs, it is important to be able to tell them what is happening in their industry or sector in Newfoundland and Labrador. Similar to how they did it in Manitoba, this could lead to a series of sector literacy profiles.

11.9 Make Current Tools Available to Stakeholders

According to the Conference Board of Canada,

Employers lack awareness and understanding of the economic benefits of investing in employee skill development, especially of investing in literacy and other workplace basic skills. Relatively few managers know how to increase employee involvement in literacy and learning programs. In addition, few managers and employees are aware of a wide range of effective workplace literacy and learning strategies. Many unions are not yet engaged in planning and delivering workplace learning to their members. As a result, there is limited strategic planning, technology training, and external linkages for mentoring and other developmental purposes.

There are, however, some encouraging signs recently. More employers are starting to pay more attention to the potential impact of employees' literacy on their business success. More unions, concerned to provide their members with services that they really value, are also exploring how they can help employees' gain literacy skills development opportunities.

(Source: Breaching the Barriers to Workplace Literacy, Jan, 2001, Conference Board of Canada, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pubs.htm>)

Whether it be certification and training for the practitioners or TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) it is important that the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador have access and distribute the latest tools for the stakeholders in Workplace Literacy programs.

(TOWES is a new test of workplace essential skills that is currently being developed in Canada. The TOWES project is developing a bank of test items that, collectively, will form the basis for an assessment tool to measure essential skills in workplace settings.

11.10 Comprehensive Web Site

The Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador should have a comprehensive web site based on the needs of the anticipated users.

Thus the entry page could be focused around the following users:

Are you a:

- Union Organizer
- Employer
- Employee
- Literacy Organizations or Other Interested Individuals

Each section from then on in would be clearly focused on the needs of the four groups broken down separately.

“Union Organizer” would attempt to anticipate and meet the needs of union locals and executives who are seeking the tools and information to negotiate the employer delivering a Workplace Literacy program, or for the union itself assisting in its delivery. Information on what other Unions or Federations of Labour have attempted would be useful here.

“Employer” would anticipate the needs of the employer who is interested in Workplace Literacy and is seeking guidance, examples and contact information.

“Employees” will anticipate the needs of employees who want to take the initiative to convince their union (if unionized) and/or their employer to deliver Workplace Literacy programming. They will need the information on how programs can be set up, suggestions on how to approach employers, etc.

Finally, “Literacy Organizations/Interested Individuals” will anticipate the needs of literacy organizations attempting to convince local employers to initiative Workplace Literacy programs.

Some information would be generic to all sections, while others will be specific to that target group.

Some of the pieces (like the ABC Canada site) would be:

- specific examples of success stories in Newfoundland and Labrador;
- a step by step process of how to implement a Workplace Literacy Program;
- a content-rich Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) section;
- a searchable database of service providers, other Workplace Literacy projects and key contacts to help them. This should be searchable by location, name, organization and function. For example someone in Baie Verte should be able to easily see the full suite of what is available in their area (realistically, within their zone);

- description of the returns on the investment for Workplace Literacy (both in the words of other companies which have implemented similar programs and from various studies and research);
- address the question of funding and costs clearly. In some instances there may be funding available;
- Give contact information of unions, employees and business owners who have participated in Workplace Literacy programs and quotes of what they thought of it; and
- Include a motivational and awareness raising “Did you know” section with statistics and facts about the impact of literacy improvements and the current state of literacy.

The web site should be easy to read, quick to load, and maintained on a regular basis.

There are many examples of good web sites (though none exactly as described above). Some of the better ones include:

- Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills <http://www.nald.ca/nls/inpub/worklit.htm#WHOdelivers>
- Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board
(<http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/index.htm>)
- Workplace Education PEI <http://www.nald.ca/wepei.htm>

11.11 Newsletter

Many Workplace Literacy campaigns and organizations have Newsletters that they publish containing information on their activities (upcoming and past), new and ongoing research in Literacy at Work Issues, and profiling of Success Stories.

This will be an effective tool for the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador only if there is an established network of interested individuals to which it can be disseminated and if it is integrated with publication on the web site.

It is important that the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador recognize, however, the large amount of work it takes to develop and distribute a newsletter. This should not be under-estimated, as is evidenced in the BC Literacy example.

11.12 Seek Free Advertising and Newsletter Circulation

Seek and take advantage of free advertising of interested organizations and private sector companies (TV, Print, and Radio may all approach the delivery of literacy public awareness ads as Public Service Announcements.

Also, instead of duplicating other newsletter distribution lists, try to negotiate agreements with partner organization for an insertion or an article in their newsletter which already goes to their membership. This saves time and money, and will probably get a better reading audience as it is packaged with a known newsletter.

11.13 Implement an Awards Program

Implement an Awards program for Excellence in Workplace Literacy programs, perhaps on a regional and a provincial basis, with categories for small businesses and larger business; Union sponsored, etc.

11.14 Be Able to Measure the Impact of Workplace Literacy

The committee needs to formulate substantive plans for measuring the impact of workplace education programs. This impact must include all stakeholders. There needs to be developed and available standards of good practice for all to be measured by and to help market programs to the stakeholders.

When campaigns are implemented (ads for example) the volume of telephone and electronic contact with Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador should be tracked.

11.15 Start Small and Be Prepared for Success

It is important that the Workplace Education Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador not create expectations from its Public Awareness Campaign that it cannot meet.

For example, the committee would be in a bad position if it publicly promoted the benefits of Workplace Literacy without having services to point to (needs assessment tools available, practitioners in place throughout the province, evaluation tools created and available, funding mechanisms in place) and other support mechanisms.

It should start by building the partnerships and the resources simultaneously, starting with modest goals, and grow based upon their successes.

12 References

12.1 Summary of References Utilized

ABC Canada	http://www.abc-canada.org
National Literacy Secretariat	http://www.nald.ca/nls.htm
National Adult Literacy Database	http://www.nald.ca
National Institute for Literacy	http://www.nifl.gov
Workplace Literacy Issues in Canada	http://www.hssfc.ca/english/policyandadvocacy/breakfastonthehill/breakfast-literacyissues.cfm
Alphaplus Literacy Information Centre	http://alphaplus.ca/mainframe.htm
Canadian Labour & Business Centre	http://www.clbc.ca
Literacy BC	http://www.nald.ca/lbc.htm
BC's Workforce Literacy Initiative	http://www.nald.ca/Province/Bc/Lbc/Workfrce/main.htm
Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board	http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/index.htm
Workplace Education Manitoba	http://www.wem.mb.ca
Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills	http://www.nald.ca/nls/inpub/worklit.htm
Metro Labour Education Centre	http://www.mlec.org
Northwest Territories and Nunavut Literacy Coalition	http://www.nald.ca/nwtlc.htm
Yukon Learn	http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/YUKON/yuklearn/havedone/havedone.htm
Workplace Education PEI	http://www.nald.ca/wepei.htm
PEI Literacy Alliance	http://www.nald.ca/peila.htm
Frontier College	www.frontiercollege.ca
Literacy @ Work Newsletter (ABC Canada)	http://www.abc-canada.org/literacy_newsletter/index.asp
Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition	http://www.nald.ca/nsplc.htm

12.2 To follow-up further

There are excellent resources to be found at <http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/liters/printresources.htm>. Some of these include:

Keeping Alberta Competitive: A Framework for Providing Literacy Development in the Workplace Elder, Elsie; Lethbridge Community College & Keyano College; co-authored with Nancy Steel; soft cover, coil-bound - 48 pages

The Impact of Basic Skills Programs on Canadian Workplaces Long, Ellen; 1997; ABC Canada; "Results of a National Study for ABC Canada Literacy Foundation"; soft cover, coil-bound - 40 pages

The Economic Payoffs to Workplace Literacy Hollenbeck, Kevin; 1993; W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research; "Staff Working Papers" series - Kalamazoo, MI; soft cover - 34 pages

Workplace Basic Skills - A Study of 10 Canadian Programs Taylor, Maurice 1995; U of Ottawa - Faculty of Education; soft cover, coil-bound - 95 pages

Workplace Education - Making it Work Davison, Marjorie 1997; Nova Scotia Education and Culture; "A Resource Guide for business, labour, government and practitioners interested or involved in Workplace Education" ; also, folder with org. charts and project outline; soft cover - 52 pages

Others:

Conference Board of Canada in a 1997 report on The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace (The Conference Board has several excellent articles for the economic benefits of Essential Skills learning in the workplace found at <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pubs.htm>)

Case Study 30 - Durabelt Inc. - Empowering Adult Learners, Small Business Award winner for Workplace Literacy

Case Study 35 - Cominco Ltd.'s Learning Centre, Refreshing and Extending Learning and Building an Engaged Workforce, Large Business Award winner for Workplace Literacy

(both can be downloaded at Conference Board of Canada <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/cben/case.htm>)

National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, Inc. (NAWDP) <http://members.aol.com/nawdp>

13 Further Reading

13.1 ABC Canada Literacy @ Work Newsletter

The following are full text reproductions from the (excellent) Literacy @ Work Newsletters relevant to this research. Each is sourced individually.

ABC Canada Literacy @ Work Newsletter #29 (http://www.abc-canada.org/literacy_newsletter/29.asp)

Message to literacy practitioners: Get out there and sell! The reason for the grimace? Practitioners are not usually also marketers

Promoting and marketing workplace education is viewed as a challenge by most, and a pleasure by few. "It's a tough slog," says Janis Stone, of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, reflecting the attitudes of many. "Not my favourite thing," agrees Karen Bennett, workplace training coordinator with NorQuest College, in Edmonton.

The reason for the grimace? "Practitioners are not usually also marketers," explains Bennett. "It's not something they do naturally." For many, their background in education has not given them the tools they need to be effective promoters of their services.

However, promoting workplace literacy programs is inevitably part of the practitioner's job. "The people who design and deliver programs are the front-line representatives of workplace literacy," says Sue Turner, of the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC). "They can very effectively influence the opinions of the stakeholders they come into contact with."

Even in the case of more formal promotional activities, practitioners can be the best people for the job. "You need to understand workplace education in order to sell it," says Bennett. She once hired a professional marketer to visit potential employers; the experiment failed because he didn't have a deep understanding of the issue.

"There's a paradigm shift waiting to happen," says Stacey Huget of the Workforce Literacy Advisory Council, which like WEMSC has a mandate to market workplace literacy programs. "Practitioners need to learn to speak the language of employers and unions, to get into their clients' heads-and position their own services accordingly."

Across the country, provincial and regional organizations are focusing on marketing, but they can never reach every single potential employer and union in their area. There is clearly an opportunity for practitioners to drum up more business.

Unions themselves are taking a role in promoting workplace literacy programs. "Unions are in a unique position to put essential skills on the table," says Tamara Levine, coordinator of the Workplace Literacy Project at the Canadian Labour Congress. "They're not knocking on the door like a college or practitioner because the union is already part of the workplace. There's a tradition of sitting across the table and putting ideas forward. If it's a priority for the union, the employer is probably going to have to reckon with it." Levine's project provides resources to unions to help them start thinking about the literacy needs of their members, and how to negotiate with employers.

Most people working in the field agree that heavy-duty marketing is not what works. "We're talking about a broad spectrum of promotion and awareness building," explains Sue Folinsbee, a consultant. "It's not so much the hard sell as getting the word out."

* NorQuest College has just produced a new marketing tool that can help practitioners: it's called "Spreading the Word: A Framework for Workplace Essential Skills Presentations." This binder of presentation materials includes components for 20, 45 and 90 minute presentations, tailored to business, labour or employee audiences, along with a Power Point diskette that can be customized by the user. Available for \$45, contact Karen Bennett at 780-427-7855.

News from workplace education promoters across Canada

Practitioners and consultants are working to promote their own workplace literacy programs, as are many colleges. Groups with a mandate to workplace education exist in almost every province and territory-here is a snapshot of current activity.

BC Workforce Literacy Initiative: The initiative undertakes a variety of awareness-raising and marketing activities-including a highly-praised series of breakfasts with speakers from the business/labour communities, promotional materials, and customized presentations and seminars.

Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES): Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) is working toward the production of promotional and display materials.

Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board: The group has recently completed a needs assessment of 200 businesses to develop a business-labour vision for workplace literacy in the province. They have also developed a handbook called "An Introduction to Workplace Literacy," that provides core information to practitioners-broadly defined as anyone working in workplace training.

WEMSC: WEMSC learned that their clients are impressed by efficiency, and Turner reports that their regular breakfast sessions operate on a tight schedule. Targeting business and labour, the WEMSC presents a topic of interest to both. "We eat, hear a presentation, do roundtable discussions, report back, and get out of there fifteen minutes ahead of schedule," says Turner.

WWestNet: The Western Workplace Essential Skills Training Network is comprised of volunteer representatives from business, labour, education and government with experience and a passion for workplace education. To raise awareness and encourage action, Wwestnet offers forums, a newsletter, and a venue to share resources and information.

Option Compétences: This brand-new workplace education centre was launched by the Fondation québécoise pour l'alphabétisation in October. The centre's mission is to promote essential skills development in the workplace. Coordinator Virginia Hall provides information and referral services, awareness-raising tools, and reference material, and works to develop partnerships with existing structures in the province. The centre has received excellent media coverage, and is strongly supported by business and labour. For more information call 514-289-8794 or check www.optioncompetences.qc.ca

Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education: Promoting literacy is one of the responsibilities of the group. Renette Muise, a field officer, describes one of her favourite tactics: deliberately

targeting the competitors of companies that have engaged programs. "One of the two sawmills in my region came on board, so I went to the other one immediately to let them know that they needed a workplace education program to keep up."

Workplace Education PEI: In its third year, this group has taken on a number of promotional activities. Their most recent marketing tool is a ten and a half minute video showcasing homegrown success stories that appeal to the small businesses on the island.

Mentoring Workplace Education

"Enthusiastic employers are often willing to go out and testify about the success of their essential skills initiatives," says Elaine Casey, a workplace education field officer with the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education. "With that kind of testimonial, it's much easier for me to get into other workplaces."

Casey was thrilled when Russell Metals, a firm whose essential skills program won an award from the Conference Board, offered to host an open house for neighbouring businesses in the Lakeview Industrial Park near Halifax. The committee members were excellent emissaries for the program, especially Lisa Ferguson, the administrative supervisor and committee member who says the program improved employee morale and increased the confidence of participants. "Of course the results are all intangible," she adds, "and I hate being asked to provide quantitative results!"

Russell Metals sent invitations to the twenty businesses in the park. About six came to the session, and Ferguson, Casey and three committee members made presentations. Casey has won at least one new client from the session, a company that is currently doing a needs assessment.

Nova Scotia has also seen workplace education being "sold" by one company to other businesses in the same family. For example, when Ben's Bread was exploring options for employee training, representatives visited their sister company Canadian Key Fibre (CKF). The visitors were especially impressed by the commitment to the program shown by the union.

Within industries, sector councils have been working to promote workplace education programs to their members. André Leury of the Textile Council comments that he has learned to package skills training differently in order to appeal to employers. "We are integrating essential skills with literacy training," he says, "since the industry desperately needs skilled workers. This sales pitch is working better." He also feels that the Textile Council's status as an unbiased, non-profit organization helps him build partnerships between business and labour. "This always has to be a joint effort," he says.

The Grocery Producers Council launched an essential skills program on October 14. Terry Paupst reports that the Council is currently conducting research that will help launch their marketing efforts. "We're working quite a lot on story development for articles that will run in industry magazines." His labour counterpart Tom Parkin visits unions in the industry to raise awareness and encourage unions to approach unions with suggestions for programs.

Lloyd Campbell of Syncrude is another expert when it comes to promoting workplace literacy to industry. Syncrude's Effective Reading in Contest (ERIC) program has been shared with a high school, the construction industry, and two apprenticeship training and trust funds: the boilermakers and operating engineers.

Campbell agrees that business people are more likely to listen to their peers when it comes to training options. A member of Wwestnet, he feels his job is to open the door for practitioners. He predicts that interest in training will increase in the coming years: "We're feeling the skill shortage already," he says, "and the brain drain will take its toll on our skilled workers."

New ad campaign spreads the word By Alexandra Dunsmuir

(Source ABC Canada Newsletter#32 http://www.abc-canada.org/literacy_newsletter/32.asp)

Last September, on International Literacy Day, the print component of ABC CANADA's latest advertising campaign, developed by TAXI advertising, was launched at a special publishers' reception in Toronto. Publications like Chatelaine, enRoute, Elm Street and Maclean's were well represented at the event. Response to the new campaign was very positive, and all the publishers walked away with a binder of artwork for their publications. Many confirmed their support for the campaign on the spot.

On the day of the launch, ABC CANADA rallied newspaper publishers across Canada to publish a special International Literacy Day ad featuring creative from the new campaign. A total of 41 newspapers agreed to publish the ad, including both national newspapers (Globe and Mail, National Post) and several major dailies like the Toronto Star, Montreal Gazette, Ottawa Citizen, Vancouver Sun, St. Catherines Standard and Hamilton Spectator. The newspaper blitz featuring the new campaign made such an impact on the general public that call volume and Web traffic to ABC CANADA's site has increased significantly.

In fact, ABC CANADA's first call on September 8 was from a mother who said that, as a result of the International Literacy Day ad, she read to her children for 20 minutes before going to work that day! During the weeks following the ad placement, calls continued to come in from across Canada.

As a follow up to the launch, over 100 major magazines and 125 newspaper publishers across Canada were sent CDs and a binder (with ad proofs) of the new print campaign. Since late September, more than 150 ads of the new campaign have been published in newspapers and magazines across the country. This includes a half page ad in the November 27 edition of TIME Magazine!

Since the launch of the new campaign, 40 newspapers that have never before published ABC CANADA ads have decided to publish ads from the new campaign.

The campaign is not just showing up in publications. Ad placement has already been secured with two out-of-home media groups. PULSE Media featured the campaign above 50 courtesy telephones across Ontario during the month of September and OMG Silver Box has been featuring the new campaign on 50 silver recycling receptacles in Toronto. In addition, ad placement was secured in Mediacom's portable transit shelter, which was displayed in a prominent location in downtown Toronto, on the day of the ad campaign launch.

And this is not the last you've heard of the new ad campaign. TAXI has also agreed to develop and produce a broadcast component (TV, with a possible extension into radio) aimed at encouraging learners to enroll in skills upgrading programs. This new campaign, which is currently in development, will hit the airwaves in February 2001. TAXI has also approached ABC CANADA

with an innovative, 'one-off' transit shelter ad that is sure to generate some significant media and public attention in the new year.

The TAXI team has been outstanding throughout the development of the campaign in terms of dedication to the cause, delivering quality materials and donation of time and production dollars. TAXI has even corralled its production suppliers to donate their resources to the campaign. This donation helped supplement the project grant received from the National Literacy Secretariat for this campaign. Special thanks go out to TAXI's Account Director, Maxine Thomas, and Account Manager, Amanda Gaspard, who are directly responsible for the day-to-day management of the ABC CANADA account. They have contributed energy, time and their personal commitment to the literacy issue.

In November 2000, ABC CANADA was able to publicly recognize TAXI's fine work: the ad agency was honoured as this year's recipient of the Honourable Joyce Fairbairn, P.C. Literacy Public Awareness Award. The "Joyce" was created in 1996 to honour outstanding private sector literacy supporters. Past award winners include: Canadian Yellow Pages™ Publishers, Maclean Hunter Publishing Limited, Mediacom Inc., Southam Inc., Telemedia Publishing, Baton Broadcasting System (CTV), Honda Canada and Royal Bank Financial Group.

ABC CANADA hosts 'media circus'

(Source: ABC Canada Newsletter #32 http://www.abc-canada.org/literacy_newsletter/32.asp)

Last October, over 100 representatives from the advertising industry and supporters of ABC CANADA participated in the first annual Gutenberg Fair, a unique fundraiser that included a media auction, acrobatic performances and interactive games.

The event, described as "the Midway meets the Circus", revolved around a not-so-silent auction of media space, donated by every major magazine, newspaper and some of the largest out-of-home media companies in Canada. Media buyers from large advertising agencies played interactive games - like "Dunk-A-Punk", "Four-Letter Pool", "Scrabble" and "Big Mouths" - to accumulate a bankroll of play money, called GUTE\$ bucks. The GUTE\$ were then used to bid on the donated media space, with the highest GUTE\$ bidder winning the right to purchase the space at 65 per cent off its real value.

Invited guests were entertained by the acrobatic skills of members of Cirque Sublime. The games were hosted by various performers dressed in elaborate costumes, including men and women dressed in traditional German lederhosen and dirndls, "barkers" dressed in lime green tuxes and media auctioneers dressed in bowler hats and outrageous vests.

"We're very pleased with the outcome of this event," says Christine Featherstone, ABC CANADA's executive director. "The support we received from the media donors has been wonderful. The publishing industry has always been very supportive of the literacy issue and we're grateful to them for having stepped up to the plate to make a contribution at this event."

Media that was not purchased at the fundraiser was sold, post-event, via a "fax auction." Media buyers were sent a purchase order form with a list of leftover media, and were invited to send the

completed form back on a given day, between specific times. The remaining media was sold on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Proceeds from the Gutenberg Fair will be put towards the development of national public awareness programs for literacy. "It's ironic that although the Gutenberg Press launched a knowledge revolution by making literacy available to the masses, in the year 2000, 5 million Canadian adults struggle with reading and writing," adds Featherstone.

Plans are already underway for the second annual Gutenberg Fair, slated for October 11, 2001.

This event was made possible thanks to the generous support of many sponsors and volunteers, who donated their time, energy and resources during the year leading up to the event. Many thanks to the planning committee, especially Maureen Cavan and Allan Hobbs who worked extensively throughout the summer conducting presentations about the Fair to ad agencies, and securing media space donations. Thanks also to all the magazine, newspaper and out-of-home companies across Canada that donated media space for the auction, and the suppliers that donated all, or a portion, of goods and services, including: Amazing Food Service, Cirque Sublime, Eventscape, Maud Street Printing, MGM, Nike, Prisma-Light, Random House, SAAB, Speedlink Travel, Sporting Life, The Government, Upper Canada Brewing Co., Vital Signs, Westbury, ZEERO Design

Very special thanks to Krista Slack and Associates, the wonderful event planning company responsible for event logistics and project development.

13.2 BC Literacy Presentation

Presentation for: Awareness of the Impact of Workforce Skills on Business Prosperity (May 7th, 1999)

"What is the impact of workforce skills on an employer's bottom line – and where does workforce training and skills development fit as a priority for the business community?"

Title: Getting Over "The Glaze"...

For those of you who aren't familiar with it, the focus of the BC Workforce Literacy Initiative is primarily directed toward upgrading the "basic skills" of the workforce. We work with business, labour, government, and educators to raise awareness about literacy issues; to provide resources and referrals that support program delivery; and we promote partnerships and collaboration around workforce skills issues.

Literacy in Context

One of the greatest challenges I face in my work is what I call "the glaze" – that look that crosses so many faces when we talk about workforce "literacy". Like, surely, people in the workplace can read and write.

So let me take a minute at the outset to put literacy in some context. **First of all**, it may surprise some of you to hear that:

- About 22% of adult Canadians 16 years and over have serious difficulty dealing with printed materials and another 24-26% read, but not well. (Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996)
- That these are *not* marginalized groups of the population *outside* the workforce or who work but don't have to read on the job (Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996)
- In fact, even those adults who score at the lowest levels of literacy report having to do a variety of kinds of reading (letters, reports, articles, manuals, diagrams, schematics, and spreadsheets) on a weekly basis. (Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996)

Second of all, as far back as 1990 (*The Impact of Illiteracy on Canadian Business*, 1990), business *has* been recognizing basic skills as an issue in which they *do* have a stake:

- 70% of employers feel they have a significant literacy problem in some part of their organization and that these problems with basic skills have:
 - slowed down the introduction of new technology (26%)
 - impeded training and the acquisition of new skills (34%)
 - adversely affected product quality (27%)
 - caused errors in production inputs and processes (40%)
 - and/or otherwise contributed to productivity losses (32%).

Third of all (?), and perhaps my most important point, literacy is much more complex and contextual than just being able to read and write at some one, universally basic level – literacy is the ability to read, write, work with numbers, problem-solve, communicate, and/or think critically *at whatever level is basic to the task at hand*. Thus when you think of “basic skills” in the context of the workplace, you can imagine a bit of a moving target. And whatever they are in a given situation, “literacy” or “basic” or “essential” skills are the foundation for all training and skills development activity – and, indeed, to lifelong learning in and beyond the workplace.

(Pause)

However...

This morning's breakfast, like all the breakfasts in this series, are not just about workforce literacy. We're concerned with workforce skills in broader terms. When I refer to literacy, however, it is only because it is still one of the most ignored aspect of training and skills development in the workplace.

The Question

Increasingly, the question employers are asking themselves is: *"Do our employees possess the skills necessary to implement change and to operate our business effectively into the next century?"* The answer, or so it seems in many cases, is no.

Consider the results of the BC Chamber of Commerce Moving Forward Survey in 1994 and 1998:

- 50% ranked workers' skills as the fourth most critical issue facing business in BC. (B.C. Chamber of Commerce, *Moving Forward: The Vision of B.C. Business*, 1994)
- 89% agreed that to become more competitive, they must improve their own management skills and to invest significantly in the education of both senior and middle management (B.C. Chamber of Commerce, *Moving Forward: The Vision of B.C. Business*, 1994)
- 91% of small or medium sized businesses believe, that to become more competitive, they'll have to up the level of worker skills training (B.C. Chamber of Commerce, *Moving Forward: The Vision of B.C. Business*, 1994)

Consider too the results of the 1998-2000 Management Issues Survey by the Alliance of Manufacturers & Exporters' Canada:

- 19% of the more than 500 manufacturers surveyed identified the availability of skilled labour as a factor expected to contribute to deteriorating market conditions (The Alliance of Manufacturers & Exporters Canada, *1998-2000 Management Issues Survey*)
- 40% of the manufacturers surveyed identify "lack of qualified personnel" as one of the chief impediments to making measurable improvements in their business performance (The Alliance of Manufacturers & Exporters Canada, *1998-2000 Management Issues Survey*)

And manufacturing is just one example. Similar expressions of concern can be found in throughout various industry and sectoral reports.

(Pause)

And We Have Lots of Reports...

And, man, do we have lots of reports! The amount of research that has been done or is being done about the changing nature of work and the evolving skill requirements of our workforce is staggering.

Shifts Between Sectors

Certainly, we all know – as organizations like Industry Canada, and many others will attest – the structure of employment in all sectors is shifting towards knowledge- and technology-intensive industries.

Much concern has been expressed about the shortages of skilled labour for certain occupations – and most notably for occupations within the high technology sector. There is a certain amount of disagreement about the extent and nature of these shortages but most serious analysis has concluded that the labour market is very tight for certain skill sets.

Fair enough – and worth addressing.

Shifts Within Sectors

What we sometimes lose sight of, however, is that although the direction of change has been towards knowledge- and technology-intensive industries, they still account for only a small share of overall employment in Canada. The majority of jobs are still concentrated in the low- to medium-knowledge and technology sectors. Indeed, the main source of employment growth remains in the service sector, with gains in employment coming from *both* high- and low-technology service industries.

Within *those* sectors as well, there is an increasing demand for more high-skilled workers. It's not just about jobs in the sexy information- and technology-based sectors. It's about the introduction of new technologies and information-based processes into *many* sectors of the workplace – and the demand for a workforce that can adapt to them. A demand that requires skills upgrading or retraining in order to be met.

Skills Surpluses

Of course, at the same time, in some sectors of the economy, a surplus of skilled labour exists and business has little need or incentive to invest in further training. Consider, for example, the "McJobbing" that is occurring in the retail grocery sector.

Skills Gaps

What's important for us to recognize and address is that there are *gaps* between the skills our jobs require and the skills our workforce possess.

In his analysis of these gaps – and he was focussing on “basic skills” alone, University of Alberta sociologist Harvey Krahn suggests that:

- the “fit” between skill levels and job requirements is 33% in Canada. What he found was that 22% of workers have skill levels that are too low given the requirements of their jobs (17% and 5%) and 45% of workers have skill levels beyond what their jobs require.

Change is the Only Constant

In any event, such analysis provides only snapshots of something that is in rapid motion. Relevant job skills are a moving target. An Ekos research study revealed that:

- 50% of the Canadian labour force believe their job skills will become obsolete in 5-10 years
- 59% believe their current education and skills limit their ability to get another job
- and 88% of the labour force see upgrading knowledge and skills as key to economic security. (Ekos Research Associates, *Lifelong Learning and the World of Work*, 1995)

So, our ability to develop and maintain an adaptable and appropriately trained (or retrained) workforce – that is the point.

Okay, So What Kind of Training Are Employers Doing...

Okay, so what does the research say about the kind of training and skills development activity that's occurring in the workplace?

First : Less Training Occurs in Small Businesses than in Large

The 1995-96 Ekos Workplace Training Survey – which gathered information on training experiences from over 2500 establishments throughout the Canadian private sector – found the

incidence of workplace training tends to be lowest in small firms and rises with firm size:

- while 86% of firms with 100+ employees offered formal training, only 38% of those with fewer than 20 employees did so.

This is understandable. Training costs are a particular concern for small firms – with expenditures per employee being twice as high as they are in large firms. Larger firms are able to take advantage of economies of scale unavailable to small firms on their own and are better able than small firms to accommodate down time while employees are being trained.

Nonetheless, it's a matter for some concern when you consider that the vast majority of businesses in BC are small business:

- Of the over 150,000 firms in BC, over 98% employ fewer than 50 workers but provide 48% of all BC employment.

It's also a concern when you consider that 50% of the small- and medium-sized businesses in the Moving Forward survey ranked workers' skills as one of the most critical issues facing employers in BC.

Second: Less Training Occurs in Traditional Sectors

The 1995-96 Ekos Workplace Training Survey Training also found that while training activity is particularly high in the financial, communications, and education sectors – among 90% of the firms surveyed – it is relatively low in the more traditional sectors, including, for example:

- natural resource manufacturing (37%)
- scale-based manufacturing industries (34%)
- traditional services such as retail trade, accommodation, and food services (38%)

And it is these traditional sectors that are having to embrace new technologies, re-engineering, and job redesign.

And no wonder that many employers who are having to do the same are intending to increase their budgets for training in the years to come. (Indeed, half of the manufacturers surveyed for the Alliance's *1998-2000 Management Issues Survey* of 542 said they planned to increase their training budgets this year and next.)

Third: Little Training is Directed at Basic Skills

According to Statistics Canada, numeracy and literacy training are very low on employers' priority list. Their 1998 Pilot Workplace Employee survey found:

- 38% of establishments train, but numeracy and literacy training are notably absent at .5%.

However, given the findings of the IALS research – that 22% of adult Canadians have serious difficulty dealing with printed materials and another 24-26% read, but not well – the near absence of workplace-based basic skills training is a matter for concern. All the more so given that it is these basic skills that provide the foundation on which all other training is laid (or not).

Fourth: Some People May Be Falling Through the Cracks

It's interesting to note that in the Statistics Canada research, the incidence of training reported by workers differs from that reported by employers. For example:

- In some industries, such as product-differentiated manufacturing, an above-average proportion of establishments train (71%) but a below-average share of the workers reported receiving training (29%)

So, we have to ask: Within companies, who's getting the training?

The research suggests training experience is higher for workers in managerial, professional, and technical occupations than for those in clerical, sales, and goods-producing occupations. It may be argued that these unequal training patterns reflect employer preferences in who they choose to invest in – and that may be true. However, it also reflects differences in how workers recognize the importance of training, and their interest in (or fear of) getting further training.

Certainly, the research suggests that the incidence of employer-sponsored training is much higher among employees who expressed a need or desire to take training than among those who did not. Those who ask tend to get. (But then, are all employees in an equal position to ask?)

According to the IALS research:

- 38% of Canadians engaged in training in 1994-95; however, of these, a disproportionately small number of these were those with lower levels of literacy. In other words, the individuals

who need training the most, participate in it the least. (Statistics Canada, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*, 1997)

(Pause)

So, Should There be a Greater Emphasis on Training in the Workplace...

So, could there be – should there be – a greater emphasis on training in the workplace? Well, we believe there should. But the business community (and I still consider myself to be a part of it) has lots of priorities. Training is not always at the top of the list.

A couple of things seem to deflect our attention from the skills development and training imperative:

We Tend to Focus on the Education System

Certainly, the education system plays a significant role in the skills of our workforce. And there are concerns about whether graduates are emerging with the right skills.

- Indeed, in the Moving Forward research, almost three quarters of small and medium business said that high school graduates did not have the necessary numeracy and literacy skills – nor the necessary communication skills, work ethic, or self-discipline – to enter the workforce.

The third breakfast in our series, on employability skills, and the fourth breakfast, on the recommendations of the BC Business Summit, will touch on the ways in which employers need to work more closely with educators.

However, as valuable as those discussions are, reforms in our educational system are not the only answer.

First, educational reform – at the K to 12 level, anyway – will do little to provide existing workers with the skills they need; and

Second, the relationship between our skill levels as adults and our educational attainment is not airtight:

- 20% of the Canadians in the IALS sample have lower literacy skills than the model of educational attainment would predict, and about 16% have higher skills – which means that about one third of our population have skills that deviate from what you'd expect given their education

Third, whether its reading or brain surgery, all skills, are a "use it or lose it" phenomena. Learning is a lifelong thing. And much of our lives are spent at work. Learning at work is an inevitable requirement for an adaptable, appropriately skilled workforce.

We Also Tend to Focus on Training with "Direct" Benefits to Us

The relatively low incidence (5%-7%) of non-vocational training in decision-making, problem-solving, team-building, leadership, and communications -- and the even lower incidence of "basic skills" training in the workplace – does not belie their importance to employers.

Rather, it may reflect the traditional human capital theory that because these skills are applicable economy-wide, individual employers have little incentive to provide them. Why provide employees with skills they'll only take to another employer?

Either way, at a time when basic, employability skills are increasingly identified as necessary for employment, establishments are not really a source of this important training.

And, Of Course, We Get Bugged Down on the ROI Question

Inevitably, the whole issue becomes one of return on investment – or ROI. Many businesses view an investment in training as a luxury they can't afford. Certainly there are costs associated with training (Canadian Policy Research Networks, *Barriers to Employer-Sponsored Training in Canada*, 1998):

- curriculum development and instructor costs
- facilities
- downtime or paid training time

And its understandable that, as investors in their own businesses, employers tend to be risk-averse and are more inclined to invest in that for which there are explicit rates of return – as there are with many physical capital investments.

On that point, though, it's interesting to note that recent OECD research suggests that investments in human capital generally do offer rates of return comparable to those available from other types of capital investment. (OECD, *Human Capital Investment: An International Comparison*)

Nonetheless, in the absence of hard ROI information, many employers do underinvest in training. Funny though, from our perspective, the whole ROI issue is a bit of a red herring. Because business rarely accounts in any comprehensive manner for human resource development investments. Conventional accounting frameworks cannot accurately measure the ROI in training or other forms of skills development; at best, these frameworks measure the costs of training but not the associated returns. And even in terms of costs, there is great variation among firms as to what factors are included.

(Pause)

A Return to Common Sense: The Impact of Workforce Skills on Business Prosperity

From where we sit, there's a need for a heavy dose of common sense. Because, the ROI issue aside, common sense tells us there are benefits to be derived from a greater and more strategic focus on training within our workplaces.

Productivity

Consider productivity:

- In a recent study, Industry Canada cites inadequate investment in people as one of the contributors to Canada's poor record in productivity increases over the past decade. And, in BC, our increases in productivity over the past two decades is worse than that of the country as a whole.
- And, going back to the basic skills issues, as far back as 1988, the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy estimated that a lack of functional literacy is costing Canadian businesses \$4 billion annually in lost productivity (Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, *Measuring the Costs of Illiteracy in Canada*, 1988)

Customer Service

Consider customer service. Common sense and experience will tell us that employees who have the skills to problem-solve, be creative, harness technology will be better able to provide customer service.

Competitiveness

Consider our competitiveness. In *Canada at the Crossroads*, Michael Porter identifies an educated and well-trained population as “the most important source of competitive advantage in the contemporary world economy.”

- In the Alliance survey, 58% of manufacturers identified a skilled workforce is a primary consideration influencing competitiveness (The Alliance of Manufacturers & Exporters Canada, *1998-2000 Management Issues Survey*)

This is particularly true when one considers the approach to training and apprenticeship and lifelong learning in general that exists in many European countries – countries with whom we increasingly compete.

Overall Impact

However non-quantifiable it may be, the impact of workplace training and skills development on our business bottom line *is* significant.

Consider the findings of two recent studies into the impact of “basic skills” training – the kind of training many employers would say likely to give the least return.

In 1998, two separate studies – by the Conference Board and by ABC CANADA – identified similar employer-assessed impacts of “basic skills” training in the workplace, including:

- Increased Productivity and Reduced Error Rates
- Better Quality of Work and Greater Work Effort
- Increased Profitability
- Increased Customer Retention
- Reduced Absenteeism
- Improved Teamwork, Problem-Solving, and Communication Skills
- Improved Health and Safety
- Increased Ability to Use Technology
- Ability to Work More Independently
- Increased Transferability and Promotability
- Improved Employee Morale and Retention
- Better Tolerance for Diversity

- Improved Labour Relations

(Pause)

We Need a Vision that Drives Action...

The question this morning is *“What is the impact of workforce skills on an employer’s bottom line – and where does workforce training and skills development fit as a priority for the business community?”*

Our “take”, based on the research, is that the impact is significant – and that employers need to ratchet workforce skills development up a few notches on their priority list.

We believe employers can play – indeed must play – a significant role in helping us to develop a culture of learning in this country. In breathing life into the *notion* of lifelong learning and continuous skills development.

How? Well, big question. Difficult question. We hope that some of the discussion that occurs throughout these breakfasts will not only explore that question – but give us some “traction” toward the answers.

13.3 Report on BC Public Awareness Literacy Initiatives

(Appended as an adobe acrobat file – Insert here)