



Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women

Promoting women's right to safe, empowering, relevant and useful education and training.

MINERVA

CLOW-Where We're At

The Context of Change

At the 1998 CLOW Board Meeting, Directors came to grips with the fact that the current organization is, in the words of President Cheryl Senecal, "...in dire need of new passion, new direction and new structures." Like many national organizations, the context for CLOW's work has changed greatly since its founding twenty years ago.

In addition to changes in federal policy on funding equality-seeking groups, there was also the recent devolution of responsibility for post-secondary education and labour-market training to the provinces. As an organization with a national focus committed to furthering women's equality through learning, CLOW had worked in previous years to prepare the way for change. Cost-cutting measures included the cancellation of our magazine, *Women's Education des femmes*, which led to many membership cancellations.

Meanwhile, changes in employment insurance funding for community-based training organizations - many of which were set up to fill gaps in institutional programs, and many of which were run by and for women - meant that these non-profits were forced to close. Our membership lost many of these adult educators, counsellors and literacy workers who became unemployed or who found work in other sectors.

Facing the Need for Change

Throughout 1998, CCLOW's Provincial and Territorial Directors had worked through a set of questions in consultation with their respective Networks. Based on feedback from members and after careful deliberation, the Board reached consensus on a motion that would shape a vigorous national women's organization and that would build on CCLOW's strengths and assets.

As a means of paving the way for the revitalization of the organization, CCLOW is calling a Women's Congress. Its purpose is to provide a forum where committed women will transform CCLOW into a different model of an organization - one which can respond more effectively to women's interests and needs around education and training as we move into the next decade. In the same way that CCLOW was formed 20 years ago, we are now entering into a similar process to both honour our history and provide a foundation for the coming years.

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The congress is planned for Toronto, the weekend of November 4-7, 1999.

Pre-conference on-line discussions are being set up to plan the workshops and activities to take place under the following six broad theme areas:

- women's education and training for labour market participation
- women's literacy education: foundation learning for full participation in society
- violence and trauma: impact on women's learning and the response of adult educators
- changing demographics: older women and education
- impact of new communication technologies on women's learning and their potential in education and training
- supporting women's participation in education and training; income support, child care, transportation, prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), counselling, accessibility, learning tools, and resources.

These thematic workshops will be used to create an environment in which this transformation can begin, and we will be looking to involve a diverse range of women in the planning process. We are hoping that creative women with energy, passion and motivation will come together and build new ways to enhance women's learning in the current Canadian context. We are also planning a joyful celebration of CLOW's twenty years of good work.

We Invite You to Participate

As a Board, we believe that these decisions are bold and responsible. We want you to participate in the work leading up to the Congress and to be a part of this important milestone in our herstory. To indicate your interest in participating, either contact us through your local Provincial/ Territorial Director or through the addresses listed on the back page of this newsletter.

Important Information for Members

Effective May 1,1999:

- CLOW files and archival materials have been transferred to the National Archives, Women's Collection, where they will be catalogued and available for research.
- CLOW Resource collection has been transferred to the Nellie Langford Rowell Library, York University, where materials will be catalogued and can be accessed.
- CLOW's 20-Year History is being written and will be published by summer 1999.
- Commemorative issue of Women's Education des femmes will be published and distributed to members in Spring 1999.
- CLOW publications will be available for purchase through Dawson College, Montreal.

But I'm Not a Therapist

Watch for a new resource, sponsored by CLOW and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat. *But I'm Not a Therapist*.

But I'm Not a Therapist examines in-depth, the links for women between literacy learning and trauma. It is based on a national research study that revealed the wide range of impacts that trauma has on adult learning.

A large percentage of the women who come to adult literacy programs have experienced or are currently experiencing violence in their lives. This experience of violence negatively impacts on their ability to improve their literacy skills. Literacy programs and other educational programs have not integrated this reality into their work. During the research, many literacy workers revealed that frequently most, if not all, of the women in their classes had experienced physical or sexual abuse. This research makes it clear that without an acknowledgement of the impacts of trauma on learning, women, rather than getting a chance to succeed and improve their literacy skills, get only a chance to fail, to confirm to themselves that they really can NOT learn.

This book is directed to all those involved in the adult literacy field. It will also be of interest to other educators of adults and social activists. There is currently virtually nothing written that takes up issues of trauma in relation to their impact on learning. This book will be an important intervention in the discussion about violence in society. It is solidly grounded theoretically, yet accessible and easy to read. It bridges the gulf that is often present between academic, theoretical work and activist, practical work. It is full of clear examples that will be much in demand by anyone involved in teaching.

The researcher and author, Dr. Jenny Horsman, is a community educator/researcher with a feminist perspective. Based in Toronto, she carries out research, writing, curriculum development, training and facilitation projects in literacy and workplace training. Jenny has written numerous articles on literacy as well as the book, *"Something in My Mind besides the Everyday: Women and Literacy."* She is particularly interested in strengthening links between adult literacy theory and practice. Her current work builds on her research on trauma and learning, and explores possible changes in literacy programs to serve survivors of trauma better.

The Women's Future Fund will be Launched on May 17th!

May 17, 1999 is the date of a press conference to launch the Women's Future Fund (WFF), an innovative partnership of national women's organizations aimed at providing a stable source of funding for our work.

After the launch, the WFF will begin to approach employers and unions across Canada to implement a workplace-giving program to support members' equality-seeking activities.

The launch will take place at 11 a.m. at Metro Hall in Toronto. The theme of the launch is "Enlarging the Pie": by reaching out beyond our traditional funding base, the WFF hopes to increase support for women's initiatives. Needless to say, reporters from national media and others who participate in the launch will be served pie as part of the festivities. CCLOW members can attend the launch, where guest speakers and resource people will talk about the funding challenges faced by national women's organizations and the WFF's response, as well as profile WFF members and their successes.

Betty Butterworth, CCLOW's treasurer is our representative to the board of WFF. The ten founding members of the Fund are:

- ACCED (Accès à l'éducation, the foundation of Le Réseau national d'Action Éducation Femmes (RNAÉF) Foundation)
- Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
- CCLOW
- Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW)
- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada
- Media Images of Women Educational Society (Media Watch)
- NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women) Trust
- National Association of Women and the Law Charitable Trust for Research and Education
- Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) National Network

Women's Access to Training

CLOW Annual General Meeting: A presentation on Women's Access to Training, with guest speaker, Ursule Critoph, Senior Associate, Canadian Labour Force Development Board.

Cheryl Senecal, President, welcomed all to the CLOW AGM and Joanne Lindsay, Executive Director, introduced the guest speaker, Ursule Critoph.

Ursule began with some background on the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB), noting that it is funded by, but not an arm of HRDC. It is autonomous. Ursule focussed on the impacts of recent federal policy changes on issues that the CLFDB had, since its inception in 1991, worked on: policy relationships within the federal government and between federal and provincial governments; and delivery of training and other labour adjustment programs. She spoke, in particular, about her recent research for a project known, within the CLFDB, as the Monitoring Project. In this context, she reviewed her findings, on the impacts of all the changes on individuals, delivery organizations and governments.

Ursule outlined the research process she undertook in the form of focus groups, a survey of providers and numerous discussions with government officials. The 39 focus groups were conducted across the country, with 9 of these groups specifically organized by members of the National Women's Reference Group on Labour Market Issues (NWRG). Other sessions were organized by reference groups from the visible minority communities, peoples with disabilities, labour and business, all constituencies within the CLFDB. Most of the individuals within the focus groups were users of training or employment services offered through Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) programs.

Before providing her preliminary analysis of the focus group data, Ursule spoke about the economic and political context, specifically about globalization, changes in the structure and power between business and government, the increasing concentration of wealth, the loss of government as an instrument of public good, the downloading of responsibilities to provinces, the loss of the training delivery infrastructure, and the overall loss of a national safety net. In this context, we also find the deregulation of labour markets, reduced employment standards, and the loss of targeted programs and affirmative action as a mechanism to redress the historical disadvantage of certain groups, including women, in the labour market.

In Canada, three major changes have taken place: the federal government has transferred responsibility for most labour market development issues to the provinces, they have also cut back almost totally on their own general revenue spending on the equity groups and they have introduced the Employment Insurance Act to replace the Unemployment Insurance Act.

All of this has resulted in a severe drop in the spending going to women's training and labour market services. At the same time, cuts to federal transfers to the provinces, in the form of the new Canada Health and Social Transfers (CHST) are also being felt at the community level since most provincial spending on education and training has always been a flow-through of federal monies. Historically, these funds have allowed for a secondary safety net for the unemployed re-entering the labour market or moving from one job to another. Now, if an individual is not eligible for Employment Insurance benefits, they don't get access to training or employment services, as these are only for those eligible for EI. At the same time, there has been a dramatic drop in the number of people who can access EI (from 83% of the unemployed pool to 42% of the unemployed pool). A drop that continues to grow!

Other changes include the elimination of the system of direct purchase of training and the increased use of for-profit organizations as the preferred mechanism for delivery of training and employment services. The new system of skills loans and grants, while making it much more difficult for individuals to afford training, also covers only about 20-45% of the costs of delivering programs in public and many community institutions but 100% in for-profit organizations. This is resulting in a large shift away from community organizations as delivery agents to the for-profit organizations and in the process, we are losing a basic level of public infrastructure. As this happens, the experience and knowledge of workers from within these institutions is being lost.

Women's Access to Training

In addition, the new skills loans and grants will be based on household income and not just individual income. There is also an expectation that assets will be liquidated before EI-based support will be provided. The system is moving towards having banks administer these skills loans, which would mean that anyone with no credit history or one of bad debt or a recent bankruptcy wouldn't be eligible for these loans. Women make up the majority of those who will be disadvantaged under this system.

Ursule then summarized some of the trends found in the survey and focus group results:

- There is no consistency across the country, but the challenges are almost universal. There continues to be disdain for those who find themselves unemployed - the blaming of the victim - that the unemployed are out there abusing the system. (This is built on false research and assumptions, as there continues to be only a small number who abuse the system. True abuse has never exceeded 2%-4%, according to statistics.) People in the focus groups expressed a sense of continuously being pushed to reduce job expectations.

• There is little support provided across the country for child care, while there is no sense of any form of entitlement of public support in times of difficulty.

• Everything is an experiment, all "pilot projects," reflecting a "flavour of the month" mentality.

• Too often, only the best students (those who are most likely to get jobs at the end of the program) are accepted into programs. This "creaming" makes programs look good to the public, including those individuals looking to spend their EI training dollars, but those most in need are being left out of the training system.

• Training programs now seldom last more than 12 weeks.

• Most programs are delivered to groups, where there is no individual attention to those who need extra support for their learning.

• Many individuals find themselves caught in catch-22 situations where they are wrong whichever direction they choose.

In summary, the federal government has not made equity a reality and it no longer recognizes and sees itself as having a responsibility to correct the historical disadvantage of certain groups in the labour market. They have eliminated past policies to this effect and they have not imposed on the provinces any requirement to identify or target any of the equity groups. The provinces are in a difficult position as they only really received half of the money that was previously spent on training and employment programs and services - half the money and all the people.

Ursule's research report will be issued in the spring of 1999 by a number of the member

CLOW volunteers Needed for the WFF workplace Campaign

Workshops this spring in Vancouver, Ottawa, Halifax and Toronto will train WFF volunteers to approach workplaces, sign agreements and facilitate campaigns. They will also provide an opportunity for individual members of WFF member organizations to get together to network and strategize. Each member of WFF is required to find at least five volunteers to become involved in workplace access in their communities.

If you are interested in participating in this challenging new initiative, please contact Betty Butterworth at bbutter@interlog.com

Funding from Status of Women Canada will support the workshops as well as research on potential workplaces; ongoing organizational development; and the development of a volunteer training manual.

organizations from labour and equity of the Canadian Labour Force Development Board. The CLFDB will cease to exist as of December 31, 1999 and Ursule is working hard to ensure that this work will continue through other mechanisms. For a copy of this report, please contact Ursule at 613-526-7427 or by e-mail at ucritoph@clc-ctc.ca in late April.

Problematizing women's literacy: the CCLOW experience

notes from a session at the women and Literacy Conference, Atlanta , January
1999

Linda Shohet

[In this session, my colleague Isa Helfield talked about her experiences in a Montreal adult literacy classroom working with women and using CCLOW materials. She was one of the teachers who pilot-tested some of the women's literacy curriculum materials, and has worked with alternative methods for many years. She is also very sensitive to issues of abuse as they impact on learning. Without being actively involved in the organization, Isa epitomizes the people who have benefited from CCLOW publications and activities.]

The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) is a national organization committed to researching and promoting education and training for women since 1979. For the past decade, the organization has undertaken a series of research, curriculum development and facilitator training projects on women and literacy. Through a rapid overview of the organization and their literacy work, I want to suggest that these projects have helped shape international discussion of the issue and have uncovered problems that mirror some current debates in both the women's and literacy movements.

A context: 20 years of CCLOW

To situate this discussion, CCLOW was founded in 1979 by a group of Canadian feminists who perceived the need for an organization dedicated solely to the learning issues of women. Within ten years, they had achieved recognition in academic and government sectors for their research and advocacy on women's education and training. They had created networks in every province and developed two publications, one of them *Women's Education des femmes*, a bilingual journal with serious gender analysis and strong classroom connections. They had also organized the first national conference on women and technology (1982) and initiated innovative projects such as the first bridging program for women in Canada.

Celebrating their 10th anniversary in 1989, they made a number of commitments including creation of a scholarship for women returning to high school, and the beginning of two major research projects on women and literacy. The core of this presentation begins there. But a note of concern has to be inserted here. In the 10th anniversary issue of

Women's Education des femmes, the editorial raised a mild alarm:

Unfortunately, the climate ...has changed since the first ten years. We have recently been informed by the Women's Program, Secretary of State, that our operations funding will be cut by 15% from last year's level. In the short term, we are going to be forced to take some painful choices. In the long term, it will depend on us. Can we lobby successfully by ourselves and with other women's groups, to have the Women's Program spending policy reversed? Can we successfully do the outside fundraising ...to ensure we can carry on with the projects we have planned? Can we pull together...to make the next ten years as fruitful and productive as the last ten?

(Joan McFarland and Susan Witter, "A Dream Ten Years old; A Challenge for the Future," *WEdf* 1989)

Ten years later, I can tell you that the cuts continued through the 1990s; the painful choices became more painful until many women's organizations have disappeared entirely, and CCLOW has been reduced to having a part-time executive director and a part-time administrative assistant to run a national office. On March 31, 1999, CCLOW will close that office, but remain a functioning organization operating electronically with a contract-paid coordinator.

The positive side is that despite the cuts, in the next ten years, CCLOW remained productive, most visibly through its literacy projects which are the focus here.

Women and literacy

In 1990, CCLOW received the first of several grants from the National Literacy Secretariat. This was for a 2-year study of twelve adult literacy programs across the country, focusing on women's everyday experience in these programs. The programs had a variety of mandates and organizational structures; sites ranged from urban to rural, from the east to west coasts and the far north. They were located in community colleges, a union, and a prison; six were community-based- on the street, in store-fronts, in public housing, in a Native friendship centre and in a community centre.

At least two women from each of these programs considered what happens when women decide to engage in learning activities designed specially for them; they called these activities "woman-positive." This phrase has now come into wide usage internationally without much awareness of its origins.

The project was groundbreaking in several ways. It did not start out to test any hypotheses, to increase students' levels of reading or writing or to improve grade standings. It did not set out to empower women or to encourage feminist analysis, or even to help programs become more woman-positive. But these things still happened.

As participatory action research, the project trained these women, then provided support and resources as they planned and implemented woman-positive activities in their

programs. They developed a collaborative analysis and a series of recommendations. And they documented every step. Among their findings was the prevalence of violence in the lives of adult learners that researchers such as Kate Rockhill and Jenny Horseman had recently written about. CCLOW as an organization eventually took up the subject of violence as a barrier to learning, dedicating two issues of WEdf and a series of national workshops to exploring it in depth and suggesting broad changes to education policy and practice.

The direct outcome of the literacy research was a set of three publications under a general heading of Women in Literacy Speak Out, including a detailed description of the project and a text for adult literacy classes. One recommendation led to a second national project - developing curriculum for women's literacy.

Modeling its commitment to feminist process, in winter 1994, through a national "Call for Participants, CCLOW put together a team of 15 women with classroom experience who had developed teaching materials. They attempted to have balance in locale (urban and rural), geography (regional), socio-economic status (full-time teachers and community-based part-time instructors/tutors), and race. Fifteen women from amazingly diverse backgrounds formed a writing team during one intensive four-day retreat, then worked independently over the next year communicating by phone, fax and computer. They reconvened the following year for another intensive week-end to share their "chapters" and to designate one "editor" and an editorial committee. Thirteen women completed modules which were published in 1996 as a "curriculum" called Making Connections. This collection provided a source book of woman-positive materials for literacy or ESL in many settings. The voices of each author were left intact framed by chapter on "Feminist Curriculum" and "Dealing with Violence." It aimed to be inclusive and sensitive to class, race, gender and social-economic inequity.

But many programs across Canada had never seen such materials before and did not know how to use them. Their questions led to the most recent of the CCLOW projects - to train another diverse group of women to lead workshops for other teachers and tutors. The same feminist process was adopted to bond the group but this one took the organization in new directions when facilitators returned from a year of pilot-testing in June 1998 to share their experiences. Several native women and women of colour expressed dismay or anger at materials they found to be inappropriate for their communities, and some of the women felt they had not clearly understood what CCLOW was when they became involved.

During a weekend retreat, deep wounds were opened as issues of race and class were uncovered, and women of good will discovered that they were not speaking the same language when they used the same words. This literacy project was in fact about literacy at its most profound - the ability to make meaning and communicate across barriers. The problems that are unearthed shook the entire organization and forced it to re-examine both the way it has defined itself and the way it is perceived by others. This crisis occurred at

almost the same time as the organization was having to face questions about its own survival, and in some ways, it both heightened awareness at the directors table and mirrored some of the larger debates. These questions touch both women's and literacy organizations: What has feminism to offer minority women? Who can claim to speak for all women? What are the dominant discourses? Whose literacy is privileged? When do women's loyalties to their racial or cultural communities supersede their commitments to women's issues?

The pain of these debates has been almost greater than the pain of too external cuts.

Where does that leave CCLOW and the work it has done? I would argue that CCLOW has moved the women's literacy agenda forward as no other organization has. In looking systematically and steadily at issues that no one wanted to talk about -- women's learning needs, violence as a barrier, feminist process-- they have touched practitioners around the world and seeded further research. A large strand of this conference is built around concerns explored by them. That is a strong legacy.

In relation to the huge divide that was uncovered last year, again there has been a move to find common ground. A group of women who participated in that project have spent the past months trying to make sense of it; they came to this conference to talk about their experience of "othering." and have suggested some directions that might move us outside of our ethnocentric bounds. Centuries of oppression and conditioning have created these bounds, and no magic formula will dissolve them quickly. But the women who have chosen to engage with the problems and search for alternatives, other than rage and hate, seem to me to embody the best of what CCLOW has offered: Opportunity. Without CCLOW, they would not have known one another and had the opportunity to work together.

And CCLOW is trying to reinvent itself as well in its twentieth year. They have opted to use this year's funding to host a national - congress in November. They will invite women who are committed to the goals of promoting women's learning to come together to define what they see as the key issues in that area for the next decade and to say whether there is energy and commitment to reshape CCLOW to address those needs. If there is a response, then CCLOW will exist in an as yet undetermined form in the year 2000. if there is not, then it will celebrate its 20 years of achievement and close down with dignity, allowing other groups to take up the challenges.

Linda Shohet is Director of The Centre for Literacy (Montreal). She has been the Quebec member on the CCLOW board since 1993 and chairs their Literacy Committee. She was a team member on both the curriculum and facilitators projects.

This article was written as a report to CCLOW.

How to keep in touch with CCLOW after the Office Closes

The CCLOW office will close on March 31, 1999. In the month of April, one of our board members will be going to the office to get mail, faxes, and e-mail. Until the end of April, you may continue to reach us through the same means. Messages left on the phone will be forwarded to the appropriate executive member or regional director to respond.

After May 1, 1999, you can reach us at:

Mailing address
27 Follis Avenue
Toronto, ON M6G 1S5

Telephone: (416) 532-9108
(Messages can be left on this line.)

Fax: (416) 532-6048

e-mail: cclow@Web.net

web site: <http://www.nald.ca/cclow.htm>



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Congress for
Learning
Opportunities for
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**Promoting women's right to safe,
empowering, relevant and useful education
and training**

CCLOW Publications for sale after April, 1999

After April 1, the Centre for Literacy of Quebec at Dawson College in Montreal will distribute CCLOW materials.

You can reach the centre at:

Mailing address:

Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Inc.
3040
Sherbrooke Street West, Room
48.1-6
Montreal, QC H3Z 1A4

Telephone: (514) 931-8731,
local 1415,
Fax: (514) 931-5181

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literacyctr@dawsoncollege.qc.ca

web site:

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