

Case Studies

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See the value of workplace education programs at work firsthand in these ABC Life Literacy Canada case studies.

Embedding Literacy and Essential Skills (ELES) in the Workplace

Background Information

Literacy BC in partnership with the Ministry of Education received three-year funding from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills for a project: *Embedding Literacy and Essential Skills (ELES) in the Workplace (2009-2012)*. The project is looking at ways to embed Literacy and Essential Skills approaches in 3 different sectors including health care. Entry level workers especially those in housekeeping and food services have been contracted out to large multinationals. Infection control is more of an issue as is the need for more health and safety training. The work in health care builds on previous joint labour management workplace literacy programming funded by the Health Care Labour Adjustment Agency that took place over approximately 8 years in 14 health care facilities from 1995-2003. At that time, stand-alone workplace education programs were offered jointly by management and unions.

The project partners believe that an embedding approach is important because it is a way to reach more workers and develop a learning culture especially when funding is not available for stand-alone programs. This approach looks at opportunities in the everyday work life and training of an organization to embed literacy and essential skills. The first two years of the project are developmental involving research and training of work groups for each sector. The third year will involve trying out approaches and involves assessment tools for learners.

Roundtable sessions at Literacy BC

Managers, union representatives and program participants all attest ABC Life Literacy Canada conducted roundtable sessions with Hospital Employees Union (HEU) representatives and staff, and representatives from Literacy BC, Capilano University and the Learning Factor for a total of 6 people. Our main goal was to find out what the impacts of the previous workplace programs had been and the expected results for an embedding approach.

Results of early workplace programs

In the mid-1990's a lot of health care workers were in transition and losing their jobs. There was a requirement for re-training to move into new jobs. The joint union-management initiative or BEST (Basic and Essential Skills Training) program used a hybrid model involving instructors and peer tutors. Some participants were able to get their Grade 12 equivalency. Some participants became tutors and coordinators for the programs. Other participants moved on to other jobs or to college programs. Management noticed that employees were more engaged in staff meetings and in sharing ideas for efficiencies in the workplace. The teamwork in the programs rippled out to the workplace and broke down silos. They became more involved in in-services and more pro-active around health and safety issues. Participants began to hold themselves differently—they became more confident. They also understood their rights at work better. There was a ripple effect to their families and communities. One woman gained the respect of her teenage son when she was able to help him with his math.

Expected results of the embedding approach to literacy

The project partners expect and hope that the same kinds of outcomes and ripple effects will result from their embedding approach to literacy and essential skills in the workplace. ■



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