

**Conference  
Report**

**“the bottom line  
on basics”**

**Western Canada Workplace Education Conference  
Calgary, Alberta, May 3-4, 1995**



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## SPONSORS

The conference organizers wish to thank the following groups for their generous contributions to the conference:

The National Literacy Secretariat

&

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Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union

Canadian Liquid Air Ltd.

Communication, Energy and Paperworkers  
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Full Value Construction Association

Imperial Oil Ltd.

Standard Aero Ltd.

Syncrude Canada Ltd.

The Calgary Herald

The Westin Hotel, Calgary

Winnipeg Free Press



## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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*Ron Torgerson*

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## BACKGROUND

In November 1993, representatives from Western Canadian business, labour, education and government met to discuss their experiences with workplace literacy and basic skills education. They discovered some commonalities and some differences among groups and regions. They also found that sharing their experiences was profitable and led, not only to increased awareness, but also to more effective use of existing resources. This small group committed to explore the broader needs of business and labour throughout Western Canada, and to organize a conference to address those needs. Respondents to a subsequent survey indicated a keen interest in attending a hands-on conference that addressed three areas:

- accessing existing workplace literacy resources;
- building partnerships between business, labour and educators;
- sharing success stories of the region's in-house education programs.

The survey showed that organizations want training programs that keep pace with change, teach new skills or refresh old ones, and replace the notion of “basic” skills with that of “essential”.

## PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION OF THE CONFERENCE

Global economics, computer technology, zero-based defects, changing management styles...the language we use on the job is a strong reminder that we are heading in new directions as we approach the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Change is inexorable. The same worker who today burns photographic printing plates, worked with lead type a few years ago, and tomorrow, if he is still in the trade, will work with a totally electronic press. The technology graduate of five years ago is now helping to develop magnetic bearings, a technology that did not exist when he was trained. If we are to believe the pundits, even the very idea of work is changing. Clearly, business, labour, government, and educators must take responsibility for building a workforce with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to keep pace with change. Important to this educational development are the basic skills in language, mathematics, problem solving, and critical thinking which provide the foundation for other skills training.

## NEXT STEPS

The organizing committee will be meeting this winter to discuss follow-up activities and strategies. Your ideas and suggestions are welcome.

## COMMUNICATION / MAILING LIST

The invitation to the conference was targeted to business, labour and government representatives, as well as a limited number of educators. With this target group in mind, respective mailing lists were developed by each provincial representative on the committee.

In December 1994, 8,500 one-page information flyers with registration cards were mailed out. The Calgary Herald also ran one L page ad in the business section of the daily paper. In addition to the direct mailing, a number of organizations included the flyer in their publications or offered their mailing lists: Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce; Canadian Bankers Association - Calgary; Alberta Roofing Association; Building Trades Council - Calgary; Alberta Federation of Labour; Human Resources Association of Calgary; Human Resources Management of Edmonton; Petroleum Services Association of Canada - Alberta; Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling - Alberta; Treaty 7 Business Development - Alberta; Native Employment Services - Alberta; Treaty 7 Tribal Council - Alberta; Lethbridge Personnel Association - Alberta; Saskatchewan Federation of Labour; Canada; Manpower Association - Manitoba Division; Manitoba Federation of Labour; Manitoba Building Trades Council.

Total mailing: BC - 1072; MB - 1106; NT - 300; SK - 2,325; AB - 3,607  
An additional 100 flyers were sent out in response to phone inquiries.

Between January and March 1995 four more advertisements were placed in the Calgary Herald. A more extensive brochure was mailed out and distributed to basically the same distribution list as for the first mailing.

The chart below summarizes attendance at the conference by sector and province.

### PARTICIPANT SUMMARY

	Business	Labour	Education	Government	Other	Total
Alberta	17	9	26*	3	1	56
B.C. & Yukon	1	2	9			12
Manitoba	8	12	4	7		31
N.W.T.			1	2		3
Saskatchewan	2	5	2		2	11
Ontario		1	2	3	1	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>120</b>

\* Practitioners were brought in to be facilitators and content experts.

# CONFERENCE PROGRAM

## Panel Discussions

The invited panellists had been asked to talk about what has motivated them to support workplace literacy, focusing on areas such as:

- Global Competition
- Technological Change
- The Change in Workplace Structure
- Cross-Training / Job Sharing
- Training in the Workplace
- Labour / Management Relations
- Barriers to Workplace Education
- Fiscal Reality and Commitment to Workplace Education

*Reg Basken*, Executive Vice President/Secretary - Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada

Key points:

- Importance of partnership and involvement in something so fundamentally important as literacy
- Partnership is a continuing process, not a program, literacy is a process
- Together we can improve the workplace and society
- Skills belong to workers
- People that need the training need to participate in the decision of what training they require

*Lloyd Campbell*, Project Manager - Syncrude Canada Ltd.

Key points:

- Future will develop a highly skilled workforce
- 70% of the technology that we will be using by the year 2000 hasn't been invented today
- We need tradespeople as well as lawyers. "No nation has ever sued its way into prosperity"
- 3 trends: a) low level of interest among youth, b) students are ill-prepared for the transition to work, c) not high enough value on careers in trade
- Challenge is to match skill sets to jobs
- IMAGINE ... "if each of the top 500 corporations became involved in workplace education"

*Paul Goyan, Deputy Minister Training and Advanced Education -  
Government of Manitoba*

Key points:

- Government and educators speak of training without sufficient discussion of what takes place in the workplace
- Government role: help Manitoba workplace adapt to globalization
- Review of model in Manitoba
  - a) workplace direct delivery programs
  - b) steering committee
- No one method can meet the needs of all organizations
- 96 programs with over 630 employees

*James E. Page, Director General - National Literacy Secretariat*

Key points:

- NLS Role
  - 1) Develop policies
  - 2) Keep literacy on the public agenda
- Concerns
  - 1) Social Security
  - 2) Justice
  - 3) Technology
  - 4) Health
  - 5) International competitiveness - a priority
- Projects
  - 1) Workforce / workplace
  - 2) Family literacy
  - 3) Literacy
  - 4) Health & justice - NLS Role
- NLS has initiated 2750 projects since it started
- Sees role as facilitator or catalyst
- Participation of business and labour together imperative for successful literacy initiatives
- Literacy must be included in every training initiative in the workplace
- We are on a journey together

## Round Table Discussions

Fifteen facilitators were selected to assist with the process of discussing evidence of need for workplace education.

- The room was set up for 15 round tables with each seating 8-10 participants. Each table had a tent card with a question printed on it.
- Five questions were asked, with three tables discussing each question.
- Facilitators introduced the topic and there was a process person to keep the group on track. One member of the group acted as a reporter to report back to the larger group.
- Each table had two minutes to report the findings back to the group. The moderator facilitated this process.

Questions and summary of responses:

1) What are the symptoms that indicate a need?

- ✧ fear of change
- ✧ reluctance to get involved
- ✧ reluctance to ask for help
- ✧ asking to take forms home
- ✧ not applying for promotions
- ✧ people don't know how to ask the right questions

2) What legislative changes impact basic skills in your workplace?

- ✧ companies get a good break if they deliver basic skills

3) What are the economic aspects of basic skill training?

- ✧ long term—education is a continuum
- ✧ short term—budget year
- ✧ secure employability rather than employment
- ✧ government grants are extremely important to set up programs
- ✧ economic aspects depend on the industry

4) What are the structural barriers to basic skills training?

- ✧ understanding and acknowledgment of basic skills issues
- ✧ difference between basic reading and technical reading
- ✧ solution: major education programs to promote workplace
- ✧ need champions, promote success stories
- ✧ resources are needed
- ✧ management attitude—possible loss of trained employees

What is the impact of the global economy, evolving technological & structural change?

- ❖ basic skills are the building blocks for higher technical training
- ❖ pro-active is best; reactive is acceptable—at the very least, we must act
- ❖ change is a result of the global economy, and change is constant
- ❖ Canada is inwardly driven. We need to change our mind set and look outward to the rest of the world.

## Presentation of Education Models

Four education Models were presented:

- 1) **Sectoral** - *Sue Turner*, Manitoba Education and Training
  - Critical factors: mutual commitment, partnership, teamwork
  - Needs Assessment: literacy task analysis, focus groups, and readability of workplace materials. Interview 10%
  - Evaluate whether skills are critical, essential, or important
  - Successful partnership creates a win/win situation
- 2) **Peer Tutoring** - *Ron Torgerson*, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
  - The democratic model
  - Parallel to apprenticeship
  - Resources are relevant and should be workplace based
  - Participants set their own goals
  - Evaluation is ongoing
- 3) **Stand-Up Delivery** - *Julie Salembier*, Alberta Literacy Advisory Committee
  - View of classroom has changed education
  - Program partners
  - Materials are off the plant floor. Authentic text, learner-centred
  - Commitment of employees to come after a long days work
  - Small groups to get greater participation. Plan their goals.
  - Learning is a social and collaborative process
  - Curriculum developed using workplace needs assessment
- 4) **Integrated Models** - *Jim Lippert*, SkillPlan
  - Integrate basic skills into trades training
  - Materials relevant to the students experience
  - Address varying degrees of needs
  - Test-taking training
  - Challenge for adults who have not taken a test/class in years
  - Knowledge belongs to the workers when they see it fits their needs
  - Small groups, one-on-one, or groups from a common context

## Round Table Discussions

Twelve topics were presented, and each round table discussion was held three times. A content area specialist opened the discussion at each table with a 5 - 7 minute presentation on the topic. No reports were given back to the larger group.

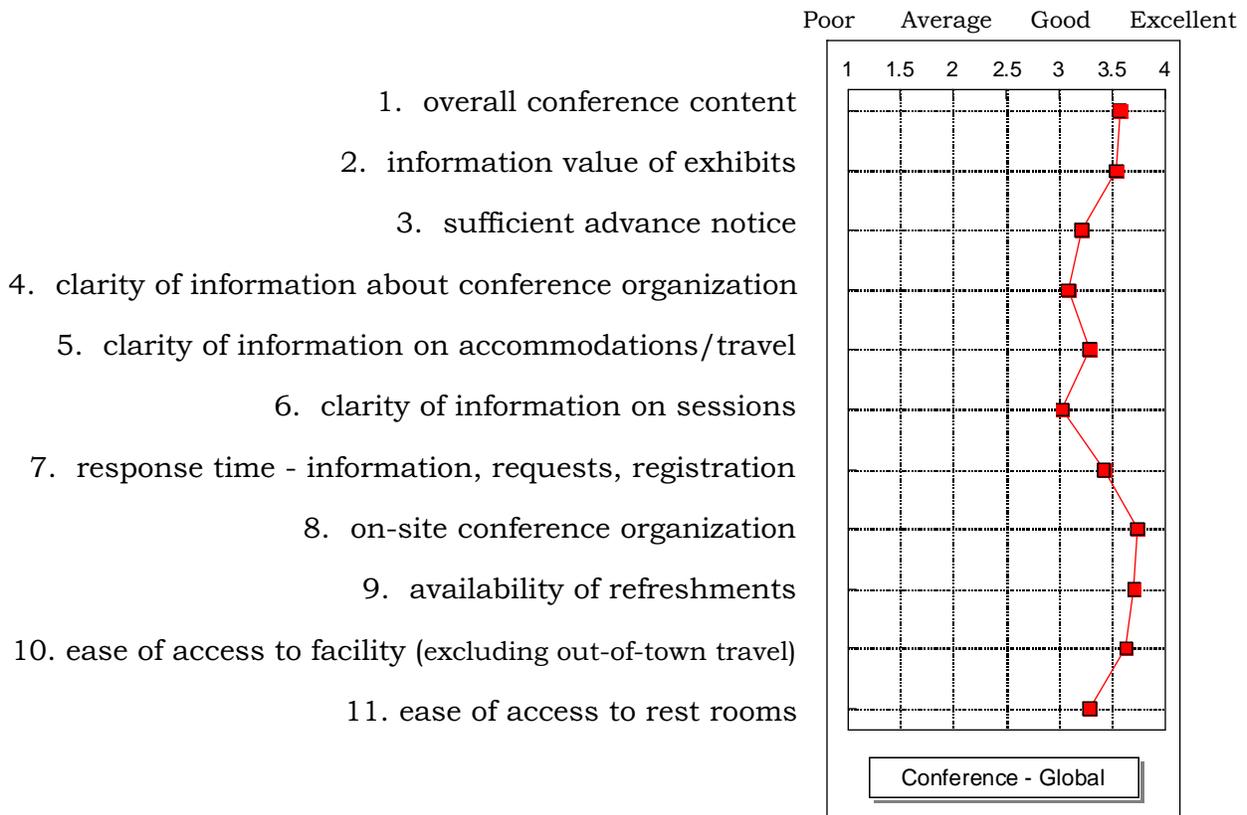
Topics:

- 1) Identify training needs in your company/organization.  
Content: *Sandi Howell*
- 2) Getting a program and maintaining a commitment.  
Content: *Dini Steyn*
- 3) Building participation in the workplace programs.  
Content: *Allan MacLeod*
- 4) Creating a checklist of do's and don'ts of workplace education.  
Content: *Lynda Fownes*
- 5) Integrating basic skills training within overall training agenda.  
Content: *Norm Semmons*
- 6) How do you determine the effectiveness of workplace education?  
Content: *Lloyd Campbell*
- 7) Testing or Assessment. Content: *Nancy Steel*
- 8) Sectoral Models. Content: *Sue Turner*
- 9) Peer tutoring. Content: *Ron Torgerson*
- 10) Stand up delivery. Content: *Julie Salembier*
- 11) Integrated training. Content: *Jim Lippert*
- 12) National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). Content: *Bridgid Hayes*

# EVALUATION RESULTS - ANALYSIS

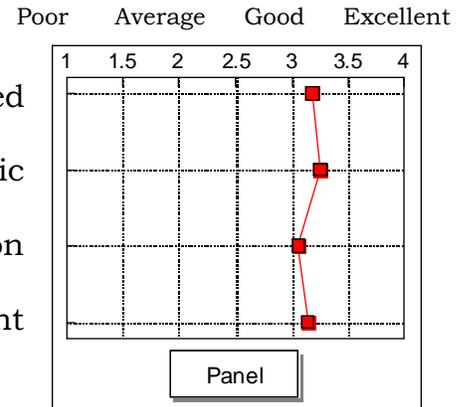
Thanks to the 60 or so delegates who faithfully filled out their conference evaluation scales, and took the time to add comments. The global evaluation shows that most delegates thought the conference was informative and worthwhile. The ratings of evaluation scales have been averaged and the results displayed in the charts below. Your comments are grouped below each rating scale. They will no doubt be used by some future conference organizers to answer the burning question, “To summarize, or not to summarize?”

## Facilities and the Conference



## Panel Discussion

1. amount of information gained
2. usefulness of topic
3. length of session
4. room size/temperature/light



You have the last word:



- Enjoyed this as an intro. • Excellent summary and recap. • Lloyd Campbell’s presentation was powerful, from the heart, and full of useful information. • Enjoyed Senator’s message. • Colleen was a good moderator. • Appreciated the variety of having different personalities and the summary. • Excellent speakers. • Moderator did a top-notch job—the summary helped pull the session together. •



- Too long—shorter and more lively presentations would be better and a woman panel member would have been appreciated. • Only concern was panel was all male, but good to have co-chairs gender balanced. • There was no “true” representative from education, but there were two from government. • Needed to have an opportunity to ask questions of the speakers. •

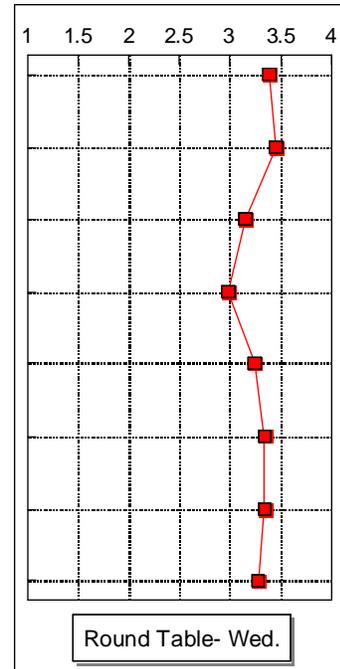


- There could have been a more pronounced or unified theme; without this, the Manitoba presentation seemed inappropriate. • As someone who has been in the field awhile, I would have appreciated even more information, particularly on evaluation of programs. • One good keynote speaker would have been more useful in launching conference. • Should have used more tables and set up so no one was sitting with their back to podium. • Should have had a break between lunch and panel, as the panel was a bit long after sitting for lunch. • If the “cheater” notes are ready earlier, I’d like to have them—but the moderator’s summaries really helped me take in what otherwise would have been information overload. • Please ask the moderator not to summarize everything for us, as we are listening carefully and at length—more length is not necessary. • Some speakers were more interesting than others, so I would have preferred an interactive panel model with questions to speakers. •

## Round Table - Wednesday

Poor      Average      Good      Excellent

1. quality of facilitation
2. appropriateness of discussion format
3. degree of representation - interest groups
4. amount of information gained
5. usefulness of topic
6. length of session
7. degree of individual participation
8. room size/temperature/light



You have the last word:



- Excellent ideas for tables. • Everything moved right along and the topics were not boring; an excellent day. • Tough to cover all areas and pressure points in “economics” in time frame, but it did give us a chance to express our concerns and needs to expand workplace literacy support. •



- Session was too short. • Tables should have been grouped further apart to improve hearing. • Feedback session was cumbersome. • Needed visual aids to keep people’s attention. • Maybe too many “right answers” make me groupthink. • Facilitators should have ensured more equal participation at the table. • The learner group was conspicuously absent. •

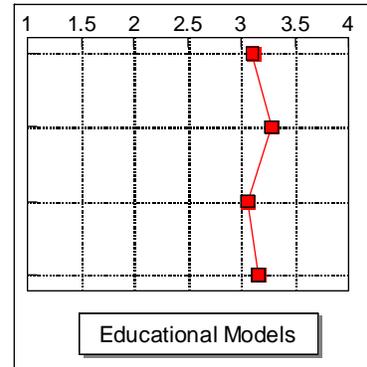


- Perhaps summary highlight could have been captured and handed out at end of conference. • Need more provincial sessions. • Groups could have been set out for a better cross-representation. • Needed more company involvement. • Clearer instructions to facilitators and recorders. • Questions required clarification in some instances. •

## Education Models

Poor      Average      Good      Excellent

1. amount of information gained
2. usefulness of topic
3. length of session
4. room size/temperature/light



You have the last word:



- Excellent. • Summary was better than the presentations. • Important to see what is going on elsewhere, and where to access information. •



- Ensure all participants can view presenters. • Some speakers were “selling” but needed to give specific actions, examples—especially “stand-up delivery”. Too short to be effective. • These were not presented as models, only as examples, and the content was of no greater significance than the following round table session. • With the four models, they seemed to overlap and so didn’t really need ‘separate’ approaches. • Not applicable to us. • Could have more specific information about one successful program. •

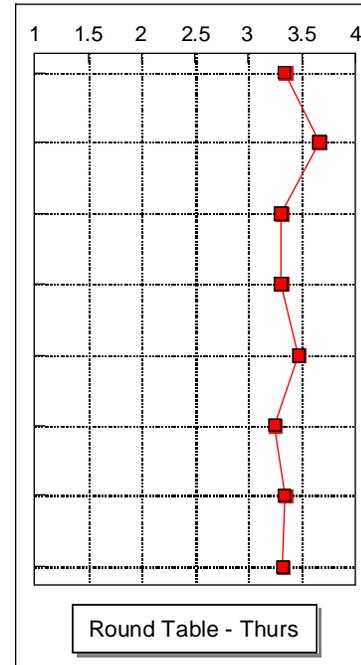


- Recommend visual presentations. • I wanted more interaction at this time. • Could have used more time for these. •

## Round Table - Thursday

Poor      Average      Good      Excellent

1. quality of facilitation
2. appropriateness of discussion format
3. representation of interest groups
4. amount of information gained
5. usefulness of topic
6. length of session
7. degree of individual participation
8. room size/temperature/light



You have the last word:



- Good format—lots of useful exchange.
- Should be a three day conference.
- Excellent and rich but far too fast for some topics.
- Excellent—the best conference format I have ever experienced in terms of sharing ideas for success.
- Learning from each other—real and practical so I wanted to attend all the tables—thank you!



- Too short—could have had just two topics.
- The sessions became very similar in content.

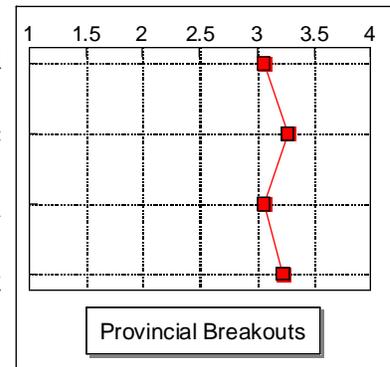


- Some facilitators were better than others in focusing us and keeping us on topic.
- The topics could have had more time and opportunity to talk about more of them.
- It was a good idea to have the opportunity to participate in three separate topics, but the amount of information gained relied on how well prepared the content person was—in the three tables I participated in this factor varied greatly and thereby affected how much I learned.
- This is an excellent format for participant activity, but maybe should add a time for facilitators to move so they can pick up some extra info too.

## Provincial Breakouts

Poor      Average      Good      Excellent

1. amount of information gained
2. usefulness of topic
3. length of session
4. room size/temperature/light



You have the last word:



- A good opportunity to hear what's going on within the province and provided some concrete goals to pursue which have germinated while participating at the conference.
- Much more sense of accomplishment when you come to a conference like this and do some work—not a waste of time.
- I found this conference very interesting and people willing to help each other.
- It's useful to hear about the provincial structure, particularly the Advisory Board and Coordinators' Network.
- Good session—short and informative.



- A lot of repetition of ideas covered in yesterday's sessions.



- Educational institutions should have made presentations.
- Needed a focus—something to lead to closure.

## PROVINCIAL BREAKOUTS - PURPOSE & RESULTS

On the final afternoon, delegates gathered in groups to discuss issues particular to each of the four provinces. Despite a common mission, basic skills programs in each province face different challenges and draw on different resources to achieve their goals. These break-out sessions gave delegates from each province the opportunity to explore what was happening in their province and create some strategy for moving ahead at the provincial level. A brief summary of these discussions follows.

### British Columbia & Yukon Territory

#### **The Current Situation in B.C.**

The federally funded Foundation Skills Project is holding a series of awareness presentations across the province. Hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, these presentations will attempt to raise awareness and introduce local providers of training to industry participants. Eighteen communities from Vancouver to Whitehorse will participate in the project.

Workplace literacy programs reviewed at the session were:

- McMillan Bloedel & IWA - Tracy Defoe, consultant.
- SkillPlan - Jim Lippert & Lynda Fownes.
- Weldwood - Christina Pikios (through Open Learning Agency).
- Workers Compensation Board and other clients - Margo Salopek & OLA Workplace Training Systems.
- Canfor - Lisa Johnson (Fort Saint John Literacy Project) & Northern Light College.
- City of Vancouver & other clients - Hastings Institute, Gary Pharness & Deborah Lee.

As the list above shows, workplace basic skills training has permeated several industry sectors in B.C: construction (SkillPlan), forestry (Weldwood, McMillan Bloedel, Canfor), and municipalities (City of Vancouver). The 20 new Community Skill Centres in the province anticipate high involvement in these sectors—especially in their capacity as drop-in learning centres.

Participants agreed that it is important that workplace literacy and basic skills upgrading not be singled out as separate entities, but rather be seen as part of an overall agenda which includes technical training, trades training, and basic skills training. Better coordination of training efforts and of funding is needed in the province.

## **The Future in B.C.**

The observation was made that B.C. compares poorly with Manitoba and Alberta. Because there is no coordination of workplace basic skills upgrading in B.C., programs such as SkillPlan have often been asked to fill the role of leader in the field, even though they are not mandated or funded to do so. Coordination of workplace literacy is not seen as a function of Literacy B.C. The B.C. government needs to become more active in the provision of workplace literacy and basic skills training. Participants felt that this could be accomplished by creating or designating a senior position responsible for the coordination of workplace education efforts and funding in the province.

In the meantime, participants supported the idea of using the B.C. Workforce Training Consortium (B.C. Chamber of Commerce, Literacy B.C., SkillPlan, Open Learning Agency) to continue with its (voluntary) leadership role, and to work toward creating awareness of workplace literacy issues, and coordination among the various stakeholders.

## **Alberta**

During the provincial break-out session, Alberta delegates were asked to respond to three questions about the opportunities for, barriers to, and requirements for workplace basic skills programs. The following summarizes that feedback.

Delegates agreed that change, in some cases, seems to present opportunities for basic skills education. WHMIS training was given as an example of a workplace learning which forced business to recognize the basic skills deficit among certain groups of workers. In many companies, the realities of a new work-team orientation, worker empowerment, and new technologies are creating a need for workers with better communication and mathematics skills. One delegate commented:

“Considerable opportunities (for basic education in the workplace) exists: long term employees moving into jobs requiring better literacy skills; existing job skill levels being upgraded; downsizing is requiring the survivors to be much more effective in their communication.”

The conference showcased many successful programs from all four western provinces. Delegates felt that maintaining and extending these programs presented many opportunities for workplace education. In some cases this would mean extending a current program to other locations operated by the same company, or it could mean that other companies will see the results and follow the leader.

When asked about barriers, a number of delegates mentioned lack of resources to carry out workplace basic skills programs. Human resources include the experts needed to carry out needs analyses, develop curriculum, and evaluate programs. Also noted was the absence of learning materials, assessment tools, program models, and credible evaluations. Many delegates went to the Conference looking for program ideas and resources. The presenters and exhibitors at the conference made it clear that there is a wealth of program models, curriculum materials, and expertise in Western Canada, but participants also felt that, unfortunately, not enough is being shared. Some delegates asked for:

“Assistance in specific areas of concern where local expertise does not exist. eg. program evaluation, need analyses, methodologies, appropriate for adult learners.”

Nearly all delegates felt that they were often working in environments where management, and workers themselves, were unaware of the importance of basic skills to further training, further growth, greater effectiveness. Despite the publicity about basic skills in the workplace, many felt that management, unions, and workers, remain uncommitted to training in this area. Alberta delegates praised the Workplace Literacy Advisory Committee and saw the hiring of a Workplace Literacy Advisor as a positive and needed step. The call for more marketing and awareness efforts was almost unanimous.

Lastly, there was general agreement that efforts to build workplace programs are stimulated by networks which enable like-minded businesses to share their concerns and experiences with basic skills initiatives. Alberta delegates felt that they needed networks which will put them in touch with other basic skills programs. These same people saw the Conference as a good start toward this goal. As one delegate commented when asked what was needed:

“Networks—information about who to go to in government, education, business or other organizations. Information about what is available. Institutions willing to provide particular contextualized programs.”

## Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan participants at the conference decided not to discuss the suggested questions. Instead they talked about a new consortium which has been established in Saskatchewan to promote basic skills in the workplace. The participants made a long list of suggestions for expanding the business and labour representation in the consortium. Additionally, the participants compiled a short list of activities in which the consortium might wish to be involved. The lists will be typed by Husky Oil and mailed to the consortium's staff person for referral to the consortium's May meeting. The roles of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) and the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) and their relationships to the consortium were also elaborated.

The Annual General Meeting of the SLN, to be held in September, 1995 was discussed. Its theme will be basic skills in the workplace. The Network's journal, Literacy Works, will also devote the autumn issue to the same topic. The possibility of a literacy conference for executive members and activists from unions in Western Canada was raised, and mention was made of an SLFDB sponsored award ceremony which will be held in Saskatoon in early June.

## Manitoba

The Manitoba break-out session began with an overview of the workplace education programs and services which are currently available in the province. The direct delivery workplace literacy and language partnership programs were reviewed by the provincial coordinators of the respective programs. These programs are developed and delivered in partnership with the Human Resources Development Canada Department. Workplace Education Manitoba, a tripartite business, labour, and government committee which promotes and conducts literacy-related research studies, outlined its mandate and also discussed past achievements and future projects in a number of Manitoba sectors.

Information was shared by the 31 break-out attendees with regard to their past experiences and future expectations. As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that Manitoba conference delegates were dedicated to the creation of a committee which would meet on a regular basis. The purpose of this committee would be to investigate the possibility of hosting a Manitoba event to network and share experiences. This joint business and labour group would shape and guide the development of future workplace education events.

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

*“The changes and developments which have been made in the arts, modes of labour, methods of business, systems of commerce, Administration of Government, and indeed every department of civilization involve the necessity and importance of a corresponding character in our whole system of public instruction. The same amount of skill and knowledge which would have enabled an artisan or a tradesman, or merchant, or even a professional man to have excelled in former years, would be by no means adequate to succeed in the present stage of mental development and of keen and skilful competition”*

*Edgar Ryerson, Superintendent of Schools, Upper Canada, 1856.*

This first Western Canada Workplace Education Conference was an opportunity to hear about many workplace education programs and projects in Western Canada, exchange ideas, and look toward the future. As the delegate list shows, workplace basic skills training has strong supporters in business, labour, education, and in all levels of government. It is an enterprise with many convergent interests. Veterans, who have for years promoted, supported, or delivered workplace basic skills programs, were pleased to see so many new faces. It is exciting to see this growing commitment to increased learning opportunities for workers.

Naming the conference “the bottom line on basics” was particularly apt. It suggested a retrospective on the eight years since the U.S. Departments of Labour and Education published *The Bottom Line: Basic Skills in the Workplace*. Many predictions featured in that report—the aging of the workforce, the movement toward an information-based service economy, and the necessity for workers to command a wider set of competencies—are becoming a reality. Our response to these changes in the workplace has grown from no workplace basic skills programs in 1988, to the vigorous field of practice that is workplace education today. The “bottom line” also suggests the different viewpoints and creative tension evident at the conference. For business, the bottom line is a positive return on training investments; for workers, the bottom line is the possession of marketable skills which will allow them to find and maintain work in a rapidly changing workplace; for Western Canada, the bottom line is the development of a flexible, well-trained workforce which will support economic growth into the next century. Reconciling these different views of what is important—profitability in the next quarter, security of employment for the next ten years, or a healthy economy in 20 years—requires vision and persistence.

There are many positive signs. Some companies have corporate visions which reach far into the future. Being around, and being competitive in fifty years is part of their agenda. These companies understand the importance of education in the worklife transitions which employees will need to make. Likewise, many labour unions can see that looking after the skills of their members is in the long-term interest of the collective. Industry and trades trainers are actively working toward integrating basic skills training into technical training. What is most important is that workers in all four provinces have more access to basic education and further skills training.

On the program delivery side, there have been significant advances over the last eight years. The process of assessing needs, building workplace partnerships, designing programs, and evaluating the results has benefited from the experience of the many successful programs mounted to date. We now have good examples of how to deliver programs into different kinds of workplaces, how to deal with geographical distances, and how to approach the various stakeholders. The well-developed program models presented at the conference display the range of educational responses available to suit particular workplaces, and particular workers.

There is still much to be done. Many people, including some workers, need a wake-up call. Too often, training is only considered when the plant closes or the new equipment hits the shop floor. It is sometimes a tragedy. What happens when workers' skills are no longer needed or valued; when the ability to lay-out pages of lead type quickly no longer matters; when things can't be taken apart and figured out, and the only way to the inside of things is through a computer display? The obvious answer is to adapt, learn some new skills; but for many workers, lack of basic skills leaves them unprepared for further training. Under these conditions, adjustment into a new job or a new industry is further complicated. Reaction to change is a poor substitute for vision and effective action. This conference showed that business and labour have made a start in ensuring the flexible multi-skilled workforce needed today and in the future.

Workforce education, as affirmed at this conference, has both social and economic dimensions. It is not a leisurely pursuit like childhood education; too often it is a few hours jammed between work and family responsibilities. The fact that people begin our programs suggests that they think learning is critically important; the fact that they persist affirms the belief that learning is rewarding. As any of the trainers or leaders will tell you about the workers who participate in workplace-based training, they invariably say that the present course or program is just the start . . . Surprisingly large numbers of workers gain the confidence, the skills, and most of all, the motivation to attempt other learning. We are all made richer.

## EXHIBITORS

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## “the bottom line on basics”

### Western Canada Workplace Education Conference

July 28, 1995

Dear Delegate,

Enclosed is your copy of “the bottom line on basics” conference report. We hope it reflects some of the excitement of the conference itself. From the evaluation responses, it was evident that the majority in attendance found the conference rewarding, and were particularly pleased to exchange information with you, the other delegates. Thanks for sharing your time and expertise.

We are gratified to see so much good adult education happening at one time. Despite disparate backgrounds, conference participants had a common vision—of opportunities for individual workers to grow and participate in workplaces that are often changing too quickly; and for companies to develop workforces capable of meeting the challenges of new technology, increased efficiency, total quality, or whatever next appears on the horizon. Seeing how this vision has been translated into concrete action and successful programs was, for us, the highlight of the conference.

Please stay in touch with other delegates, and with us, “the bottom line on basics” Organizing Committee.

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