



## An Introduction to this Newsletter

*The bottom line* is published by WWESTNET, a group of educators, labour leaders, business people and government representatives who have an interest in worker education. Its purpose is to inform an ever-increasing network of interested individuals from business, labour, education and government about the evolution of workplace education in Western Canada. We hope to be able to keep readers in touch with worker education programs in the region, and to showcase examples of innovative practice. Most of all, we would like to provide a forum for the thoughts and opinions of people who have a stake or an interest in workplace essential skills training.

### A brief history

In November 1993, representatives from Western Canada met to discuss their experiences with workplace literacy education. They discovered some common ground but also differences between groups and regions. They found that sharing their experiences was profitable and led, not only to increased awareness, but also to a more effective use of existing resources. This small group

committed to explore the broader needs of business and labour throughout Western Canada and eventually organized a conference to address those needs. Respondents to a subsequent survey showed a keen interest in attending a hands-on conference where they could find out more about using existing workplace literacy resources, building cooperative training partnerships, and learning about successful in-house worker education programs.

In May of 1995, delegates gathered in Calgary for the first Western Canada Workplace Education Conference. This important two-day event offered valuable opportunities for participants to voice questions and concerns about workplace basic skills training. Round table sessions considered a variety of issues—how legislative changes affect essential workplace skills, the financial realities of workplace training, barriers to offering training, and the impact of the shift toward a global economy.

Since the conference, WWESTNET has continued to meet, and has continued to discuss the development of workplace education. We hope this newsletter will widen this important discussion. \*

## Dynasty Wood Products: Preparing for Change

The case for an organizational needs assessment.

KAREN HAMMOND

There is a French proverb that says "you have to step backward, the better to jump forward." Workplace training is something like that. Rather than beginning by boldly addressing the issues, the first and most critical action is to step back and evaluate the issue from a broader perspective. To do otherwise could limit or compromise the potential of the entire venture.

Dynasty Wood Products, Inc. is a fast-growing furniture manufacturer, which wanted to ensure that its employees, 90% of whom speak English as a second language, would be able to successfully manage the transition to more advanced technology. Assuming English instruction to be the primary need, they contacted Alberta Vocational College - Calgary to design a custom 'English in the Workplace' program for select employees. AVC agreed, but suggested that the company consider an organizational needs assessment (ONA) as a first step.

An ONA is a systematic analysis of workplace basic skills needs and related issues within the context of the whole organization. It proceeds from the philosophy that training needs do not emerge or exist in isolation and they

should be addressed accordingly. Under the direction of a project team representing the stakeholders, facilitators collect and analyze data to determine how these issues function as part of the bigger picture. The results and recommendations of the needs assessment are assembled into a comprehensive report that serves as a strong foundation for further planning.

### Better information aids planning.

The ONA at Dynasty Wood Products was able to reveal important issues which might otherwise have passed unnoticed. For example, effective communication in the company was hampered by routine documents written at an unnecessarily advanced level. Employees voiced specific preferences regarding course costs, location and scheduling. Workers agreed that English language training was important, but expressed an equally strong need for computer skills training, a perception validated by new technology rapidly coming into the plant.

Another interesting finding was the fact that the majority of Dynasty's employees started full-time work at

*Continued p. 3*

---

# Alberta Supports Training for Literacy Workers

'Train the trainer' project is now underway.

NANCY STEEL

A new project, designed to provide community literacy coordinators with the skills and information they need to offer workplace literacy training in their communities, is now underway.

As industry and labour become more aware of the benefits of workplace literacy development for employees and their organizations, they often look to community literacy projects for help. There are presently about 80 community literacy programs in Alberta. These programs are established in various communities across Alberta; some of the programs have been operating for 15 years. The programs often work in collaboration with community colleges and community social service agencies. They are a vital part of the fabric of any community, so it is not surprising that many employers and union organizations turn to the local community literacy program for basic skill development advice and expertise. Literacy coordinators have broad literacy expertise; however, they may not be familiar with how to provide literacy development appropriate to the workplace. This new 'train the trainer'

project, which includes research, education, workshop, and mentoring components, will build on the expertise which literacy coordinators already have.

The training offered to literacy coordinators will be broad based. It will cover marketing the issue to employers and labour organizations, negotiating for program development and delivery, conducting needs assessments, choosing a delivery model, developing workplace tailored curriculum and materials, and program evaluation. It will also address significant issues, such as English in the workplace, workforce literacy, return on investment for such programming, and principles of good practice. Existing resources which may support coordinators' workplace literacy initiatives will also be examined.

An advisory committee will guide the development of the project, which will build on existing expertise in literacy, and increase the ability of community literacy providers, employers, and labour representatives to work together to promote basic skill programs in the workplace. The National Literacy Secretariat has provided funding for this work. For more information about the project, contact Nancy Steel at the Calgary Learning Centre, 3930 - 20<sup>th</sup> St. S.W., Calgary, AB, T2T 4Z9 (403) 686-9300. \*

---

## Workplace Education Manitoba: A Successful Partnership

Steering committee coordinates business, labour and government activity.

SUE TURNER

In Manitoba, workplace education is coordinated by the province and has a significant partnership with the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC). The committee is a five-member partnership made up of two business members, selected by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association-Manitoba Division: Mr. Rob Despina, Operations Manager, PT6 Standard Aero, and Ms. Sylvia Magyar, Customer Service Manager, Winnipeg Free Press; two labour members selected by the Manitoba Federation of Labour: Mr. Greg Maruca, Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), and Mr. Graham Dowdell, Coordinator for the Manitoba Federation of Labour Communication Skills Project; and one government member: Ms. Sue Turner, Coordinator, Basic Education in the Workplace, Manitoba Literacy and Continuing Education Branch. The National Literacy Secretariat provides funding for the activities of the committee. The coordinator and the committee oversee each workplace education initiative and monitor the quality of the programming.

The WEMSC is a successful model of a cooperative partnership which has created the framework to guide the development of workplace literacy and numeracy in the province of Manitoba. The committee works within industry sectors to develop innovative workplace educa-

tion projects. Sectors targeted by the committee reflect the industrial makeup of Manitoba and have included projects in a number of sectors such as agriculture, the garment trade, aerospace, mining, construction, and the manufacturing sector. In addition, the committee has facilitated the initial and ongoing development and delivery of workplace instructor training in the province.

WEMSC has published a number of sectoral literacy reports and produced promotional items such as sweatshirts, t-shirts, lunch bags and baseball caps. The committee has also created two videos. *Keeping Pace With Change* is an eight-minute video which can be used to promote and recruit participants for Workplace Education Programs. *Essential Skills for Lifelong Learning* illustrates principles of good practice to follow when setting up a workplace education program. Free copies of these videos may be obtained from WEMSC, 505-138 Portage Avenue East, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0A1. \*

---

***"Formal education systems provide only the raw material for adult literacy. The evidence shows that the lack of application of literacy in daily activities is associated with lower levels of performance. Some supportive contexts at home and at work seem to reinforce literacy practices and applications better than others."***

T. Scott Murray, Statistics Canada

---

# Basic Skills Research: What do the Workers Say?

ELIZABETH THOMPSON

Addressing basic skills in the workplace is a complex task, requiring knowledge of what skills are needed, what skills are currently being used, and how the changing demands of the workplace are being met. To date, information for many occupations has been sketchy. Concerned partners in business, industry, education, and government are looking for up-to-date information about how basic skills are used in the workplace.

## Job-related basic skills

In response to this need, a nationwide study into the basic skills used at work is being conducted this year. Under the direction of the Standards, Planning, and Analysis Directorate of Human Resources Development Canada, the *Basic Skills Research Project* is gathering job information from approximately 2500 workers in hundreds of occupations. The objective of this research is to provide a basic skill requirements profile for each entry-level occupation, one which will reflect the actual requirements of the Canadian workplace. Further analysis will identify skills common to occupational groups, as for example, entry-level jobs in the hospitality industry.

The *Basic Skills Research Project* explores skill areas in reading, writing, use of forms & documents, numeracy, oral communication, problem solving, decision making, information technology, working with others, and continuous learning. These are skills addressed only incidentally in many job analyses, yet they provide a starting point for success in the workplace—now, and in the future.

## Variety of jobs examined

Designed and carried out under the direction of Debra Mair, the research will provide quantitative and qualitative information about basic skills. Researchers work from a sampling plan derived from the National Occupational Classification. It categorizes standard descriptions of occupations and lists duties for nearly all jobs found in Canada. Researchers conduct open-ended interviews with workers, visit work sites, and talk to managers and supervisors, focusing on the basic skills used by competent workers in particular jobs. The researchers also attempt to collect samples of reading materials, schedules, forms, and other documents used at work. Information from the interview is recorded in a standard format. Anecdotal notes describe the workplace context and record specific examples of tasks requiring basic skills.

The practical, on-site approach used in this research focuses on the people who do the work, and will undoubtedly lead to analysis at many levels. Results of the research will be provided in a form useful to those seeking, and to those providing, workplace basic skills training. Information about the basic skills used in jobs and job clusters will provide a good starting point for planning job preparation and skill upgrading. Program coordinators,

course designers, career counsellors, and individuals will have access to better information about the skills needed for particular occupations. For example, along with the fact that a food preparer needs to do basic calculation, will be examples of actual tasks where calculation and measurement are elements. The research is also collecting information about trends and changes in the workplace.

The *Basic Skills Research Project* is being carried out in Western Canada by two leaders in the field of workplace basic skills training. McKeag Consulting Ltd. of Winnipeg is carrying out the research in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while SkillPlan (BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council) has researchers working in British Columbia and Alberta. Research teams are traveling throughout their respective provinces gathering data from a variety of settings. It is gritty work which can take the researchers down mine shafts, or into the gumbo of a pipeline right of way. Cooperation from industry and business is excellent, an indication of interest in the area of basic skills and the credibility of workplace research teams.

Information about the *Basic Skills Research Project* is on the Internet. A sample data collection document for a welder can be found at <http://www.globalx.net.hrd/>. Project newsletters can be seen by anonymous login to [ftp.globalx.net](ftp://ftp.globalx.net), accessing the pub directory, and then the OCIB sub-directory. ☼

---

## *Dynasty ONA Cont.*

the company within weeks of arriving in Canada. This meant that most of Dynasty's workforce had not benefitted from federally-funded Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) courses, and the company was able to successfully bid for federal assistance with language training to become the first company in Calgary to offer a workplace-based LINC program.

## Program responds to a variety of needs

Dynasty Wood Products chose to offer two English in the Workplace programs for its staff. But those are just two of nine separate programs currently being offered to more than 80 employees at the plant. These programs, variously funded by the company, the employees, and two levels of government, include a range of delivery models—on-site and off-site; classroom and private-tutorial; generic and custom. Although it is still experimenting with delivery models, Dynasty is confident that without the comprehensive analysis of the organizational needs assessment, their workplace education program would not have been nearly so diverse or so well-supported.

A good organizational needs assessment will require an investment of time and resources. While it is certainly an extra step, it is one that saves a lot of legwork in the long run. It is a step worth taking. ☼

# Introducing WWestNET

## The Western Canada Workplace Essential Skills Training Network

WWestNET brings together labour, business, education and government representatives from across Western Canada. The committee is united by a common belief that better training opportunities for workers are critical for our common future. Global economics, computer technology, zero-based defects, changing management styles . . . The language we use on the job is a strong reminder that we're heading in new directions as we approach the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We all share a responsibility for building a workforce with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to keep pace with this change.

Donna Barclay - Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Lloyd Campbell - Syncrude Canada Ltd., Alberta.

Ron Despins - Standard Aero, Ltd. Manitoba.

Carolyn Dieleman - Alberta Advanced Education & Career Development.

Jim Lippert - *SkillPlan*, British Columbia.

Greg Maruca - Union of Needle Trades, Industrial & Textile Employees, Manitoba.

Conrad Murphy - Alberta Vocational College - Calgary.

Kate Sills - N.W.T. Education, Culture and Employment.

Christine Skrepetz - B.C. Federation of Labour.

Nancy Steel - Calgary Learning Centre.

Dini Steyn - Open Learning Agency, British Columbia.

Ian Thorn - Communications, Energy

& Paperworkers Union, Alberta.

Ron Torgerson - Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.

Sue Turner - Manitoba Education and Training.

## Coming up

Literacy B.C. is offering its second **Summer Institute** from July 15 to 26, 1996. The Workplace Education component of the Institute is being led by Sue Folinsbee and Nancy Steel from ABC Canada. Further development will include a mentored practicum and call-back session to evaluate the practicum experience. To find out more or to register, call toll-free at 1-800-663-1293. ☼

**Breakfast of Champions.** Each spring The Calgary Learning Centre hosts a breakfast meeting to promote awareness about literacy and learning development.

This year the theme for the breakfast is 'Workplace Education,' and so several champions of workplace basic skills development will be invited to hear Lloyd Campbell of Syncrude Canada, Ltd. share his organization's reasons for making workplace education a priority. For more information about the breakfast, contact Nancy Steele at the Calgary Learning Centre, (403) 686-9300. ☼

## Resources

### Curriculum for 'Soft Skills in Hard Jobs'

Vocational and technical instructors are test-driving new teaching materials which address the important, non-technical skills that trades and technical graduates require for success in their occupations. The *Career Tech* project, developed at Malaspina University-College on Vancouver Island, promotes positive workplace attitudes by helping learners reflect on their own values and strengths while they also consider the realities of the current world of work. Eight modules, comprising 24 to 30 hours of group-based activities, cover the 'new economy,' small business economics, pride and satisfaction at work, self-marketing strategies, and interpersonal communication skills. Drawing on the original meaning of 'avocation' as a person's calling, the project encourages learners to explore how their chosen occupation can be a medium for creativity and self-expression.

The *Career Tech Instructor Guide* is being piloted in several colleges in Western Canada. It will be available through the Open Learning Agency in Burnaby, later this year. For more information, contact John Meredith at the Training Development Centre, Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC. ([meredithj@mala.bc.ca](mailto:meredithj@mala.bc.ca))

### Coaching skills: Better on-the-job training

*Workplace Coaching Skills* is a self-paced study program designed to help workers master job coaching skills. Using a participant's workbook and two video tapes, the program demonstrates real life coaching activities in a broad range of work settings in six informative and entertaining modules. The series is also an excellent resource for classroom delivery.

The price for the full package (two videos and a workbook) outside B.C. is \$300.<sup>00</sup> and \$50.<sup>00</sup> for each additional workbook. *Workplace Coaching Skills* can be obtained from The Marketing Department, **Open Learning Agency**, 4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby, B.C. V5G 4S8. Tel: (604) 431-3210 or 1-800-663-1653. Fax: (604) 431-3381.

## GET IN THE PICTURE!

To get your name on the mailing list for *the bottom line*, send in your address by mail, fax or e-mail. Contact information is listed below.

Enquiries and submissions to *the bottom line* should be directed to the editor:

Julian Evetts

#103, 1720-13<sup>th</sup> St. S.W., Calgary, AB, T2T 3P4

Phone (403) 541-1367. Fax (403) 541-1835

[jvetts@avc.calgary.ab.ca](mailto:jvetts@avc.calgary.ab.ca)