



Study Targets Alberta Agri-food Sector

Over the last six months, the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA), in partnership with the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Steering Committee (AWES), carried out an impact study that will assist businesses to identify and address essential skills needs in food processing plants. Using a case study approach, researchers explored the essential skills needed to support and sustain the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system. HACCP is the quality assurance system recently adopted by the agri-food industry in both Canada and the United States. A final research report was released to AFPA members in February 1999.

The goal of the study was to profile the relationship between HACCP and essential skills requirements in the agri-food industry. The first part of the study was to carefully describe and define essential skills required for selected key positions (e.g. operator, lead hand, quality assurance technician) which will be affected by HACCP. This information allowed the researchers to identify potential skill gaps and training needs. The researchers also reviewed current and proposed HACCP training to identify barriers and supports for

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El Molino Foods of Canada. Shown here, a quality control check as toppings are placed on one of the company's heat-and-eat pizzas.

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UPCOMING

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essential skills development. Of special interest, were the differing needs of workers in larger and smaller production facilities, and across the varieties of food products now made in Alberta.

The field work and research for the HACCP project was carried out in the north of the province by Alberta Vocational College - Edmonton, and in the south by Hammond & Associates. This study recommended practical strategies and solutions for addressing identified needs, and has laid the foundation for the development of made-in-Alberta training materials for HACCP implementation.

Work is already underway to address some of the needs identified in the report. With funding from Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, AFPA has worked with AVC-Edmonton to develop a package of highly-visual, plain language training materials



Lab technicians like these at Molson Breweries in Edmonton are a critical part of the quality assurance program at all agri-food production facilities.

which are called *Frontline HACCP*. An advisory committee representing nine agri-food companies, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the United Food and Commercial Workers has ensured that training materials will fit industry needs. Although the *Frontline HACCP* was designed for workers with limited English language skills, they are well-suited for use in HACCP training generally.

In addition to having their voices heard, AFPA members who participated in the needs assessment received company-specific recommendations for supporting the HACCP system at their plants and a complementary copy of the final research report. As a bonus, managers in several participating facilities also noted that the research activity had increased awareness and discussion of HACCP among line workers.

For further information about the HACCP impact study, contact Janet Henderson, AFPA, (403) 201-1044 or Karen Bennett at Alberta Vocational College - Edmonton (780) 427-7855.

Mining for Curriculum Gems

How can workers gain the accreditations now required in many workplaces, while at the same time learn the skills they need for job performance and personal life tasks? *Workplace Education Development (WED): Customizing Accreditation Curricula*, is a new Canada-wide research project that will study the strategies being used by workplace educators to customize the delivery of established accreditation curricula such as the GED to maximize learning.

The WED project will build on the research done by HRDC in producing essential skills profiles of 150 entry-level occupations. A matrix will be developed which correlates the skills that are common to both the Essential Skills Profiles and the GED. The research focus will be on how the teaching of these skills can be made more relevant and accessible to workers through the use of contextualized materials and instructional techniques that are customized to the workers' backgrounds and learning styles.

"We believe that creative customizing is being done in programs large and small. Recognizing and describing this work will help other practitioners who don't have the time or resources to work on curriculum development," says project coordinator Ann Haney, Winnipeg.

WED invites input from programs across the country. Researcher Sheila Whincup, will design the research process and train provincial contacts to work with her in visiting programs and gathering data in their regions. Interviews and program visits will take place later this year. The project is funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and guided by a team with representation from Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario.

For more information about WED, contact Sheila Whincup. Phone and fax: (250) 642-2800 E-mail: wh@guild.bc.ca

Craft Labourers Build National Curriculum

JAN RAMSAY

The training room at Calgary's Construction and General Workers Union, Local 1111, recently hosted representatives from British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Alberta who eagerly participated in an exciting project intended to develop and pilot a training curriculum for construction craft labourers.

This project began in 1996 when the Construction Owners Association of Alberta identified essential skills as an important component of workforce development in the construction industry. After consultation with organized labour, major contractors and construction owners, several proposals were developed to address the immediate training needs of workers.

In January of 1997 the Construction Craft Labourer became an official occupation in Alberta. When an individual worker achieves standards of performance and successfully challenges an exam, the Minister grants that person an Occupational Certificate. This process is also occurring in other parts of the country.

Bow Valley College was chosen to develop and deliver a workplace literacy curriculum for labourers. Funding was provided by the National Literacy Secretariat and Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. Bow Valley College conducted a needs assessment in 1998 and designed the curriculum early in 1999.



Pilot training participants. Back row: Gerald Ott, Local 180, Regina; Ernest Tessier, Local 1111, Calgary; Jan Ramsay, Bow Valley College, Calgary; and Sandy Clarke, Local 1077, Charlottetown. Front Row: Lonnie Kuipers, Local 1111 Calgary; Earl Affleck Local 1077, Charlottetown; Grant Trimble, Local 180, Regina; and Frank Peters, Local 890, Saskatoon.

The needs assessment indicated that the literacy skills of some of the skilled labourers in the field may not be sufficient to allow them to pass the new multiple-choice Construction Craft Labourer exam. From this knowledge, a curriculum has been designed to improve literacy skills through construction specific content such as safety, concrete placement, excavation, compaction, rigging and hoisting, etc. A section on study skills and multiple-choice test taking skills has also been included.

The week of March 22 was chosen to pilot the course. Content experts from across Canada gathered to review the content for accuracy and develop 'train the trainer' strategies. These enthusiastic and hard-working individuals spent many hours poring over pages to ensure the course is practical and relevant.

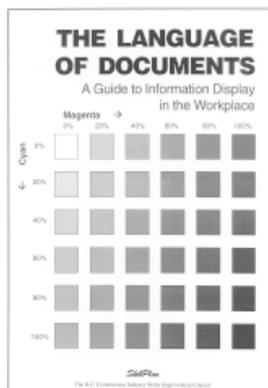
The Calgary project is part of a larger provincial initiative sponsored by the Construction Owners Association of Alberta's *Best Practices Partnership* which comprises major industrial owners, construction contractors, and labour. The goal is to make a continuum of essential skills programs available to the construction industry.

An advanced level reading program designed specifically for construction workers has been piloted at the Joffre 2000 camp and with the Operating Engineers in Fort McMurray by Keyano College. AVC Edmonton has completed research into the needs of low level learners, and staff is currently preparing an assessment instrument and recommendations for program delivery. AVC Edmonton has also prepared a glossary of safety vocabulary for construction which is now available through the Alberta Construction Safety Association.

For more information about the Construction Craft Labourer curriculum, contact Jeffrey Anders, Program Coordinator, Labourers' AGC Education and Training Trust, Vancouver, BC, or Jan Ramsay, Bow Valley College, Ph: (403) 297-4872; E-mail: jramsay@bowvalley.ab.ca

Fownes, L. (1999). *The language of documents: A guide to information display in the workplace*. Vancouver, BC: SkillPlan

The Language of Documents is a sequel to the earlier *SkillPlan* publication, *Document Literacy: A Guide for Workplace Trainers and Educators*. The intent of the new guide is to establish a common



language for talking about documents and to advance the discipline of document literacy instruction. Thinking and talking about documents requires a vocabulary upon which everyone can agree. Without appropriate vocabulary and an understanding of document structure, educators are crippled in their attempts to teach the skills needed to handle the documents that adults encounter at work and in their everyday lives.

Nearly every worker in Canada uses documents; charts, entry forms, graphs, maps, charts and other varieties of information design. They may locate information, make inferences, integrate several documents, make entries, interpret data and more. Documents are used to inform, instruct, gather information, persuade, locate, and visually represent. The ability to wrestle meaning from documents is critical to successful employment.

The Language of Documents explores the connection between traditional reading instruction and the teaching of document literacy skills. For example, informational text can be analyzed using elements such as exposition, sequence, rationale, style, and form. These are commonly accepted as a means of discussing and analyzing language. Every school age child parses sentences into verbs, nouns and other parts of speech. *The Language of Documents* suggests a parallel system which can be used to analyse the elements required to understand documents.

The drive for transferable employable skills is not always met through the study of prose, instructive as that may be. The study of document use is valuable instantly in everyday life. Workplace educators and trainers who may be challenged philosophically by the idea of teaching directly to one-time applications will be relieved by familiar features including vocabulary development, definition and classification, parsing details, critical analysis, comparing, contrasting, summarizing and applying. This manual names transferable skills, gives examples and suggests adaptations for practice.

For further information about *The language of documents: A guide to information display in the workplace*, including how to order, contact *SkillPlan* at (604) 436-1126 or e-mail skilplan@axionet.com

Learning@Work

The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) and the National Literacy Secretariat have undertaken a new workplace literacy project called Learning@Work. The objective of this project is to promote workplace learning and literacy and to formulate an industry vision. The SLFDB and NLS believe that the definition of literacy should not just include reading and writing, but should also include skills in computer usage, reading charts and diagrams, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking, conflict resolution and communication. Just as these skills can be lost after leaving school, they can be regained at work through practice and additional training.

The Learning@Work Project has three goals. The first goal is to discuss workplace learning and literacy with sector partnerships throughout Saskatchewan. It is felt that there is not enough real understanding of what the issues are, especially among small businesses. Secondly, SLFDB and NLS hope that Learning@Work will create linkages from business and labour to training resources and to the provincial, regional and national organizations which work in the workplace essential skills field. The final goal of Learning@Work is to promote and raise awareness of lifelong learning and literacy through one-on-one contact with industry and small businesses, and through pilot projects. For more information contact:

Learning@Work, 2 Floor, 2222 - 13th Ave., Regina, SK, S4P 3M7

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This newsletter is funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. Submissions to *The Bottom Line* should be sent to WWESTNET: c/o Julian Evetts, Apt. 103, 1720-13th St. S.W., Calgary, AB, T2T 3P4, Phone (403) 541-1367. Fax (403) 541-1835 jevetts@telusplanet.net