



Essential Skills National Best Practices Workshop

September 29 to October 1, 2002

Human Resources Development Canada, Bow Valley College (Calgary) and the Conference Board of Canada combined efforts in hosting the Innovations in Workplace Skills and Learning — National Best Practices Workshop in Calgary at the end of September.

The well-attended conference served a dual purpose: to provide delegates with information regarding the impact that essential skills development has on industry and Canadian society's burgeoning youth workforce, and to provide information on new and ongoing essential skills training programs and the value of recognition of prior learning.

The conference began in grand western tradition with a barbeque at Heritage Park, hosted by Bow Valley College. Delegates braved unseasonably chilly weather to attend an evening of informal networking, greeting old friends and making new ones.

Bow Valley College President Sharon Carry welcomed the delegates who were treated to fine food, a colourful aboriginal dance presentation and a special appearance by Alberta's favourite country troubadour, Ian Tyson.

Delegates got down to business early Monday morning in the Fairmont Palliser Hotel Crystal Ballroom. Sharon Carry opened the morning by introducing Scott Murray, Director General of Statistics Canada. Mr. Murray set the stage for the day with a presentation that provided delegates with background information on essential skills.

Mr. Murray began by defining essential skills as a "set of skills that are essential in virtually all occupations...and used throughout the activities of daily life". He went on to present the most recent statistics on the social and capital impact of essential skills acquisition and what the loss of those skills means in today's changing workplace.

The next session, facilitated by HRDC Skills Information Director Corinne Prince-St-Armand, featured Allan Cunningham of Suncor Energy Inc. and Tamara Levine of the Canadian Labour Congress. They provided first-hand anecdotes about the impact that essential skills training has on workers, the work environment, workplace safety and worker productivity.

Both speakers put the discussion of the benefits of essential skills training into a practical framework, balancing the theoretical viewpoint provided earlier in the session.

The morning ended with a showcase of essential skills best practices, hosted by Brigid Hayes of HRDC and Boeing Canada's Sue Turner. Playing the roles of roving reporters for Essential Skills Television (ESTV), they conducted short, yet informative interviews with various delegates highlighting essential skills tools, products, programs and resources. These included: "Navigating Documents", "Numeracy at Work", "Writing at Work", the "Measure-Up" website, "Applications of Working and Learning"



Sue Turner interviewing Donna Palmer on SkillPlan's newest essential skills products

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(AWAL), the "Ontario Passport" program, and the "Test of Workplace Essential Skills" (TOWES).

After a sumptuous lunch, delegates heard from Alison Campbell (Conference Board of Canada) and Lynda Fownes (SkillPlan) as they examined some of the barriers that threaten the success of workplace learning and explained how essential skills training can be used as a foundation in workplace learning and in addressing those barriers.

Delegates then spent the rest of the afternoon attending breakout sessions of their choice, exploring a variety of potential applications of essential skills training. Session topics included: Essential Skills and Apprenticeship, Essential Skills and Aboriginal Recruitment and Training, Community Colleges and Essential Skills, Essential Skills in Sector Council Initiatives, and Essential Skills in the Oil Patch.

The final session of the day provided delegates with an opportunity to discuss what they had learned and to provide input on what Canada's direction in responding to the challenges of integration of essential skills training in a knowledge-based economy.

The day ended with a reception hosted by Bow Valley College that celebrated the official launch of TOWES. Conrad Murphy and Lynda Fownes shared a brief history of the development of the assessment tool and presented an overview of the three new versions of TOWES.

Day 2 was dedicated to the recognition of workplace learning (RWL). The day began with a panel discussion chaired by Lenore Burton (HRDC) and featured panellists Michael Bloom (Conference Board of Canada), David Rathburn (Aliant Inc.), and Richard Krauss (American Council on Education).

Opening comments centred on the importance of RWL and the effective use of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in streamlining and customizing training.

Michael Bloom shared statistics on the potential economic and societal impacts of RWL using statistics from his report "Brain Gain: The Economic Benefits of Recognizing Learning and Learning Credentials".

David Rathburn spoke on how the nature of today's dynamic workplaces requires continuous upgrading of skills and how workplace learning bridges the gap between workplace requirements and existing knowledge and skills.

Richard Krauss talked about the initiatives taken by the American Council on Education in having workplace learning recognized as equivalents of secondary education accreditation through the establishment of partnerships between business and academic institutions in the US.

Facilitator Harry French (Conference Board of Canada), invited delegates to ask panellists questions and share their views on the benefits and challenges of recognizing workplace learning.

Delegates spent the remainder of the day in breakout sessions of their choosing where they discussed the impact of RWL on the business and academic community. These sessions included "RWL — Small Enterprises, Sector Councils and Chambers of Commerce", "RWL — Large and Medium-Sized Enterprises" and "Recognizing Learning and Learning Credentials — Academic Institutions, Accrediting Agencies and Professional and Regulatory Bodies".

After a wrap-up session that summarized the day's events and highlighted key issues discussed by delegates and their ideas for action and direction in advancing recognition of workplace learning, the Conference Board of Canada hosted a reception that allowed delegates one more networking opportunity before returning home with what they learned.



ESTV reporter Brigid Hayes interviews Conrad Murphy, (Bow Valley College, Calgary), about the official launch of TOWES

Integrated Language & Communication for the Workplace

The Manitoba Model – 2002

*by Dale Klassen and Lynn Campbell,
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Integrated Language and Communication for the Workplace programs are becoming the training model of choice for Manitoba businesses and industries with immigrant workers. The development of communication competencies in the workplace provides immigrant employees with the foundation they need to integrate more quickly and successfully. The ability to use English at work allows new and established immigrants to put to use the skills and knowledge that they arrive with.

The new integrated model is an extension of Workplace Language Training programs that have operated in Manitoba since the mid-1980's and are also inclusive of Workplace Education Manitoba Essential Skills training. Workplace Language Training classes provide on-site job-specific English language training for workers, with contributions in funding and/or planning coming from the Province, the company, and the union.

In Manitoba, 20 to 30 Workplace Language Training programs are taught annually by independent contract instructors for an average of 300-400 workers. Training focuses on the specific communication needs of workers at varying levels of English.

Based on the British Industrial Language Training model, classes are held at the end of the workday, one hour on paid work time and one hour on employee time, usually delivered twice a week for 4 - 6 months. Training benefits employers and employees through reduced wastage and errors, increased adaptability, improved understanding of quality standards, training and health and safety issues, and enhanced confidence and morale in the workplace.

However, two common limitations to the success of Workplace Language Training are that only a selected portion of the workforce can participate, and that learning objectives might be achieved in the classroom but not transferred to the job.

Integrated Language and Communication for the Workplace replaces the itinerant contract teacher with a full or part-time staff trainer employed by the company. The trainer becomes a part of the human resources training unit who is totally devoted to the development of effective

workplace language, communication and essential skills and practices.

Integrated Language and Communication for the Workplace has the potential to be of benefit to the entire company workforce while at the same time continuing intensive classroom training for those who are able to participate.

The new model allows for more responsive and relevant programming. Because the trainer isn't looking in from the outside, the trainer becomes a tremendous resource for the company in all communication needs and can provide valuable insights on cross cultural communication issues.

Integrated language and communication trainers carry out many new tasks, many of which go far beyond the limited role they once had in simply developing and delivering classes. Examples of these tasks include:

- facilitating transfer of learning to the shop floor - trainer works side by side with workers for periods of time ensuring classroom learning is used and practiced
- designing and delivering "English for Specific Purpose" courses (e.g. English for blueprint reading, English for AutoCAD, English for WHMIS, etc.)
- adapting existing skill and safety training practices and materials to reflect the needs of English as a Second Language speakers — integrate language training into skill and safety training
- establishing and coordinating volunteer programs within the workplace (e.g. a Language Partners program that matches English as a Second Language speakers with Canadian English speakers for conversation practice).

Four Manitoba businesses are at various stages in changing their style of programming from the traditional Workplace Language Training model to the Integrated Language and Communication for the Workplace model, and so far with positive results.

Most noticeable is that instruction is provided on the shop floor as well as in the classroom. Some workers who could not attend classes in the traditional model are benefiting from the 5-10 minute tutoring they now get at their workstation a few times a week. Other workers who do attend classes are now expected to transfer the classroom learning they have become comfortable with to practical

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usage at their workstation. As one supervisor said, "Here's where the rubber hits the road!"

Providing general skills training to employees with added language training support approaches traditional Workplace Language Training from another direction, and businesses think it makes sense. Talk to managers about running language and communication training for employees, and it's often seen as an "extra". Talk to them about having a trainer on staff dedicated to ensuring that the skills training is actually understood, and you're no longer outside of the business objectives of the organization.

For Manitoba, Integrated Language and Communication for the Workplace is now the preferred model for making true and long-lasting changes not just to individuals, but to entire workplace cultures.

Numeracy at Work

*by Elizabeth Thompson
SkillPlan,*

BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council

The use of the word numeracy suggests a new concept that is not limited to arithmetic, is different from mathematics and is useful when discussing what goes on at work. It includes job skills and other essential skills such as problem solving and information gathering that are often used in fast paced multi-task situations where accuracy is critical. SkillPlan's experience as workplace educators and researchers forms the basis and the motivation to address numeracy in the workplace. Numeracy at Work is the result.

The foundation of the book comes from workers. Workplace educators from across Canada contributed their expertise with enthusiasm. They contacted companies and workers to gather real-life stories of numeracy situations. Each of the twenty chapters features a worker for example, a line shift supervisor, a forestry technician. The numeracy tasks include, among others, testing for quality control, measuring to administer medication, comparing two contracts, and reconciling petty cash receipts.

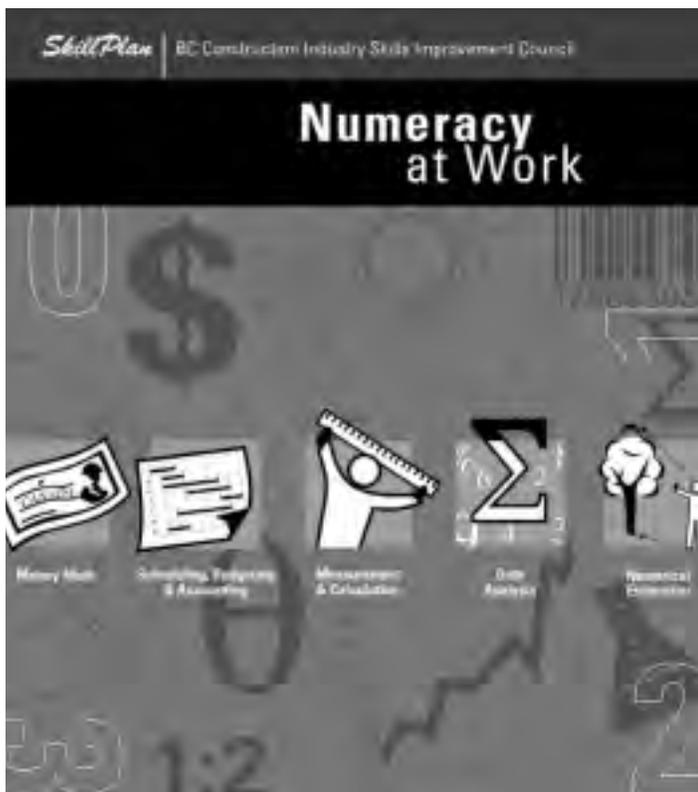
Numeracy at Work illustrates workplace applications of: Money Math, Scheduling or Budgeting and Accounting, Measurement and Calculation, and Data Analysis. These are the categories of numeracy described in the Essential Skills Research Project from Human Resources Development Canada, www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/essentialskills

The richness of the stories is supplemented by numeracy activities that mimic the tasks of each worker. The activities, along with steps to arrive at answers, are designed to give practice in skills that are actually used on the job. There are suggestions for further exploration and applications in other settings.

Numeracy at Work has met with enthusiasm from adult educators and curriculum developers in Canada, the U.S., and Australia. It was the featured resource for September 2002 in the Mathematics and Sciences section of the U.S. National Institute for Literacy (NIFL).

Numeracy at Work was developed with funding from Human Resources Development Canada, and is available in English and French.

For more information, contact SkillPlan, the BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council, by phone at (604) 436-1126 or online at www.skillplan.ca.



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