



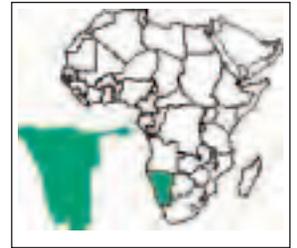
Essential Skills Integrated Training – an African Spin

by Pat Salt

On March 12 and 13, the Bow Valley College International Education Department sponsored a "hands-on" workshop based on the training approach the College is implementing in its Skill Links initiative in Namibia (see left). The Linkage Model, a "made in Africa" vocational training methodology, targets technical, business and workplace essential skills. The Model is unique in that it addresses entrepreneurship training not as a series of business management modules, but as an integrated exercise in critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making. Through the completion of projects involving actual customers, valid market studies, design specifications, costing and pricing, production planning, and quality control, students learn a wide range of important essential skills in a real world context. The Linkage Model uses essential skills defined by HRSD - thinking skills (problem solving, decision making and critical thinking), reading, numeracy, document use, writing, oral communication, job task planning and organizing, and working with others. These are taught to students using small business-based applications. The Model is versatile because it is a delivery methodology and not a training program; this means curriculum must be developed by users to meet the specific requirements of the learning community for which it is intended.

During the two-day workshop, participants experienced the Linkage Model by working in small groups to complete actual projects (hand made folders for a fictitious arts organization). This approach allowed delegates to assume the role of learners and

explore the Model from a "ground level" perspective. At the same time, they were given concrete ideas by the facilitators (Pat Salt and Melissa Gardner) about how to integrate entrepreneurship, problem solving, and workplace essential skills into vocational training lessons.



Participants completed specifications lists, conducted target market interviews, created technical drawings, measured materials, planned production, estimated time requirements, calculated costs and prices, navigated documents, and worked collaboratively. At several points during the exercise, learners were reminded just how important it is to present trainees with opportunities to make decisions, think critically and solve problems.

By the end of the second day, the 18 delegates who included representatives from Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES), Trident Resources, Aurora College (sponsored by Shell Canada), ChildSpeak, Bow Valley College, and the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST) agreed that they had learned a lot. One Bow Valley College instructor commented how important it was to offer training based on real experiences and for essential skills to be taught in context. Guest presenters, James Holroyd (a local artist and instructor in the Artstream program) and Charmaine Toms (President, Alberta Theatre Projects), agreed that the tasks assigned



Ron Lentz from CAWST developing his product

continued on page 2

CUPE Leads the Way

by Naomi Frankel

CUPE has been at the forefront of Workplace Essential Skills projects in Saskatchewan. CUPE Saskatchewan Division and the CUPE National Literacy Project initiated the Water and Wastewater Workers Essential Skills Project in the province, and CUPE Local 21, in partnership with the City of Regina, initiated a Workplace Essential Skills pilot program called Return to Learn (or R2L as it became known).

Certification has been mandated for a large percentage of the province's 1,300 water and wastewater workers, with a July 2005 deadline. Employer support for workers who face the certification exams varies from none, to release time to take courses, to paying for the courses.

However, many water and wastewater workers have been out of the formal education setting for a long time. CUPE questioned whether there were workers in the sector who might need refreshers in areas such as numeracy, reading text, and document use in order to succeed in the certification preparation and the certification exams.

Working closely with the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL), CUPE developed a proposal to conduct a customized TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) with a sample group of water and wastewater workers and

then develop a learning strategy based on the results. The proposal was accepted and funded by Saskatchewan Learning. A sector committee was formed with membership from several organizations with an interest in the certification issue and chaired by representatives from Labour and Education.

Nearly one-third of the 44 workers surveyed scored less than 80% (TOWES indicator for "demonstrates proficiency") overall in the three workplace essential skills surveyed. The scores among water and wastewater workers north of Prince Albert, in the fairly isolated and often Aboriginal communities of the province, were considerably lower than the overall average.

The report of the project, currently in press, recommends that models be developed to offer workplace essential skills upgrading to the workers. In addition, it strongly recommends:

- Exam preparation workshops
- Literacy funding for regional colleges north of Prince Albert to support workplace essential skills training for water and wastewater workers in the region
- Compensation to the workers for study time
- Formal recognition of the effort and commitment of the workers who prepare for and take the certification exams

continued on page 3

an African Spin *continued from page 1*

were very practical while encouraging innovation and design.

One of the highlights of the two days was the inclusion of two Hillhurst Elementary School GATE students from the Bow Valley College ChildSpeak project. They and their teacher, Sandra Ryan, came to learn about the Model and how it might be adapted for a primary school setting. The children will be taking what they have learned and re-configuring the workshop for classmates here and in Namibia.

Delegates working with Aboriginal programs noted the applicability of the Linkage Model to First Nations train-



Dylann Golbeck selling her product to Charmaine Thoms

The CIDA-funded Skill Links to Self-Employment (Skill Links) project is introducing the Linkage Model to Namibia's community training system. Skill Links capitalizes on the expertise and experience gained from Bow Valley's CIDA award winning Entrepreneurial Skills Promotion project in Zimbabwe. Namibia has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world (total expenditures of the richest 7000 people, or 0.5% of the population, equal the total expenditures of the poorest 800,000, or 57% of the population). The majority of Namibians (65% of the population) lives on less than \$200 Canadian dollars per year.

ing. As one participant said, "The project based learning advocated by the Linkage Model lends itself to teaching pre-trades. I will definitely be taking ideas back to integrate into our program."

For more information about the Linkage Model, contact Brian Leacock, Manager of the Bow Valley College International Education Department (403.410.470). ♦

CUPE Leads the Way *continued from page 2*

For further information about the Water and Wastewater Workers Essential Skills Project, email waterworkersproject@mail.com

In another workplace essential skills project, CUPE Local 21 and the City of Regina developed a Union-Employer partnership to offer the Return to Learn network. The pilot program of Return to Learn ran for six three-hour sessions. It focused on both workplace essential skills and particularly skills that would help individuals who were returning to a formal learning situation such as GED, apprenticeship, or certification.

In an unexpected turn of events, 15 of the 16 participants in the pilot were either wastewater workers or outside workers who repair sewers and water pipes. In other words, all 15 were facing mandatory certification.

As the coordinator of Return to Learn also happened to

be the coordinator of the Waterworkers Essential Skills Project, information collected from the latter project informed the development and design of R2L.

Return to Learn focused on exam preparation, coping with exam anxiety, numeracy, and navigating documents using the certification preparation study guide. In addition, one hour of each session was used for "focused conversations" where small groups of learners discussed in a purposeful way a topic of concern to them. Integrated into the activity was skill development in the following workplace essential skills: written communication, problem solving, decision making, working with others, and thinking skills such as reflection and analysis.

For further information about Return to Learn, email: r2learn@mail.com. ♦

Tribute to Brigid Hayes

by Rob Despina

In 1987, the federal government demonstrated tremendous foresight when they established the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). In 1989, they made another excellent decision by assigning Brigid Hayes as Program Manager, Business and Labour Partnerships with the NLS. For the next 14 years, Brigid was synonymous with workplace literacy. She was committed to the cause, continuously engaged, a passionate supporter, and the main interchange of every Canadian workplace literacy network. If you needed to know what was happening in workplace literacy, all you had to do was call Brigid.

Brigid ventured far past the expected role of a federal civil servant responsible for a national program. She spent many days on the road supporting the cause, the workplace programs, the committees, the workshops and the conferences. Her presence and input were highly valued by co-partners in workplace literacy initiatives. This on-the-ground exposure fine-tuned her perspective and gave her a thorough appreciation of the context of the workplace. For this, she earned the respect of business, labour, not-for-profit organizations, and other government agencies.

Brigid always stood up for what she believed even when she knew what she said wouldn't necessarily be well received. This conviction was part of the foundation that built the credibility of the NLS program. It was also the mortar that cemented many partnerships between the NLS and the workplace literacy community.

Best of all, Brigid was always game to have fun. Her personable approach and sense of humour helped to increase the success of many events. At WWestnet conferences, she assumed the persona of the "roving reporter" as



if born to it. She was so natural in the role we suspected she might audition for a national reporter position with the CBC.

In November 2003, Brigid Hayes accepted an assignment as a senior researcher with the Canadian Labour and Business Centre (CLBC). In this capacity, she will use her vast workplace and program experience to engage in projects related to essential skills, language at work, and foreign credentials recognition. Recently, Brigid was appointed Interim Director of Labour for the CLBC and was honoured by the Canadian Labour Congress as "Unions and Literacy Champion" in appreciation for her contribution to unions and literacy.

We know Brigid will have the same impact in her new role at the CLBC as she had at the NLS. For Brigid, there is only one mode: Full Throttle.

Thanks Brigid, for 14 years of total personal commitment to the workplace literacy movement. ♦

Taking the Next Steps Together

WWestnet's 2004 Workplace Essential Skills Development Symposium

Calgary's February chill was eased by the warm exchange of ideas and information at the Workplace Essential Skills Development Symposium, *Taking the Next Steps Together – a Collaborative Approach to Workplace Essential Skills Development*, held at the Hyatt Regency. The event was hosted by WWestnet with support from the National Literacy Secretariat (Human Resources Skills Development).

Symposium organizers and delegates came together with five major objectives in mind:

- To reinforce the importance of the inclusion of workplace essential skills in all types of training programs
- To facilitate a collaborative approach to essential skills development among workplace and non-workplace based trainers and program developers
- To explore how critical thinking, problem solving and decision making can be addressed in workplace and non-workplace based training programs
- To foster a dialogue around the relationship and interaction between workplace and non-workplace based training programs with a focus on workplace essential skills development in order to streamline the essential skills elements addressed in training programs, improve interfacing and maximize outcomes
- To provide WWestnet and the NLS with ideas regarding what is needed to strengthen a collaborative approach to workplace essential skills training

The symposium began the evening of February 25th with a reception sponsored by Conoco Phillips Canada where old friendships were renewed and new acquaintances were made.

Thursday morning, delegates were welcomed by symposium facilitator Irma Mohammed (WWestnet BC member) and were hard at work by 8:30 am.

The morning's highlights included:

- A summary by Chris Bates (Human Resources Partnership Directorate) of the roles played in essential skills development by the Department of Human

Resources and Development (HRSD), the Human Resources Partnership (HRP) Directorate and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). He also introduced the Honourable Joseph Volpe, the new minister of HRSD, who spoke of future plans for essential skills development in Canada.

- A presentation by Statistics Canada's Scott Murray, intended to provide a context for the symposium and to give delegates valuable information about the accomplishments made and the needs that still need to be addressed.

- An on the ground perspective of what types of training are needed by today's workers and why, in a guided discussion led by Scott Murphy. The panel of presenters included Lloyd Campbell (Syncrude Canada Ltd.), Ron Torgerson (SK Fed. of Labour), Larry Wucherer (Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg), and Tamara Pongracz (Women in Trades Program, BCIT).



After being welcomed back from lunch by NLS Director (Human Resources Skills Development) Lianne Vardy, delegates went to work on case studies that addressed a specific essential skills training issue and were assigned the task of creating a solution that demonstrated a collaborative approach among the training sectors represented at each table.

After the group work session, delegates were treated to three sessions detailing real life workplace essential skills collaborations that garnered impressive results. The sessions were led by Sue Turner (BC Hydro) and Herman Hansen (Boeing Canada Technology), Diana Twiss (Capilano College) and Gloria Stalzer (former Capilano client) and Susan Devins (BHP Billiton).

The first day ended with a much needed debriefing session and refreshments, where delegates took the opportunity to discuss what they had learned.

The final day included presentations by:

- Denise Theunisen (Bow Valley College) on ways of identifying literacy and learning difficulties and suggestions on addressing these problems.

continued on page 6

Book Review

by Sandi Howell

Reading Work: Literacies in the New Workplace

by Mary Ellen Belfiore, Tracy A. Defoe, Sue Folinsbee, Judy Hunter and Nancy S. Jackson. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, New Jersey, 2004.

The term literacies, adopted throughout this book, reflects a broader and more inclusive definition than has traditionally been used, including the idea of multi-literacies. It encompasses a growing range of media (e.g. video and computers), domains of use, challenges associated with a growing diverse cultural and linguistic society, and many kinds of specialized knowledge (e.g. environmental literacy and media literacy), which end up signifying membership in groups such as the workplace. Additionally, to practice literacy means more than just the use of functional skills and requires understanding and action over and above function.

Part 1 of this book contains stories from four worksites where ethnographic research was conducted for six to eight months each. The goal of the research was to look systematically at what people actually do and to understand when they participate in various literacies. Part 2, Chapters 5 to 8, is a reflection about what was learned and what others may learn. This includes an analysis of literacies within technical training, reflection on the implications of research findings for practice, and an examination of social theories of literacy and language within other theories such as cognitive theory. The book finishes with excerpts of communication between researchers over the course of the project and shows their evolution of thought and the complexities of the topic.

One of the strong messages in this book is that literacies and worker use of skills cannot be isolated from the context or situation in which they occur. In other words, literacies cannot be described simply as a skill requirement along with technical skills, resulting in the worker viewed as an isolated actor and the skill as an individual trait. Literacies are deeply interwoven with learning and use in

daily work. "They are tangled in with the meanings, risks and opportunities that people create through their daily work practices." (pg.219).

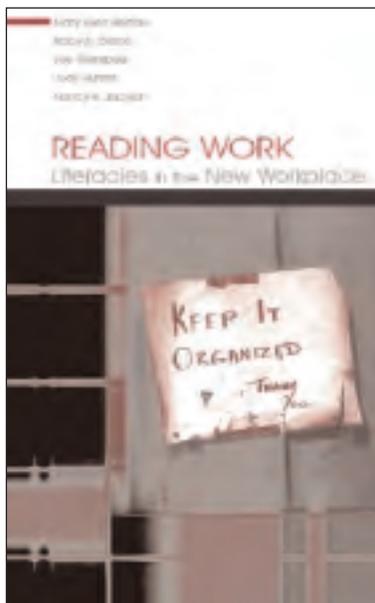
Literacies require consideration of specific relationships and occasions. A worker's decision to use their literacy skills has much to do with these situations and, at the least, some understanding that lack of use of a literacy skill may be due to the situation versus the worker's capability. To add to this is the idea that for any situation, including those with a power dynamic, workers, managers, staff etc. will find different and sometimes conflicting meanings in any given text and that will determine how individuals will engage with the text.

The researchers argue that educators cannot remove themselves from the social meaning of literacy at work even though they may argue that it is none of their business or that it is the organization's responsibility. Educators must create a safe place for these meanings to emerge and encourage other trainers (e.g. technical) to do the same if progress is to be made at all. The researchers found that other types of training are often conducted in a manner and using materials that impede learning rather than facilitate it.

The researchers admit that some educators understand this perspective quite well while others do not at all. Many workplace educators do not see this perspective as something that is their responsibility at all. The researchers argue that no significant progress (learning) is typically made unless this perspective is dealt with on some level. By this rationale, it becomes an educator's responsibility to consider it and to reveal practices and understandings that make people use their literacies or not.

When I began to read this book, I repeatedly asked myself "Who is the audience?". I went over a list of potential industry or government partners that I know and could not find anyone I thought would be interested. I thought about the workplace practitioners that I dialogue with and rejected them also. I felt that many would be frustrated by the nature of ethnographic research and its reporting style, and that many of the findings were either too obvious or too complex to be dealt with efficiently within the workplace.

continued on page 6



The book is extremely well-crafted and admirable from that perspective alone. It has changed my perspective ...

Next Steps *continued from page 4*

- Chris Bates (HRP), Erik de Vries (HRSD), Naomi Frankel (Labour-focussed essential skills training consultant), Sandi Howell (Workplace Education Manitoba) and Sue Turner (BC Hydro) on upper band essential skills and how they are viewed by the Government, how they are defined and their importance.

- Wendy Magahay (Applications for Working and Learning (AWAL) Project Manager) and Louise Nichol (President of OARS Training Inc) on two resources (AWAL National Project and Skill Passports) that encourage collaboration between trainers and workplaces.

Irma Mohammed closed the symposium by asking the delegates to reflect on what they had gained from the ses-

sions and then to share their responses with the group. Feedback included such statements as:

"That there are a number of resources available at our disposal and I can utilize them."

"The AWAL database was entirely new to me. I will search it and recommend it."

"I want to share what I have learned with others in the organization with a view to action."

The success of the symposium was best summed up in a comment from an anonymous delegate: "Bravo to WWestnet. This has been the most informative and enlightening session/conference put on in the past three that I have attended." ♦

Book Review *continued from page 5*

As a long-time workplace education practitioner, I had a difficult time with this book myself until I hit Chapter 6, which is constructed of thought provoking questions which do not necessarily have ready answers. My first reaction to the initial chapters was that these discoveries were old news. However, I increasingly became uncomfortable as I pushed on - uncomfortable as I reflected on my own years of practice and some of the scenarios in which I participated. Uncomfortable with my cognitive perspective of practice and its neat tidy edges.

By the time I finished Chapter 6, I had become very curious about hearing more about practice and reflection based on this theory. As with all paradigm shifts, it is a framework without a lot of extra on it right now, but the researchers acknowledge this and call on all workplace practitioners to write more about their experiences in spite of the barriers to doing so.

The book is extremely well-crafted and admirable from that perspective alone. It has changed my perspective and caused me to create a list of individuals that I would like to have consider these ideas and create a dialogue and some practice around it. Its complexity and challenge alone is motivating to me as a practitioner trying to improve and, as a policy maker, trying to do the right thing. Most importantly, the potential benefit of making this work, to me, is without question. ♦

What's next

Measuring Success

International Comparisons and Bottom Lines

Pending project approval, WWestnet proposes to organize a conference addressing the initial findings of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), a research project known internationally as the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey. WWestnet also proposes to acquaint delegates with the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and its 2003 Framework, an exploration of the extent to which young people (including Canadians) have acquired the wider knowledge, skills and competencies they will need in adult life.

CONFERENCE

February 27 (evening) &

February 28 (full day) 2005

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Calgary Alberta

For further information contact:
Melissa Gardner at
megardner@telus.net

WWestnet acknowledges the financial support of the National Literacy Secretariat.

Submissions and queries regarding submissions can be e-mailed to the editor,

Peter Exner at pexner@shaw.ca

or to *The Bottom Line* at wwestnet@shaw.ca