



## Measuring Success International Comparisons and Bottom Lines

June 2005

WWestnet's June 2 - 3, 2005 conference, *Measuring Success: International Comparisons and Bottom Lines*, was kicked off in fine style with a reception sponsored by Bow Valley College and the Standard Aero Corporate University at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Calgary.

Rob Despins, business co-chair of WWestnet and General Manager of the Standard Aero Corporate University, welcomed delegates to the reception on behalf of both Standard Aero and WWestnet and explained that, for Standard Aero, it is important for company employees to have literacy and essential skill levels that allow them to be full participants in the company. He then introduced Conrad Murphy, Director of the TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) department at Bow Valley College, who welcomed delegates on behalf of the College. A founding member of WWestnet, Mr. Murphy spoke about how Bow Valley has been a generous supporter of WWestnet over the years because the College believes the group's efforts to raise awareness and provide learning opportunities around essential skills are valuable contributions to the effort to increase essential skills levels amongst Canadians.



*Scott Murray addresses the delegates.*

The rest of the evening saw delegates establishing new relationships and renewing old ones in preparation for the next day's work.

On the next day, WWestnet's Sue Turner (BC Hydro) welcomed delegates to the conference and explained that the conference sessions would feature the preliminary findings of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) and would also review the findings of the first International Adult Literacy Survey and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003. She then thanked the presenters and acknowledged the National Literacy Secretariat (Human Resources Skills Development Canada) for its ongoing support and financial contribution.

Sue introduced Linda Coyle, Vice President Emeritus, Kwantlen College, who was the conference moderator. Ms Coyle greeted the delegates, outlined the conference goals and objectives and explained the timetable for the day. Her excellent facilitation and organizational skills ensured that the sessions were on time and speakers' efforts were honoured.

The day then got underway with Karen Jackson, Assistant

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## Measuring Success *continued from page 1*

Deputy Minister Human Resources Skills Development Canada, who brought greetings on behalf of Secretary of State Claudette Bradshaw. Ms Jackson conveyed Minister Bradshaw's regrets that she was unable to attend the conference. Ms Jackson's address to the delegates focused on the release of data from the international Adult Literacy and Life (ALL) Skills Survey and what the data means to the country. She told the audience that "The ALL survey, conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Government of Canada, tells us that nearly 9 million working-age Canadians lack the literacy skills necessary to survive and thrive in today's knowledge-based economy. Worse, the report indicates that these scores have not improved significantly since 1994, when the first International Adult Literacy Survey was done."

Ms Jackson went on to put the ALL Skills Survey data into context regarding the Federal Government's commitment to developing a "comprehensive strategy to support learning, literacy and essential skills development". She detailed the government's involvement in literacy and essential skills programs and spoke of its partnerships with other governments and organizations in boosting the literacy and essential skills levels of Canadians.

Delegates had a busy day ahead of them and attended the following sessions:

- **Practice Test Questions** – Presenter Scott Murray (Deputy Director International Statistics, UNESCO) explained how IALSS questions are composed and why they are composed in this way. Delegates then had an opportunity to try some IALSS type questions, after which Mr. Murray debriefed the results.
- **Job Design** – Presenters Doug Giddings (Giddings Consulting), Rob Despina (Standard Aero), and Greg Maruca (Alberta Union of Provincial Employees)

discussed how the IALSS results indicate that, in some cases, workers enter the workforce with relatively good skills but that over a period of time these skills are eroded. They talked about how and why this happens, some possible solutions, and some of the challenges and benefits to implementing changes to the way work is performed.

- **BC Licensed Practical Nurse Program** – Presenter Gordon MacDonald (Executive Director, BC College of LPN's) described his college's LPN training program and how it works to enrich the student nurses' training by encouraging higher levels of literacy and essential skills and multi-skilling in academic training. He also described how the college works with employers to encourage the full utilization of the available skills so that both employers and LPN's benefit from the enriched training.
- **Round Table Session** - In round table discussion groups, delegates were asked to respond to questions regarding what they had learned during the course of the conference and how it affects them within their own domains. Responses were collated and the results e-mailed to delegates two days following the conference.

The session was brought to a close by Keynote Speaker, Brigid Hayes (Director, Labour of the Canadian Labour and Business Centre) who spoke on behalf of Shirley Seward, CEO of the Canadian Labour and Business Centre. Ms Hayes' speech recapped the messages put forward throughout the day and ended the conference on an inspirational note by urging conference delegates to "work towards improving the skills of all workers while ensuring all Canadians can continue to enjoy our social and economic prosperity". ♦



*Brigid Hayes*

# English Communication Learning and Resource Centres in Manitoba

By Dale Klassen

*English at Work Coordinator Manitoba Labour and Immigration*

The Manitoba *English at Work* program is one of five ESL program streams in the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program of Manitoba Labour and Immigration. English at Work program costs are shared with participating businesses and organizations. This year, the program has three new health care learning and resource centre programs.

*English at Work* classes have been delivered for almost twenty years in Manitoba, with approximately 20-30 classes annually for about 300 immigrant employees at businesses ranging from manufacturing to the financial sector. To respond to emerging needs, new ways of delivering English for specific purposes have been explored and piloted. The creation of English Communication Learning and Resource Centres is proving to be a successful model in offering support to working immigrants and their employers.

The Manitoba Nurses' Union opens its new learning centre for immigrant nurses at its downtown office every Tuesday from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. The time allows nurses from day, evening, or night shifts to drop in for a couple of hours. The Centre has an ESL specialist on hand to work on English communication skills with individuals or small groups, or facilitate use of nursing-related print or computerized learning resources for those who want to study alone. Mini-workshops and guest speakers discussing topics of importance to nurses are also featured. For nurses working outside of Winnipeg, e-mail and telephone instruction is available. The Manitoba Nurses' Union believes strongly in supporting all of its members, and has taken this unique step in making sure that immigrant nurses receive the support they need to integrate into the Canadian workplace.

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*Two program participants with instructor Leigh Trusler at the St. Boniface Hospital English Communications Learning and Resource Centre.*

## Resource Centres in Manitoba *continued from page 3*

St. Boniface General Hospital (SBGH) has also begun an English communication learning and resource centre for its support staff. Participating employees come from dietary, housekeeping, laundry, equipment sterilization, transport, and health care aide departments. The instructor provides English communication training to these departments in turn, with a focus on the specific vocabulary and methods of communication needed for each area. SBGH has also initiated a process for determining the language requirements needed for different work areas. A sample of current immigrant employees in a particular department will be tested for their Canadian Language Benchmarks to establish a baseline for new employees hired into that department. SBGH is now developing its own job-specific English Communication Assessment to be used as part of their application process.

Another English communication learning centre at the Riverview Health Centre (RHC) is still in the planning

stage with hopes of opening this fall. RHC is primarily a palliative long-term care and rehabilitation centre and it is essential to the centre that its patient care teams communicate clearly and sensitively with residents and families. The learning centre would initially be offered to all health care aides and then be opened to other participants. An instructor would be on hand two half-days per week, and staff could drop in as their shifts allowed. Instruction would be individualized or in small groups, complemented by scheduled presentations on topics of interest to the employees.

A firm indication that the English Communication Learning and Resource Centre model is a success is that it is being used by the Winnipeg-based Boeing Canada plant in the development of its own centre. This is further evidence that the message that improved English communication at work is not just good for working people, it's good for business is getting across. ♦

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## New Essential Skills Profiles



This fall, the Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative (ESWLI) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada will release new profiles for professional and technical level occupations. Profiles describe how each of the nine Essential Skills are used by workers in a particular occupation. These profiles can be used to develop curricula, investigate career options, create job descriptions and much more.

To date, over 200 profiles for various National Occupational Classification groups have been developed. The goal is to develop Essential Skills profiles for most of the occupational groups in Canada. The selection of new profiles was largely based on three priorities:

- regulated occupations relevant to foreign credential recognition
- apprenticeable trades
- occupations of direct interest to sector councils

Some of the profiles expected to be released this fall include: pharmacists, veterinarians, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, automotive service technicians and gas fitters.

The profiles are an important step in achieving the goal of ESWLI, which is to improve the skill levels of Canadians entering or already in the workforce. The ESWLI is linked to Canada's Workplace Skills Strategy, which aims to help Canadians become the best trained, most highly skilled workers in the world, and ensure that employers' needs are met.

For more information on the Essential Skills profiles or other Essential Skills related information, please visit

[www.sdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential\\_skills/essential\\_skills\\_index.shtml](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential_skills/essential_skills_index.shtml) ♦

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# Essential Skills and the Northern Oil and Gas Workforce

May, 2005

Yellowknife, “The Diamond Capital of North America”, served as a backdrop for WWestnet’s May 2005 event, Essential Skills and the Northern Oil and Gas Workforce. The event was kicked off with a reception dinner held at the National Defence Headquarters. Yvette Souque, of the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), spoke about the work of the Secretariat in supporting literacy and essential skills initiatives in Canada. Musical entertainment was provided by local musician John Tees and conference moderator George Tucarro.

of the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment, and The Mackenzie Gas Project Producer Group for their collective support, assistance with conference planning and funding contributions. Mr. Sammons then introduced George Tucarro (Mikisew Cree First Nation) who acted as moderator for the conference.

Before sending delegates off to the scheduled sessions for the day, Mr. Tucarro reminded them of the conference goals, which were to:

- raise awareness around the importance of integrating essential skills into training programs
- acquaint delegates with accessible and effective essential skills tools and resources
- provide delegates with an opportunity to learn about relevant successful training programs currently being delivered by a variety of businesses, institutions, and training centres in northern and western Canada
- deliver practical hands-on train-the-trainer sessions that would provide insight into techniques for developing and delivering effective employment-focussed training
- provide opportunities for delegates to network and share information with colleagues from across the Northwest Territories
- explore what further trainer development and teaching/learning resources are needed to support the development and delivery of relevant training to current and future workers
- inform delegates of the Workplace Skills Strategy and the impact of the Strategy on workforce preparation in the future

With the goals setting the context for the conference, delegates were kept busy throughout the three-day event attending numerous sessions that helped to explain the education, training, and employment challenges that are unique to the north and to provide an overview of industry and the labour market, as well as the education and workforce preparation training situation in the north. Sessions were well conceived and delivered. The following is a list of the session titles.

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*Delegates hard at work.*

The conference was opened the next morning with an address to the delegates by the Honourable Charles Dent, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). The Minister commented on the importance of appropriate effective training as a key ingredient in preparing northerners for the opportunities that will accompany the economic boom in the north.

WWestnet’s Jonas Sammons welcomed delegates on behalf of the group and thanked the event’s sponsors, The National Literacy Secretariat (HRSDC), The Government

- **The Training Picture in the North** – described some of the education, training, and employment challenges that are unique to the north and provided an overview of industry and the labour market, as well as the education and workforce preparation training situation in the north.
  - **Perspectives on Training Needs in the North** – presented three perspectives on training needs in the north focussing on how to enable Aboriginal peoples who wish to enter the workforce and be successful, the technical and essential/employability skills workers need to work in pipeline construction and maintenance, and approaches to skills development and best practices for developing local employment.
  - **What are Essential Skills?** – provided an overview of the Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative and the Federal Government’s Workplace Skills Strategy.
  - **Approaches to Essential Skills Development** – explained the role of the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council within the trucking industry and provided an overview of training in the industry and the reasons that essential skills are considered an important element of training programs.
  - **An Integrated Model for Employment Preparation** – described the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation’s Workplace Readiness Program which is designed to transition Inuvialuit Beneficiaries into the workplace by providing basic essential skills and job exposure through work placements.
  - **Northern Pipeline Projects** – described some of the training programs delivered by the pipeline trades with a focus on northern workers entering the trade involved in pipeline construction.
  - **Akita Drilling** – described how the drilling industry operates in the north and some of the critical training components necessary for working in the industry.
  - **Is It Always an Essential Skills Issue?** – discussed some of the issues, aside from essential skills proficiency, that must be considered in developing workforce preparation and training programs.
  - **Northern Workplace/Workforce Literacy Consortium** – described a joint initiative between the NWT Literacy Council and the Nunavut Literacy Council that promotes and supports workforce/workplace literacy programs in the NWT.
  - **Job Design** – explained why work should be organized in such a way that workers retain the skills they have at entry to the workplace, have a greater degree of satisfaction with their jobs, and have opportunities to expand on their skills and develop new ones.
  - **Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES)** – described the test and how it is used to assess individual abilities in three of the nine essential skills identified by HRSDC (reading text, document use, and numeracy).
  - **Assessing Learning and Work Readiness** – a panel discussion in which panellists described some of the tools and approaches that can be used for determining learning and career paths, readiness for work, and occupational “fit”.
  - **Tools for Assessing Learning and Work Readiness** – described two programs developed by Keyano College in partnership with Syncrude – the Effective Reading in Context (ERIC) that emphasizes safety and workplace reading and Syncrude Applied Math (SAM).
  - **The Linkage Model** – presented a training approach that is competency-based and promotes an entrepreneurial mindset and the skills necessary to achieve a sustainable livelihood.
  - **Integrated Document Use** – defined what document use is, what it includes and provided delegates with an exercise in document use that involved the interpretation of flowcharts.
- Copies of the presentations have been published in WWestnet’s report and resource guide for the conference entitled *WWestnet Presents Essential Skills and the Northern Oil and Gas Workforce*, which is available online at <http://www.bdaa.ca/wwestnet/index.html> .
- The conference concluded on the third day with a large group discussion hosted by a panel consisting of Elsie Casaway (Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, HRSDC), Margaret Imrie (VP Academic, Aurora College), and George Tucarro. Delegates were asked to consider a number of points and were asked two questions: “What did you hear that will be valuable in your life and in your work context?” and “What’s next?”.
- Delegates left the conference with a lot of information to digest and to use in working to develop and improve the workplace essential skills of the burgeoning northern workforce. ◆

# City of Grande Prairie Hosts Workplace Literacy/Learning Workshop



*Nancy Steel of Bow Valley College addressing delegates in Grand Prairie.*

The City of Grande Prairie, in partnership with the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) Literacy Project, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) National Literacy Project, and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), held a workshop for representatives of municipal management and unions on June 21-22. The goal of the event was ‘to raise awareness about municipal workplace learning and to assist management and labour in planning a municipal workplace learning program.’

Initially, the reasons for establishing workplace education and literacy programs revolved around health and safety, hiring policies that required a high school or equivalent diploma, and the introduction of new technology. Now, in our knowledge-based society, “literacy” has taken on a much broader meaning in municipal workplaces.

Municipal employees have to use information in new and more complex ways. They have to understand information and technology, and have the skill base to apply it. Critical thinking and problem solving on-the-job are essential in daily routines. These ‘literacies’, the skills needed to function successfully in today’s society and workplace, include information, media, visual and multicultural skills and are necessary components in municipal staff classifications. Local governments have problems attracting skilled workers and once the ‘baby boomers’ leave the workforce, there will be substantive labour shortages. Municipal corporations have to be prepared for this eventuality by putting in place workplace literacy and education programs that will assist municipal workers in upgrading their skill base, and keep it current in the knowledge-based work site.

Over the past several years, the CAMA and CUPE Literacy Projects have collaborated on a variety of initiatives, including these workshops. Workplace literacy is a major concern to both employers and unions and the collaboration ensures the success of workplace literacy/learning programs. It is a ‘win-win’ for both.

Representatives (managers and unions) of six municipal governments participated in the workshop as did representatives of Literacy Alberta, Grande Prairie Council for Life long Learning, Grande Prairie Regional College, Bow Valley College, CUPE National and AUMA. These organizations and agencies are committed to literacy and can support municipal workplace programs in the future. Nancy Steel (Bow Valley College), facilitated the workshop using the guide “Municipal Workplace Learning and the Community: Bridges to the Future” which was developed by the CAMA Literacy Project and used in nine locations across the country.

In introductory comments, Mayor Wayne Ayling and Dave Gourlay, City Manager spoke about the need to put the issue of ‘literacy’ on the table in Grande Prairie and other municipalities. Following an overview of municipal workplace education/literacy initiatives in Canada by Patricia Nutter, CAMA Literacy Project Director, Ms. Steel introduced the delegates to facts and information on literacy, IALS/ALLS reports and the skills necessary for today’s municipal workplace.

The workshop format took participants through a series of group activities. Discussions focused on:

- the benefits of workplace learning for labour and management
- building a positive learning model
- joint labour/management committees
- working together
- developing action plans for the future

We feel certain that the results coming from the Grande Prairie workshop will see the birth of several new workplace education/literacy programs in Alberta.

For further information about the CAMA Literacy Project, please contact Patricia Nutter at (613) 264-0111; the CUPE Literacy project, Sylvia Sioufi at (613) 237-1590. ◆

# Making Skilled Trades a Desirable Choice

By Wendy Magahay

Five of us sat around a picnic table listening to the Latin band playing at the Art Gallery fundraiser. We were three men and two women: a retired college professor, a construction company CEO, the director of continuing education for the school district, a manager in the provincial government's education ministry and me, a program coordinator at the college.

At first glance, you might think we'd all shared the same or at least similar career paths. Maybe a liberal arts degree, then teaching or professional credentials, followed later by an MA or an MBA. But you'd be wrong. While that was my path, the first three – the college prof, the CEO and the school district director – all began their careers as journeymen carpenters, and the fourth – the public servant – as a welder.

Increasingly, there is widespread agreement that Canada must continue to develop a highly skilled, adaptable workforce to counterbalance increasing skill shortages and the wave of boomer retirements. And yet, the perception still exists that trades offer second-rate, last-chance, or dead-end careers with little potential for advancement.

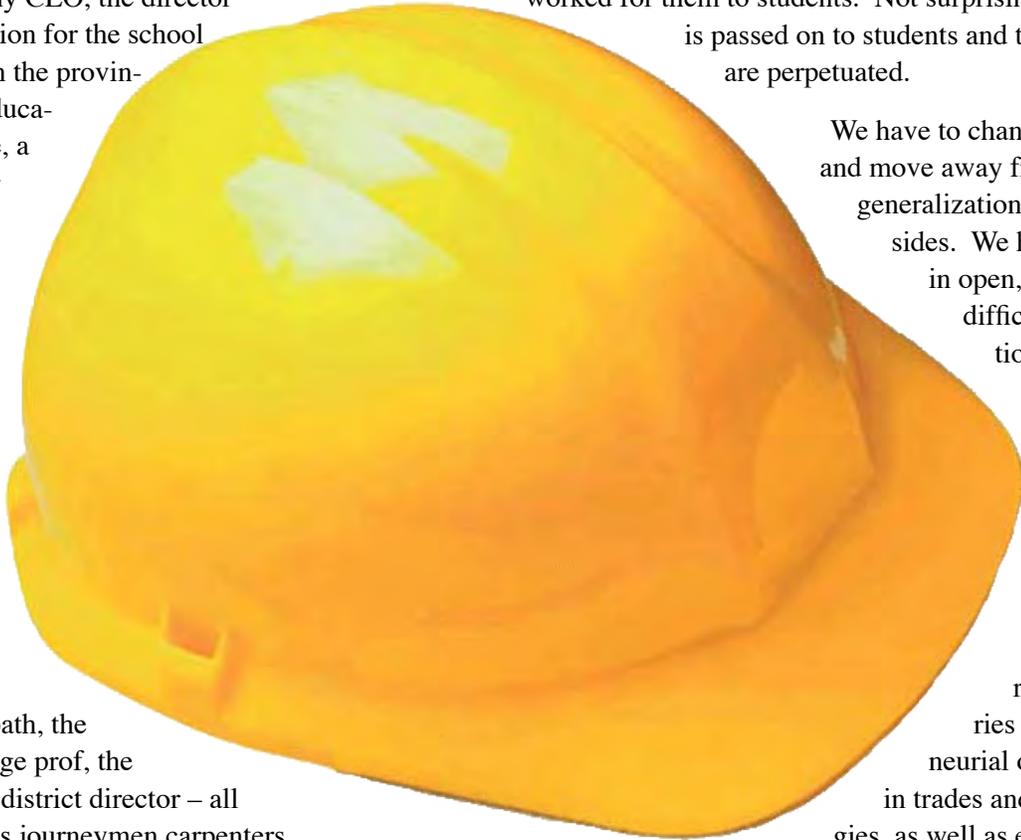
But the story above is true. The five people who sat at that picnic table are not kids, but between the ages of 40 and 65. So, what's going on? Why, with at least one generation of fantastically successful tradespersons to look to as role models, are there still persistent barriers to attracting young and returning workers to trades and technologies careers?

There are many reasons and some involve attitudes. Parental attitudes, firmly rooted in their own experience of the "university-for-all" of the 1970s, can be negative

either intentionally or unintentionally through ignorance. High school teachers and counsellors often share that same life experience and frequently recommend the path that worked for them to students. Not surprisingly, that bias is passed on to students and the stereotypes are perpetuated.

We have to change attitudes and move away from the generalizations on both sides. We have to engage in open, honest and difficult conversations about those attitudes and their devastating impact on our workforce and our economy. We need to raise awareness related to salaries and entrepreneurial opportunities in trades and technologies, as well as expose younger learners to positive role models from trades and technologies.

Let's have a conversation about non-university careers in a way that balances education and training priorities and respects all choices in post-secondary education. Who should we talk with? Those four people sitting with me around the picnic table would be a good place to start. ♦



*Wendy Magahay is the manager of Applications of Working and Learning (AWAL), a workplace essential skills project funded by HRSDC and managed through Camosun College, Victoria BC.*

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# Resources for Essential Skills Practitioners

## Reading at Work

*Reading at Work*, developed by SkillPlan, addresses the needs of those who want to improve their workplace reading skills through real-life situations. These learners can study on their own or in various instructional situations.

*Reading at Work* consists of two books, *Workplace Reader* and the *Facilitator's Guide*. They are part of the At Work series: Document Use, Numeracy, and Writing at Work. The Workplace Reader features stories about workers from six different occupations as they complete reading tasks at their jobs. Although these stories and tasks are content specific, the skills are transferable. Each chapter contains authentic workplace documents and tasks that mimic how the workers read at their workplace. By copying how the worker reads, learners can improve both their reading skills and the process to arrive at the answers to simple and complex reading tasks. The chapters vary in difficulty level and focus on skills such as locating information, comparing and contrasting, integrating, and evaluating information. The Reader is written in an informal style that connects to its audience using practical applications of reading text and document use.

The accompanying *Facilitator's Guide* provides additional material for instructors and builds on concepts introduced in the Reader. Lessons are organized to connect background knowledge to what learners read, to build

on learners' reading strategies and to give suggestions for further practice. *Reading at Work* is based on Dr. Peter Mosenthal's approach to reading theory and list structure. The project was developed with financial support from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and will be available in English and French.

Connections between Reading at Work and the information processing structure and strategies developed by Dr. Peter Mosenthal and Michael Hardt will be presented at a workshop from October 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> in Vancouver.

## Numeracy at Work

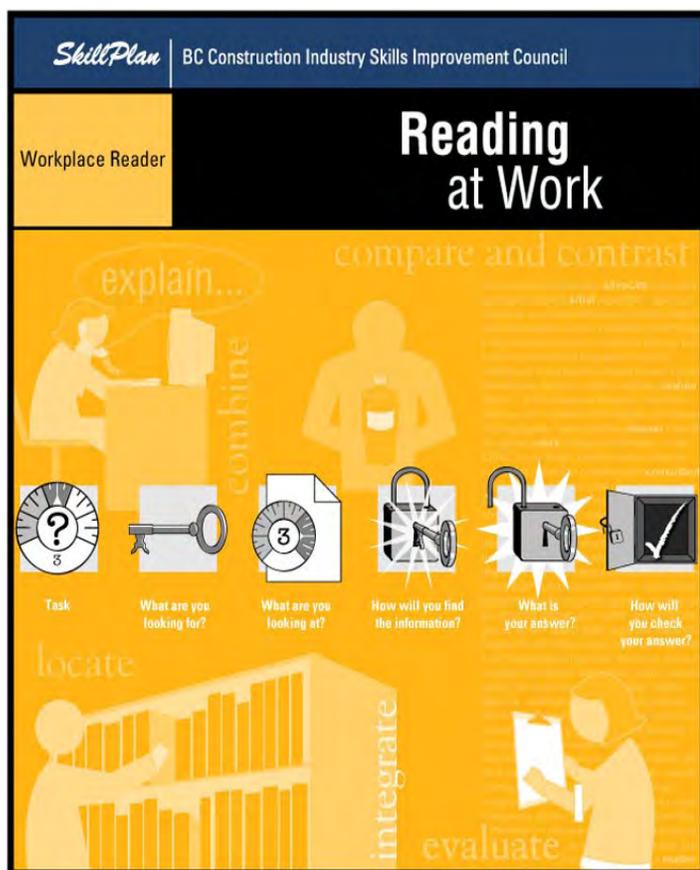
The use of the word numeracy suggests a new concept that is not limited to arithmetic, is different from mathematics, and is useful when discussing what goes on at work. It includes job skills and other essential skills such as problem solving and information gathering that are often used in fast paced 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.sdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential\\_skills/essential\\_skills\\_index.shtml](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential_skills/essential_skills_index.shtml).

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).

Both *Reading at Work* and *Numeracy at Work* were developed with funding from Human Resources Development Canada, and are available in English and French. For more information, contact SkillPlan by phone at (604) 436-1126 or online at [www.skillplan.ca](http://www.skillplan.ca). ♦



# Assessing Workplace Readiness

Dr. Sandra G. Pritz, Senior Consultant to  
The National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI)

Many U.S. school reform and economic development groups, such as the 21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs, High Schools That Work, and the National Skill Standards Board, have expressed concern that young people are struggling with the need to obtain the workplace readiness skills that are essential to compete for high-skill, high-wage employment opportunities. Business and industry require a workforce that has not only specialty skills, but also workplace readiness skills to enable them to stay competitive. The United States and Canada share these needs, as do all nations on the globe, ultimately.

Many educators are working to address workplace readiness deficiencies. Leaders from the assessment community can assist in this endeavor by establishing agreement on the standards to which curricula and accompanying

assessments should align. The National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) took up this challenge. NOCTI, a non-profit consortium comprised of all U.S. states and territories, has almost four decades of experience in designing and developing occupational competency tests and providing related services, all built upon nationally validated, workplace-based standards.

## What Are Workplace Readiness Skills?

The skills that result in effective job performance are what business and school reform groups call *Workplace Readiness Skills*. Their reports have identified needed workplace competencies, including personal qualities at the heart of effective job performance. These are grouped into the following critical employability skill areas:

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*Students practice workplace readiness skills involving technology for quality control.*

# Assessing Workplace Readiness

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- Communications
- Problem Solving & Critical Thinking
- Information Technology Applications
- Business & Organizational Systems
- Safety, Health & Environment
- Leadership, Management & Teamwork
- Ethics and/or Legal Responsibilities
- Employability and/or Career Development

These areas correspond to foundation skills for the initiative gaining momentum in the U.S. to provide cluster-based career-technical programs and assessments.

<http://www.careerclusters.org/>

## How Was the NOCTI Workplace Readiness Assessment Developed?

NOCTI conducted an in-depth, research-based examination of sets of competencies recommended by education officials, corporate human resource directors, and other experts in the field. Competencies and skill sets were identified that relate directly to business and industry needs. Attention was paid to the needs of states and local districts that offer career and technical education at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Further consideration was given to work-based learning and apprenticeship programs.

NOCTI validated and prioritized competency sets with national leaders as subject matter experts in focus groups, used evaluation experts to develop test items to assess student learning of the specific and agreed-upon skills, piloted the assessments, and analyzed the results statistically. Two parallel forms of the assessment were developed, plus a version for one-period administration and an adaptation for middle school. The assessment has been endorsed nation-

ally and has been adopted as the certification mechanism for SkillsUSA, a large U.S. student association. A Skills Assessment Guide with Practice Tests is also available through SkillsUSA, which offers students who pass the assessment a Workplace Readiness Certificate. The logos of a large number of partnering companies, such as Toyota and Caterpillar, appear on the certificate and enhance its significance.

## Is This Process Applicable Elsewhere?

The same or a similar process could be followed in Western Canada or elsewhere. In fact, it would be easier if the organization sponsoring such a process chose to start from the NOCTI competencies. The first step in that case would be to review the competencies with local business and industry representatives to ascertain which are relevant to their regional needs and to establish their priority order and weighting. Some may already have embarked on such an initiative independently.

NOCTI stands ready to work with organizations to help customize or assist with assessment for their needs. As a leader in student job ready and experienced worker occupational testing, NOCTI actively assists educators and employers in identifying occupational skills required of employees and in enabling assessment of job ready skills for workforce education and training. All individuals and companies stand to gain by the assessment of workplace readiness and subsequent activities to recognize strengths and address weaknesses in critical areas. More information is available at [www.nocti.org](http://www.nocti.org). *Dr. Pritz is available for comment at [spritz@nocti.org](mailto:spritz@nocti.org).* ♦

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