



Staying in the Game: Training for Workplace Trainers

GINNY CARPENTER

A group of educators from across Saskatchewan gathered in Saskatoon recently to learn how to adapt their knowledge and skills for workplace education programming. Sponsored by the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan (WECS), *Staying in the Game* was developed and delivered by Margerit Røger, a workplace education consultant from Winnipeg.

Participants learned how to conduct an Organizational Needs Assessment and a Literacy Task Analysis in a workplace, how to integrate, develop and adapt workplace materials into programs, and how to hold information sessions and focus groups. The group also learned how the differing perspectives of management, unions, and employees can affect workplace education.

One highlight was a panel discussion involving business and labour. Representing the business sector were Jodi Drury, Human Resources Director for the Delta Bessborough Hotel and Jamie McIntyre, Manager of Corporate Education and Training for Cameco. Barb Byers, President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour represented labour. Both sides emphasized the positive aspects of workplace education and discussed their company's or organization's particular needs and goals.

Tours of Intercontinental Packers and Flexicoil gave participants a look at what a 'real' workplace was like. The tours also allowed them an opportunity to view workplace reading materials such as signs, work orders, and equipment manuals, and to consider how these materials might be used in program development. The tours and questions sessions also gave the group an understanding of the priorities of business and how education of the workforce fits into a company's mission or mandate.

The training was very successful and created a group of competent, qualified instructors. In the future, the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan will promote these instructors to businesses interested in implementing workplace education programs.

The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan was established in May 1995 with the objective of furthering workplace education in the province. The Consortium has representation from business, labour, education and government. It is working on developing strategies for increasing awareness and accessibility to workplace education. For more information, please contact the WECS office in Regina (306) 777-6013. ❁

WWESTNET Represented at Mexican Conference

ROB DESPINS

WWESTNET members Sue Turner (Government of Manitoba, Literacy Office) and Rob Despins (Standard Aero Ltd, Winnipeg) attended an international conference in Guanajato Mexico called 'Formacion Basada en Competencia Laboral: Situacion Actual y Perspectivas' which roughly translates as 'Competency-Based Education: Present Status and Perspectives.' The conference was held from May 22 to 25, and was attended by 350 people from 31 countries. Objectives set for the conference were to debate the policies of standardization and approaches to competency based education, share experiences and successful undertakings from various countries, disseminate the Mexican strategy for labor market development, and examine the possibility of establishing an international network on these issues. Presentations were made from 11 countries including the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, Spain, Mexico, and Paraguay. Noteworthy presentations were made by Dr. Albert Tuijnman, from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on the International Literacy Survey (ILS); by George Nakitsas, Executive Director, Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress, on a successful and innovative approach to retraining for displaced steel workers; and

by WWESTNET members on a partnership approach to workplace education and the formation of the WWESTNET network. The conference debate was not restricted to competency-based education and it could have been more suitably titled 'Human Resource Development Issues and Approaches in the Global Marketplace.'

It was very apparent that the USA and Canada have taken a grassroots approach to training, letting partnerships between employers, unions, and governments drive the change process. European countries have maintained their central control structures, but have streamlined programming and bureaucracy to make the systems more responsive. The Mexicans recognize the huge undertaking in their country and used the conference to get feedback on their proposed initiatives. The evaluations of the conference were very positive and the Mexican organizers exceeded their initial expectations for the amount of interest from international participants. The conference was well organized and the 16th century town of Guanajato served as an ideal setting, allowing participants an insight into a culturally rich and historical Mexico. A copy of the full conference report can be obtained from Rob Despins, Operations Manager, Standard Aero Ltd. by faxing in a request at (204) 788-2719. ❁

Study Examines Literacy in Seven Countries

Some people will undoubtedly have little enthusiasm for another study showing that many Canadians adults can't read instructions or use the information in a simple line graph. However, the latest Statistics Canada literacy study correlates literacy with a host of other variables to give us our best information yet about how literacy is distributed within the Canadian population and how the attainment of Canadians compares with that of people in other industrialized countries.

StatsCan takes lead role.

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was organized to gather comparative data about adult literacy in seven industrialized countries. It was a massive research effort, and drew on the research expertise of seven national governments, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Union, and Unesco. It is the first time that researchers have directly tested large samples of adults from each participating country using scales which allow comparisons across different languages and cultures. Statistics Canada managed and coordinated the project.

Not one literacy; many literacies.

The approach used for IALS follows that used by Statistics Canada in its 1991 study of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities. In this survey, as in that one, three scales were used to measure ability in three domains. The first domain, *prose literacy*, includes the knowledge and skill to understand and use information in continuous texts such as editorials and news stories. *Document literacy* describes the skills and knowledge needed to locate and use information contained in a variety of document formats—maps, schedules, payroll slips, and entry forms. Lastly, *quantitative literacy* refers to the skills and knowledge required to apply arithmetic operations to numbers embedded in printed formats. Completing an order form or balancing a chequebook are typical tasks requiring quantitative literacy.

Measurement scales are divided into five literacy levels. Each level implies the ability to carry out a particular set of adult reading tasks. At level 1, workers are able to read and interpret only short selections of familiar text, while at level 5, workers can read dense and complex texts which often require considerable inference and specialized knowledge.

Many Canadians at lower literacy levels.

The International Adult Literacy Study validates earlier studies which showed that many Canadians have limited literacy. About 40% of the population fall within levels 1 and 2 on all literacy scales. To get a feel for what these levels indicate, the reader is advised to review the sample tasks included in the report. One level 2 question asks for some information which can be found by reading a plant care label from the greenhouse or nursery—basic information written for the general public. Needless to say, workers at, and below, this level of literacy will have great difficulty adjusting to a future economy which offers only jobs requiring high levels of reading and writing ability.

“Skilled craft workers differ noticeably from country to country. In the United States and Canada, between 25% and 30% of the craft workers are at level I (document scale), but in Germany only 7% are at this level. Similar large differences can be found on all the scales. This reflects the fact that entry into craft occupations in North America is relatively easy and often unregulated, in contrast to Europe where these occupations are usually subject to more rigorous entry requirements and/or certification based on demonstrated skill.

Stan Jones, IALS researcher.

Skill varies by industry, nationality, and age.

The study provides concrete evidence of the increasing skill demand in modern industrial economies. In growing industries such as personal and financial services, workers demonstrated literacy skill at high levels; workers in shrinking industries such as agriculture and manufacturing had the lowest average literacy ratings. Workers in these declining industries are less literate and less able to make the transition to other work.

There are some interesting differences between workers in different countries. German workers read more than Canadian workers. Germans reported reading a variety of workplace documents at rates 10%-15% higher than Canadian workers. Europeans generally scored higher on the document literacy scale and lower on the prose scale than their North American counterparts, a difference which is probably related to variations in the respective educational systems.

Schooling: the foundation for adult literacy.

The study confirms what most workplace educators and trainers know already; literacy is not a one-time accomplishment, but a skill which must be exercised or it will be lost. School provides a foundation for adult literacy, but without continued application to adult demands, literacy decreases. In Germany, literacy levels continue to increase after leaving school, with greater numbers of people at higher reading levels ten years after they finished school. In the United States, the proportion of people at the lowest literacy level increases with age. In Canada also, older people have lower skills than younger people with similar educational attainment. The study indicates that maintaining a high degree of literacy is a challenge not met by some individuals, and underlines the need for recurrent training to maintain skills.

When asked to assess their own skills, an overwhelming majority of people rated their skills as sufficient for work—even those who scored at level 1. Most people who were surveyed felt

that they needed more mathematics and better writing skills. The message for workplace program developers, who often stress reading 'literacy,' is that workers have a general need for a variety of basic skills and workplace education programs should present a variety of opportunities. It could also be that it is easier to admit that you need to upgrade your math, than to admit that you need to read better.

The study report, *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey* is a preliminary look at the data, so watch for further analysis. (Price - \$50.00, Contact StatsCan in Winnipeg at (204) 983-4020). ❀

"Literacy is, in effect, a relative concept that can be given meaning only in relation to the demands of the economy and society. Adults who are highly literate in terms of being able to understand and act upon a complex message contained in a text may be completely at a loss when other domains of literacy are considered. At a time when societal demands are growing, even those judged literate may require remedial education or skills upgrading.

Albert Tuijnman, Education and Training Division, OECD

Breakfast of Champions Salutes Business Commitment

On May 29, the Calgary Learning Centre hosted its annual 'Breakfast of Champions.' This year, the focus was on workplace basic skills training, and eighty people turned out at 7:30 a.m. to hear Lloyd Campbell, Senior Consultant, Syncrude Canada Ltd., talk about business trends that influenced his company's decision to offer basic skills training back in 1988. Lloyd's passion and experience combined to make his presentation a dynamic one. Lloyd identified several reasons why Syncrude continues to support programs which help workers to develop better reading comprehension. He identified the fast-paced technological change and the organizational re-engineering needed to stay competitive in a global marketplace as factors driving the demand for workers with superior reading skills.

The Breakfast was also not without its lighter moments. Poet Thomas Flagg recited a poem that soon had the listeners chuckling and remembering their favourite elementary school teacher. The event ended with a special presentation which recognized Imperial Oil's commitment and contribution to workplace literacy. The Calgary Learning Centre was pleased to dedicate the Centre's library copy of *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey* to Imperial Oil. ❀

Adult Education: A Comparison of Approaches

ELIZABETH THOMPSON

An exciting and challenging aspect of the field of basic education is the variety of ways basic skills upgrading is addressed. Perspectives and programs vary and, in a field where a wide range of individual needs must be met, a smorgasbord of offerings is important.

When a company needs to improve its training environment by addressing basic skills needs, it encounters significant differences between workplace basic skills upgrading and general adult education upgrading in areas such as English and mathematics. It is critical to understand the perspectives and capabilities of potential providers, to define what programs are needed, and to get service in a way that is most advantageous to the company and its employees.

Adult upgrading courses offered in community college and other programs across Western Canada are a common way for adults to continue an interrupted education. Many of these courses, while geared to adult learners, are general in nature and institutionally-based, that is, they are developed by educators and meet the requirements of the education system. Adult learners take these courses in a variety of ways: in traditional classes, by computer learning, or through distance education. Some are 'fast tracking,' by just reviewing academic learning skills and course material they have seen before; others are in for a long, sometimes discouraging, time while they struggle with effective learning skills and courses that may or may not have meaning for them. Course content is often a repeat of theory-based high school courses that still have little relevance for many learners. Account-

ability is to the learner in the context of the education system. This approach, although valid for many, misses the learning needs of a whole segment of the adult working population.

In contrast, workplace basic skills upgrading, while sometimes provided by educational institutions such as community colleges, is workforce-based and motivated by industry needs. Assessment of the basic skills needed by the job and work environment precedes assessment of worker's skills. Courses or other learning opportunities are developed in the context of the workplace, based on the language and culture of the workplace. Course developers, instructors, trainers and company experts work together to make sure the learning experience is relevant and educationally sound. The focus is on effective learning and application of skills in the workplace and feedback is direct. Accountability is to the learner in the context of industry and a life-long learning culture.

In the changing world of work where adaptability is a key and new learning is constant, many workers perceive that they do not have time to 'waste' learning what they do not need to know. An added factor for some is a reluctance to return to an education environment in which they may not have succeeded in the past. Learning what they need for work is different, more relevant, and more immediately applicable.

Workplace educators focus on recognizing the learners' needs in the workplace and offering the most appropriate solutions possible. For the learner, successful new learning can lead to more learning within, and beyond, the workplace. ❀

Canadians Attend Workplace Learning Conference

Tired of the late spring snow, Canadian delegates headed south to attend *Workplace Learning: The Strategic Advantage*, a conference held on April 28 and 29, 1996 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Centre on Education and Work, University of Wisconsin coordinated the conference, which drew together approximately 1000 delegates from the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Brigid Hayes, Program Consultant, NLS and Sue Follinsbee, ABC Canada, served on the planning committee for this event. Due to their participation and great promotional efforts, 70 Canadians registered and gave 20 presentations. Returning delegates reported that it was a useful and successful conference.

The Canadian delegation made quite an impact on the event. Margerit Roger, from Manitoba, made a presentation about the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee's *Advanced Certificate for Instructors in Workplace Education*, and was invited to make a presentation at a conference in Indiana later this year. Members of WESTNET were invited by the Consejo de Normalizacion y Certification de Competencia Laboral, Mexico City, to make the Milwaukee WESTNET presentation at an international conference to be held in Guanajato, Mexico, in May. Rob Despina and Sue Turner obliged and made an abbreviated presentation (See the article on page 1). ❁

Resources

Assessing Learning Difficulties in the Workplace. A.K. Todd, and Marilyn Samuels. (Mac or Windows)

This interactive CD ROM is a new learning tool which will help educators and human resource specialists to understand the issue of learning difficulties in the workplace. Produced by Alberta Vocational College - Calgary, the Calgary Learning Centre, and the University of Calgary, it should provide supervisors, workplace trainers, and human resource specialists with skills which will allow them to identify and assist employees who may be encountering literacy or learning difficulties. The CD uses actual cases to illustrate a problem-solving cycle which can be used to improve workplace performance. The examples on the disk demonstrate that a learning difficulty may manifest itself in a variety of forms, ranging from absenteeism to poor relationships with co-workers. Determining the real source of performance problems is the first step to solving them, and as the disk suggests, many problems are caused by learning difficulties.

The disk was premiered at AVC - Calgary on Friday, June 28, and received words of praise from Senator Joyce Fairbairn, who complemented the project coordinators, Anna Kae Todd and Marilyn Samuels for their innovative thinking and the use of technology to address the problem of assessing learning and literacy difficulties in the workplace.

For availability and cost for this CD and other related resources, contact the Department of Communications Media, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3709, Fax (403) 282-4497.

Building Skills, Building Business: Information Kit. The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan.

Subtitled, *Bringing Education into the Workplace*, this information kit is intended to introduce workplace education and basic skills issues to a Saskatchewan business audience. For more information about the kit, contact WECS at 2311 12th Ave., Regina, SK, S4P 3Z5.

The following new publications are available from ABC Canada. Order by phone (416 442-2292), fax (416 442-2293), Internet (abccanada@southam.ca), or mail (ABC Canada, 1450 Don Mills Road, Don Mills, ON, M3B 2X7)

Understanding Curriculum Development in the Workplace: A resource for Educators. Mary Ellen Belfiore.

This resource book provides a comprehensive view of a range of curriculum development approaches. The book has a rich sampling of case studies and provides some checklists for curriculum developers. (\$20.00)

Workplace Literacy in Canada: A listing of Providers. Wendy Johnston.

This listing provides contact names, addresses, and descriptions for workplace literacy programs and providers across Canada. It is a valuable networking tool. (\$20.00)

Principles of Good Practice in Workplace/Workforce Education: A Report on the Think Tank. Carol MacLeod.

This publication provides an account of the views and ideas offered during a 'think tank' event hosted by the National Literacy Secretariat and ABC Canada in November 1995. Contributions to the discussion were made by representatives from business, labour, education, workplace consultants, and government. Two versions of this report, a complete version and an shorter overview, are available free of charge from ABC Canada.

Coming up

Golf with Peter Gzowski

The seventh annual Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament for Literacy is just around the corner. This year, the event will be hosted by the Calgary Learning Centre. It will be held on October 3rd and 4th at the Willow Park Golf and Country Club. Funds from the PGI help to provide adult literacy consulting services to community agencies throughout the province, train volunteer literacy workers, and support information and referral services. For more information, call the Calgary Learning Centre, (403) 686-9300.

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

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