



## Construction Owners' Association of Alberta Completes Needs Assessment of Essential Skills

ELIZABETH THOMPSON

Building 'capacity' in the construction industry in Alberta includes addressing essential skills needs in this large and diverse workforce. The industry is the largest employer in the province, and is increasingly challenged to meet the demands of new projects, new management styles and new technologies. The foundation for change and new learning includes the skills of reading, writing, math, oral communication, and English as a Second Language. To determine areas to address during this time of change, the Construction Owners' Association of Alberta (the large companies and municipalities who use construction services) initiated a Needs Assessment of Essential Skills.

The Needs Assessment was conducted throughout the construction industry in Alberta during the winter of 1997. Teams of researchers in five areas of the province interviewed journeymen in over 20 trades, their employers, training personnel, and union representatives—about 200 contacts. The interview information, supplemented by an analysis of workplace materials and a literature review, focused on essential skills as used now, and as will be needed in the future.

*"There is an immediate and critical need to address the essential skills needs in the construction industry and to build on to the capacity of this strong workforce."*

Final Report: COAA Needs Assessment of Essential Skills

The Needs Assessment was initiated and directed by the Construction Owners Association of Alberta and funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development.

The Steering Committee for this project brought industry, labour, and government together in a working group. Brian Bickley and Lloyd Campbell of Syncrude Canada; Vair Clendenning, formerly of the Alberta Building Trades Council (now an international Representative of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers); and Carolyn Dieleman of Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development brought their expertise to the project. Brian and Vair also provided the link with the COAA Workforce Development Committee.

The research team comprised workforce educators from around the province, who expanded their industry contacts within their own communities and their knowledge of the construction industry. These links between essential skills providers and the industry mean more effective partnerships as the work of addressing essential skills needs continues.

The final report was presented to over 270 industry leaders (construction owners, contractors, and labour organizations) at the Construction Owners' Association of Alberta *Best Practices Workshop* in Edmonton in May. From this ambitious and unique initiative, recommendations are being taken to many segments of the industry, the workforce education community and the National Literacy Secretariat.

Copies of the Highlights of the Final Report or the entire report are available from the Construction Owners' Association of Alberta, Suite 1410, Oxford Tower, 10235 - 101 Street, Edmonton, AB, T5I 3C1. Telephone: (403) 420-1145 Fax: (403) 425-4623. \*



*"The initial research conducted with the COAA indicates that the (construction) industry requires a high level of literacy skills in the workforce. . . . No longer can the worker rely on the foreman and supervisors to do the paperwork and read all the documents."*

Final Report: COAA Needs Assessment of Essential Skills

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# WoodLINKS - An Innovative Industry/School Partnership

ROBERT FORREST

WoodLINKS is a new and innovative partnership between the wood products industry and the education system. WoodLINKS is intended to foster awareness among students, their parents, and teachers of the career opportunities available in wood products manufacturing.

WoodLINKS, with support from the industry-funded Forest Renewal BC, resulted from the cooperation of people in both the wood products industry and in the education system. Its efforts will help to create skilled entry level employees for industry and to provide needed job opportunities for youth. "We're here to promote student awareness of the good-paying career opportunities available in the industry", says Sandy Steward, one of three program directors with WoodLINKS. "We want to improve student, parent, and teacher understanding of the wood industry. We want them to understand more about the opportunities that are available."

## New Manufacturing Courses Developed

The efforts of WoodLINKS staff are already achieving results. Through co-operation with the provincial Ministry of Education two new wood manufacturing courses have been added to the senior secondary curriculum. This is the first time in British Columbia that industry representatives have had direct input into the content matter of a secondary school course which could directly affect the performance of their future employees.

To support these new courses, WoodLINKS has developed several tools to help teachers promote career opportunity awareness. A package of materials, *Wood-in-Box*, will help classroom educators teach about the industry. Materials in the package will include reference textbooks, sample products and industry videos among other things. The WoodLINKS group has also developed an Internet Website, [woodlinks.com](http://woodlinks.com), and an interactive CD-ROM which provide information on careers available in the wood products industry.

The heart of the Website and the CD-ROM consists of four databases that students can use to access information on careers in the wood industry. The four databases developed for the Website and the CD-ROM are a selection of job profiles for positions available throughout the North American wood products industry; colleges and universities in Canada and the US which offer programs and courses related to the industry; skills in demand in the wood industry; and a section which provides information and profiles of real companies in the wood industry.

WoodLINKS is fostering a strong level of cooperation between industry and schools at the local level. This industry-school partnership includes the sharing of resources and the support of workplace-based learning through a program of student and teacher industry internships. British Columbia has a work experience program in which every student must participate to graduate. In several schools where the wood manufacturing

courses are offered, WoodLINKS has actively supported industry-school partnerships which allow students to gain their work experiences in wood products manufacturing facilities.

For further information about the WoodLINKS project, contact Wilf Torunski at 6620 NW Marine Drive, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4. Phone (604) 822-0815. \*

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## Communicating across Cultures: Smile, Nod, and Misunderstand . . .

KAREN HAMMOND

"Why won't they tell me when they don't understand?" "She won't look at me when I'm talking to her" "We'd like to have his input, but he won't speak up..." In many workplaces where workers have limited English proficiency, comments like these are common. The necessity of translating instructions and dealing with workers' uncertain English skills adds another dimension to bottom-line issues like safety, quality, customer service and productivity.

*'Tran' was a highly valued employee at an international hotel. Wanting to recognize his significant contribution to the hotel, the personnel department honored him as 'Employee of the Month,' complete with photo feature of Tran in the main lobby. The very next day Tran submitted his resignation saying he could no longer work for the hotel. The baffled HR manager was left to wonder, "What happened?"*

Over the last decade, concerns about communicating with a workforce for whom English is a second language led more than 60 businesses to ask Alberta Vocational College - Calgary for *English in the Workplace* programs. In time though, it became obvious that 'their' language skills were only one side of the communication coin. Without realizing it, supervisors, trainers, and other workers were contributing to the problem. English-speaking staff needed to know what they could do to cross the language or culture gap.

The College's response to this need is *Communicating Across Cultures*, a hands-on course for anyone who regularly communicates with people from other cultures. Participants learn how to change patterns of speech, writing, body language, and training so that they get the right message across. Participants learn proven techniques with direct application to the workplace. Case studies like the hotel bellman who resigned the day after he had been chosen Employee of the Month, highlight cross-cultural differences in work values, roles and expectations. Understanding these differences and how to overcome them helps all parties to communicate effectively in the workplace.

For more information, contact Karen Hammond at AVC - Calgary, Tel: (403) 297 - 4776. \*

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# Saskatchewan's Mining Sector Pilot Project Establishes Educational Program

GINNY CARPENTER

In May 1996, Cameco, the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan, the Mineral Sector Steering Committee, The Prince Albert Grand Council, Northlands College, LaRonge and Northwest Regional College embarked on a 13 month long pilot project to determine the best workplace education model for program delivery in the mining sector. The pilot project will also provide an information base for other sectors in which workers follow irregular work schedules.

This pilot project took place at the Rabbit Lake Mine site in northern Saskatchewan. Phase 1 comprised an Organizational Needs Assessment. This was followed by Phase 2 which was the actual program delivery. The project had 36 participants registered with 30 completing courses. A learning centre was set up and participants dropped in, or had scheduled meetings with the instructor who was at the Rabbit Lake site for a straight two week period. The employees themselves work at the mine on a seven day in, seven day out schedule. They also rotate day and night shifts, which means that setting up a schedule to reach everyone is a challenge. A great deal depends on the employees' commitment to the program.

The pilot project ended in May, and Cameco has committed to continuing the program for its employees. Vivian Phelps, the instructor who implemented Phase 2, will continue to work at the learning center on a two week in, two week out schedule. Congratulations to Cameco for the effort it is putting into providing educational opportunities for its employees.

## Other Saskatchewan Updates

- The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's *WEST* program continues to provide many programs to organized labour within the province. One *WEST* program recently won a Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board's *Training for Excellence Award* in the area of Basic Skills Upgrading.
- The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan continues to be busy with the development and implementation of programs for non-union workers, training, promotion, and coordination throughout the province.
- A Small Business Needs Assessment has been conducted by six regional colleges, SIAST institutes and READ Saskatoon. The field work has now been completed and the final report is due this summer. This research will provide information on the needs of small business in Saskatchewan and generate ideas on how to make workplace education accessible to the small businesses which make up 85% of Saskatchewan's economy.

## Looking Ahead

Recent reports from the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Conference Board of Canada have raised the awareness level about workplace education among business and union leaders in Saskatchewan. The provincial government has recently introduced a training strategy which emphasizes essential skills upgrading and the need for education to be more responsive to business. This strategy also encourages partnerships and collaboration. Those involved with workplace education in Saskatchewan expect to see the commitment to, and implementation of, workplace education programs to increase in the near future. \*

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## Workplace Educators in Manitoba Form Professional Association

JUDITH HOLLIDAY

In a field that changes as quickly as workplace education does, support and contact between practitioners is essential. In Winnipeg, Manitoba, a group of independent consultants has joined together to form the Manitoba Association of Workplace Educators and Consultants (MAWEC). The established mission of the organization is the development and promotion of quality Workplace Essential Skills training and consulting. MAWEC's members want to develop professionally to keep pace with the changes that are occurring in the workplace. They want to work collaboratively to provide high-quality, responsive professional services to business, labour and industry. They also want to remain active participants in the growth of the field, contributing their expertise and experience to the development of future policies, issues and directions. The Association intends to provide relevant and high quality professional development events for its members, and to help establish the professional identity of workplace education providers in Manitoba.

With the help of funding from the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee, the Association is in the process of investigating an appropriate legal structure, developing an action plan, complete with long-term, short-term and immediate objectives, and compiling several data bases of local, national and international resources, publications and contacts. They have already hosted two highly successful professional development events: one in early June on Workplace Culture, facilitated by Bob Kent of Mansis Development Corporation; and another in late June on Document Literacy, facilitated by Sheila Whincup and Julian Evetts of *SkillPlan*.

MAWEC's work is continuing through the summer and they hope to have their legal structure in place in time for a fall launch and membership drive. For more information, write to: MAWEC, P. O. Box 2039, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 3R3. \*

## Coming Up

### Plain Language in Progress 1997 - Conference

September 24, 25, and 26 in Calgary

Sponsored by the Plain Language Consultants Network, this conference will bring together plain language professionals from government, education, and private industry. It is the second event organized by the group, and promises to be a worthwhile three days. Expressions of interest and presentation proposals have been received from 17 countries. The conference will also feature a trade show and exhibit section.

For more information, contact Janet Dean, Plain Language Partners, 320, 720 - 6<sup>th</sup> Street, New Westminster, BC, V3L 3C5. Phone: (604) 521-5473. e-mail: [jde@web.net](mailto:jde@web.net) \*

### Functional Context Education: Making Learning Relevant - A one-day workshop with Dr. Tom Sticht

Friday, October 3, 1997 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in Calgary

Tom Sticht is recognized internationally for his work on the education and training of undereducated youth and adults. He holds a Ph.D in psychology from the University of Arizona and has taught at numerous universities, including the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has published over 150 books and articles on the education of under-educated youth and adults. Dr. Sticht has served on the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS); the National Commission on Working Women; and he chaired the California Workforce Literacy Task Force. He is currently the President, Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc. for the San Diego Consortium for Workforce Education & Lifelong Learning. Articles on Dr. Sticht's work have appeared in newspapers and magazines including, among many, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the London Times and the Wall Street Journal.

Workshop contact: Catherine Bruce, Alberta Vocational College Calgary, 332 - 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue S.E., Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2G 4S6. Tel: (403) 297 - 4932 e-mail: [cbruce@avc.calgary.ab.ca](mailto:cbruce@avc.calgary.ab.ca) \*

### Taking Charge - 1997 ATESL Conference

October 17 - 18, 1997 in Calgary

This conference will focus on "Taking Charge" of your classroom, career, learning, technology, finances, and health. Guest speakers include Dr. Tara Goldstein from the O.I.S.E., University of Toronto and Catherine Ford from the Calgary Herald.

For more information, contact Sharon George, ATESL Conference Chair, phone (403) 297-4062 or Joan Baker, Program Committee, ATESL Conference, phone (403) 240 - 5512. \*

### Calgary Learning Centre Summer Institute: "Literacy: Putting the Pieces Together"

August 18 - 20, 1997 in Calgary

Topics covered will include literacy in the home, school, and workplace; multicultural issues and literacy; learning issues and literacy. The sessions will feature Senator Joyce Fairbairn, Dr. Carl Braun, Dr. David Watt, and Catherine Ford. Registration fee is \$250; however, a reduced fee of \$75 is being offered to volunteer literacy coordinators, volunteer literacy trainers and tutors throughout Alberta. If you are interested in taking advantage of this offer, contact Noelle Piquetta-Tomei at (403) 686-9300. \*

### Moving Forward: A Forum on Workplace Education

November 30 to December 2, 1997 in Toronto

Organized by the Workplace Education Centre at ABC Canada, this conference is an opportunity for individuals involved in workplace education to share ideas, explore issues, and enhance knowledge by getting the latest information available. The conference should provide a forum for debate on key policy and program issues that affect workplace education, and an opportunity for information-sharing and exchange around different regional initiatives and program models. For further details, contact the Workplace Education Centre, ABC Canada, 1450 Don Mills Rd., Don Mills, ON. Ph: (416) 442-2292 \*

## Resources

### Connect: The National Newsletter for Technology & Adult Literacy

This new newsletter should be of interest to literacy practitioners who use computers for teaching and learning activities. It contains reviews of software, reports from innovative programs using computers, comments from adult learners, and sample lesson plans. The newsletter is very readable, and clearly aimed at the typical instructor or tutor rather than the computer 'expert.'

A subscription costs \$5.00 per year. Contact: Pauline McNaughton, Continuing Education Centre, Ottawa Board of Education, 515, Cambridge St. South, Ottawa, ON, K1S 4H9. Phone; (613) 239-2429. \*

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c/o Julian Evetts, #103, 1720-13<sup>th</sup> St. S.W., Calgary, AB, T2T 3P4, Phone (403) 541-1367. Fax (403) 541-1835

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