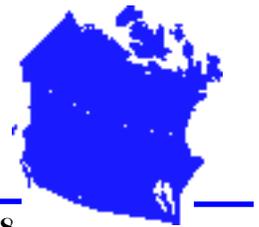


the bottom line



WWESTNET - Western Canada Workplace Essential Skills Training Network No 9, May 1998

African Project Promotes Workforce Literacy

MARGUERITE ABBOTT

Bow Valley College (formerly Alberta Vocational College - Calgary) is in the first year of a four year Canadian International Development Agency funded initiative known as Entrepreneurial Skills Promotion or ESP. The College is working with its partners—Atteridgeville College in Pretoria, South Africa and Mupfure Self Help College in Chegutu, Zimbabwe—to create a vocational training model, applicable across southern Africa. The ESP model is based upon a vocational/production training approach where skills-based technical instruction is combined with “hands-on” entrepreneurial experience. Learners actually

has invited labour to become a partner in the project. In March, Ian Thorn representing the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, and the Canadian Labour Congress traveled to Zimbabwe and South Africa with Pat Salt, Bow Valley College’s ESP project manager. The purpose of the trip was to interview union representatives and decision-makers in order to determine training needs. In just over two weeks, Ian and Pat spoke to more than twenty people, including the Education Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU); the African Director of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions (ICEM);

the training director for the South African Atomic Energy Commission; and the Zimbabwean Minister of Advanced Education. It was very apparent to Ian and Pat that Canadian labour and its training practices are extremely well respected in southern Africa.

Of particular interest to all parties was WWESTNET’s multi-sectoral approach to workforce literacy. In a round table co-hosted by Atteridgeville College, Bow Valley College and Canadian labour (attended by representatives from South African business, labour and government), there was considerable interest in developing a workshop addressing this training model. Both South Africans and Zimbabweans were also keen to learn more about Canadian programs that use an integrated, contextualized approach to essential skills training, especially one that incorporates entrepreneurship.

Over all, the trip to Africa was a great success, and several preliminary plans are on the table including a training needs assessment with the Associated Mine Workers of Zimbabwe and a joint project with COSATU.

Another significant ESP accomplishment has come in the form of a spin-off project addressing children’s literacy. Through Bow Valley College’s involvement with Mupfure, Zimbabwe, a



ESP Project participants, from left to right, Shele Papane, COSATU; Norman Allkins, Atteridgeville College; Pat Salt, Bow Valley College; Ian Thorn, Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada; and Meryl Plasket, National Union of Mineworkers.

operate their own businesses on campus under the guidance of college staff. ESP provides a value-added by integrating training addressing entrepreneurship, employability skills and workforce literacy. ESP also advocates respect for human rights and gender equity through its promotion of gender issues awareness.

One of the central goals of ESP is to build capacity within the developing country colleges so they can become key players in facilitating educational change. In order to maximize impacts, ESP

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Work Starts on New Test of Essential Skills

CONRAD MURPHY

With support from the National Literacy Secretariat, *SkillPlan* (BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council) and Bow Valley College (formerly known as the Alberta Vocational College - Calgary) are joining forces to develop a new, 'made in the workplace' tool which will accurately measure important dimensions of essential skills in the Canadian workplace. The partners, together with others in the field, will pool their expertise and experience to create a new skill assessment tool called the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES). It will assess individual ability in the areas of textual reading, document use and quantitative literacy. These three key dimensions to literacy have been found to be closely linked to success in the workplace.

For some time, adult educators, colleges, employers and employees have been searching for an effective method to assess cognitive ability in critical areas such as reading, document use, and numeracy. These essential competencies are the 'enabling' skills which are required to perform most job tasks. They also provide workers with the foundation for learning technical and trade skills and are therefore key factors in adapting to workplace change. TOWES will be more valid and appropriate than existing tests, all of which were developed for other audiences or other contexts. It will be significantly different from other tests of basic skills in that its content will be based on workplace documents and item responses will mimic workplace tasks.

The TOWES project team will use the knowledge gained from two recent research projects carried out by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada. The first, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), demonstrated how literacy skills can be assessed through performance testing. The second, the Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP), identified those essential skills that workers need to do their jobs. Both research efforts used the same cognitive model of literacy and a similar five point scale to measure literacy skills and the complexity of tasks in the workplace.

Using the TOWES assessment, and the ESRP methodology, educators will be able to accurately gauge the skill requirements of the workplace and to compare this with an assessment of workers' skills. These measures will provide a precise determination of training and development needs. TOWES will be a made-in-Canada solution, using internationally validated scales.

The partners are pleased to have the assistance of Stan Jones, a consultant with Statistics Canada, to provide his expertise to the project. The TOWES team will also be guided by a national advisory committee which will comprise sectoral councils, educators, labour and business.

Jim Lippert, Executive Director of *SkillPlan*, commented, "Workers need essential skills to cope with the ever-changing demands of the workplace. They (essential skills) are the 'Velcro' to which other training sticks. Workers need these skills to stay employed and to keep their workplaces competitive. TOWES is a tool to make that happen."

Sharon Carry, President of the Bow Valley College said, "Bow Valley College is pleased to be part of this project which will move workforce development forward. Our College may have a new name, but we have a long history of workplace essential skills training. Once the development of TOWES is completed, we anticipate that it will be a cornerstone of our new Skills Assessment Centre."

If you would like further information or wish to receive the project newsletter, contact Lynda Fownes at *SkillPlan* Phone: (604) 436-1126 E-mail: skilplan@axionet.com or Conrad Murphy at Bow Valley College; Phone: (403) 297-4929 E-mail: cmurphy@avc.calgary.ab.ca ❀

Africa - from p.1

partnership between W.O. Mitchell Elementary School in Calgary and Hartley #1 Primary School in Zimbabwe has formed. The children correspond with each other, and W.O. Mitchell students recently raised money to purchase reading materials for Hartley (the school had no reading library). In March, Pat and Ian delivered eight duffel bags of books to Hartley (heartfelt thanks to Canadian Airlines International and British Airways which waived excess baggage restrictions). However, there are still many more boxes of books and teaching resources to be sent. Bow Valley College is currently seeking corporate or union sponsorship for this initiative to cover the costs of postage and shipping (to date, teachers and students have financed the project out of their own pockets). ❀



A student from Hartley # 1 School reads one of the books donated by students at W.O. Mitchell school in Calgary.

Flint Takes Workplace Writing to the Internet

MARILYN LUFT

Flint Canada Inc. has recently introduced a workplace writing course with a difference; e-mail provides the communication link between participant and instructor. Flint is an Alberta-based contractor with satellite operations in over twenty locations in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Northwest Territories. By turning to the electronic classroom, Flint is able to offer the course to employees in all Operation Centres, regardless of distance. This also opens the doors to employees whose work hours fluctuate greatly, a fact of life in the construction and oil field business.

The focus of this course is the development of effective business writing skills for managers, supervisors, and clerical staff. Participants are able to practice their skills on a number of writing assignments, using the Flint format and basing the writing on actual workplace situations. Assignments are e-mailed to the instructor who in turn e-mails back comments. Telephone consultations are used as needed. The next step is to introduce on-line discussions.

Effective Business Writing was developed and is being delivered by Marilyn Luft of Red Deer, Alberta. She is the author of the course manual and is the instructor at the other end of the computer. Response to the course is positive. Employees appreciate the opportunity to practice their writing skills without leaving the workplace, as well as the flexibility to work on the course whenever their job allows them a window of free time.

Flint Canada is not new to the field of workplace literacy. Six years ago, with the facilitation of Marilyn Luft, the company began its Skill Training Enhancement Program (STEP), specifically designed to address a shortfall in literacy skills. STEP is a

voluntary program for employees wishing to develop their essential skills. To overcome the barriers of distance and work hours, delivery is by professional on-site tutors, coordinated by Marilyn.

Flint's belief in the benefits of such a program to the company is underscored by the fact that the company fully funds all STEP programs, including the new online writing course. John Richmond, Manager of Human Resources for Flint Canada states that the success of STEP "can be measured by the sense of accomplishment and self confidence noted by our participating employees." He adds that the STEP program "has grown to be one of the most appreciated employment benefits offered within our organization."

For further information about the Flint program, please e-mail Marilyn Luft at: mluft@telusplanet.net. ❁

AFL Begins Worker Literacy Project

NANCY STEEL

In 1992, the Alberta Federation of Labour launched the Worker Literacy Initiatives Research Project. The goal of this project was to conduct a survey among affiliate union members to learn what they perceived to be the literacy demands of their workplace, and the level of their ability to meet those demands in the face of the ever-changing world of work.

The new 1998 Worker Literacy Project builds on the work done in 1992, and extends it into new directions. The first part of the project will organize and orient a group of key union people in a variety of workplaces to the issue of literacy, and prepare them to undertake update interviews of members' thinking about literacy today. These findings will be reported, and the relationship, if any, of these findings to International Adult Literacy Survey findings will be identified.

Another aspect of the 1998 project will be to enhance labour education curriculum by incorporating literacy skills development into the existing content. Labour education courses, offered once a year to develop members' skills, include topics like Arbitration, Collective Bargaining, and Health and Safety, all of which require the participant to have effective reading comprehension, writing, and math skills. This 'integrated' approach to refreshing literacy skills in the context of content learning will also require that labour educators learn fundamental approaches to literacy instruction, and so instructor training in this area will also be a component of the project.

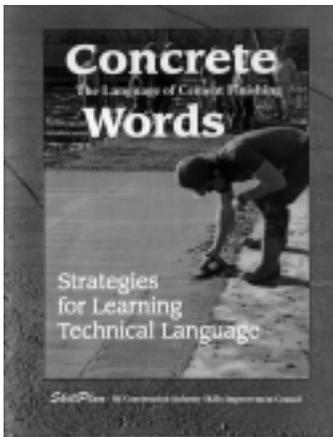
This project is being conducted by the AFL in partnership with Bow Valley College, and is supported by the National Literacy Secretariat. For more information, please contact: Felice Young, Alberta Federation of Labour, 483-3021; or Nancy Steel, Bow Valley College, 297-4777. ❁

City of Calgary Opens New Education Centre

City of Calgary employees now have another option for workplace education and training. In early March, the City opened the Victoria Park Learning and Technology Centre. The new learning centre features a classroom with space for twenty people and a twelve station computer lab with up-to-date pentium computers and fast internet access. Located in the office section of one of the Transit department's huge 'bus barns,' it is well serviced by public transportation and close to major City departments—Streets, Engineering, Waterworks—in the nearby Manchester yards. The learning centre offers adult basic education, high school upgrading, GED, and apprenticeship preparation courses during evening and afternoon hours. In the computer lab, City workers can take a range of introductory-level computer and software courses. When not in use for the regular adult education program, the centre will be open for any City department wishing to stage its own training events. ❁

Resources

Thompson, Elizabeth. (1998). *Concrete words—the language of cement finishing: Strategies for learning technical language*. Burnaby, BC: SkillPlan



Concrete Words is a practical guide to learning vocabulary in the skilled trades, using the cement finishing trade to illustrate the process. It came about as the need for increased formal technical training and certification became a reality for all cement finishers. Skilled tradespeople who know the physical work and are expert 'readers' of concrete are also taking classes, studying manuals, and writing exams. Many find the shift from job

skills and knowledge to the written language of their trade a challenge. They are accustomed to doing the job, not talking about it.

This new volume describes a particularly effective way to marry the expertise of the content expert and the workplace educator. The term workplace educator refers to a professional who specializes in the learning of the essential skills of reading, writing, and math in the context of the workplace. They add their expertise to the extensive knowledge and skills of tradespeople and trades instructors as they prepare to meet the training demands of industry.

Concrete Words was originally written for workplace educators who specialize in English as a Second Language and who are assisting cement finishers to challenge a trade qualification exam. This expanded edition of *Concrete Words* uses the model of the cement finisher course to show how workplace educators can participate in the process of learning with workers and instructors in other trades and occupations. ❀

Lewe, Glenda. (1998). *Quicksands: Sidestepping the quality quicksands Setting continuous improvement on bedrock*. Ottawa: Culture Concepts Publishers.

WARNING! There are quicksands out there ready to swallow up your 'total Quality' initiatives. Glenda Lewe, M.P.A. has spent the past several years exploring 'total quality' projects and management in many industries cited in the book. A former student of Dr. W. Edwards Deming, she has been one of the first Canadian researchers to champion the learning link that successfully binds 'continuous quality improvement' to 'bedrock skills development'. In her latest book, you will find out how to use 'bedrock skills development' to sidestep the quality quicksands.

Quicksands is recommended reading for everyone in business or industry who asks, "What is missing from quality improvement initiatives?" Find out, as many managers already have, that without continuous individual improvement, there can be no

effective continuous quality improvement. This insightful volume is also for educators and facilitators offering workplace essential skills upgrading programs. Concrete examples combine incisive analysis with sharp insights into the invisible spoiler of Quality programs. All training rests on fundamental 'bedrock skills.'

Available from Culture Concepts. Ph: (416) 245-8119 Fax: (416) 245-3383 www3.sympatico.ca/cultureconcepts. ❀

Essential Skills on the Net

For the past several years, Human Resources Development Canada has been developing 'Essential Skills Profiles' for a wide range of occupations. Each profile describes how essential skills are used in a particular Canadian occupation (the occupational descriptions are taken from the National Occupational Classification). Essential Skills are those skills that are found in virtually all occupational areas, though their specific form or level of complexity may vary. This can be illustrated for writing. Workers in one occupation may merely have to fill out simple forms, while another occupation may require the writing of reports. However, virtually all occupational areas require some ability to write.

This job-specific information will be of particular interest to course & curriculum developers, trainers, teachers, guidance & career counsellors, employers, parents, students and occupational researchers. For more information, please check out the Human Resources Development Canada Web site at:

<http://www.globalx.net/hrd>

Coming Up

Literacy B.C. Summer Literacy Institute

July 12 to July 25, 1998

The Institute will be held at the Simon Fraser University, Burnaby Campus. The institute is open to literacy practitioners from British Columbia, the Territories and the Western provinces. The following three streams are being considered:

1. Family Literacy Development and Training;
2. Volunteer Tutor Program Development & Coordination; and,
3. Community Based Literacy Development and Practitioner/ Classroom Based Research).

For more information please contact Jean Rasmussen at 622-510 West Hastings St. Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8. Phone (604) 684-0624 Fax (604) 684-8520 Toll free in BC 1-800-663-1293 or email at: literacy_bc@douglas.bc.ca

<http://www.nald.ca/lbc.htm>

This newsletter is funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. Submissions to *the bottom line* should be sent to WWESTNET:

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

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