

REACHING FOR THE
**Tipping Point
in Literacy**

A Pan-Canadian Invitational Roundtable
February 4 and 5, 2008
Ottawa, Ontario

ADULT LEARNING
KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

WORK AND LEARNING
KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

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Disclaimer

The opinions and conclusions expressed in the document are those of the individuals who participated in the *Reaching for the Tipping Point on Literacy* roundtable, and do not necessarily reflect the views of either the Canadian Council on Learning's Adult Learning Knowledge Centre or the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre.

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List of Acronyms

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AdLKC	Adult Learning Knowledge Centre
ALLS	Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey
CAMA	Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
CCL	Canadian Council on Learning
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CME	Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
EI	Employment Insurance
EU	European Union
FLMM	Forum of Labour Market Ministers
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
MCL	Movement for Canadian Literacy
NLS	National Literacy Secretariat
NSSAL	Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning
OLES	Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (HRSDC)
PISA	Programme of International Student Assessment
SLC	Saskatchewan Literacy Commission
SLFDB	Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board
SLMC	Saskatchewan Labour Market Commission
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
TOWES	Test of Workplace Essential Skills
WILM	Workplace Informal Learning Matrix
WLKC	Work and Learning Knowledge Centre

Welcome from the Lead Agencies

Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy is the first time that the Canadian Council on Learning's Adult Learning Knowledge Centre and the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre have formally partnered on a knowledge exchange event. This collaborative effort has been tremendously successful. As the lead agencies supporting the two centres, we are very pleased to provide you with this report.

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research to improve all aspects of learning—across the country and across all occupations.

CCL has identified five key areas of learning in Canada that require urgent attention and has created five Knowledge Centres to help address them. The key areas identified by CCL are: Aboriginal Learning, Adult Learning, Early Childhood Learning, Health and Learning, and Work and Learning. These knowledge centres play a key role in supporting CCL's work, which includes monitoring, reporting, research, and knowledge exchange.

Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (AdLKC)

Led by the University of New Brunswick, CCL's Adult Learning Knowledge Centre was established to address issues related to a broad spectrum of adult learning activities encompassing formal and informal learning. The knowledge centre recognizes that Canada's engagement with lifelong learning will require collective efforts to transform an idea into a concrete reality. As described in a 2002 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there is a significant lack of coordination among adult learning programs in Canada, resulting in systems that are fragmented and disconnected. The gap occurs between federal and provincial governments, as well as between the public and private sectors. The Adult Learning Knowledge Centre is working with adult learning organizations across the country to develop a culture of learning that is accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs and interests of all Canadians as individuals, as communities, and as a nation. Recognizing that adult learning is a complex and diverse area with multiple stakeholders and affected parties, the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre is working to develop a better understanding of the role of lifelong learning in economic productivity, social equity, and civic engagement.

Judith Potter
University of New Brunswick

Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC)

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) are the lead agencies for the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre. In today's knowledge-based economy, Canadians cannot afford to stop learning after they leave the formal school system. In many cases, individual success and satisfaction in the workplace depends on continual learning in order to upgrade skills and acquire new knowledge.

CCL's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre was created to help ensure that Canadians continue to learn for work and from work, and to improve their opportunities for a successful and fulfilling career. Drawing together a network of over 160 organizations in the work and learning domain, WLKC's purpose is to identify and capture existing knowledge on workplace learning, package it and use it to influence the learning decisions of key stakeholders groups in the labour market.

Ken Georgetti
Canadian Labour Congress

Jayson Myers
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters

Introduction

On February 4 and 5, 2008, the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre and the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre, initiatives of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), organized an invitational, bilingual, pan-Canadian roundtable—Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy. More than 80 experts met in Ottawa for an informed and insightful dialogue about how to achieve improvements in the area of literacy. Participants included representatives from the literacy movement, community-based organizations, business, labour, policy-makers, and researchers.

Literacy is one of CCL’s crosscutting themes and an area of significant expertise for both knowledge centres. CCL has adopted a broad definition of literacy that recognizes the reading, writing, and numeracy skills needed to cope with everyday tasks, thus enabling people to thrive in a knowledge economy. CCL’s State of Learning report has laid out a clear path for action:

Canada’s literacy challenges will not be met without the active involvement of all sectors of society. While governments can provide leadership and resources, they cannot solve these problems on their own. The commitment and effort of families and individuals and of the private and non-governmental sectors are also required.

Each knowledge centre brings a valuable and unique perspective to the challenge of literacy, based on their collective experiences and resources. The arena of adult learning brings a community development and social equity perspective; workplace learning considers the impact on productivity and the greater social as well as economic inclusion of Canadians through work-related learning opportunities.

The “tipping point” motif was used to describe the current situation—the literacy issue is on the brink of change. Starting with the premise that improving Canada’s literacy record is a shared responsibility, the participants focussed on developing ideas to inform diverse sectors, encourage tangible actions and achieve progress. The emphasis was on reviewing the current state of literacy in Canada and on identifying effective actions.

Many thanks are owed to the planning committee, keynote speakers, and expert panellists.

This report contains the highlights and key findings of the event. We hope that you will use it to guide additional conversations in your own region or within your own sector.

Key Outcomes and Conclusions

- The goal of full literacy for all Canadians has not been met. Nine million Canadians, 42% of the population (aged 16 to 65), are still below level 3, the minimum considered necessary to function effectively in a knowledge-based society.
- There was agreement that the International Adult Literacy and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills surveys have served the literacy issue well and have assisted in putting literacy on the public agenda. However, the tendency to combine level 1 and level 2 of the literacy scales into one number (“42 %”) has resulted in considerable confusion. This number does not resonate with the Canadian public, who seem to find it hard to believe. In addition, it does not distinguish between the varying needs of people at the lower levels of literacy.
- The word “literacy” itself may be misleading or may not convey the complexity of modern-day literacy. Some favoured linking literacy to a message of lifelong learning that would appeal to a broader group. Others argued for a focus on individuals with major literacy challenges.
- Advocates of literacy need an “elevator speech”—i.e. a short, clear, and concise message about the main issues related to literacy.
- Crafting the message that “sticks” is a challenge—the message must be clear and concise. Participants proposed a variety of approaches, including:
 - using an alarmist message to convey a sense of crisis;
 - focussing on a doable task, such as raising people at level 2 to level 3;
 - using economic arguments, e.g., gain in productivity, return on investment, increase in GDP;
 - linking literacy to issues of poverty, health, citizenship, and participation.
- Some participants favoured an approach that would see different messages crafted for different audiences, while others argued this would diffuse the message.
- Champions—influential people with visibility and credibility—are needed to spread the message.
- Suggestions were made for tool kits for employers, more success stories, and mechanisms to share information and knowledge.
- Participants called for an ongoing forum to keep the conversation going to develop an action plan that engages all sectors. A group of committed people could help lead the process by developing a multi-sectoral plan of action.
- Participants called for another meeting to develop the message and communication methods and tools, facilitated by a communications expert.

Agenda

Monday, February 4, 2008

OPENING SESSION

Welcome from the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre and the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre
*Alex Stephens, Coordinator, Work and Learning Knowledge Centre and Dr. Kathleen Flanagan,
Coordinator, Adult Learning Knowledge Centre, Canadian Council on Learning*

Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy — an overview
Bill Stirling, Vice President, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Newfoundland & Labrador Division

PLENARY SESSION

Views from the Mavens
Moderator: Barbara Byers, Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress

Literacy Data and Implications — what do we know? *Scott Murray, DataAngel*

Literacy Policy — what do we know? *Dr. Allan Quigley, St. Francis Xavier University*

Provincial Perspectives — what is happening on the ground?
*Bobbi Boudreau, Director, Skills and Learning Branch, Province of Nova Scotia
Dr. Margaret Lipp, Commissioner, Saskatchewan Literacy Commission*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS #1 — Where are we and where do we want to go?

KEYNOTE SPEECH: *Judith Maxwell, Senior Fellow, Canadian Policy Research Networks
Moderator: Robert J. Giroux, Chair, Board of Directors, Canadian Council on Learning*

Tuesday, February 5, 2008

PLENARY SESSION

The Stickiness Factor — Perspectives from Other Vantage Points

Moderator: Dominique Ollivier, directrice générale, Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes

An analysis from a change management point of view

Alan Kay, The Glasgow Group, Change Consultant, ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation board member

An analysis from a communications point of view

Fernan Carrière, directeur des communications, Fédération canadienne d'alphabétisation en français

An analysis from a local point of view: reflections on how one community reached the tipping point

Michelle O'Brien, Project Coordinator, Town of Fort Erie Learning Community Project, Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS #2 — The Stickiness Factor

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS #3 — The Law of the Few

FINAL PLENARY

Where do we go from here?

Moderator: Jayson Myers, President, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters

Synthesis and Impressions

Chantal Ouellet, Professeure, Département d'éducation et formation spécialisées, directrice des programmes d'enseignement en adaptation scolaire et sociale, Université du Québec à Montréal
Nadine Valk, Senior Program Specialist, Crosscutting Themes, Canadian Council on Learning

Next Steps — Facilitated discussion

Closing Remarks *Kathleen Flanagan and Alex Stephens*

Opening Session

The session moderators, Kathleen Flanagan and Alex Stephens, Coordinators of the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre and the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre, opened the roundtable with a joint presentation.

The coordinators pointed out, although the mandates of the two knowledge centres differ, literacy is a shared priority. Whether the issue is adult learning with its focus on community and personal development, or work-related learning with its focus on skill development and economic productivity, literacy is a core issue and a core challenge. For this reason, the knowledge centres joined forces to convene a knowledge exchange event on literacy.

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) has identified literacy as a crosscutting theme across the entire scope of its activities. CCL's 2007 State of Learning Report, which states that improving Canada's adult literacy levels is everybody's business, provided further reason for the two knowledge centres to facilitate a joint, evidence-based, knowledge exchange event..

Numerous data-driven publications have painted a discouraging picture of progress in literacy attainment in Canada. These have combined with serious emerging social and economic concerns about inequitable access to adult learning opportunities and growing challenges in the labour market, such as skills shortages and the need to develop a highly skilled workforce. The time to achieve the tipping point in literacy is now.

The roundtable was designed to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to reflect on the evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, and to identify effective actions that could be undertaken by all sectors of Canadian society.

The coordinators indicated that the knowledge centres will continue to play a role in convening key stakeholders to engage in knowledge exchange and evidence-based dialogue on this issue. They are committed to ensuring that there are ample opportunities for productive dialogue.

Reaching for the Tipping Point — An Overview

Bill Stirling, Vice-President, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Newfoundland and Labrador Division, suggested using the “tipping point” as a metaphor for the roundtable. Mr. Stirling presented the key notions of the ‘tipping point’, as expressed by author Malcolm Gladwell and shared some of his own thoughts on how the ‘tipping point’ concept can be applied to the literacy issue in Canada.

In 2000, Malcolm Gladwell wrote, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*¹. The term used in the book was drawn,

“... from the world of epidemiology. It is the name given to that moment in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass. It is the boiling point. It’s the moment on the graph when the line starts to shoot straight upwards.”

In a world of social epidemics, ideas, behaviours and changes spread through a population much like a virus does. Many viral outbreaks do not become epidemics, a few reach the “tipping point” and spread like wildfire.

There are three factors to reaching the “tipping point”:

1. The Law of the Few — those who spread the message
2. The Stickiness Factor — the message itself
3. The Power of Context — the environment in which the message is operating

The Law of the Few suggests that a small number of highly connected people can have profound influence and impact. Three types of people comprise the “few”: connectors, mavens, and salespeople.

Connectors are people with special gifts for bringing people together. They see the possibility of connections that others do not. They know many people and they move in several social and professional circles, cutting across social strata and communities.

Mavens are information specialists. They understand markets, products, needs, and channels of distribution. They are problem-solvers, using information and data analysis.

Salespeople are the persuaders. They have the ability to influence attitudes and behaviour. They are good communicators who rely on subtle gestures and non-verbal cues to convince others. How the message is communicated can be more important than the message itself.

The Stickiness Factor deals with the content and nature of the message. In order to stick, a message must be memorable and have the capacity to spur someone to action. It has to be noticed. A message must be able to cut through the clutter of today’s world. For the purposes of the *Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy* event, a number of key questions surfaced regarding this message. What is it about the literacy message that has the capacity to be sticky? Why has it not stuck in the past? Can we make it stickier? Have we accurately identified the target audiences? Why has the issue not *tipped*?

¹ Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 2000.

The Power of Context deals with the environment in which the message is communicated. The context can have political, social, economic and community elements. In an industrialized country like Canada, literacy is taken for granted. As a result, the message that low levels of literacy are a serious problem is simply not heard. Moreover, there are competing priorities for the hearts and minds of Canadians.

Mr. Stirling offered some questions to guide the thinking at the roundtable:

- How do we identify and engage the *Few*?
- How do we create *Stickiness*? What is the message that the Few should share?
- What is the *Context*? How do we set the context so that the message can be seen in a new light and with new urgency?

Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy — Views from the Mavens

The first plenary panel was chaired by Barbara Byers, Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress, and was titled “Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy — Views from the Mavens.” Mavens are information brokers who share and trade what they know. This first session featured presentations on the current state of literacy from two different perspectives, as well as presentations from two provincial government representatives.

Literacy Data and Implications — what do we know?

Scott Murray, DataAngel

Scott Murray provided an overview of the five elements that he believes are necessary for literacy to reach the tipping point: a unifying theme, debunking some very durable myths, a \$6 billion investment by governments, an efficient and effective “literacy industry”, and political courage.

According to Mr. Murray, a unifying theme could be “helping Canadians realize their full economic potential through literacy.” His rationale for this message is that literacy is a tool needed to compete in the emerging global knowledge economy, one that 42% of adult Canadians do not possess. He proposed a negative message: “if we do not confront the issue, we will pay a serious economic price.”

Mr. Murray argued that there are some very durable myths that require debunking:

- 1. Myth:** Our literacy levels are as good as our competitors’.
Reality: Our average literacy skill level is lower and we have larger proportions of the population with low literacy skills than many of our competitors.
- 2. Myth:** Our literacy levels are good enough to support our social and economic objectives.
Reality: Because we live by trade, our ability to remain competitive requires higher levels of skills.
- 3. Myth:** Literacy doesn’t influence individual outcomes.
Reality: Literacy is the single-most important determinant of valued individual outcomes.
- 4. Myth:** Literacy doesn’t influence macro-economic performance.
Reality: Literacy is the single-most important determinant of macro-economic performance.
- 5. Myth:** There is no role for government in fixing the problem.
Reality: Only government has the tools to overcome the market failure that has resulted in Canada’s inadequate levels of investment in literacy.

Mr. Murray offered his perspective on what it would take to get government to invest. There needs to be unequivocal data on the economic costs of solving the problem, as well as a sense of the benefits that would be gained through an investment in literacy. Options need to be developed for diverting existing expenditures on passive income support and employment creation to literacy skills enhancement. There is a need for a clear sense of the cost of doing nothing, assurance that the system has the capacity to deliver, and a way to monitor progress.

Finally, political courage through leadership is required. This means seeing beyond the urgent to the important and resisting some of the competing interests.

According to Mr. Murray, the case for literacy has not been made on an economic basis (i.e., costs, benefits, and returns on investment). Other “failures” include: clinging to the moral imperative for action; not finding a champion; the inability to convince governments and employers that they can realize the needed skill gains; and a failure to put in place systems that document success.

Mr. Murray ended his presentation with a rallying cry: “What Canadians need is a minimum skill guarantee.”

Literacy Policy — what do we know?

Dr. Allan Quigley, St. Francis Xavier University

Allan Quigley titled his presentation “*School vs. Tool: Challenging the Formula*” — *How did we get to this state in Canada?* He noted that adult literacy education in Canada has a long history, citing evidence that the first adult literacy program took place as early as 1858 at the YMCA in Kingston.

Dr. Quigley believes there is an under-researched history of literacy in Canada. Moreover, it is a history of which Canadians should be proud and from which there are lessons to be learned by looking at past practices.

Since the demise of the Adult Occupational Training Act in 1980, Dr. Quigley believes Canada has experienced an erosion of the funding base for literacy and a narrowing of the literacy vision. He suggested that the Adult Basic Education (ABE) model of individual instruction, continuous intake, and course modules, has been and continues to be effective, but that it is necessary to add alternatives to the model to increase the effectiveness of literacy programs.

Dr. Quigley argued that the model needs to be re-examined due to the ongoing dilemma presented by the literacy statistics — there have been negligible improvements to literacy attainment between the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1994 and those of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) in 2003. While the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) statistics have improved, adult literacy statistics have not. The question: “What are we going to do differently before the next IALS?”

Dr. Quigley provided an interesting perspective on the word literacy. The etymology of the word does not come from reading. The written word (and reading) started 6,000 years ago as a communication method. Literacy, however, is not as straightforward. Some 7,000 years after the first appearance of written language, the Romans developed the notion of “*litteratus*” to describe one who could read Latin. Dr. Quigley’s theory is that this demonstrates that literacy is not simply a question of who can read and write, but rather the accommodation of prevailing values. In the 7th century, a person was deemed illiterate if they could not read Latin, even if they could read another language. Thus, what was important was based on what society required rather than what the learner required. If literacy (e.g., reading, numeracy, writing) was merely a set of neutral skills with no other implicit values attached to it, no one would be stigmatized for lacking those skills. This demonstrates that literacy derives from a construct of values—and schooling is the best way to teach these prevailing values.

Dr. Quigley argued that the primary way that literacy has been taught since at least 1812 is in classrooms, with teachers and books. The prevailing values are what adult educators have decided learners should learn. Today’s prevailing values are to raise literacy levels, improve the economy, and prepare people to enter the workforce.

Dr. Quigley proposed looking beyond this model to ask whether classrooms, books and teachers are always necessary. There are many examples of innovation in teaching literacy. Dr. Quigley cited examples such as Frontier College’s abandonment of a traditional classroom, the Middle East’s use of technology such as TV, and Australia’s investments in distance technology. Google and Wikipedia are also tools that can enhance literacy practice. These examples illustrate the possibility of reaching the tipping point if informal learning alternatives are a part of the solution.

Provincial Perspectives — what is happening on the ground?

Bobbi Boudreau, Director, Skills and Learning Branch, Province of Nova Scotia

Bobbi Boudreau began by presenting the statistics on the literacy rates in Nova Scotia.

- There are 75,000 people at Level 1 — 56% male and 42% female. Of these people, 47% are employed, 14% are unemployed and seeking employment, and 39% are not in the labour force. 67% have less than high-school education.
- There are 168,000 people at Level 2 — 50% male and 50% female. Of these people, 58% are employed, 13% are unemployed and seeking employment, and 29% are not in the labour force. 38% have not completed high school.

Ms Boudreau noted that the labour force of Nova Scotia is aging. Twenty-six percent are over the age of 50 compared to 16% only 10 years ago. This demographic shift has serious implications for the province, such as skills and labour shortages, difficulties with employee recruitment, upward pressure on wages, pressure to increase the participation of older workers, and the need for succession management and knowledge transfer. Workers with lower literacy skills are less able to adapt to changing labour force requirements and skills expectations. Low literacy skills significantly limit upward mobility in an environment of higher retirement rates, and limit the available labour supply.

The changing nature of work is leading to increases in under-employment, greater barriers for the unemployed, and employers unable to find the right people for the job. Addressing these issues requires investment in retraining, skills upgrading, and lifelong learning.

Ms Boudreau spoke about the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL), which provides tuition-free programming to adults in French and English. Its mandate is to contribute to the social and economic development of Nova Scotia by ensuring that adult Nova Scotians have the essential skills, knowledge, and credentials to make successful labour market transitions, and to participate actively in the home, the community, and the workplace. Adults can access the programming through community-based programs, adult high schools, Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and Université Sainte-Anne. In 2006, there were over 140 programs.

The NSSAL was developed to create more programs, clearer pathways, increased accessibility and affordability, and an increased flexibility to recognize adult experiences. The province also created a recognized, portable credential—the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults.

As the province moves ahead, NSSAL's priorities include raising awareness, building new partnerships, testing the full-service model, creating greater synergies with community-based organizations, creating more opportunities for shared professional development, and increasing regional planning team participation.

Provincial Perspectives — what is happening on the ground?

Dr. Margaret Lipp, Commissioner, Saskatchewan Literacy Commission

According to Margaret Lipp, the context for Saskatchewan's approach to literacy reflected worldwide concern about literacy as identified by the United Nations in its declaration of the Decade of Literacy, as well as the Council of Ministers of Education Canada's (CMEC) establishment of literacy (and the development of an action plan) as one of its three priorities.

Literacy took a prominent role when the government of Saskatchewan launched the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission (SLC) in 2005—the province’s centennial year. The government appointed a minister responsible for the Literacy Commission. The SaskSmart Innovation fund of \$1 million was launched to encourage an innovative response to literacy needs throughout the province.

The goals of the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission are:

- To raise the literacy levels of all Saskatchewan people;
- To work collaboratively across government to influence the literacy development agenda in each ministry;
- To ensure that learners have equitable access to a range of literacy development opportunities across the province and stand to benefit equitably from these programs and services;
- To guide the emergence of a provincial literacy system supporting current literacy service-providers in non-formal and informal learning settings, and expanding the range and type of literacy programs to meet the diverse needs of literacy learners.
- To expand public awareness, develop community ownership and increase local capacity for program response to literacy development needs within the community, through grassroots activities involving community-based organizations and volunteers.

Saskatchewan chose to define literacy as a comprehensive term that refers to the multiple literacies necessary for success in life and learning—information and communications literacy, numeracy, scientific and technological literacy, and personal/social/cultural literacy. Literacy is based on a holistic approach wherein all literacy development increases the competence of the whole person (intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually) to contribute successfully and to participate equitably in the social and economic life of the family, community, province and society. This model is used for learning at every age—from infants and pre-school children to seniors over 65. As well, the model applies to learning in every type of setting—family, compulsory education, continuing education and training, workplace, and the community. Specific goals for technology are also included in the plan. This will see a sustainable technology and communications infrastructure, an e-business environment that is responsive, efficient, and cost effective, and an e-learning environment that supports the diverse needs of all learners and instructors regardless of location.

Saskatchewan faces a number of challenges:

- Overall reading results for 15-year-olds declined significantly from 2000 to 2003 and are lower than the Canadian results at all levels of socio-economic status, particularly at the low and high ends.
- The 2003 figures indicate that approximately 203,000 people in the province had prose literacy Levels of 1 or 2.

Dr. Lipp outlined particular challenges relating to the Aboriginal population. The proficiency level in prose literacy of urban Aboriginal people in Manitoba and Saskatchewan was lower by almost 10% than that of non-aboriginal people.

Dr. Lipp indicated that one of the key initiatives of the Commission is support for communities to develop literacy plans. Community literacy plans invite the community, engage local leadership, recruit local volunteers to access and address community literacy needs. Because Saskatchewan has the highest rate of volunteerism in Canada, recruiting volunteers is a key component. Through community planning, public resources are used more effectively and cooperatively, federal, provincial, and municipal government resources are maximized and harmonized, assets in the community are made available to serve the literacy needs of the people, and the private and volunteer sectors have become more engaged in literacy activities.

The Commission has defined success as stability in the system, equitable opportunities and province-wide results, and community-level commitment and collaborative action to increase literacy.

Plenary Discussion

Following the presentations, the floor was opened to the audience for questions and comments.

Scott Murray was asked what was included in the \$6 billion that he recommended be invested in literacy. He estimated that \$6 billion would be required to move everyone at Level 1 and 2 to Level 3, based on the information for distinct groups of learners and the best-practice program-responses gathered from his research. His analysis of the economic benefits indicated that a return on investment would be evident within 5-7 years.”

Another participant raised the issue of support for formal educational systems versus support for adult learning. Mr. Murray indicated that overall, the system has been producing children who are increasingly more skilled. However, even if the school system can produce skilled graduates, the system may not be able to produce enough graduates to replace older workers exiting the labour force. This is why literacy training aimed at adults who are currently in the workforce is critical to resolving skills imbalances.

Another participant asked that if it is difficult to convince employers of the need for literacy programs, how does one address literacy in the workplace? Ms Boudreau described a workplace literacy initiative in Nova Scotia where the government provides grants to employers to hire instructors and for the costs of materials. Employees attend the program half on company time and half on their own time.

Dr. Lipp indicated that one of the challenges is convincing business that the issue is very significant. However, she noted that many large employers in Saskatchewan are involved in workplace initiatives. For example, one health-care provider is creating a school within the workplace. Dr. Lipp also noted that the Saskatchewan Labour Market Commission (SLMC), a joint business-labour initiative, has appointed a specialist in workplace literacy. The SLMC has created partnerships with the K-12 school system by establishing business / education councils.

Another participant commended Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan for creating a partnership model. She challenged Scott Murray’s suggestion that a guaranteed skill level should replace the minimum wage legislation, pointing out that both are necessary. Mr. Murray replied that if Canadians have the requisite skill level, Canada would not need a minimum wage. He also stressed that it is important that people have jobs where they can use their skills.

Another participant stated that a serious discussion about literacy must be predicated on the understanding that work-related issues are not the only reason people with low literacy skills may want to improve. There is considerable emphasis on the needs of the workplace, but personal and social reasons must be recognized as well.

Barb Byers ended the session by offering her perspective. She has been involved in literacy issues since 1989, and has learned that literacy is not a neutral concept, either economically or socially. She reinforced the strong message about the importance of partnerships. She emphasized that the challenge is to create environments that are aware of and responsive to literacy and clear language issues. She pointed out that the Canadian Labour Congress rewrote its constitution into clear language three years ago.

Ms Byers reinforced the idea that workplace-based programs are not just about the workplace—they also have positive impact on workers’ homes and communities. She underscored that Canada needs both a guaranteed minimum wage and minimum literacy skill level.

She added that there is a strong message about the need for cross-government and cross-sector initiatives. Government needs to be a leader in this area. Many in the labour movement felt the National Literacy Secretariat was extremely valuable.

Ms Byers asserted the importance of champions and reminded participants that some who had previously championed literacy are no longer involved in the issue. She suggested that it would be worthwhile to go back to some of the champions to see if they could be re-engaged.

Where are we and where do we want to go? — Small Group Discussions #1

The first set of discussion groups was designed to provide an opportunity to reflect on the current state of literacy and to examine what would be required to make significant improvements to the state of literacy in Canada. Participants were asked to consider three key questions:

1. Given our own experiences, how do we characterize the state of literacy in Canada?
2. What can be learned from the panel presentations about why we have not reached the tipping point? What is working and what is not? Are there lessons to be learned from Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan?
3. What is needed in order to make significant improvements to literacy in Canada?

1. Given our own experiences, how do we characterize the state of literacy in Canada?

Roundtable participants expressed concerns about what they identified as the lack of a pan-Canadian, adult learning system that is well coordinated and that has sufficient resources. Many participants commented that, although there appears to be an increasing sense of urgency around adult literacy issues, the resources available to adult literacy programs remain inadequate. The overall picture is dismal.

Demographic analyses clearly indicate the need for an adult workforce with a full skill set, and there is evidence that providing “second-chance” learning opportunities to adults is a good investment. Nevertheless, literacy issues are addressed in a piecemeal fashion. Literacy is an invisible problem.

The lack of improvement between the IALS and ALLS data may suggest that literacy programs have not been effective. However, the roundtable participants pointed out that the statistics do not tell the whole story. The surveys measure individual skill levels; they do not provide an analysis of the delivery system.

Precarious and uncertain funding makes the challenges faced by the literacy movement very difficult. There was considerable pessimism about the future availability of funds.

The question of credibility was raised by most participants. The data on literacy are well documented in CCL’s State of Learning report as well as the various international surveys. Yet many people find it hard to believe that 42% of Canadians aged 16-65 have literacy challenges.

The word “literacy” is problematic. Among the public and perhaps the literacy community there is no clear understanding of what literacy means. In addition, there is confusion about terms like “essential skills”.

The situation for francophones, both within and outside Quebec, is especially difficult, as indicated by low levels of literacy, workplaces that use English only (primarily outside Quebec), and low participation in programs even in Quebec where there is a strong literacy delivery system.

Many participants said that the literacy movement should build on its strengths which include extensive, direct experience in the area of literacy combined with a passionate concern.

2. What can be learned from the panel presentations about why we have not reached the tipping point? What is working and what is not? Are there lessons to be learned from Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan?

Participants felt that the presentations from Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan demonstrated that the situation is not uniformly dismal; indeed some jurisdictions are doing quite well. It was pointed out that the Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan examples are located in provinces with relatively small populations, receive provincial funding, and involve partnerships with business, labour, and government.

There was agreement that literacy had not yet reached the “tipping point”. The challenges include the multiple definitions of literacy, which make it difficult to develop clear key messages. In addition, supporting information essential for policy development may be missing, such as a study of program delivery capacity or a profile of the literacy sector. Finally, the overall mood in the country appears to be unaware of literacy problems and unsupportive of programs to advance literacy. This is in contrast to the UK, where Prime Minister Tony Blair successfully launched the UK literacy initiative when it was clear that the cost of doing nothing was much greater than the cost of taking action.

It was agreed that it is important to make compelling economic arguments. However, there was a strong feeling among participants that they did not want to lose the holistic/citizenship approach to literacy. Building on Dr. Quigley’s description of “prevailing values”, some participants wondered if the use of the term “essential skills” to describe literacy reflects the relative importance placed on the needs of the workplace, as opposed to the importance of a literate citizenry.

3. What is needed in order to make significant improvements to literacy in Canada?

Discussion groups used the notion of “sticky messages”, i.e. lasting messages which have the capacity to convince multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives. Participants suggested that it would be useful to identify the key “sticky” messages and the key message deliverers who would provide the convincing arguments to funding agencies and other players.

Participants uniformly spoke of the need for consensus about a clear message appealing directly to learners’ human aspirations. The message should work in conjunction with the economic arguments, but remain mindful of learners’ holistic experiences.

Adult learning tends to be under-valued within communities or workplaces. The delivery of adult learning must move beyond the classroom model. Any effective model must include formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

It was noted that good communication cannot sell a bad policy, but bad communication can kill a good policy. This suggests a need for a core “elevator speech” based on the culture and language of the specific target group. Literacy needs a “unique selling proposition”.

To be successful, it is necessary to broaden the ownership of the issue, linking literacy to other priorities, such as health, harm reduction, and family values.

Participants expressed an interest in supporting federal and provincial/territorial partnerships in a non-adversarial way, building on what works, and using existing institutional partnerships, such as the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM), and Council of the Federation. Industry sector councils and associations could also assist.

Another suggestion from the roundtable participants was for a literacy secretariat in the office of the prime minister. This could be a multi-dimensional coordinating body making links to justice and health.

In addition to government and other partnerships, the group discussed the need for champions. One suggestion was the creation of a small group of 10-15 champions outside of the literacy community to work with the literacy community to develop a compelling message and raise the profile of the issue. The group of champions could include media and cultural icons, business and labour leaders, and other key stakeholders.

In conclusion, participants stressed the need for a coordinated, pan-Canadian strategy for basic skills and literacy that is based on national goals, a sustainable funding model, and multiple outreach points including community and workplace-based programs.

Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy — The Power of Context

Judith Maxwell, senior fellow, Canadian Policy Research Networks, was the keynote speaker at the evening session. Robert Giroux, chair of CCL's Board of Directors, introduced Dr. Maxwell and moderated the discussion.

The central thesis of Dr. Judith Maxwell's presentation was that change occurs when "the stars are aligned." This happens, she suggested, when the context, the evidence, and the actors converge. Dr. Maxwell believes that a window of opportunity for literacy will open within the next few years.

The context, according to Dr. Maxwell, is based on the four biggest demographic and labour market challenges facing Canada in the next 30 years:

- Slower labour force growth and selected labour shortages;
- Weak productivity growth;
- Growing inequality in labour market outcomes — good jobs and bad jobs;
- Social exclusion and risk of an underclass.

Since literacy is a primary factor in all four challenges, employers, governments, and civic leaders can be expected to invest in a literacy initiative. However, low literacy is a hidden deficit. Canada has universal schooling and high scores on international student tests (such as PISA). Canadians are sceptical of the literacy data demonstrating that 42% of working-age adults have low literacy skills. Employers do not test for literacy and they may have no knowledge of their employees' abilities.

In the past, Canadians could ignore the problem because unemployment was high and there was an excess supply of labour. Moreover, there was no evidence that literacy programs worked. Many regarded such programs as a waste of money, and may have been unaware of evidence that highlights best practices for effective programs.

Dr. Maxwell believes those concerned with literacy have not been effective in demonstrating the cost of low literacy skills. No one has used a comprehensive approach to ascertain the economic price tag. Dr. Maxwell noted that a forthcoming study by Scott Murray might fill the gap.

Dr. Maxwell outlined three categories of costs: opportunity costs, remedial costs, and intergenerational costs.

Opportunity costs are the benefits that are foregone: lost economic growth and thus potential income and jobs; lost civic and social participation, including voter turnout and volunteering; and fewer adult learning activities.

Remedial costs are the costs of maintaining social order: social assistance and social services; costs related to personal health and use of health-care services (patient costs are four times higher for those with literacy challenges); and policing and justice (there is a higher incidence of low literacy skills among offenders and the annual incarceration cost is \$53,000 per offender)².

The third category is inter-generational costs. This is the legacy left to future generations because parents' education is a strong predictor of their children's literacy skills. Fifty percent of adults whose parents did not complete high school scored at Levels 1 or 2.

The bottom line is that the total cost of low literacy is enormous. The only way to reduce the cost is to raise literacy skills.

However, Canada does not have a comprehensive literacy strategy. Dr. Maxwell believes this is due to a number of barriers. The first is disbelief or denial. When she talks to opinion leaders, the conversation is stopped as soon as she says "42%". The result is the discussion does not concentrate on solutions.

Another barrier is a lack of confidence that investment will bring results. There is no agreement on focus, whether it be a preventative focus on children and youth or a remedial focus on adults. Dr. Maxwell believes the Saskatchewan example of prevention and remediation is an excellent approach and should be our focus. Enhanced early childhood education makes it possible to deal proactively with issues such as the 28% of children who arrive at Grade 1 not ready to learn. Prevention can also respond to the 38% of people aged 16–25 who have weak literacy skills.

At the same time, remediation remains important. Approximately 55% of recent immigrants and 33% of people aged 26–35 need help with literacy. Adults face enormous challenges in finding and completing an appropriate program. Perhaps Canada should look at the UK where there have been impressive gains in raising adult literacy.

Dr. Maxwell outlined the four key ingredients for a strategy to reach the "tipping point":

1. Find good case studies and do the cost-benefit analysis.
2. Explain the literacy numbers and their consequences by linking them directly to the four big demographic and labour market challenges.
3. Generate a vision for the system you want to build and identify a successful role model. The Alberta model is robust for the current environment, placing a strong emphasis on professional standards.
4. Address the federal/provincial problem. Historically, governments have made progress when two or three provinces become the champions. Some examples would be the National Child Benefit (where Ontario and British Columbia convinced their colleagues to proceed) and the national student-testing program (where Quebec and Alberta led the way). In the case of literacy, champions are needed at the CMEC and the Council of the Federation as well as at the federal and provincial/territorial tables.

She stated that the literacy "tipping point" will be reached when:

- Literacy is linked to the four challenges of labour shortages, weak productivity, inequality and social exclusion;
- A cost-benefit analysis is developed and best practices are documented;
- A vision of what can be achieved through investments in high quality literacy programs captures the imagination of Canadians.

² *Background for this presentation is based on a forthcoming paper: Judith Maxwell and Tatyana Teplova, Canada's Hidden Deficit: The Social Cost of Low Literacy Skills, Canadian Language and Literacy Network, forthcoming*

Plenary Discussion

Dr. Maxwell was asked about the usefulness of looking at the European Union (EU) and the mechanisms it has put in place to deal with pan-European issues. She replied that the European model functions as an “open method of coordination”. The EU is the secretariat to meetings of delegates from each of the member countries. These meetings establish goals, timelines, and tracking. As a result, it is clear who is making progress and who is not. There is also considerable sharing of best (and worst) practices. Dr. Maxwell feels that the EU and Canada are institutionally different—our federal government would not see itself as having a secretariat role. However, there is scope to do this under the Council of the Federation—provinces could do it themselves.

She was asked to comment on the placement of literacy—an issue that impacts several ministries—within a single department. Does this not make it more difficult for the literacy secretariat to work on an inter-ministerial basis? Dr. Maxwell agreed that a literacy secretariat should serve all ministries, citing the benefits of the inter-ministerial approach seen in Saskatchewan, with the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission, and in Nova Scotia, with the Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning.

Dr. Maxwell was asked whether it would make sense to make it a condition of the Labour Market Development Agreements and the Labour Market Agreements transfers that a portion be used for literacy. Dr. Maxwell replied that with the current state of EI, there are more workers outside the EI system than inside it (only 44% of unemployed people receive EI benefits). If government is to plan for the whole workforce, it needs to be thinking in terms of new institutional arrangements (or side arrangements) so that governments can pool resources to let people have access to literacy and essential skills training and to make a smooth transition to a better job. She argued that EI and its related components need to be re-examined.

Another question was how to build consensus about what should be measured. Dr. Maxwell agreed that it matters what you measure and how you measure it. The British tend to brag about the number of people who have moved from one level to another. That seems to be a fairly neutral way to measure. However, she concurred there should be a process to achieve consensus among the stakeholders about the monitoring and reporting of data.

Another participant noted the mixed feelings among roundtable participants about how to use the “42%” literacy figure as a part of the literacy message. Dr. Maxwell said that she too is struggling with the message, and expressed a sense of frustration and failure in persuading decision-makers to get beyond the literacy numbers.

Another participant stressed that one of the dilemmas about the message is that on the one hand, many would like to avoid talking about learning deficits and would prefer that the message be positive, grounded on asset-based concepts. Yet on the other hand, the message must also acknowledge and address negative issues such as inequality and the fact that there are too many left behind.

In response, Dr. Maxwell said that people who have education tend to invest in their ongoing learning and it is those who are trapped or oppressed who need public attention. We rely on governments to step in when certain groups in society are unable to access learning opportunities, a situation which results in low literacy levels.

Reaching for the Tipping Point in Literacy — The Stickiness Factor

Dominique Ollivier, directrice générale, Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes, chaired the second plenary. The purpose of the plenary was to provide some alternative ways of looking at the issue of literacy. How does the literacy issue look from a marketing perspective? What about a change management perspective? The plenary session included a presentation on a recent initiative where a city chose to become a 'learning community.'

An analysis from a change-management point of view

Alan Kay, The Glasgow Group, Change Consultant, ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation board member

Alan Kay began his presentation by referring to the efforts of the United Kingdom that resulted in an £8 billion investment within the UK education system. This effort involved every part of government, and exploited several key messages as articulated by a champion (Prime Minister Tony Blair):

Education: The best economic policy, preparing Britain for the future;

Education: The best social policy, helping create a Britain where work and merit, not privilege or class background, decide how far you go;

Education: The best liberator of any human being's potential; Education, education, education, then and now the key to the door of Britain's future success.

In Canada, the literacy problem lacks visibility. Governments tend to speak about the strengths of their educational systems, and this in turn may compel them to focus on other critical areas rather than literacy.

Mr. Kay also felt that the term 'literacy' is too broad to be meaningful. He believes that saying "Canada has a 'literacy' problem" is like saying "Canada has an 'illness' problem". Key priorities need to be defined (what are the most serious problems/the biggest opportunities) in order to get on the agenda of Canada's decision-makers.

To make Canadian literacy visible, Mr. Kay suggested that we undertake an audit of what is working, and then set priorities. This includes focussing on what can be supported with statistics, such as adult workforce learning, an issue which is measurable, whose results are visible, that has direct links to government agendas, and has the ability to utilize existing resources.

A clear purpose helps people rally around a cause, and, according to Mr. Kay, literacy is lacking a clear purpose. This purpose must resonate among all players and take the long view. It will help to define and drive key strategic initiatives and build momentum to get action on the "tipping point". And, while not all initiatives can succeed fully, with purpose one learns, recovers, and continues.

He also suggested determining which learners to target and what and how to teach them. This will make the issue visible by designing and delivering learning that fits specific needs and learning styles. This process is efficient and effective for both learners and funders.

Mr. Kay advised the group to think in terms of outcomes, e.g., what do employers need, and how does literacy learning fit with other further education. The plan should utilize existing distribution points/programs, such as vocational colleges, etc.

Any plan will need to be implemented over time, e.g., the time frame of the anti-smoking campaign. There should be one urgent priority and it should look for the ‘low-hanging fruit’ — easy to implement!

As an expert in change management, Mr. Kay shared his thoughts on the two key agents of change. The first is that the most senior executive must be heard and seen to be ‘doing’ something. The second is to recognize that change works when the front-line supervisors are given the tools necessary to achieve results.

The literacy movement needs to develop the ‘elevator speech’ — how to pitch a message in the time it takes the elevator to reach its floor. A core elevator speech can be adapted for each constituency. However, it must be consistent in terms of purpose, the problem it solves, who benefits, and the call to action. Repetition is the key to getting the message heard.

Measurement is important. Mr. Kay suggested that literacy should be measured on learning outcomes, not just the learning process. For example, measurement should examine how many learners are better off economically and therefore how many businesses and families begin to thrive, etc. Developing indicators of a more literate nation will help achieve success. Finally, outcome measures should be useful to learners and visible to the public.

Mr. Kay argued that while Canada is making progress — after all the country’s literacy capabilities are not a catastrophe — the literacy movement needs to focus, get the attention of the nation’s leaders, and let them know where progress is urgently needed.

Mr. Kay concluded by summarizing his three key points:

- Have a clear purpose and a plan that works over time.
- Make it work for the learners.
- Have the attention of the senior executive and the supervisors. Show them how it will work and what outcomes will be measured.

An analysis from a communications point of view

Fernan Carrière, Director of Communications, Fédération canadienne pour l’alphabétisation en français (FCAF)

Although we are becoming increasingly aware of the seriousness of the literacy issue — whether for poor readers or the general public — we are not prepared to take the steps or make the personal choices required to tackle or solve this problem.

During a recent conversation with an education policy and public opinion specialist, Mr. Carrière said that the specialist maintained that, contrary to what most people think, literacy is a publicly recognized issue.

We now know much more about the problem than we did 20 years ago: the series of articles by Peter Calamine published in the *Toronto Star*, the first *International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey* (IALSS) and the biography of Jacques Demers, former Montreal Canadiens coach, which revealed that he was virtually unable to read or write. There was the report from Mrs. Bradshaw's departmental committee, which presented a comprehensive study on the economic and social problems caused by low literacy levels among Canadians.

A few months later, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) published its very first *Composite Learning Index*— the only tool of its kind in the world that provides an annual measure of Canada’s performance in a number of areas related to lifelong learning. The CPRN (Canadian Policy Research Networks) also published a reported titled "Too many left behind" (*Les trop nombreux laissés-pour-compte*).

Since then, Mr. Carrière notes increased commitment on the part of the provincial governments. A few examples include the statements of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, the Council of the Federation, which established a literacy award, and the tabling of a literacy bill in Manitoba. Could one then say that there is now healthy competition between the provinces? British Columbia has said it wants to become the most literate province. Literacy was the topic of a recent statement by the Atlantic Premiers and mentioned in the New Brunswick throne speech. And many were aware of and intended to take part in a conference organized by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada.

According to Mr. Carrière, there is support. Mr. Demers's revelation helped us a great deal, especially as an illustration of the merits of our fight against budget cuts. There are influential people behind us who know the problem. What's missing is cooperation and commitment from every sector, including the private sector, especially employers and governments. But Mr. Carrière has also been seeing encouraging signs in that regard for a few months, including the TD Bank report and the Society of Management Accountants of Ontario presentation to the Parliamentary Committee asking the government to institute tax measures to address the literacy issue.

Mr. Carrière also stressed the importance of case studies, stories with concrete examples.

The meaning of the figures has to be explained. The literacy problem is mainly associated with poor reading skills. The number of years it takes people to learn to read has to be acknowledged. People with good reading skills don't always remember the effort and work it takes to learn to read. That's why it has to be explained.

According to Mr. Carrière, we also have to stop blaming the individual. If it is four times more expensive to keep someone with poor reading skills healthy, that represents a cost that everyone has to pay. Two hundred laid-off people who are unable to fill out an application form because they haven't kept up their reading skills for 20 or 30 years represents a cost that we all have to bear. Mr. Carrière has called on the participants to be honest in their communications and properly explain the importance of these economic and social issues. A positive environment and a set of measures therefore need to be created to correct this situation.

The FCAF has prepared an action plan. In terms of communication, the goal is to get thousands of people to take the necessary steps to become involved in learning.

The challenge is to develop a clear and coherent message and reach those with decision-making authority.

Finally, we have to create a learning-focused culture in Canada.

An analysis from a local point of view: Reflections on how one community reached the tipping point

Michelle O'Brien, Project Coordinator, Town of Fort Erie Learning Community Project, Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA)

Michelle O'Brien presented an example of how one community reached the "tipping point". She has been working with the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) on workplace literacy programs in municipalities over the last 12–14 years with considerable success.

Approximately six years ago, a group within the CAMA literacy project decided to explore the concept of creating a 'learning community.' This concept had been seen in Europe and Australia, but this would be the first time it would be led by a municipal government.

CAMA took up the challenge and created an advisory committee to examine the feasibility of creating learning communities. For the next two years, the advisory committee looked at the concept and eventually produced a blueprint for a learning community. The committee then reached out to find a city that was interested in helping pilot the concept. The Ontario town of Fort Erie stepped forward.

Fort Erie has 30,000 permanent and 10,000 seasonal residents. From a demographic perspective, it is older than surrounding communities. In its efforts to cope with the challenges of a declining economy, the city approved a gambling casino. One of the licence provisions specified that a portion of the revenues generated by the casino must be invested in the community.

The town had formed a health and wellness committee to investigate how the community could benefit. Both the mayor and the committee saw the creation of a centre for lifelong learning as a cornerstone for economic restoration and improved quality of life. They formed a learning community committee, which spent the next two years finding partners. The committee built on the fact that the town already saw itself as a learning community. Late in 2006, the town funded a consultant who was asked to develop a plan to achieve learning community status, and to include attainable goals and an outline for self-sufficiency. The committee is now in the implementation phase aimed at sustainability.

Several factors contributed to the committee's success:

1. **Partnerships:** The initial partnership between NLS, CAMA, and Fort Erie was clear at the outset and other partners from the community were quickly brought in. There has been shared decision-making between CAMA and the town of Fort Erie.
2. **Timing:** The committee had two years to bring something to the table that was sustainable. Achieving the 'tipping point' was a daunting task and little slippage was tolerated, yet all partners ensured the timelines were met.
3. **Recognizing what was already there:** The committee built on what was already in place in terms of a learning community. Connections to social development organizations gave the advisory committee access to various partners. An inventory was developed of existing resources that could be drawn into the effort.
4. **Common definition of a learning community:** The original broad definition came from CAMA. The Fort Erie committee agreed to it. Regularly, the committee goes back to the definition and re-confirms its commitment to it.

The implementation plan started with a mission statement based on certain guiding principles:

- Build on what is already there.
- Be evolutionary not revolutionary.
- Focus on capacity building and sustainability.

This model of a municipality reaching the 'tipping point' was achieved by blending these guiding principles with the community's passion to succeed."

Plenary Discussion

The first question focussed on the issue of the message and the notion of a hidden deficit. If both demographics and economics are driving us to the tipping point, which one should be emphasized? Bad news sells and crises move people to action, yet the message conveyed is negative. On a more positive side is Jacques Demers, the former NHL coach who admitted he was illiterate, and who achieved so much while managing to keep his inability to read well hidden.

Mr. Kay thought we should make heroes of these people because they have succeeded against the odds. We should notice skills and provide assistance to overcome barriers. He added that Scott Murray's research is important to get attention and to turn it to our advantage.

Ms O'Brien added that she did not feel the message from Fort Erie was a negative one, but rather one that says every community has the right to access tools for lifelong learning.

Mr. Carrière, however, cautioned about using Jacques Demers as an example precisely because Demers did not enrol in a literacy program. He felt it could send a dangerous message: “I’ve succeeded without literacy programs.” It is also important to realize that people at Level 2 can read, they just cannot read well enough to deal with the tasks they encounter. It is not just about ‘literacy’ but also comprehension.

Mr. Kay reinforced that the elevator speech must state what the problem is and the message we want to send. It needs to be clear: those who need help have to take action.

A labour participant said that in the labour movement’s experience there are many people like Jacques Demers. She suggested that replacing ‘deficiencies’ with ‘barriers’ moves the problem away from the individual and on to all of us. We should all go back, be a learner, and find out what it is like. Her final question was how to sustain the tipping point when it is reached.

Ms O’Brien said that Fort Erie is at that point and it is a tough issue. There has been a change of council and a new mayor. While they understand that sustainability is key, there are many other groups competing for casino dollars.

Mr. Carrière raised the dilemma that if we are successful in getting the message out, we still do not have the instructors or programs to respond.

Mr. Kay mentioned that there are many worthwhile causes in our society. Literacy is only one. We should measure what is learned and celebrate our achievements.

Another participant suggested that we seek simple answers to complex questions. We need a simple message and/or a broader message. Alan Kay felt the message should focus on the workplace. Michelle O’Brien suggests a focussed, broad message aimed at the whole community.

One participant asked whether the focus on professional and technical training would be at the expense of basic skills training. Ms O’Brien responded that in Fort Erie they are attempting to address both sides of the equation.

Mr. Carrière agreed the coherence of the message is a major concern, because it is important to adapt the message. FCAF is consulting both the literacy community and its partners to try to re-position the message.

Mme Ollivier ended the session by reminding the audience of the importance of setting priorities. There are important economic and social reasons for people to have the skills necessary to participate in society. When setting priorities, there is a tendency to leave some groups out. If the intention is to include everyone, we need to be clear about what people need to facilitate their capacities to acquire literacy skills.

The Stickiness Factor — Small Group Discussions #2

The second set of discussion groups focussed on how to make the literacy message ‘stick’. Participants were encouraged to build upon the presentations from the morning plenary, using several key questions: (1) How should we package the issue of literacy? Are there major aspects of this issue that need to be better framed? How can we tell our story? (2) Who are our target audiences? Do we need to rethink ways to engage them, and if so, how?

1. How should we package the issue of literacy? Are there major aspects of this issue that need to be better framed (e.g., in policy statements, communications)? How can we tell our story?

Content of the message

The question of the content of the message dominated discussions. There seemed to be a consensus that one message with several sub-messages is the most appropriate way to proceed.

The discussion offered a range of approaches to framing the content of the message. Some participants expressed resistance to using the ‘economic argument’ as the key message. Those who favoured the economic approach proposed that the message could be expressed in a way that would not limit a broader, more inclusive discussion.

Some participants emphasized the importance of speaking directly to learners, while acknowledging the range of learners’ circumstances and needs. This led to a proposal for two messages: a negative message that delineates the financial and societal costs of low literacy capacity, and a positive message that focuses on the financial and societal value of high literacy attainment. Some advocated moving away from a rhetoric of learning ‘deficiencies’ and toward talking of barriers and questions of access.

Lifelong learning and literacy message

There was general agreement that literacy should be linked to lifelong learning. Some suggestions included:

“We all benefit when everyone participates in learning.”

“In ten years’ time we can create a genuine culture of lifelong learning.”

“A culture of learning which allows everyone to realize their full capacities in their family, community, and workplace.”

It was noted that those who are unfamiliar with the phrase ‘lifelong learning’ might view it negatively, interpreting it to mean “learning takes a long time” or “learning is a never-ending task”. The language used to describe lifelong learning must therefore be clear, positive, and user-friendly.

A lifelong learning message creates links to international efforts such as embedding literacy challenges in the concept of the right to learn. This would also promote Canada as being a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Learn.

Delivery of the Message

While the content of the message was not easily described, it was clear that different versions of the message, customized for different audiences, are needed. For the general public, the message needs to state explicitly “What’s in it for you” and “What you can do to help.” For policy makers, it is important to understand and speak their language, e.g., the language of “human capital”. The workplace audience – employers and labour – would require its own messaging.

A concrete suggestion was to identify 12 to 15 ‘eminent Canadians’ and to seek ways to put the literacy message in their hands. It was suggested that employers are important advocates; enlisting the aid of champions from this sector could be helpful.

Community engagement processes are important in bringing the message to the public. The community is where service delivery takes place, and where key economic players act (e.g., municipal Chambers of Commerce).

2. Who are our target audiences? Do we need to rethink ways to engage them, and if so, how?

- Learners/general public: The message is one of informed choice and the need for full participation in society.
- Specific identity groups such as Aboriginal Peoples: The message is that literacy is essential in order that specific identity groups may assert a place in society.
- Governments: Literacy is a cross-ministerial issue and does not belong only to education and training ministries.
- Employers: The literacy message must be packaged to communicate in their language and address their needs, e.g. health and safety issues, good hiring practices, productivity, and equity and diversity.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): The literacy message must inform them about sources of help and support.
- Labour: The message must be shaped by a strong equity focus. Literacy will add to participation in union meetings and activities, as well as workplace relations processes.

The Law of the Few — Small Group Discussion #3

The final set of small group discussions saw participants seated with others from a similar sector or background. The eight groups were: employers, labour, researchers, non-governmental organizations, literacy organizations, practitioners, CCL, and government. The session focussed on the law of the few — those few people who have particular responsibilities and particular capacities to advance literacy in Canada. Participants discussed what these groups could do to move forward on literacy, and were asked to consider four questions:

1. What can governments, employers, labour unions, social institutions, educators, learners, and other individuals do to facilitate reaching the tipping point? Are the existing partnerships among these communities sufficiently broad, inclusive, and effective to improve Canada's literacy record?
2. What are three concrete actions that can be taken by those of us who are at this roundtable to spread the message?
3. What tools do the various stakeholders need to assist in improving Canada's literacy standing?
4. How will we know when we are successful?

1. What can governments, employers, labour unions, social institutions, educators, learners, and other individuals do to facilitate reaching the tipping point? Are the existing partnerships among these communities sufficiently broad, inclusive, and effective to improve Canada's literacy record?

Employer representatives noted that employers are too often absent from these events and discussions. If they are present at all, they are mainly large employers. Large employers assume that the responsibility for basic skills training lies with the public sector and tend to be unwilling to invest in literacy. There is a need for leadership 'from the top' of the business sector to engage employers. There is a lack of effective ways and solutions for small business to become involved as partners. Small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) do not have the capacity or supporting organizations to provide workplace training, especially as it relates to basic skills. Perhaps a business champion for small and medium-size enterprises could be identified. Other ideas included having consortia or networks share best practices among employers.

Researchers mentioned a lack of 'connection between literacy researchers and practitioners. It was noted that there have been attempts to partner researchers with practitioners. In the 1990s, the NLS developed a successful partnership with Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). While this was seen as "a good thing", there was a sense that the results were not entirely effective. Research was too far from practitioners' interests and practitioners did not appreciate what researchers were doing. The result is that researchers and practitioners "failed to communicate". The research community could re-examine and learn from the SSHRC/NLS experience in order to be clear about objectives and the value of the research work.

Government representatives felt that departments might benefit from a cross-ministerial approach. Lifelong learning tends to be a crosscutting issue, and this is not always reflected in government structures. Consistency in priorities and policies is difficult to maintain in the face of changing political priorities and departmental reorganizations. The official absence of the province of Quebec at national events means that Canada loses the richness of that experience.

Literacy coalitions indicated that they do not necessarily have links to their respective provincial and territorial governments. These linkages should be pursued diligently, especially given the devolution of federal funds. ABC Canada Literacy Foundation can help the literacy community by opening the door to business links. Literacy coalitions could reach out to professional associations such as training and development groups and health associations to forge greater links.

Labour participants discussed how best to coordinate the messages, involving legislated training provisions and a government role in infrastructure and training. There is a great need to make participation accessible to labour members, through various methods such as clear language efforts, bargaining training and literacy, as well as connecting literacy to labour issues such as training, adjustment (employed and unemployed) and health and safety. There was recognition that labour needs to find ways to tell the stories of learners and broadcast the impact of literacy on the labour community. An excellent example of this was the WEST literacy program of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.

The Canadian Council on Learning has identified literacy as a crosscutting theme. CCL participants gave suggestions on how they could help reach the “tipping point”:

- map out the issues at the grassroots level;
- identify ways for grassroots organizations to work together and to share information;
- provide relevant research findings.

Literacy is everybody’s business and each player must reflect on the resources available to them and what they can do to help. Strong leadership is necessary. Some suggested that government should take responsibility, while others saw the leadership role as a collaborative effort. Champions were seen as a useful way to get broader public attention. The question of mobilization and leadership was raised throughout the roundtable.

The existence of very positive examples of partnerships such as the Town of Fort Erie Learning Community Project provides the promise and potential of building literacy partnerships based on existing social and community partners. More investments from business, labour, and municipal entities are needed so that when government funding ends, the project does not die. Perhaps there is also a need for innovative fundraising initiatives.

2. What are three concrete actions that can be taken by those of us who are at this roundtable to spread the message?

Message:

The message that 42% of Canadians do not meet Level 3 is problematic. The message needs to be simple and clear. This sentiment was persistent throughout the roundtable. There was discussion about how much ideology was affecting the crafting and communication of the message. Some called for a strengthened economic argument, while some definitely saw a need for inclusion of the social argument. Still others suggested using “literacies” to reflect multiple roles and outcomes.

While many acknowledged that a national strategy exists³, there was the question of the degree of agreement on the means to implement the strategy. At the end of the day, there needs to be a plan, leadership, and commitment to enable movement forward. While we might not be able to agree on a ‘common message’, we can be committed to sharing and spreading the word.

The message should promote an inclusive and holistic idea of the learning culture. It should indicate that literacy touches everyone. Some suggested it be linked to a pan-Canadian right to learn.

Labour members developed a plan to match the call for a mandated right to learn based on a coordinated labour strategy. This plan includes a training levy to level the playing field, the inclusion of training leave in the Employment Standards Act, a system of learning advocates (animators of lifelong learning in the workplace), and public dollars for delivery. This would ensure sustainability and set a standard for all workers.

Awareness

Participants discussed the development of a bottom-up social marketing approach, and using a public awareness campaign to bring it to the kitchen via popular media. Partnering with a marketing firm was an approach that found favour among participants.

There was a sense that the message needs to be simplified, and that better ways are needed to tell the story. Public awareness campaigns such as ParticipACTION were held up as an example. Participants also recommended closely examining how issues such as AIDS or the environment reached the ‘tipping point’.

Public Policy Debate and Dialogue

Participants noted that there should be discussion around public policy. One suggestion was to encourage a process for regular interaction between policy makers and stakeholders. An analysis of current expenditures on language and literacy skills at all government levels would enrich the public debate. It was proposed that Canada invest 6 per cent of its gross national product in education and allocate an equitable share of the education budget to adult education, as was recommended in the 1997 Hamburg Declaration; the Agenda for the Future.⁴

Partnership Building

Partnerships are key to ensuring there are advancements in literacy. Mapping the orbit of potential partners would help to identify and access opportunities for collaboration. It was proposed that potentially effective partnerships would include: employers working with labour; social organizations that work on inclusiveness issues; a forum for labour-market partners (unions/employers/others, both federal and provincial) to focus on infrastructure and funding.

³ *Participants spoke of the Movement for Canadian Literacy National Literacy Action Plan; the report, Towards A Fully Literate Canada, from the Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills to the Minister responsible for literacy (the “Bradshaw Report”); the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need For A Pan-Canadian Response; and the recommendations in CCL’s State of Learning Report.*

⁴ UNESCO. *The Hamburg Declaration; the Agenda for the Future. 5th International Conference on Adult Education. Hamburg, Germany (1997)* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001161/116114eo.pdf>.

Improve / refine services

There were many suggestions for formal, non-formal, and informal delivery models for literacy training, services, and programs. The models that were mentioned included the use of technologies for distance education; delivery aimed at specific groups, such as the Aboriginal population and women; alternative settings in institutions for intervention and delivery (e.g., hospitals). Efforts should also be made to ensure enrolment in francophone programs. A first step would be to clarify which groups are most in need. Community-based collaboration on services would be helpful. This could include, for example, asking community colleges to invite the community into their facilities, especially during evenings and on weekends.

3. What tools do the various stakeholders need to assist in improving Canada's literacy standing?

Participants noted that there is strong agreement within the literacy community regarding next steps. What is needed is:

A precise and clear message: a common message; define the objectives, vision, and status of the issue.

A more cohesive and integrated literacy community would demonstrate a capacity to deliver. One participant used the analogy of “quilt making.” Look at what we have and work with the pieces to make the vision. To continue the analogy, the “backing” for the quilt could be the National Literacy Action Plan already developed by the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL).

A dedicated ‘**Literacy Champion**’ for SME’s is needed, as well as more mavens/connectors and salespeople in general.

Through **further study and consultation**, some of the “knowns” from the research need to be further fleshed out.

An online tool kit for businesses should be developed (e.g., NALD@Work). It could include Conference Board case studies and manuals, TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills), WILM (Workplace Informal Learning Matrix) and other literacy-related resources.

Create **simple ways of telling stories:** CCL can gather and share a handbook of “stories” (successful practices) leading to “how to’s”, a road map for the greater community.

A mechanism to share information, expertise and funding and revenue streams; consortia or learning networks for employers to share best practices; details of experiences and a community of effective practices and ineffective practices so we can learn from what works and what does not.

Compare to the best; Canada needs to reach higher and perhaps look to Norway which is ascending in IALS. There is also a need to be inventive in the methods of measuring progress, to move beyond simply measuring outcomes that change literacy levels. Sweden is measuring the quantity of lifelong learning. MCL has developed a logic model that proposes some benchmarks such as the number of programs without waiting lists. CCL can help to refine the tools of measurement in the literacy field so practitioners can use/develop/communicate indicators of their success.

Other suggestions included funds for mass marketing; better links to CMEC; unionization of practitioners.

4. How will we know when we are successful? A number of vision statements were proposed:

- When success can be reported in terms of objectives/milestones that are attainable and demonstrate the impact of what literacy delivers.
- When all Canadians understand that literacy is part of lifelong learning and not just a ladder to climb through the school years.
- When Canada has adult learning strategies and systems.
- When Canada has the highest literacy and numeracy levels in the world.
- When Canada has ‘the right to learn’ for both employed and unemployed.
- When Canada has good working conditions for literacy providers (which lead to good learning conditions)
- When organizations embrace a culture of learning and integrate literacy.
- When CEOs embrace and celebrate learning, giving it value as a contributor to competitiveness.

Reaching for the Tipping Point — Where do we go from here?

The closing plenary was chaired by Jayson Myers, President, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. Jay opened the session by calling upon the two rapporteurs to give their impressions of the last day and a half and to set the stage for the conversation on next steps.

Chantal Ouellet, Professor, Department of Specialized Education and Training, Director of the School and Social Adjustment Teaching Programs, University of Québec at Montreal

Chantal has commented on a series of key issues.

How do we define the state of literacy education in Canada?

- There isn't enough concrete employer involvement in literacy education.
- Literacy education is multidimensional, and there are different points of view on the issue.
- There's a lack of coordination between the different parties involved and the different resources.

What's working and what isn't?

- The government should focus more on training needs, especially those of Francophones in minority settings.
- Not spread itself too thin, but concentrate on specific points or aspects.
- We have data, but they aren't enough to move the cause forward.
- Literacy is a two-way street: people and environment (context, institutions, etc.): adopt a holistic model.

What has to be done to make significant headway in literacy education?

- Understanding the economic and social issues at play in literacy so that training is based on needs.

How do we present the issue of literacy?

The message:

- Two types of messages for two different audiences? An alarmist message for decision-makers and a positive one for learners?
- Putting the message back in its proper context for the different audiences based on their needs and interests.
- Speaking the language of economics, the language of decision-makers, the language of employers.
- Presenting best practices, success stories (models of learning communities, companies, etc.)
- Beware of confusion, of the terms (literacy education, literacy, basic training, basic skills, etc.)
- Value the multiplicity of approaches.

Who are the audiences and what are the proposed approaches?

- The whole community and specific groups in particular.
- Influential people.
- Employers that, once they're convinced, will highlight the added value of training.
- Workers aged 50 and over.
- The learners themselves.

...among practitioners

- Inform them of good and poor practices.
- Influential people at organizations (experts, connectors).
- Working in complementary ways.
- Sustained action.
- Report on practices.

...among academics

- Partnership.
- Employers aren't actively involved.
- SMEs.
- Cooperation between researchers and practitioners (knowing what the others have to offer).
- Promoting good practices, drawing lessons (e.g., Fort Erie).
- Raising the issue: opinion leaders from different walks of life.
- Need to change the message: where to go next.
- The patchwork of literacy: stressing what is already working.
- Developing new success indicators (broader).

...among non-profit organizations

- Cross-industry approach.
- Conveying the message appropriately.
- Marketing (best way to convey the message).
- Canada-wide strategy (ideas and messages are already there).

...among provincial, national coalitions

- No consensus on how.
- Have a common message.
- Have places and opportunities to continue the discussion.
- Other measuring instruments (+ qualitative, + about practices).

Nadine Valk, Senior Program Specialist, Crosscutting Themes, Canadian Council on Learning

Nadine Valk commented that if “we always do what we have always done, we will get what we have always gotten.”

What resonated with her is the concept of stickiness and how the literacy message is not sticking. First, there is the sense of disbelief about the 42% statistic. Then there are the mixed messages: “Canada is doing great”; “We’re bronze medalists”; “Our PISA numbers are good”; “We are not doing well”; “Canada is in a literacy crisis.”

There are different perspectives and priorities, very little agreement on the economic vs. social imperative, differing opinions on whether to adopt a focussed vs. a broad message, and about whether to target literacy vs. lifelong learning. There is no agreement on message or priorities.

Misunderstanding, competitiveness, and a lack of coordination and fragmentation abound, and the message is not sticking. We have not reached the point where we can come together.

Underpinning all this is the issue of stigma. Stigma prevents stick. There is a great need to create a new image of literacy and the literacy learner.

There is a need for a macro-level elevator speech that is positive, inclusive, adaptable and revisable. There is a need to identify champions, connectors, mavens and salespeople. And there is a need to understand the current context.

Many at the roundtable mentioned the need for tool kits and models of successful practices. We need to build on what works, and define the various roles and responsibilities.

Plenary Discussion

One participant who worked at the NLS in 1994 when the first IALS was released spoke about concerns they had at that time about combining the numbers from Level 1 and Level 2. Unfortunately, despite cautions, this did happen, and people started to use the 42% figure, (the combined figure). This statistic has haunted this meeting. By using that sticky message, the literacy field has been done a great disservice. Unsticking that message will not be easy. However, the path ahead is a positive one and we must articulate clearly the challenges and solutions.

Another participant commented that the “tipping point” concept resonated with people. We should not forget how well served the literacy issue was by the 42% figure, which did succeed in putting the issue on the agenda. However, we need to shape the debate. If the 42% figure were not used, then what?

A need for clear measures of success was put forward as a priority. It was asked whether there are lessons to be learned from other fields such as health. Society is well beyond measuring the success of the health agenda based on whether life expectancy has been extended. Other indicators include quality of care, access (through wait lists), and affordability. Perhaps this model can be used for literacy.

The group was reminded that International Adult Learners Week was approaching on March 3-10, 2008. One participant asked about CCL’s plans to honour International Adult Learners Week, which is celebrated in 47 countries and has helped progress in many of these countries. Kathleen Flanagan reported that the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre was part of the consulting process undertaken by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, which is responsible for this initiative in Canada. In addition, AdLKC sponsored nine community-based knowledge exchange projects, developed to celebrate International Adult Learners Week.

Some commented that the *Tipping Point* event was too short. Future events need more time for discussion of the next steps.

It was suggested that the elevator speech needs to be written, perhaps based on “a right to learn” or “every place a learning place.” A meeting in one year’s time was also proposed to keep the momentum going.

CME President Jayson Myers closed the session by stating that CME is pleased to collaborate with CLC on work and learning issues through the WLKC. Although there is a great deal of analysis and awareness building, many businesses are unaware of available resources and/or how to access them. Even though these issues are national and global, we always need local solutions.

Closing Remarks

Alex Stephens indicated that the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre is looking at specific ways to promote the literacy dialogue, especially between business and labour. The Work and Learning Knowledge Centre can foster conversations with the workplace partners. There are other knowledge centres working on literacy issues in health and the aboriginal communities. The Work and Learning Knowledge Centre can identify and share effective practices.

Kathleen Flanagan indicated that the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre and the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre see their respective contributions to the literacy cause as a positive fit, creating synergy. The role of the knowledge centres at the roundtable is as a convenor. The Adult Learning Knowledge Centre focusses on community development and social equity while the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre uses the workplace as its point of reference. The commitment to literacy fits within the continuum of adult learning and is manifested in all the knowledge centres’ activities. In the weeks and months ahead, the knowledge centres will continue to exchange information across the various sectors and encourage all participants to follow up with their own sectors. The knowledge centres are committed to stay involved.

Mr. Stephens and Dr. Flanagan thanked the participants and remarked that the roundtable has demonstrated how CCL can bring the stakeholders together for a productive dialogue, moving toward a full societal discussion about reaching the “tipping point”.

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Nadine Valk
Canadian Council on Learning

Appendix 3 – Speakers Biographies

T. Roberta (Bobbi) Boudreau

Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning (NSSAL)

Bobbi Boudreau is the Director of the Adult Education Division, Department of Education and Principal, Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning (NSSAL). She also oversees the administration of the High School Graduation Diploma for Adults, the GED Testing Service, and a number of literacy/adult learning programs such as the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, the Community Learning Initiative, and the Family Learning Initiative Endowment Fund. She has a Master of Public Administration in Human Resources, a Bachelor of Business Administration (Accounting) and a Certificate in Adult Education.

Barbara Byers

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

Now serving a 2nd three-year term, Barbara Byers was first elected Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress in 2002 after more than a decade as President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. The populism of Sister Byers' Prairie upbringing is reflected in her approachability, openness, and determination to fight for the underdog. Her 17 years with the Saskatchewan Social Services brought Sister Byers face-to-face with issues that remain at the centre of labour's agenda: workers' rights; poverty; Aboriginal concerns; youth unemployment; and justice for equality-seeking groups. Her conviction naturally led her into political activism. Having risen through the ranks of the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union (SGEU), Sister Byers was at the helm of the SGEU through the turbulent years of the scandal-ridden Conservative government of Grant Devine. Sister Byers makes her presence felt nationally as the Canadian Labour Congress officer responsible for education, youth, medicare/health care, training and technology, literacy, employment insurance and apprenticeship. As a labour representative at the executive level, Barbara Byers also ensures that the voices of workers are heard within the International Labour Organization, a Geneva-based tripartite body of the United Nations.

Fernan Carrière

Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) FCAF Communications Director Fernan Carrière was part of the team that created the first francophone radio network in Ontario during the seventies. After a brief stay at the Franco-Ontarian magazine, *Liaison*, in the 80's, he jumped the fence. He spent the next 17 years at Canada Post Corporation in a variety of roles within Corporate Communications, Human Resources, and Change Management. Two years ago, he returned to the community sector as Director of Communications for the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF).

Kathleen Flanagan

Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (AdLKC)

Kathleen Flanagan is the Coordinator of the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre, an initiative of the Canadian Council on Learning, a national, independent, non-profit corporation committed to improving learning across all walks of life. The Adult Learning Knowledge Centre is based at the University of New Brunswick. Dr. Flanagan's approach to adult learning is informed by an extensive background in the visual arts and a deep commitment to social justice. She is a photographer who has been active as a photojournalist and a photographic artist. An adult educator since 1981, she has served as an academic administrator at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University, Mount Allison University, and CCL's Adult Learning Knowledge Centre.

Robert J. Giroux
Canadian Council on Learning (CCL)

Robert J. Giroux retired as President of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) in March 2004. Before joining AUCC in 1995, he was Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada and Comptroller General of Canada. As a former senior federal official, he held the positions of President of the Public Service Commission of Canada, Deputy Minister of Public Works Canada, and Deputy Minister of National Revenue, Customs and Excise. Mr. Giroux is a member of the Order of Canada, an honorary member of the Order of Gatineau and a recipient of the Trudeau Medal from the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ottawa. He received Honorary Doctorates from many Canadian universities. Mr. Giroux currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Education Centre Network, Katimavik, the University of Victoria, the Canada Foundation on Innovation, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Council on Learning and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Ocean Networks Canada Society. He is also a member of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Since January 2006, he is a part-time member of the Federal Public Service Staffing Tribunal. He has a Bachelor in Commerce and a Masters in Science from the University of Ottawa.

Alan Kay
The Glasgow Group

Alan Kay is a change management consultant specializing in strategic planning, brand and customer experience implementation, and organizational alignment. All of his work focusses on the things that matter to the end customer.

A former senior executive in the advertising and marketing communications industry, Mr. Kay was Managing Director of the high profile Toronto advertising agency, Harrod & Mirlin. Prior to this, he held a variety of client management roles at McCann Erickson and Foster Advertising in Canada and the US, serving a broad range of multi-national and domestic clients. Mr. Kay is a past President of the American Marketing Association (Toronto Chapter), a board member of the ABC Canada Literacy Foundation and Hope Air charities and a member of the Education Committee of the Canadian Marketing Association. Deeply committed to sharing his wide knowledge and experience in marketing communications, Mr. Kay also teaches executive development students at the Schulich School of Business, York University.

Margaret Lipp
Saskatchewan Literacy Commission

Prior to becoming the provincial Literacy Commissioner, Margaret Lipp was Assistant Deputy Minister of Saskatchewan Learning. Her career in education includes 16 years in the school system as a teacher, teacher librarian, counsellor, and curriculum and program developer and consultant, and five years of teaching and research with the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Since 1985, she has worked with the provincial Department of Education as the consultant for gifted learners, then as the Director of Special Education, and, from 1993 to 2003, as the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction with responsibility for K-12 learning programs. As the Assistant Deputy Minister, Dr. Lipp was responsible for the development and implementation of the provincial Core Curriculum in English and French, e-learning activities across the K-12 and post-secondary learning sector, teacher and student records, teacher certification, departmental exams program, sector-wide strategic planning processes, and the operation of the Regional Offices of Education across the province. Dr. Lipp served for approximately 10 years on the Board of Directors for the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission until she became the Literacy Commissioner. She also served as the government representative on the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board for a decade. Dr. Lipp is on the editorial board of *Exceptionality Education Canada*, a professional educational journal and holds a similar position with the U.S. research journal *Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*. She is the recipient of a number of research and academic awards.

Judith Maxwell
Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)

Judith Maxwell is Fellow and the Founding President of Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), and a biweekly columnist for the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business*. She has extensive experience in both public and private sector think tanks, and has established a national reputation as a leading thinker on Canada's social and economic policy choices. She is also one of the pioneers in deliberative dialogues that give unaffiliated citizens a voice in public policy discussion. Dr. Maxwell is a member of the Order of Canada and a member of the Board of Directors of BCE Inc. and of the Community Foundation of Ottawa. Dr. Maxwell has also been awarded honorary degrees by eight Canadian universities. She was Chair of the Economic Council of Canada from 1985 to 1992. Earlier in her career, she worked as a consultant, as Director of Policy Studies at the C.D. Howe Institute and as a journalist with the Financial Times of Canada.

Scott Murray
President, DataAngel Policy Research Inc.

Scott Murray holds the post of President, DataAngel Policy Research Inc. DataAngel is a full service policy research company serving a broad range of national and international clients. In March 2005, he was appointed Director, Education Outcomes at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) where he was responsible for adult and student skill assessment programs. Mr. Murray also held the post of Director General, Social and Institutional Statistics. His 23 years in the Special Surveys Division at Statistics Canada included 5 years as Director. Mr. Murray has specialized in the design and conduct of large-scale ad hoc surveys to meet emerging public policy issues. Currently, he is International Study Director for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL). Mr. Murray holds an Honours BA in Business Administration from the University of Western Ontario and is overly fond of claret.

Jayson Myers
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME)

Jayson Myers is the President of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Canada's largest industry and trade association. He is also the Chair of the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition, a coalition of over 30 industry associations that have come together to speak with a common voice on priority issues for Canada's Manufacturing sector. Dr. Myers is a well-known economic commentator, and is widely published in the fields of Canadian and international economics, technological and industrial change. As CME's Chief Economist, he led the association's *Manufacturing 20/20* initiative, the largest cross-country consultation ever convened by Canada's business community on the future of manufacturing in Canada. He has been recognized by the consulting firm Watson Wyatt as the most accurate economic forecaster in Canada. Dr. Myers sits on special advisory councils to the Minister for International Trade, the Minister of Industry, the Canadian Border Services Agency, and the Bank of Canada. He is co-chair of the Work & Learning Knowledge Centre of the Canadian Council on Learning. He studied at Queen's University, Kingston and the University of British Columbia in Canada, and at the London School of Economics and Oxford University in the United Kingdom. He has held appointments as a research fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford and a lecturer in international studies at Warwick University, also in the U.K. He is a consultant on Canadian and international business affairs for Oxford Analytica, an international consulting group based at Oxford University.

Michelle O'Brien
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrator's (CAMA)

As the pre-amalgamation City of Ottawa's Director of Human Resources Planning, Staffing and Skills Development, Michelle O'Brien guided the implementation of the recommendations of the City of Ottawa's Mayor's Task Force on Literacy, in the early 1990's. Responsible for corporate training programs, Ms O'Brien worked closely with staff from the Ontario Federation of Labour to support the introduction of BEST training at the City. Ms O'Brien is currently the chair of the National Steering Committee for the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrator's (CAMA) project, "Municipal Partnerships: Building Capacity for Literacy and Learning in the Workplace and the Community". In her time on the Committee, Ms O'Brien has authored "Workforce Literacy in Canadian Municipalities: A Status Report in the Year 2000" and assisted in the development of "After the Pilot Projects: Revisiting the Process". Ms O'Brien managed a project to examine the validity of a municipal government 'championing' the move to create a literate community. She authored "The Learning Community: Creating a Blueprint — A framework for a Learning City in the knowledge society", as well as "Blueprint for a Learning Community: A guide for the Municipal Stakeholder". Currently, Ms O'Brien continues her work for CAMA with her support to the Town of Fort Erie and its Learning Community Advisory Committee, the group actively involved in the establishment and promotion of a Learning Community in this region of Ontario.

Dominique Ollivier
Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICÉA)

Dominique Ollivier is the executive director of « *l'Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes* » (ICÉA). With a masters degree in public administration, she worked from 1996 to 2006 as a media relations and political advisor for several different Minister Cabinets for the Quebec Government and for the leader of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa.

Previously, she was a guest columnist for radio and television. From 1990 to 1995, she was the editor-in-chief of the intercultural magazine *Images* as well as the coordinator for Black History Month between 1992 and 1996. She specializes in intercultural communications and has served on several juries such as the 1993 "Gemini" awards for television. She has contributed to the preparation of several collections of short stories and has written text on intercultural education, expresses of minority cultures in public spaces, pluralism, and civil engagement.

Her community commitments include serving on several boards for working groups and organizations with goals to enhancing civil engagement.

Chantal Ouellet
Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

Chantal Ouellet has been involved in adult literacy for the last 20 years (in Quebec and West Africa) in research and in training. Her research work focussed on literacy in the workplace, essential skills, health literacy, partnership between school boards and NGOs, and reading comprehension.

B. Allan Quigley
St. Francis Xavier University

Allan Quigley is a Professor of Adult Education in the Department of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University.

Dr. Quigley received both his Masters of Arts and Bachelors of Arts degrees from the University of Regina with a major in English. His doctorate in Adult and Continuing Education is from Northern Illinois University with a specialization in adult literacy and policy. He recently completed a five-year term as Departmental Chair and is the immediate past Editor of *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*. Currently, he is the Chair of two Adult Education & Literacy Research Working Committees under the auspices of the Canadian Council on Learning. He recently completed a major study on health literacy as Co-Investigator under a Social Sciences and Humanities Research grant, and is currently a Co-Investigator with a SSHRC grant studying authenticity in teaching.

He has published widely in the top refereed journals in his field and has been received a number of awards.

Alex Stephens
Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC)

Alex Stephens is the Coordinator of the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC) of the Canadian Council on Learning, an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research and knowledge exchange to improve all aspects of learning in Canada. He was previously a Researcher at the Canadian Labour and Business Centre, and has had over 10 years of experience as a researcher on various policy issues. He has a Masters degree in Political Science from the University of Toronto. The WLKC initiative is co-led by Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and the Canadian Labour Congress. Mr. Stephens coordinates the initiatives and projects of the WLKC on behalf of its 150 members from business, labour, government, education, and leading research and policy organizations — key stakeholders interested in working together to translate strong evidence on the benefits of workplace learning into practical intelligence for workplace stakeholders.

Bill Stirling
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters — N&L Division

Bill Stirling has been involved in economic and business development in Newfoundland and Labrador for seventeen years. On graduating with an MBA from Memorial University's Faculty of Business Administration in 1990, he began his career in community economic development, working in Placentia. In 1992, he became Manager of the Bishop's Falls Development Corporation — the community-based organization established as a result of the closure of the Newfoundland Railway. In 1998 he joined the provincial public service, holding a number of executive positions with the Departments of Industry, Trade and Technology; Development and Rural Renewal; and Industry, Trade and Rural Development. In late 2004, Mr. Stirling was appointed Vice President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Division of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

Nadine Valk
Canadian Council on Learning (CCL)

Nadine Valk is a Senior Program Specialist, with a focus on health and learning, literacy, culture and gender for the Canadian Council on Learning. Ms Valk is an experienced facilitator, having developed, coordinated and lead a variety of workshops and training sessions with health and cancer care groups, community and international development organizations. Ms Valk has a background in health care and health policy and a Masters degree in Public Administration from Queen's University.