

Canadian Auto Workers Workplace Training Program

Language	English
Provider	Canadian Auto Workers
Location	Ontario
Highlights	PROJECT SUMMARY: The Workplace Training Program is delivered to CAW members across the “Big Three” automakers (General Motors, Chrysler and Ford) and is focussed on issues specific to the workplace, union and industry and to broader political and economic issues.
Overview	<p>HOW THE PROGRAM STARTED</p> <p>The CAW has several educational programs in place. The Workplace Training Program is one of the most important for its members working for the Big Three automakers and also to members employed by CAMI, Electromotive Canada and General Dynamics.</p> <p>This program was designed to facilitate participation among all of its members by offering paid instruction during scheduled working hours. Previously, members had the opportunity to take advantage of the CAW’s “Paid Educational Leave” and its residential training programs. However, not all members could participate due to familial responsibilities along with other limitations.</p> <p>The Workplace Training Program is a unique initiative. In 1996 the CAW negotiated training provisions and funding from the Big Three for all of its members. In subsequent rounds of bargaining the program grew from 8 to 32 hours of paid time training over the life of the agreement.</p> <p>The union faced tremendous pressure to abandon the program due to the financial hardship hitting the industry in 2008. However, the union demonstrated its commitment to workers’ education at a time when the industry was aggressively seeking concessions. Although some hours were lost, the union persisted in emphasising the importance of training and maintained 24 hours of training.</p> <p>The Program has three main purposes: to build awareness about the union, the industry and a broader understanding of how the world works. Specific topics have included: union awareness, industry overview; neoliberalism; globalization; how government works; environment; stress in the workplace and ergonomics. Courses are proposed by the national union and are negotiated with the employers in the collective agreement.</p> <p>The industry overview component is quite notable since it allows workers to be more knowledgeable about the economic trends, industrial developments and policy issues that impact the industry in which they work and by extension that affect their working lives. Workers are able to understand the economic</p>

	<p>restructuring that underpins the industry and the value of the work they perform as autoworkers.</p> <p>The Workplace Training Program also includes “Building a Respectful Workplace” curriculum that addresses how diverse forms of oppression filter into the workplace and how to create a better social environment at work. Sexism, racism, religious intolerance and anti-harassment are among the specific topics discussed and analyzed at length in the classroom setting. A course on “Violence in the Workplace” has recently been added in response to Ontario Bill 168 that amended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include violence and harassment as a health and safety issue at work. This is another demonstration of how relevant this training is to workers and the changing work environment as a result of new laws and economic trends.</p>
<p>Issues Targeted</p>	<p>LOGISTICS</p> <p>The Workplace Training Program is made possible by course developers, national training coordinators and 80 peer trainers. The training fund covers the participants’ wages, instructors, curriculum developers, outreach and administration.</p> <p>Training is on company time and is designed to meet diverse learning needs and styles of adult learners. Trainers are recruited from the assembly line and local leadership by the national office. Recruitment criteria are based on facilitation skills, union activism and the ability to work well with others. Trainers undergo intensive training at the union’s education centre in Port Elgin, on how to be effective facilitators. They also undertake a 40 hour course on Human Rights and a week-long course-by-course training on the particular curriculum that they will be delivering in their workplaces. Trainers teach on a regular basis and have had to be replaced by new workers. Hence the program has also created a few new jobs to replace the trainers. Classes are delivered in the actual plant when possible or in a union hall. Classes last an entire day to the equivalent of a work shift. Workers sign in to the classes in the same manner that they would to start their work in the plants.</p>
<p>Key Features</p>	<p>OBJECTIVES AND METHODS</p> <p>The objectives of the Workplace Training Program are broad based. They are not limited to oftentimes unquantifiable notions of productivity. The goal for the CAW is to engage their members in learning and to contribute to their self-realization as valuable workers, union members and citizens who can contribute to a better world. One participant claimed “to be smart enough to read between the lines” and in this way analyze for themselves their roles and place within the industry, workplace and society.</p> <p>Training methodology is geared to acknowledge and value all the levels of analysis among participants and the diverse ways that adults learn. Complex concepts are brought to life through audio visual media, case studies and news</p>

	<p>stories that are discussed in small groups and within the class as a whole. Trainers take their cue from the most pressing issues that participants bring with them to the class and see their roles as facilitators of collective learning.</p> <p>Benefits for members are multiple. They can turn to their workplace and union to grow and learn as intellectual beings. They can be in the same classroom as their co-workers and learn to relate to one another outside of the assembly line. Bringing workers together creates more unity among workers which in turn leads to an improved workplace environment. Workers share their knowledge with one another and challenge each other to rethink assumptions and ideas.</p> <p>All of the courses impart practical knowledge that members can use in their daily lives in their communities. For instance, religious intolerance was significant after the September 9/11 terrorist attacks. Through the course that dealt specifically with these serious issues, members were in a better position to counter racism and intolerance not only at work but in their public life and within their families. The course on stress and ergonomics on the other hand allows members to be more cautious with their health and safety at work in order to promote a better quality of life and secure their employment.</p> <p>Employers and the union, in turn, benefit from creating these learning opportunities in the workplace. Workers are more vested in their union since the union is relevant not only for grievances and workplace problems but also in providing them with practical tools that better their workplaces and understandings of themselves and society. Through the Workplace Training Program the CAW has clearly situated itself as an important and effective educational provider. The sustainability of this program however depends on employer funding that has been challenging to maintain in light of the pressures on the automotive industry.</p>
<p>Key Results</p>	<p>IMPACTS OF PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES</p> <p>The Workplace Training Program allows members to develop awareness about their multiple roles in the workplace, union and society at large. Individuals are not formally evaluated. Learners' feedback about the program itself is much more important for the CAW in their role as educators. This program fosters a culture of learning among members who had left formal schooling many years ago or who have little or no post-secondary education. The classroom becomes a space for their voices at work and among their co-workers. Trainers report that once workers undertake training they are more excited, appreciative about learning and express interest in wanting to learn more. Trainers in turn are seen as educational representatives who members turn to for their learning needs and curiosities.</p> <p>The practice of using peer trainers is highly effective in grounding the themes of the trainings to the practicalities of the workplace and industry. Peer trainers have experiences, valuable knowledge and class identity similar to the rest of the classroom. Peer trainers derive from the same workplace culture and even</p>

	<p>language or workplace lingo to relate directly to participants. This translates into a more inclusionary, participatory and safe learning environment for participants.</p> <p>Union activism is revitalized with members knowing more about the importance and function of their union. One learner for instance offered this feedback about one of the courses: “I thought the Union Awareness course was really good... because of the training I have become more active and been inspired by the union.” Equity representatives have also noted a tangible difference with respect and acceptance in the workplace. One learner commented, “it’s so important to have this training because it makes you aware of your rights. I give our union credit for fighting for workers through the years and standing up for our members. I have learned that through the union we can communicate about issues like harassment and discrimination.”</p>
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Sectors	Manufacturing
Projects	Union-Led Work-Related Learning
Sponsors	Trade Union, Labour federation or Labour-affiliated Group
Target Audiences	Workers
Initiative Types	Program
Sources	<p>FURTHER REFERENCES</p> <p>Worker Education & Training http://www.caw.ca/assets/pdf/TrainingPolicy.pdf</p> <p>Chapter 13: Union Education and Training, CAW 20th Anniversary Collective Bargaining Convention, 2005 http://www.caw.ca/assets/pdf/Chapter13.pdf</p> <p>CAW Education Department http://caw.ca/en/services-departments-caw-education.htm</p>
Conclusion	<p>WHAT’S NEXT</p> <p>The CAW continues to advocate for government funding to strengthen workplace learning. While governments talk about the importance of a competitive and effectively trained workforce, they have not supported workplace based training like the Workplace Training Program.</p> <p>The union notes that there is a grave need to preserve the training commitment among employers in the next round of bargaining and continue to lobby the federal and provincial governments to fund such initiatives.</p>

For CAW, workplace training is not solely about productivity to enhance employer profit but to conceptualize the worksite as a space for learning and development for workers in their full capacities within and beyond work.