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ABSTRACT

The need for a better educated work force has created a corresponding need for workplace literacy programs. A number of issues have emerged as the focus of literacy education has shifted from improving social mobility to providing employment-related literacy programs. Some of these issues are related to the need for more resources for workplace literacy programs. Several aspects of issues related to resources are: emphasis on improving the basic skills of the unemployed rather than individuals in the current work force and lack of resources that serve adequately both the general and employment-related literacy needs of all adults. Another set of issues surrounding workplace literacy programs has to do with their content or curriculum. They include determination of what skills should be taught, choice of teaching methods, and the narrow focus of many workplace literacy programs. (Thirty-one print resources provide information about workplace literacy. A listing of seven resource organizations is also provided.) (YLB)

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WORKPLACE LITERACY

During the latter part of the 1980s, workplace literacy has emerged as a national priority. The impact of adult illiteracy on private industry is increasingly visible as technological advances and foreign competition raise workers' basic skill requirements. A poorly educated work force has a negative impact on economic productivity and the nation's ability to compete in world markets. Demographic factors and changes in jobs are also creating a need for workplace literacy programs. Current trends indicate that by the year 2000, it is likely that there will be more jobs than qualified people to fill them.

Many diverse strategies and programs have been implemented to address the need for a better educated work force. At the same time, a number of issues have emerged as the focus of literacy education has shifted from improving social mobility to providing employment-related literacy programs. Some of these issues are related to the need for more resources for workplace literacy programs. Because current national efforts in literacy education tend to focus on improving the basic skills of the unemployed, the poor basic skills of many individuals in the current work force have been referred to as "the most seriously neglected national problem" (Chisman 1989, p. 13).

Another aspect of issues related to resources is the concern that employment-related literacy education programs, which frequently serve adults who possess at least minimal reading and writing abilities, tend to divert scarce resources from adults who have little or no literacy skills. More resources are needed to serve adequately both the general and the employment-related literacy needs of all adults.

Another set of issues surrounding workplace literacy programs has to do with their content or curriculum. Although it appears that the types of skills needed to enter and advance in the workplace are expanding, businesses are not always clear about what specific skills are needed. Furthermore, there is no consensus on how these skills can best be taught. The narrow focus of many workplace literacy programs raises another curriculum issue. Rather than helping adults learn to read, write, solve problems, and continue learning, programs focus on training for specific tasks. However, the business community itself is divided on the extent of its obligation regarding the improvement of general literacy.

The need to improve literacy levels of workers has been the subject of national attention. As a result, a number of issues have emerged that need to be acknowledged and addressed. The resources below provide information about workplace literacy, including a discussion of related issues.

Print Resources

- The Bottom Line: Basic Skills in the Workplace.* Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, 1988. (ERIC No. ED 291 922).
- Building a Quality Workforce.* Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Labor, Education and Commerce, 1988. (ERIC No. ED 298 300).
- Business Council for Effective Literacy. *Job-Related Basic Skills. A Guide for Planners of Employee Programs.* BCEL Bulletin Issue No. 2. New York: BCEL, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 285 974).
- Carnevale, A. P.; Gainer, L. J.; and Meltzer, A. S. *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want.* Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor; Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, [January 1989].
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- Chang, K. L. "Occupational Literacy and/or Literacy in the Workplace." Paper presented at the meeting of the Commonwealth Association for the Education and Training of Adults, Surat, India, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 286 044).
- Chisman, Forrest P. *Jump Start: The Federal Role in Adult Literacy.* Final Report of the Project on Adult Literacy. Southport, CT: Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, January 1989.
- Colliuo, G. E.; Aderman, E. M.; and Askov, E. N. *Literacy and Job Performance: A Perspective.* University Park: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, 1988.
- Conklin, N. F., and Reder, S. *Changing Channels: A Guide to Functional Literacy for the Automated Workplace.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1985. (ERIC No. ED 264 395).
- Drew, Rad A.; and Others. *How to Gather and Develop Job Specific Literacy Materials for Basic Skills Instruction. A Practitioner's Guide. The Work-Education Bridge.* Bloomington: School of Education, Indiana University, 1988. (ERIC No. ED 297 160).
- Fields, E.; Hull W.; and Sechler, J. *Adult Literacy: Industry Based Training Programs.* Research and Development Series No. 265C. Columbus: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education,

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- Gainer, L. *ASTD Update. Basic Skills*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1988. (ERIC No. ED 291 882).
- Geroy, G. D., and Erwin, M. E. "Assessing Literacy in the Workplace." *Performance and Instruction* 27, no. 5 (May-June 1988): 32-38. (ERIC No. EJ 377 773).
- Harmon, David. *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*. New York: Cambridge, 1987.
- Hull, W., and Sechler, J. *Adult Literacy: Skills for the American Work Force*. Research and Development Series No. 265B. Columbus: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 284 980).
- Imel, S. *Workplace Literacy Programs*. ERIC Digest No. 70. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1988. (ERIC No. ED 292 973).
- Lee, Chris. "Basic Training in the Corporate Schoolhouse." *Training* 25, no. 4 (April 1988): 27-36. (ERIC No. EJ 368 394).
- Mark, J. L., ed. *Let ABE Do It. Basic Education in the Workplace*. Washington, DC: American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 288 080).
- Massachusetts State Executive Department. *Guidelines for Developing an Educational Program for Worker Literacy*. Boston: MSED, 1986. (ERIC No. ED 284 071).
- Mathes, D. M. *Workplace Literacy: Raising the Floor of Education in the Workplace*. Stanley, NY: Finger Lakes Regional Education Center for Economic Development, November 1988.
- Mikulecky, L. "Literacy Task Analysis: Defining and Measuring Occupational Literacy Demands." Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, 1985. (ERIC No. ED 262 206).
- National Governors' Association. *Bringing Down the Barriers. Making America Work: Productive People, Productive Policies*. Washington, DC: NGA, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 284 843).
- Packer, Arnold H. *Retooling the American Workforce: The Role of Technology in Improving Adult Literacy during the 1990s*. Background Paper Prepared for the Project on Adult Literacy. Southport, CT: Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, December 1988.
- Philippi, Jorie W. "Matching Literacy to Job Training: Some Applications from Military Programs." *Journal of Reading* 31, no. 7 (April 1988): 65^o-66. (ERIC No. EJ 368 683).
- Rosenfeld, S.; Levy, S.; and Shreefter, R. *Learning While Earning: Worksite Literacy Programs*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Southern Growth Policies Board, 1987. (ERIC No. ED 291 881).
- Rush, R. Timothy. "Occupational Literacy: Requirements and Instructional Response." 1987. (ERIC No. ED 296 283).
- Rush, T.; Moe, A.; and Storlie, R. *Occupational Literacy Education*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1986. (ERIC No. ED 270 728).
- Skagen, Anne, ed. *Workplace Literacy*. AMA Management Briefing. New York: American Management Association, 1986.
- Sticht, T. G., and Mikulecky, L. *Job-Related Basic Skills: Cases and Conclusions*. Information Series No. 285. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1984. (ERIC No. ED 246 312).
- Workplace Literacy: Targeting the Future. A Report on the National Conference on Workplace Literacy*. Washington, DC: Office of Advocacy, U.S. Small Business Administration, October 3-4, 1988.

Resource Organizations

- AFL-CIO, Education Department, 815 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (202/637-5144).
- American Society for Training and Development, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313 (203/683-8100).
- Business Council for Effective Literacy, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, 35th Floor, New York, NY 10020 (212/512-2415, 2412).
- Education Writers Association, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036 (202/429-9680).
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (800/848-4815, 614/292-4353).
- National Alliance of Business, 1015 15th Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005 (202/457-0040).
- International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714 (302/731-1600).

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