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ABSTRACT

This document contains the first four issues of a quarterly publication on workplace literacy and learning in the workplace. The September 1989 issues feature the following articles or excerpts: "Workplace Literacy--Initiatives for Growth in the 90s"; "Yes! There Is a Cure for the Babblespeak Blues" (Nore); "Review: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs" (Valle); and "A Company Comes to Grips with Illiteracy" (Mark). The January 1990 issue includes the following articles/excerpts: "Partners in Learning: Literacy and Telecommunications" (Camilleri); "Labourer Teachers: A Tradition of Shared Work Continues" (Poulton); "Functional Literacy in Canadian Business" (DesLauriers); and "Tutoring Program Balances Personal and Organizational Learning Objectives" (Nore). September 1990's issue highlights the following: "New Frontier for Labourer-Teacher Program--Literacy in the Lettuce Patch"; "Workplace Literacy Goes East--The Atlantic Connection" (Poulton); "Clear Lines Workshop Clears the Air"; and "Dayco Products Canada Delves into Literacy." The November 1990 issue contains the following: "Learning in the Workplace Network Stretches Coast-to-Coast and Crosses Borders"; and "Statistics Canada Puts Finger on Literacy Pulse." (NLA)

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**LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE**

**VOLUME 1, NOS. 1-4**

**SEPTEMBER 1989-NOVEMBER 1990**

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# LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

September 1989

Published by Frontier College Press

Vol. 1/No. 1

## Workplace Literacy: Initiatives for Growth in the 90s

Welcome to the first edition of *Learning in the Workplace*. In this issue you'll find current topics in workplace learning and an introduction to the Learning in the Workplace program at Frontier College.

In 1987, a Southam survey showed that 24 per cent of adult Canadians are functionally illiterate. This means they have difficulty reading, writing and using numbers well enough to function effectively in everyday living. The Business Task Force on Literacy estimates the lack of basic literacy skills is a \$10 billion dollar drain on the economy each year. Canadian business pays \$4.2 billion of this cost in lost productivity, direct training and industrial accidents. The federal and provincial governments are convinced of the need to upgrade the literacy skills of today's workforce. Broadly defined, workplace literacy includes any skill, or group of skills an individual needs to do their job.

Organized labour, community colleges and boards of education are among the growing number of organizations promoting and implementing programs designed to upgrade literacy skills in the workplace. Frontier College has been assisting people to develop basic skills in workplace environments since 1899 through the Labourer Teacher program.

Learning in the Workplace incorporates much of Frontier's experience in operating workplace programs and offers a range of additional services.

An executive briefing is one way of bringing senior managers up to date on literacy as both a workplace and a national issue. The sessions, which can be half a day or a day in length, are tailored to the concerns of a specific company or industry. They include a quick self-assessment designed to highlight company issues which may indicate a literacy problem. The presentations conclude with a list of options and suggestions for follow-up.

An organizational needs assessment is often the first step in determining literacy needs. It identifies the learning needs of a company as well as additional issues which can influence the success of a workplace literacy program (such as the readability of company materials). The assessment process involves people from all levels in the company and this encourages broad support for resulting initiatives.

One of the ways companies can upgrade the literacy skills of their employees is to set up self-sustaining, in-house tutoring programs. Whether employees need to understand the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information

System (WHMIS), communicate more effectively with co-workers or upgrade basic math skills, the peer tutoring model provides an effective environment in which to learn new material. In-house tutoring programs can be used to supplement existing training initiatives.

The successful introduction of new technology and management approaches may require the design of learning materials that will help to teach specific tasks. Frontier College has worked with companies to create learning activities that increase skills in blueprint reading, quality circles and WHMIS comprehension.

Continued inside

### INSIDE

- ◆ Workplace Literacy: Initiatives for Growth in the 90s
- ◆ A Company Comes to Grips with Illiteracy
- ◆ Yes! There is a Cure for the Babblespeak Blues
- ◆ Review: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs

# Yes! There is a Cure for the Babblespeak Blues

Gord Nore

It happens without warning. You glance at the bulletin board in the lunch room. There it is. Your worst nightmare. Gobbledegook, Babblespeak, Technodribble and Legalese. Rambling sentences and polysyllables taunt you at every turn. Meaningless phrases abound. *This has been established as a Company policy and, as such, violation will be subject to the disciplinary procedure.* Huh?



Unclear writing isn't just a nuisance; it is a serious problem. Instructions are misinterpreted, or not followed. Changes in company policy go unnoticed. Information, time and money are lost.

The 1987 Southam survey on literacy in Canada reports that one in five Canadians who can read say they have difficulty with government documents. For one in six Canadian workers who cannot read, write or use numbers well enough for everyday purposes, unclear language is another barrier.

For example, a bulletin board in a Brampton, Ontario, manufacturing plant provides information on company policy, lay-off schedules and safety requirements. The majority of the memos are written at university level. The majority of the employees who are Canadian born have not completed high school. Many employees are immigrants.

A number of factors determine the clarity of a document.

Sentences that are too long or that run on are difficult to read. Professional jargon may alienate the lay reader. Documents which do not speak directly to the reader often miss their mark. Here's an example that you might find in a personnel manual: *All decisions about the dispensation of subsidies for outside education will be the prerogative of the president's office.*

The sentence does not address the reader. Verbs like 'decide' and 'dispense' are changed into nouns unnecessarily. The sentence is longer than it needs to be for a simple message. A clearer version would read: *The president will decide whether the Company will pay for your outside courses.*

Editing documents for clear language is not the answer. It's cheaper to make sure that documents are composed in a clear style. Writers are less likely to make grammar and punctuation errors when they write clearly. Take another look at our original example. *This has been established as a Company policy and, as such, violation will be subject to the disciplinary procedure could read If you violate this company policy, you will be punished.*

Frontier College is developing a clear language training session for employers who want to ensure the readability of internal documents, particularly for employees who have trouble with reading and writing.

The Centre for Professional Writing, University of Waterloo and the Canadian Law Information Council's Plain Language Centre also offer clear language seminars and workshops.

Clear writing cannot take the place of teaching people how to read. It can build a bridge by showing that the writer wants the reader to understand the content.

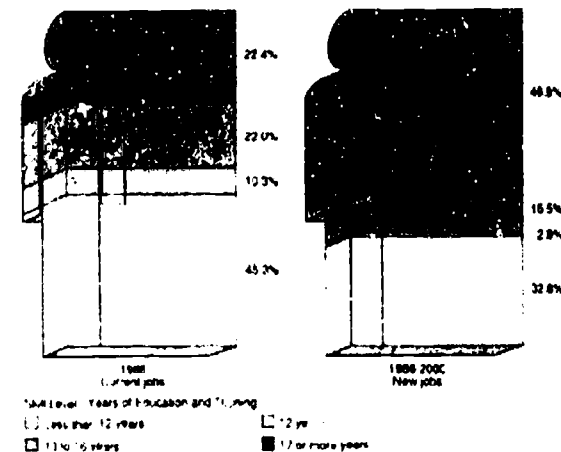
## Workplace Literacy (continued)

Canada's survival in the global marketplace depends on the creation of an adaptable, multi-skilled workforce. With a narrowing labour pool our challenge continues to be ensuring equal access to skills and information, through literacy and training initiatives, for those who want and need it.

We hope you'll find *Learning in the Workplace* informative and a good way to keep abreast of trends and issues in workplace literacy.

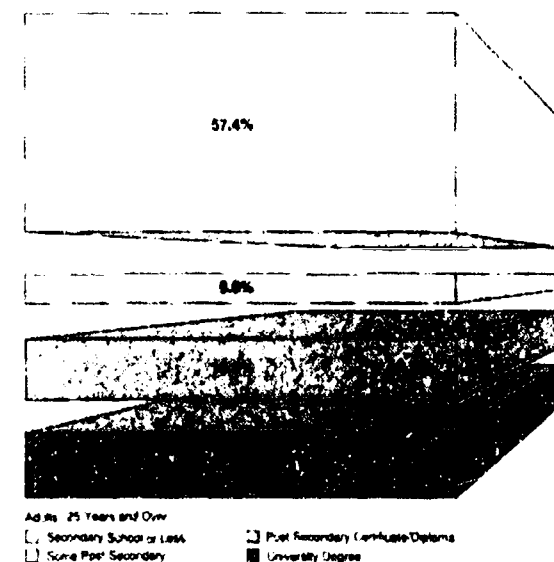
Sarah Thompson  
Editor

### Rising Skill Requirements



Source: Employment and Immigration Canada, 1989.

### Educational Attainment of Adult Labour Force, 1988.



Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Annual Averages, 1981-88.*

# Review: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs

Gina Valle. Excerpt. (September 1989) *Update*. OSTD, Toronto.

"Literacy encompasses so many things. Approach it as a learning opportunity and above all, with sensitivity," stated Gord Nore, Senior Trainer at Frontier College, where a 2-day workshop on "Literacy in the Workplace" was held.

Miria Ioannou, Director of Learning in the Workplace of Frontier College, outlined how to diagnose the literacy needs of your company. First, examine the organizational structure of the company. Second, evaluate a cross-section of employees and identify issues that can be addressed such as skills training, health and safety hazards, how to follow written instructions. Interview the employees privately. Prepare a report for senior management covering a summary of data and comments from the employees' recommendations, and the approach that will be taken. "You cannot underestimate the importance of having commitment from everyone - senior management, unions, middle management and employees," emphasized Miria.

Creating a climate for learning in the workplace isn't easy, even in the best of times, but Brent Poulton, a trainer at the College, suggests a literacy campaign is your best approach. With a campaign there is commitment to shared values, and a united vision. According to Brent, "the common vision must include growth, development in the organization and consistent goals each step of the way."

Gord Nore reviewed "Train the Tutor" techniques, outlining how to set weekly goals and prepare daily lesson plans. A humorous video was shown demonstrating how tutors should not be. Watch out for the Problem Solver or the



Learning about what makes campaigns fun. Workshop participants erect a READ Canada tent.

Professor. Their attitudes and approach are more harmful to the learner than helpful. "In order to enhance the learning process, use material that is easily found in the company and that is relevant to the learner's life at work or elsewhere." concluded Sarah Thompson, the program's Resource Co-ordinator. It's important that learners feel comfortable with the material they're working on.

Once it's all in place how do you keep the project rolling? Miria Ioannou suggests setting up Learning Committees and keeping updated records of descriptive data on all participants and program performance data on the learner and tutor training. She insists that, "record keeping helps monitor the literacy program. It also gives you a chance to improve the program and make changes where necessary."

After two days of learning activities, group work, videos and exercises the workshop drew to a

close. As one participant put it, "I had an idea of how to start and what to do, but this workshop gives you a step by step plan of action on how to put an effective literacy program in place at your company. It's comprehensive, practical and certainly worthwhile."

## CALENDAR

- ◆ Workplace Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs, September 27-28 and November 15-16, 1989
- ◆ Clear Language Writing, October 12, 1989
- ◆ Diagnosing Literacy Needs in the Workplace, October 26, 1989



# A Company Comes to Grips with Illiteracy

Ken Mark. Excerpt. (March 1989), *Materials Management and Distribution*.

Executives at Allanson, a medium-size (\$28 million in annual sales) division of Jannock Ltd., which produces electrical components for the lighting and battery industry, have taken pioneering steps to upgrade their workers' literacy levels.

The 325 Allanson workers are, like employees in other industrial plants around Toronto, a mini United Nations with widely varied skills and language backgrounds.

"We're in the process of modernizing our production processes and increasing our level of computerization," explains Howard Carney, Allanson's director of manufacturing, "but we have run into resistance to these changes."

"Many workers do not understand our explanations and others misinterpret them so they are unsure how changes will affect them."

"Our overall goal," he adds "is to reduce our fixed overhead. Right now we have one supervisor for 15 workers. We would like to raise that by increasing the ability of each employee to troubleshoot and to work independently in a work cell."

The problem of literacy arose after the introduction of quality circles - small groups of shop floor workers meeting regularly to discuss ways of improving production methods.

"Many of the workers attending these meetings had trouble preparing minutes, and others lacked the confidence to speak up," recalls Janice Davidge, Allanson's former director of personnel. "So we contacted Frontier College to see if they could help us."

Frontier College's people assessed Allanson's needs and objectives and helped to establish ground rules.

Allanson decided to have the learning groups meet once a week. Half of it would be on company time; employees would contribute the other half from their lunch

hour. Participation by learners and tutors would be voluntary.

During interviews with potential learners, Frontier College staff stressed to them that they, the learners themselves, would choose the materials and the topics. At the same time, they were asked for their personal short and long-term goals for the program.

Later, learners would be informally asked if these goals had been met.

"We never have placement or other types of formal tests," says Miria Ioannou, Director, Learning in the Workplace, for Frontier College, "they scare off learners, most of whom have frightening memories left over from school."

"Our classes are different. Besides increasing (learners') language skills, we are there to strengthen their self-confidence and to show them that they can have some control over their lives."

Although learners are in control of the course material, Allanson has started to use the classes to supplement its existing training programs.

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# LEARNING

## IN THE WORKPLACE

January 1990

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### Partners in Learning: Literacy and Telecommunications

Christine Camilleri  
Coordinator, Project Development  
and Training

During a strike at Bell Canada two years ago, managers continued staffing the switchboards and assisting callers. What they experienced was very surprising to them, although it was familiar to the regular staff. They found that some callers were unable to write down the number they were given, some couldn't find information in the white or yellow pages, others couldn't read their phone bills.

"When I was on the lines", says Penny Gilray, a member of the Frontier College - Bell Canada joint committee, "I had a young man call who needed to get his muffler fixed. I directed him to look in the yellow pages under muffler. He told me in a shy voice that he couldn't read and would I help him? I was touched by his predicament. He asked me to tell him which page to find the muffler shops. In this way, he said, he could then look at the word *muffler* and phone those companies that showed that word."

Realizing that low literacy is a pervasive problem, Bell Canada's Community Relations Department



Right to left. Denise Donlon (Muchmusic), Peter Mansbridge (CBC), Gary Lautens (Toronto Star), Shelagh Rogers (CBC), Jack Sinclair (Bell Canada) and Jack Pearpoint (Frontier College), appreciate the reading offered by a Frontier College learner, Terence Byer, at the Bell Canada project launch, October 18, 1989.

initiated a joint project with Frontier College. In partnership over the next year, Bell Canada and Frontier College are committed to initiating a program that will provide materials to individuals and community organizations interested in including literacy components in their services to clients. Tutors and trainers will be recruited from Bell Canada and the community. Emphasis will be placed on creating learning opportunities through the use of telephone and telecommunications.

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- ◆ Functional Literacy in Canadian Business
- ◆ Tutoring Program Balances Individual and Organizational Learning Objectives

# Labourer Teachers: A Tradition of Shared Work Continues

Brent Poulton  
Coordinator, Labourer Teacher  
Program

Ninety years ago Frontier College began working in remote Canadian work sites. Labourer Teachers, toiling long hours in lumber camps and on rail gangs, tutored workers in basic reading, writing and math skills.

Today Labourer Teachers are sent to workplaces seeking an on-site person to facilitate literacy training, recreation and career counselling. They are hired by companies, usually for periods of three to six months, and they live, work and learn with their co-workers. This generates an atmosphere of respect and

camaraderie, which helps create the after-work opportunities for tutoring, counselling and recreation. The mandate of a Labourer Teacher is determined in consultation with the company or union, and usually covers many activities that can improve the quality of workplace life.

In 1989, Labourer Teachers were sent to Canadian Pacific railway crews, as well as to an urban site in Winnipeg. Labourer Teacher, Brenda Smith, began the first phase of a Learning in the Workplace project at Perth Services. In addition to holding tutoring sessions, she assisted Learning in the Workplace staff to recruit tutors and learners and carry out an organizational needs assessment.



Labourer Teacher, Brenda Smith, centre, with co-workers at Perth Services

## Functional Literacy in Canadian Business

Bob DesLauriers. Excerpt. (Winter 1989) Vol. 16 No. 4 *Canadian Business Review*. Conference Board of Canada.

To what extent are low literacy levels a problem in the workplace? Is Canadian business really hampered by having workers on their payroll who lack basic skills? Aren't there many enterprises where the work consists of highly routine tasks, making functional literacy simply a non-issue? Don't organizations today carefully screen applicants to ensure that those hired possess at least basic literacy and numeracy skills?

In response to these questions the Conference Board of Canada launched a study earlier this year to measure the extent and impact of a lack of basic skills among Canadian employees.

This article presents the preliminary results from the first 338 returns - two-thirds of anticipated replies - representing a wide cross-section of Canadian enterprises. Analysis of these results reveals significant cause for concern.

As a result of a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills among employees, between 31 and 38 percent of organizations surveyed have experienced difficulty in meeting human resource objectives. These objectives include introducing new technology, training and acquiring new or advanced skills.

A shortage of basic skills is also becoming a management and production issue. Between 27 and 41 percent of firms report that employees who lack skills are causing problems in product

quality and productivity and errors in inputs and processes.

Between 32 and 40 percent of survey respondents reported that employees with basic skills shortages face difficulties in taking on new assignments, in accepting promotions or transfers to new positions, or in completing work assignments.

Between 9 and 41 percent of respondents report that skills shortages cause health and safety problems, difficulties with staff reassignments and, to a lesser extent, absenteeism and job leaving.

*Significantly, 76 percent of respondents with literacy problems have not yet implemented a human resource policy to deal with the training questions raised by functional illiteracy.*

Continued next page



# Tutoring Program Balances Personal and Organizational Learning Objectives

Gordon Nore. Excerpt. (March 1990) Vol. 7 No. 2 *TESL Canada Journal*. Toronto.

Allanson, a division of Jannock Ltd., manufactures electrical components such as ballasts for fluorescent tubes, battery chargers and transformers. They employ 325 non-unionized workers. Many of the employees are women between the age of 40 and 50 who immigrated to Canada from Italy and Greece. Many left school early to help with household chores. Most were married with their first children by the time they came to Canada. Few have had any schooling since. Most say that they have no time, as days are spent working at the plant, and nights are spent caring for their families.

Back in 1988, Allanson's management was concerned about its employees ability to adapt to rapid changes in the company's manufacturing processes. In addition to upgrading its technology, the company was

sponsoring an employee involvement program. Such programs place workers in groups to set goals, define how best to meet these goals, document progress and trouble-shoot.

One observable component of the change in literacy requirements at Allanson was a plan to teach every employee to decipher a Bill of Materials. A Bill of Materials (BOM) is actually two documents: a blueprint with manufacturing instructions, and a parts list. Previously, only a handful of supervisory personnel were required read BOMs.

During a day-long training session, volunteer tutors were instructed to work with their students in defining specific learning goals, related to work and to personal interest.

Tutors also brainstormed for materials within the workplace that might be of interest. Following are some examples.

1. Make drawings of students' work areas labelled with the necessary vocabulary

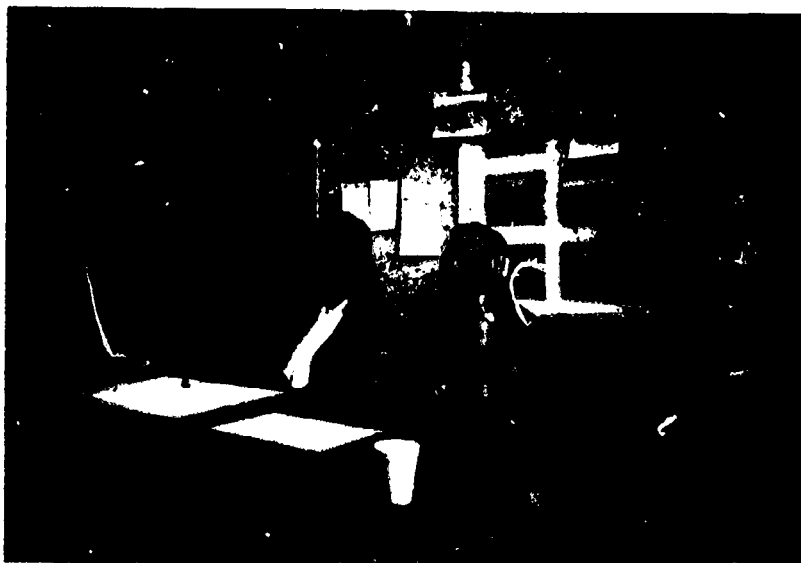
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## Functional Literacy (continued)

Human Resource departments are increasingly aware that problems with literacy and numeracy exist in the workplace. Twenty-four percent of respondents with literacy related problems have developed policies dealing specifically with basic skills. One of the most common approaches (65 percent) involves unionized employees and union representatives working together to resolve basic skills issues. Often this involves training time spanning on- and off-duty hours. Other frequently used approaches include in-house basic skills training (51 percent) off-site basic skills training (36 percent), second language training (25 percent), and community sponsored basic skills training (30 percent).

Preliminary results show that the lack of basic skills in literacy and numeracy does indeed have a significant negative impact on Canadian business objectives, and on management and operational processes. Moreover, for the worker with low literacy skills the inability to read, write and perform simple math unquestionably takes its toll in sense of self-esteem.

The edge lost by business due to literacy problems could well be a decisive factor in determining future success.



Learner and tutor work on the Bills of Materials at Allanson

## CALENDAR

- ◆ Workplace Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs, March 14-15, May 30-31, 1990
- ◆ Clear Lines: The Composition and Design of Clear Language Documents, February 22, April 19, 1990
- ◆ Diagnosing Literacy Needs in the Workplace, April 11, 1990

## Tutoring Program (continued)

2. Do a plant walk to study safety signs
3. Roleplay to practise English conversation with co-workers and supervisors.

In addition to these, students identified a number of work-related tasks that they wanted to pursue.

1. Fill out company forms
2. Participate in volunteer company projects
3. Write notes to supervisors
4. Read computer manuals
5. Write contributions to the employee suggestion plan.

Some personal interests identified by the students included the following.

1. Read to children, or participate in children's schooling (eg. attend PTA events, help with homework)
2. Bank and pay bills independently
3. Read the newspaper
4. Read recipes
5. Read at church or community events
6. Write letters and notes to friends and family.

Students and tutors were matched one-on-one and in small groups called learning circles. The criteria for matching included finding a tutor who expressed

interest or expertise in an area in which a student wanted instruction. Where more than one learner (maximum three) was placed with a tutor, efforts were made to draw learners from different areas of the worksite. This way no one work area was "stripped" of personnel at the same time. Occasionally, personality conflicts arose, and learners and tutors had to be re-matched. In all, 15 tutors were matched with 45 students. Another 20 students were on a waiting list. Many of these were later matched with tutors when participants left the program or the company.

**Peer tutoring did yield positive results.** In exit interviews, usually after three to six months, many students and tutors reported that they were satisfied with the tutoring process. They felt they had achieved their goals and that it was time to move on. Company personnel reported that many learners were more confident in their interactions with supervisors and co-workers. A handful of students decided to go to night school to improve their English. Some wrote letters of thanks to their tutors and to Frontier College staff. Also, a number of tutors reported that the experience helped them to relate better to their co-workers. Senior management at

Allanson formally acknowledged the work of participants in the company newsletter.

The BOMs, written originally for personnel with training or experience in engineering, contained jargon familiar to that discipline. Sentences were quite long. A Frontier College trainer worked with Allanson personnel to simplify manufacturing instructions. A list of guidelines for writing was prepared which included the following.

1. Eliminate unnecessary technical jargon from the training
2. Explain all useful terminology in context.

Existing training in BOMs depended largely on printed information. Frontier College staff worked with the BOM trainer to help make the instructional process and materials more accessible to those who had difficulty with reading and writing. The trainer was encouraged to use product parts in the training so that learners could see not only the parts' number and name, but also the object they represented.

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## New Frontier For Labourer-Teacher Program *Literacy In The Lettuce Patch*

The sun has been up for an hour over the lettuce fields at Cooks Bay Produce farm in the Holland Marsh area, one hour's drive north east of Toronto. About fifteen field workers are on their knees in rows of lettuce, heads bowed toward the sun. Irene Jansen, labourer-teacher with Frontier College, is dressed in yellow rubber overalls, boots and gloves. She works in unison with her fellow lettuce pickers, grabbing three heads at a time and packing them neatly in boxes. The sweet hum of Spanish and Portuguese conversation rises above the noise of lettuce leaves crunching beneath knees and feet. At night, the workers forget about lettuce and attend informal English language classes.

This is a new frontier for the labourer-teacher program. "For 90 years our program has been aimed mostly at railway workers," says Brent Poulton, Coordinator. "We wanted to get into some other areas. In 1989 there were over 10,000 migrant workers brought to Ontario farms. We see the program expanding its partnerships with educational institutions, organizations, employers and government across Canada."

Irene, a first time labourer-teacher, smiles up at me, cracks a joke in Spanish with a fellow labourer without missing a beat, and keeps on picking and



Irene Jansen works days in the lettuce patch and nights teaching English.

packing. A political science/anthropology student at McGill with a world of experience — Canada World Youth in Ecuador, a domestic workers' rights group, a Latin American community group, French, Spanish, ESL — Irene was attracted to Frontier College's 90 year old labourer-teacher summer program, and joined in immediately when agricultural workers became involved.

"I wondered who this gutsy gal was who wanted to work out

here and live with nine guys," says Peter Vanderkooj, owner of the 250 acre lettuce, onion and carrot farm. "It's excellent for the workers. There's more to life than a grind. From my perspective, we should be so lucky (to have someone like Irene)."

"The rest was up to me," says Irene. "The first night I worked with eight guys. By the next class a neighbouring farm had heard about it." Within a few days the makeshift classroom was crowded.

With a whiteboard, basic reading books, cultural videos and informal chats, the workers began to learn Inglés.

"It's a very natural way for them to learn," Irene says, "because they see me primarily as a worker. Helping them learn English, bringing books and buying sports equipment is seen as a natural thing for me to do."

"I bounce my Spanish off them, they translate. I'm learning as much as they are," adds Irene. "They can see I'm having the same difficulties learning Spanish as they are learning English. It bridges the gap."

Some days the crew fills 500 boxes, on others 1500. It's supply and demand.

"I've heard we're the fastest packers in the area," says Irene.

"It's hard to put the benefits into tangibles," comments Rene

Continued next page

# Workplace Literacy Goes East — The Atlantic Connection

Brent Poulton  
Trainer and Labourer-Teacher  
Coordinator

"I have been struggling with my own literacy program and now I know all the things I need to know. You addressed the issues well." This comment came from one of the participants at the Learning In The Workplace workshop delivered by Frontier College for a group of New Brunswick Community College adult educators in Saint John.

The Workplace Literacy training program was tailored to address Atlantic issues such as smaller, more scattered populations, unemployed learners and small to medium sized businesses.

Errol Williams, of the New Brunswick Department of Advanced Education and Training, and Lori Moran-Baker from the New Brunswick Department of Labour — both familiar faces from previous LWP workshops — worked to organize the day and a half event. The session opened with a look at the impact of literacy in the workplace, how to conduct an effective needs assessment, and the methodology



Participants and trainers at the Saint John Workshop.

for tracking and training tutors.

Next, information was presented on developing workplace learning materials, recruitment strategies, and alternatives to testing and formal evaluation. The session closed with a look at how to market workplace literacy services to businesses.

Participants agreed that the

LWP Student Centred Individualized Learning (SCIL) approach was a useful alternative and could complement existing literacy services.

One participant said, "You've given me a new respect for sharing knowledge...and a brand new concept of how I can use and develop team training."

## Lettuce Patch (continued)

Schoemaker, farm manager. "The fellows are very eager to pick up on English and the social aspect is fulfilling. Irene has excellent rapport with the guys."

"The workers are trying harder, testing phrases, picking up the tone of English, communicating and understanding better. I've noticed for the first time this week that their pronunciation is better," adds Jansen.

Much of the learning takes place right in the lettuce field. English words about work, time,

salutations, as well as new adjectives help provide humour, learning, and something to think about.

"For example, we banter that the workers are 'cute and crazy.' For them to be able to say, in English, 'Bill, you crazy tall guy' is great. One guy calls the manager's son 'baby chief.' It gives them a big thrill to hear themselves speak English," says Irene.

"It's very rewarding for me. I'm getting a window into this incredible, unique little Mexico and Portugal in the middle of a

lettuce patch. Theirs is a culture of great jokes, laughter, teasing, screaming at each other," adds Irene. "I'll hear a scream and think it's a life and death matter, when all they're discussing is what's for dinner. This is a precious opportunity for me to see their culture. They joke about doing the lambada in the lettuce patch."

"Generally speaking, there's an attitude in the marsh that these workers are good for us and we have to be good to them. I'm sure I can persuade others to participate next year," says Peter.



# Clear Lines Workshop Clears The Air

LWP's inaugural clear language workshop, Clear Lines: How to Design and Compose Clear Language Documents workshop, helped clear the air — or error — about presenting organizational materials in plain English.

"We wanted to help writers make their messages more accessible," says Frontier's Gordon Nore, workshop leader, "especially to those who have trouble reading, writing and using numbers."

A diverse mix of participants — from the TTC, the Toronto Stock Exchange, Eatons, as well as a Frontier College Independent Studies tutor, a community literacy worker and an English teacher — contributed to a successful first workshop.

Having opened with a look at the ties between workplace literacy issues and the role of



Mr. Roberts, another unclear writer, confronted by the Clear Writer's Hit Squad.

clear language, the next step was to look at options. The Clear Writer's Hit List, 10 simple guidelines for achieving clarity, was introduced. Topics including clear design techniques, achieving

readability, and bringing plain language practice and policy back to the office, rounded out a full day.

Participants discussed the following issues:

- Readability tools, such as S.M.O.G. (Standard Measure of Gobbledygook), which estimates the reading grade level of a piece, are interesting and provide a benchmark, but should not form the basis of clear language. There is no substitute for knowing your audience.
- When identifying audience needs, a number of factors come into play: culture, race, family structure, income level and role in the organization.

Continued on back page

## Dayco Products Canada Delves Into Literacy

"It's like a the United Nations here," says Dayco's Personnel Manager, Lois Giddings.

"Our workers speak at least 10 languages and come from over 30 countries."

Dayco Products Canada Inc., a 75 year old, multi-national automotive and industrial parts supplier, has experienced many of the corporate crises of the 80's, including two corporate takeovers. One of the biggest challenges they face, however, is workplace literacy.

After a needs assessment, Dayco acted on the recommendation that English reading and writing classes be set up for workers to get them started.

"We knew the classes would start off large and then drop off," says Lois. "Now we can look at ways to promote a (student centred individualized learning) program and find tutors for those

who don't want the classroom style. We want to help them at home as well as at work."

Employees' reaction to the English classes included comments such as, "I found it interesting," "Other people understand me now," and "I can explain problems."

"Part of the problem with program drop-outs was shift work and an unexpected increase in overtime," adds Lois. "There was such a mix of levels: some could communicate in English, others couldn't read or write, some had limited education in their own language."

"In the Fall we'll be able to look at a student-centred learning program. We have some workers willing to be tutors. This program will go hand-in-hand with work and other training," Lois says.

"We're also planning to do inter-cultural communications

training for management and salaried employees on the floor. It will help people gain knowledge and change attitudes and behaviour in multicultural situations."

### CALENDAR

- ◆ Workplace Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs, September 17-18, October 22-23, November 20-21, 1990
- ◆ Clear Lines: How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents, September 19, October 24, November 22, 1990

# Sources and Resources

## VIDEOS

**Clear Writer's Hit Squad:** 16 min.  
Designed for managers, administrators, human resource professionals, trainers and anyone who is concerned about clear language in the workplace. The video comes with a trainer/user guide which includes samples of clear and unclear writing.  
\$125.00

**Plant Tours, Developing Learning Materials:** 5:34 min.  
The camera takes you on a tour of two manufacturing sites in search of learning opportunities. An accompanying Leaders' Guide offers a workshop to translate these opportunities into workplace-specific materials and activities.  
\$50.00

**Tutoring Styles:** 8:43 min.  
A humorous look at some of the situations that first time tutors encounter, emphasizing positive attitudes towards students and the student-centred approach to learning. Leaders' Guide included.  
\$50.00

## PRINT

**Clear Lines Workshop Manual:**  
This manual expands on the Clear Writer's video and User's Guide by offering tips, worksheets and writing samples to help you compose and design clear language documents. Included in the price of the Clear Lines workshop (see Calendar for dates), or can be purchased separately.

**Workplace Literacy — Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs:** A manual of information, tips, sheets, checklists and activities to support the Workplace Literacy workshop (see Calendar for dates). Bibliography. Included in the price of the workshop or available separately for \$100.00.

**Tutor Resource Guide:** A handbook designed specifically for tutors in the workplace. Available in 1991.

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

*Coming soon to a location near you?  
Taking our expertise on the road*

continues to be part of our tradition. If you're interested in organizing training opportunities, our training team is available to customize and deliver workshops in your region.

## Clear Lines (continued)

- Clear language does not mean "dumbing down" to the reader. The writer who strives for clarity is one who genuinely cares about the reader's comprehension.
- Clear writers must take numeracy skills into consideration. The clear writer cannot make complex ideas and concepts simpler or easier; however they can make them more accessible.
- Clear writers must be creative in demonstrating clarity. Sometimes less is more. Writers with computers tend to overdo document design. Simple formats, with lots of white space, are easier to read.

*Many thanks to Kate Harrison of Kate Harrison Communications, Winnipeg for research and writing.*

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# LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

November 1990

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## LWP Network Stretches Coast-to-Coast And Crosses Borders

Although the head office of Frontier College is nestled in downtown Toronto under the watchful eye of the CN Tower, the Learning In The Workplace (LWP) crew can look east, west, north and south and know someone out there is spreading the word.

The Learning in the Workplace network of contacts has started building its own momentum, and is still growing. We'd like to introduce you to some of them.



Kate Harrison surveying the lettuce patch.

**Kate Harrison, Principal, Kate Harrison**

**Communications** Kate's communications services and training business is always changing direction to meet new

challenges. When Kate saw Frontier College's (FC) past President Jack Pearpoint interviewed on Canada AM, she knew literacy would be her next focus. After taking training with Learning In The Workplace, Kate invited FC to help carry out a needs assessment at a large, multi-cultural manufacturing plant in Winnipeg.

Kate also heads up the Literacy Action Plan Committee for the Manitoba Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators. The committee has provided PR to a World Literacy Day event, volunteers for Beat The Street, Winnipeg, and is producing an a/v for members as well as

writing monthly articles on literacy in the workplace for the association's newsletter. Kate presented Literacy In The Workplace: Issues and Options to IABC at the first national Human Resource Managers' conference in September.

**Janet Carlisle, Salary/Benefits and Training Coordinator, Human Resources, MacMillan Bloedel, Pine Hill, Alabama** Janet teamed up with her company's communications officer to attend the two day workshop, Workplace

continued next page



Janet Carlisle is flanked by Tom Conway, Manager of Communications and Community Relations, MacMillan Bloedel, and Theresa Holden, IAPA, at Frontier College during Workplace Literacy training.

# QUARTERLY NEWS

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## Network (cont'd)

Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs. Literacy is an integral part of MacMillan Bloedel's training programs. The decision to involve the communications manager shows the company's commitment to getting the word out.

Janet's company already has an instructor come on site to help employees with reading and writing; math is next on the list. MacMillan Bloedel also sponsors community literacy projects.



Donna Kirisits at the Chempac Book Fair.

**Donna Kirisits, CHRP, Human Resources Manager, Chempac Powder, Division of CCL Industries, Etobicoke, Ontario**

Donna has just received the new Certified Human Resource Professional designation, and it's easy to see why. She has taken literacy concerns under her wing with both her human resource responsibilities at work and the human resource courses she teaches at Sheridan College.

Chempac Powder, a medium-sized custom manufacturing company, has seen many changes — including a restructuring in the whole corporate philosophy from a top-down to a bottom-up

communications and management decision-making path. These changes — technology, computers, and information — along with her own close attention to individual skills needs prompted Donna to bring writing, reading and math skill training to the forefront.

Dedicated to getting a Learning In The Workplace program up and running "forever," Donna has successfully managed the needs assessment and tutor/learner recruitment phases. She arranged for thirty-two Chempac employees to receive six hours of tutor training from LWP staff in September. Using data gathered from individual interviews with interested tutors and learners as well as LWP staff, Donna carried out the matching and scheduling of program participants. The program is now under way.

**Lois Giddings, Dayco Products Canada Inc., Weston, Ontario**

Lois describes her company, which manufactures automotive and industrial belts, as a small United Nations. When the company began experiencing difficulties in communicating changes as well as Health & Safety issues to the workers, they carried out a needs assessment to identify specific



Lois Giddings of Dayco Products Canada.

worker interests. Lois accepted a recommendation to implement a basic English language class for workers as a starting point. With Workplace Literacy: The Design And Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs under her belt, and basic English training in place, Lois has been designing and implementing a student-centred program this Fall. She already has willing participants. She sees this new program going "hand-in-hand" with Dayco's other training programs.

## MacMillan Bloedel To Expand Program

Janet Carlisle, Salary/Benefits and Training Coordinator, MacMillan Bloedel, Pine Hill, Alabama, has worked with MB's employee literacy program for 5 years. Now she's working to expand the company's efforts in this area.

Employees can currently get help with writing and reading through the company's instructor. An increased awareness of learning needs gathered from internal needs assessments and a

greater awareness of issues and options has inspired Janet to go one step further.

"We are planning on adding a math instructor," says Janet, "as our needs assessments are indicating math skills are a priority. Other areas, such as sciences used in our field and computer skills are also being

continued on back page



# Stats Canada Puts Finger On Literacy Pulse



## Latest Stats on Reading and Numeracy Literacy

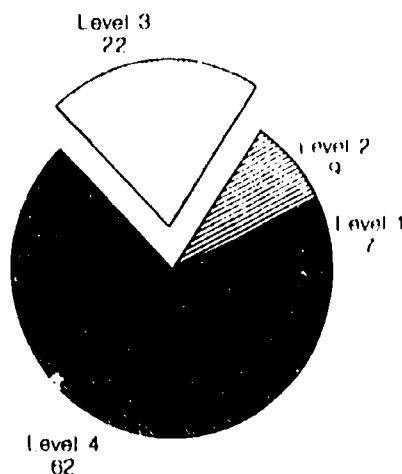
Statistics Canada is getting to the heart of the national literacy problem with a three phase, extensive literacy survey of 9500 Canadians, aged 16 - 69 from coast to coast. Their Survey of Literacy Skills Used In Daily Activities, complements the heralded Southam Report on Literacy.

Defining literacy as "the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community," Stats Can set out to measure the reading, writing and numeracy fitness levels of Canadians. The reading and numeracy data is out; writing details are coming soon.

Stats Can put reading skills into four levels: Level 1, non-readers or those who have great difficulty, totalled 7 percent of those surveyed. Level 2, limited skill use, familiar words only, numbered 9 percent. Level 3, those avoiding or doing only task-oriented reading, totalled 22 percent. Level 4 participants, illustrating a wide range of reading skills, added up to 62 percent.

The report highlighted these findings: High school completion is one key to acquiring everyday reading skills. Almost 30 percent of adults born outside of Canada have limited reading skills. These skills decline as one moves from west to east across Canada.

## READING LEVELS OF ADULT CANADIANS Statistics Canada 1989



See text for description of levels.

## Numeracy skills linked to reading skills.

More than one in three Canadians has difficulty dealing with the numeracy demands of everyday life. Stats Can illustrated their findings in three levels.

Level 1, or 14 percent, had limited skills and at best could only identify numbers in a text. Level 2, adding up to 24 percent, could only perform simple adding and subtracting. Level 3, totalling 62 percent, could meet everyday skill needs.

Numeracy skill levels are also closely linked to schooling: 46 percent of those having no schooling or only elementary levels had limited numeracy skills. These skills are also closely associated with functional reading skills and were weakest among young adults (16-24 years), while

strongest among adults aged 25 - 34 years.

For more information contact: Stats Canada's Gilles Montigny 613-951-9731, Karen Kelly 613-951-4594, or the National Literacy Secretariat 819-953-5283.

## CALENDAR

- ◆ **Workplace Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs, Jan. 22-23, 1991; Feb. 19-20; Mar. 19-20; Apr. 22-23; University of Winnipeg, Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 1991.**
- ◆ **Clear Lines: How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents, Jan. 24, 1991; Feb. 21; Mar. 21; Apr. 24.**

# December Forum For Workplace Literacy Practitioners

Barbara Fretz

The end of the year is rapidly approaching and Learning in the Workplace is culminating its activities with a two-day, national forum on workplace literacy programming. The forum will take place at Frontier College on December 6 & 7. The idea of bringing together all the past workshop participants under one roof was conceived after discussions with our participants.

Throughout August and September 1990 LWP conducted a follow-up evaluation of the training workshop Workplace Literacy: The Design and Implementation of Workplace Learning Programs. The follow-up took the form of telephone interviews with some 40 participants. Although the evaluations of the workshop were very favourable, many participants expressed concern that the workshop did not provide enough time for informal discussions and networking with the other members of the group. There was

also a desire for further discussions with those who have initiated workplace literacy programs.

The forum will allow all past LWP workshop participants to come together and share their ideas, concerns, and questions regarding workplace literacy programs. In order to maximize the amount of group participation and information sharing, the forum will be set up to focus on the issues which were raised by our participants during the phone interviews. The main issues include: marketing and promotion, organizational needs assessments, options for increasing workplace literacy, developing learning materials, and building networks.

To keep the forum as informal and participatory as possible, we have asked some past participants to act as presenters. Discussions will be facilitated by Sue Waugh who is an independent consultant. The presenters will also act as resource people to the facilitator.

The forum is open to those who have attended LWP workshops. For further information contact Sarah Thompson or Barbara Fretz.

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## MacMillan Bloedel (cont'd)

identified. We will continue to assess employee needs and expand our program to meet those needs."

Janet works closely with Tom Conway, Manager, Communications and Community Relations. Together they create an important link between human resources and communications: a key partnership in literacy programs.

MacMillan Bloedel is not only active with internal literacy, but in the community as well. It is providing financial support for community programs and has helped establish an evening mathematics program.

*Many thanks to Kate Harrison of Kate Harrison Communications, Winnipeg for research and writing.*

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