

Learning *together*

Solidarity at work

Vol. 4, number 11, Fall/Winter 2003

CLC Executive Council Celebrates Literacy

On May 27, 2003, Barbara Byers, CLC Executive Vice-President and Bev Burke, consultant, presented the exciting results and recommendations of the evaluation of the CLC Workplace Literacy Project to members of the CLC Executive Council. Several

heads of unions responded with stories of the literacy initiatives taking place in their own unions, making the link to the inspiration and support provided by the CLC and the CLC Literacy Working Group.



Members of the CLC Executive Council sport *Unions and Literacy* t-shirt.

Learning and clean water: labour takes the plunge

Following a 2002 inquiry into a serious incident of contaminated water in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, water and wastewater workers now have to be certified by June 2005. For many of these workers, certification is going to be a problem.

In northern Saskatchewan and in small communities across the province, many got their Grade 12 decades ago, while others never went past Grade 8 or 10. Although the workers may well be doing their jobs safely and effectively, they could face problems with the certification exams if they have difficulty reading text and documents or if they have forgotten math skills they don't use. They may also need help with how to take an exam: dealing with multiple choice questions, for example, and managing exam anxiety.

The aim of the Water and Wastewater Workers Essential Skills Project is to support workers in the sector who face losing their jobs or being frozen in their current jobs if they do not get certification. The project is surveying workers across the province to see what their training needs are in essential skills and recommending training strategies.

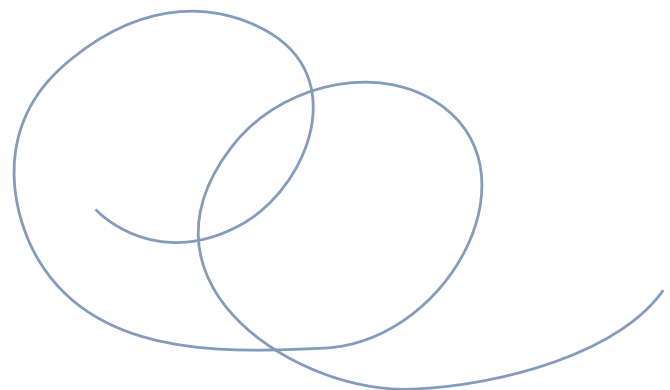
The union-led Sector Committee for the project, with representation from CUPE and CEP and co-chaired by Ron Torgerson of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL), is committed to looking at the certification issue from a worker-centred point of view.

For more information on the project, contact Naomi Frankel, Project Coordinator at: waterworkersproject@mail.com

by Naomi Frankel, Project Co-ordinator,
member of CUPE and the American Federation of Musicians.



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Labour on the Rock

Although the 26 labour delegates who arrived at the 4th Atlantic Region Workplace/Workforce Institute in St. John's on October 16th weren't sure what to expect, we left three days later charged with enthusiasm and energy to pursue literacy issues back in our home provinces.

We were among the 80 delegates from business, labour, government and education from the four Atlantic provinces, so it wasn't a surprise that with all the "stakeholders" participating that the word "partnership" was used a lot. While the differences among us created a certain degree of tension, it was clear that we were all passionate about workplace education.

"...we are well-positioned in the region to continue to share information, best practices and resources while valuing our provincial identities."

Sometimes we need to look at why a particular stakeholder might be our partner in workplace education, even if we don't agree with their motive. Labour knows that partnership or "jointness" is not "sameness": we work on literacy from our own vantage points, and sometimes we can create partnerships that lead to innovative programs for our members. The challenge is to see whether the tension can be worked with toward a common goal. Is there room for common ground when a business delegate speaks of education as "a gift" that employers can give, while at the same time Gerry Duguay (USWA) was able to speak eloquently of empowering his co-workers as a peer tutor in the EAST Literacy Project? It was truly heartening to hear about the many successful programs highlighted by labour, business and government.

Brigid Hayes of the National Literacy Secretariat summarized how far we have come since the last Institute in PEI in 1998. For example, business, labour, government and practitioners attended each other's workshops this time. Brigid pointed



out that she was the only CFA (Come From Away) at the Institute: participants, presenters and our keynote speaker, Nancy Riche, who spoke on *Workplace Education - Not a Frill*, were all Atlantic Canadians. We need to look at how far we have come in five years and celebrate and build on our accomplishments.

Delegates were encouraged to value the common threads, the great models and programs and to build on them. At the same time, we know that the provinces are all at different stages in the development of policies, procedures and programs. The Institute provided labour, already a major player in the field of adult education, with a valuable opportunity to influence the people involved in making the critical decisions. Through our Labour-LEARNS Atlantic network, we are well-positioned in the region to continue to advocate and to share information, best practices and resources while valuing our provincial identities.

**By Linda Wentzel, NSFL
Margie Hancock, NLFL
and Jason Carney, NBFL**

Ode

to

Brigid



Brigid Hayes of the National Literacy Secretariat and Tamara Levine, Co-ordinator, CLC Workplace Literacy Project.

This is an excerpt from *Ode to Brigid*, written on the occasion of Brigid's departure from the NLS.

*Workers need a chance to learn, to question and to know
To get involved, to help their kids, to blossom and to grow
In factories, in nursing homes, in mills across this land
With Brigid's work it always meant there was a helping hand.*

*The labour movement learned so much with Brigid as our guide
When we needed help or wisdom, you were always at our side
You knew that in the workplace, the union must be heard
To stand up for the workers, hold the bosses to their word.*

Brigid Hayes, Program Manager for business and labour at the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), Human Resources Development Canada since 1989, has accepted a new position as senior researcher with the Canadian Labour and Business Centre. Many of us in the labour community who worked with Brigid on literacy projects over the years will

miss her support, her enthusiasm, her creative thinking and her hearty laughter. We wish her all the best in her next adventure!

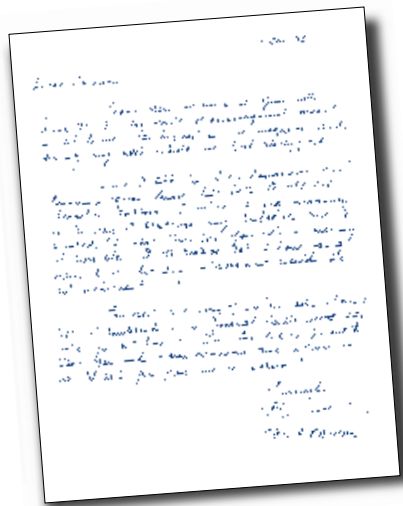
by Tamara Levine, Co-ordinator, CLC Workplace Literacy Project

For the full text of the poem, see the literacy page at www.clc-ctc.ca.

Clear language = better letters

Syed Rahman, a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) Edmonton local, participated in the *Clear Language for Union Communications* course at the Alberta Federation of Labour/CLC Fall School in November 2002.

An avid writer of letters to the editor, Syed's letter on the war in Iraq was published in *Time* magazine in June 2003. Here are excerpts of his response to Tamara Levine, CLC, who co-facilitated the course with Karen Kennedy, CUPW. Tamara had written to congratulate Syed.



July 11, 2003

Dear Tamara,
Thank you so much for your letter ... your words of encouragement mean a lot to me. Your buying *Time* magazine and liking my letter made me feel really good.

Since I took the *Clear Language for Union Communications* course last fall at AFL/CLC School in Jasper, I noticed a big improvement in the way I structure my sentences and I wanted to thank you for your help in making it possible. I do realize that I have long ways to go but any improvement would be an achievement.

... I want to thank you and Karen Kennedy once again for all the help you gave me in Jasper.

Sincerely,

Syed A. Rahman
CUPW member, Edmonton local

Resolving to be clear

I wanted to share some exciting news from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour's (NSFL) 42nd convention (October 2003): 39 out of the 84 resolutions before the convention were in clear language format.



Following the guidelines for submitting resolutions in the optional clear language format, the resolutions put the action first followed by the reason. While the styles of the resolutions varied, the point was made: clear language works! The debates were intense and interesting with lots of speakers at the mikes. I believe that in part this is due to the clear

language used.

My heart sung when a sister, who had attended several previous conventions, commented that she found the resolutions easy to understand this time and could now follow the debates better because she understood the resolutions!

Linda Wentzel, NSFL Literacy Co-ordinator

Note: The CLC and Federations of Labour in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and the Northwest Territories have policy encouraging convention resolutions to be submitted in clear language format.

CUPE local works toward first clear language contract

In 2002, CUPE Local 1505 and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (Fort McMurray), Alberta signed a letter of understanding in which the local and the employer agreed to change their collective agreement into clear language during the next round of negotiations.

“I’m hopeful that when this language is clear... our members will understand their rights and responsibilities.”

When the joint committee set up for this purpose asked CUPE to help, Sylvia Sioufi, CUPE National Literacy Coordinator and Josey Finley, CUPE Education Representative went to Fort McMurray in July 2003 to facilitate a week-long clear language workshop. By the end of the training, the union/ employer committee understood what clear

language means, had rewritten several contract clauses in clear language and had a plan in place to be ready for negotiations next year. The plan includes testing the new language with membership and management groups.

“I’m hopeful that when this language is clear, we’ll have more success in getting shop stewards to come forward and our members will understand their rights and responsibilities. With clearer language, maybe even our managers will be more consistent in applying the terms of the contract,” said a CUPE Local 1505 member on the joint committee.



by Josey Finley, CUPE Education Representative

Upcoming courses:

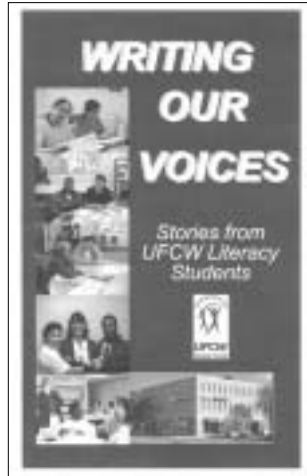
Clear Language for Union Communications:

1. CLC Pacific Winter School, Harrison Hot Springs, BC - Jan. 18-23, 2004.
Contact the CLC at (604) 430-6766.
2. CLC Ontario Winter School, Port Elgin, Ontario - Feb. 15-20, 2004.
Contact the CLC at (416) 441-3710.
3. CLC Atlantic Spring School, Memramcook, NB. April 25-30, 2004.
Contact the CLC at (506) 858-9350.

New Resources

1. *WRITING OUR VOICES* – *STORIES FROM UFCW LITERACY STUDENTS*

This 28 page booklet is a compilation of stories from literacy students at the UFCW Local 832 Training Centre in Winnipeg. Through the stories, we learn about their struggles and how far they have come by participating in a union program that acknowledges and builds on their experiences and skills. *Writing Our Voices* was created so that other workers would see themselves and find hope that they too can transform their lives.



Visit www.ufcw832.com/UFCW Training Centre/Literacy Program to download a free copy of *Writing Our Voices* or contact the UFCW Training Centre at (204)775-8329 or (877)775-8329 or email: info@ufcwtraining.com to order copies for a nominal fee.

- involving members in rewriting clauses
- creating a companion document to your contract
- negotiating a clear contract

For copies, contact literacy@cupe.ca.

3. *LITERACIES*

Have you ever wondered how people across the country are using art in the adult literacy classroom? Or what the International Adult Literacy Statistics (IALS) really mean? *Literacies:*



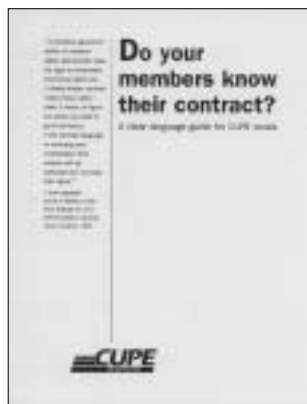
Researching practice, practising research is a new Canadian journal that connects people working and asking questions in the field.

Literacies comes out in spring and fall. The Fall 2003 issue is available now. To receive a free copy, e-mail journal@literacy.ca with your mailing address. Next year, the journal will be available by subscription only.

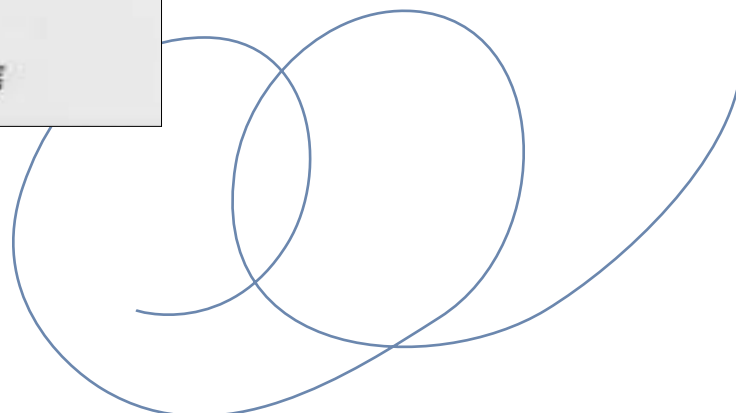
The on-line version of the journal includes articles and a discussion forum for each issue. The Fall discussion starts November 24 and focuses on the IALS. Join us at www.literacyjournal.ca and let us know what you think.

2. *DO YOUR MEMBERS KNOW THEIR CONTRACT?*

This new 35 page clear language guide for CUPE locals can help make collective agreements more accessible to union members. Here are some ideas that CUPE locals have tried:



- using a more inclusive process and language at meetings
- explaining selected clauses of your contract in your newsletter



The CLC Literacy Working Group

The CLC Literacy Working Group is composed of affiliates and federation representatives with an interest in union-based literacy and clear language. The Working Group meets twice yearly to share information and resources, learn from our collective

experiences and advise the CLC on its Workplace Literacy Project. Contact your Literacy Working Group representative for more information about what's going on in your organization.

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