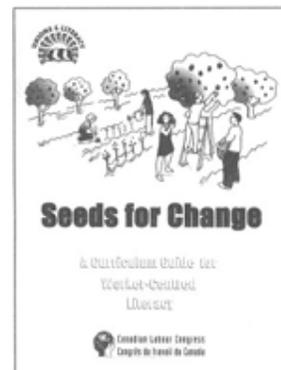




Volume 3, number 7, Winter 2001 – 2002

Literacy is political

In worker-centred literacy, curriculum is first and foremost a political issue. That's because education isn't neutral, no matter who provides it. *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-Centred Literacy*, the latest resource from the CLC's Learning in Solidarity series, is about the union approach to course development and content.



Unions and business have different views about curriculum. Business usually defines literacy in the context of productivity and profit. But the union believes a worker-centred curriculum must address the broad range of the learning needs of workers. Unions are interested in seeing the worker develop as a full human being who has many different roles-in the family, the union, the workplace and the community. Unions recognize that literacy plays an important part in each of these roles.

Our curriculum has to be about more than reading and writing, because literacy in its fullest sense is about critical reflection and action. It is more than developing the skills we need to carry out particular tasks. It is also about understanding the contexts or systems that affect our daily lives. A worker-centred curriculum is about creating learning experiences that build on our lives in a way that strengthens us individually and collectively to be active and participating citizens. It is also about developing the union's capacity to engage in the struggle for social justice.

To explore these ideas more fully, order a copy of *Seeds for Change*. For more information, please see page 5.

Learning Together is published three times a year with financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat. We welcome your articles, event notices and opinion pieces.



Congrès du travail du Canada
Canadian Labour Congress

Transforming BEST

CAW Canada is taking on the challenge of rebuilding BEST, the basic skills program that saw its Ontario government funding collapse in 1997.

Since its formation in 1988, The Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST program had provided resources, trained peer instructors, co-ordinated program delivery and helped to negotiate BEST in the workplace. The program proved that unions could develop their own vision and model of literacy training.

No union felt the loss of BEST more acutely than the Canadian Auto Workers. The CAW accounted for more than 60% of BEST's active workplace sites.

With funding from the National Literacy Secretariat, the union has put in place a new BEST Transformations project that covers the Big Three auto assembly plants, where commitment to BEST is entrenched in the collective agreement. The project will help local unions keep the "best" elements of BEST in their workplaces. It will also transform BEST in some key areas.

Already, a two-week Train-the-Trainer workshop has been offered with help from former BEST Training Officer, Jean Connon-Unda. The pilot included instruction in adult learning principles, and the use of new curriculum units and learning materials.

Future work will focus on making changes to the training program, developing curriculum and planning for the ongoing support of peer instructors. As well, new needs will be considered, such as helping members who want to finish their high school education.

The best of BEST stays

The CAW will keep four elements that set the earlier BEST program apart from other basic skills training:

- The "50/50" commitment, where employers pay for two hours of work-time instruction, and workers match this with two hours of their own time each week.
- Employer funding for needs assessments, promotion, peer instructors' time for training, instruction and class preparation.
- The peer instructor model.
- The learner-directed model. This means emphasizing adult learning principles and critical thinking skills. It is also about empowering members to learn, question and become active participants in their workplace, union and community.

The key changes will include:

- Providing a stronger content base. The curriculum will be about 50% theme-based (see below). At the same time, the CAW's commitment to adult learning principles will be maintained .
- Building the union's capacity to develop workplace literacy and support peer instructors.

"This is part of the union's vision to enable members to participate in various kinds of learning - a vision that is also reflected in the CAW's collective bargaining and legislative agendas", said Buzz Hargrove, CAW President. While the current project focuses on the auto sector, the challenge remains to develop programs for members in newer sectors of the union and beyond the traditional Ontario base.

"This is part of the union's vision to enable members to participate in various kinds of learning ..."

Theme-based curriculum is where it's at

Developing a new theme-based curriculum is a key component of the CAW's *BEST Transformations* project, It's all about ways to better meet the needs of CAW members.

The theme-based approach builds on the framework described in the CLC's *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-Centre Literacy*. Theme-based curriculum units are provided for instructors to use in developing participatory programs. The units are based on the themes relevant to workers in the auto sector. They incorporate real workplace material and situations, with activities that pose problems and are designed to develop skills. The units include instructor notes and participant handouts.

The CAW plans to use the prepared curriculum for about 50% of the instructional time. Learning activities around specific interests and needs of participants will be developed by the instructors for the remaining time.

"I see this workplace material all the time and I had no idea it could be used this way."

At an October training session in Port Stabton, Ontario, 17 peer instructors had a chance to learn about the team-based approach and become familiar with the materials in the first unit of the new curriculum. They worked in small groups to plan and practise facilitating the lessons. Each practice session ended with self-reflection and peer feedback.

"It was evident that instructor skills and confidence grew throughout the week," said Jean Connon-Unda, the curriculum developer. "The instructors are looking forward to using the new curriculum, and were also pleased they had the chance to learn how to use relevant real-life materials in workplace literacy programs. As one instructor said in the wrap-up session, 'I see this workplace material all time and had no idea it could be used this way.'"

by Laurell Ritchie, CAW

Making the UI law readable

It's frustrating for any worker to wade through the "legalese" of Employment Insurance legislation and regulations. But that might soon change, thanks to a project designed to make it easier to read the EI law and regulations.

The *Readability Project* is not just about translating the law (into clearer language, according to Neil Cohen, Executive Director of the Community Unemployed Help Centre in Winnipeg. It is also about re-formatting and restructuring it, using more accessible size and style of type, headlines, and changes to margins and table of contents. Along with appointees from business and the Department of Justice, Cohen is one of ten labour representatives nominated by the CLC to the Advisory Group to the *Readability Project*. The project began in 1999 as an initiative of Human Resources Development Canada in partnership with the Department of Justice.

"The challenge is to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of their literacy levels, can understand and exercise their rights under the law."

The first task of the project is to re-write the current act and regulations in plain language. The plan is to introduce a clear language version of the legislation to parliament by Fall 2003. The hope is that the plain language version of the law will become a model for future statutes.

Just a first step

While the CLC Literacy Working Group applauds this project, it is clear that there is more to be done. It's not just what the law says that needs to be more accessible. The initiative should extend beyond the Act and regulations to examine all the information workers rely on to access their rights under the law through the lens of clear language. For example, there needs to be an assessment of how public information is written and delivered, including applications, decision letters, information booklets and reporting cards. Also, the CLC has long maintained that worker advocates funded by EI are needed to help workers apply for benefits, so that those who pay the premiums that support the system can access it fully.

The *Readability Project* is a worthy undertaking. But it only marks a beginning of how we must consider literacy needs as we strive to make our systems more accessible. The challenge is to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of their literacy levels, can understand and exercise their rights under the law. For this reason, the *Readability Project* is of particular interest to those involved in literacy, and the CLC Literacy Working Group will continue to follow the Project with interest.

by Karen Kennedy, Alberta Federation of Labour rep, CLC Literacy Working Group (with thanks to Ne

Working to support literacy programs in BC

More and more unions in BC are creating literacy programs, and others are interested in getting involved. yet until recently, there has been no co-ordination, and often each union has had to re-invent the wheel.



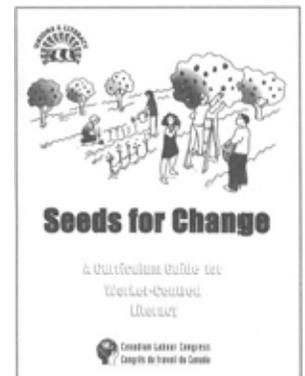
Enter *Working Together*, a project of the British Columbia Federation of Labour. the project was proposed by 1999 BCFL *Think Tank on Literacy* to help unions develop more sustainable union-led workforce literacy programs, and to provide ways to support and co-ordinate union literacy efforts.

The project team is made up of representatives from BCFL, CEP, Capilano College and Literacy BC. It is bringing unions together to support the sharing and development of ideas and to create a vision for union-led literacy in BC. A provincial working committee is developing standards of good practice, while the regional working committee is implementing a roundtable in the North Central Region of the province. Together, they hope to Identify potential efficiencies for literacy programming and develop regional plans to co-ordinate literacy efforts in the community.

For more information on th'e BCFL project, contact Irma Mohammed at (604) 430-1421 or educate@bcfed.com.

Tools for learning

Seeds for Change: A curriculum Guide for Worker-Centred Literacy, by long-time union literacy educator Jean Connon-Unda. This is the latest publication of the CLC's *Learning in Solidarity* series. A practical guide for instructors on how to integrate literacy into a problem-posing curriculum to encourage critical reflection and action in and beyond the workplace. 110 pages. Cost: \$14 each or \$12 for bulk orders of five or more, including GST. To order contact: clcliteracy@clc-ctc.ca.



A Quest for Learning: The Canadian Labour Movement and Worker Literacy Education. From the early history of Canadian trade unions, literacy skills were seen as fundamental to the advancement of the cause of workers. *A Quest for learning* looks at the proud history and current challenges of unions and literacy education. 30 pages. Cost: \$10\$ each or \$7 for bulk orders of 10 or more. To order, contact the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre, 51 Stuart St., Hamilton L8L 1B5. Tel.: (905) 522-5424; email wahc@web.net.

Workplace Education Development (WED) Practioner's Guide: Customizing Accreditation Curricula in Workplace Education Programs. A synthesis of the practice observed among workplace education practitioners across Canada who are customizing curriculum to fit their particular context. 443 pages. Cost: \$32. To order, contact Learning Resource Service, Bow

Valley College, 400-332 6 Ave. SE, Calgary AB T2G 4S6. Tel: (403) 297-4810; fax: (403) 297-4833.

Nova Scotia Takes Strong Position on Literacy

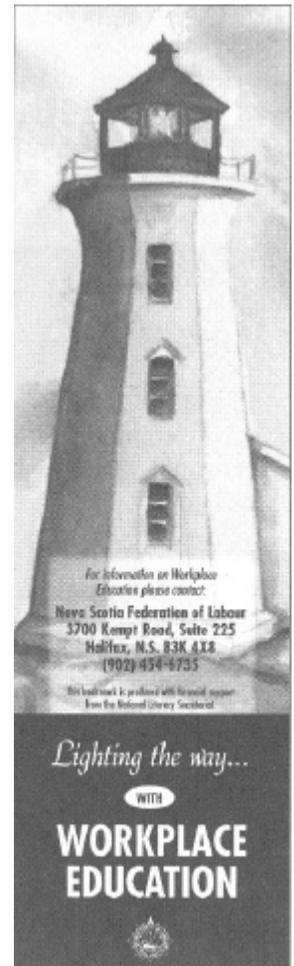
The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour took a strong stand on literacy issues when delegates to the 41st convention in October adopted, without debate, a resolution that will allow affiliates to submit resolutions in clear language. The resolution was presented in the traditional format and the new clear language format.

The convention also approved the following policy Statement on Literacy:

1. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour and its affiliated unions shall work to eliminate barriers to accessing and participating in basic skills training.
2. Affiliated unions shall seek to entrench opportunities for workforce/ workplace basic skills upgrading through collective bargaining such that:
 - a. Employers assume the responsibility and bear the costs of developing and supporting basic skills upgrading programs;
 - b. Workers shall be entitled to paid time off during training;
 - c. Union control over the development and delivery of literacy programming shall, at a minimum, be equal to that of management.
3. The Federation and its affiliated unions shall advocate basic skills upgrading initiatives that are:
 - a. union-based and further the values and principles of the labour movement;
 - b. learner-centred and sensitive to their needs, aspirations, and prior learning.
4. The Federation and its affiliated unions shall support the delivery of basic skills upgrading initiatives by unionized public institutions, labour-based training centres, and/or non-profit community-based agencies rather than by private, for-profit training organizations.

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour believes that workers are the backbone of our society in providing the goods and services that make our communities viable. Greater literacy skills will *Light the Way* for workers in Nova Scotia. Competent literacy skills lead to an informed and involved trade union movement for all Nova Scotian workers.

by Linda Wentzel, Workplace Education Co-ordinator, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour



CUPW to look at members' needs

What literacy needs do members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers have?

This is what CUPW will try to assess as part of its new literacy project, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat. The union wants to use the project to develop a more systematic analysis of its members' literacy needs and integrate a dynamic view of literacy into its everyday work.



CUPW believes that reading and understanding an information bulletin, filling out a dental claim form, participating more actively in union life and finding new ways to explain clauses in the collective agreement are all elements of our daily life that require literacy skills.

"... we need to understand literacy in its fullest sense as the exercise of critical reflection and action."

"Literacy involves much more than basic reading and writing skills," said Denis Lemelin, 2nd national vice-president responsible for education. "As trade unionists committed to action on behalf of human wholeness and social justice, we need to understand literacy in its fullest sense as the exercise of critical reflection and action."

CUPW also believes that literacy work requires a commitment to find ways to democratize information and a responsibility to communicate with members in clear language.

The union included literacy in its general resolution on education adopted at its 1999 National Convention. Since then, the union has actively participated in the CLC Literacy Working Group.

For more information about the CUPW project, contact Dave Bleakney at: (613) 236-7238 ext. 7953 or dbleakney@cupw-sttp.org.

Making connections

Some important inroads were made between labour educators, literacy co-ordinators and university researchers at the *Researching Work and Learning Conference* in Calgary in July. Conference organizers made important efforts to include labour in this forward-looking international conference. There were successful roundtables on Innovations in *Labour Education and Union-based Literacy*, and two union caucuses. As well, local union members were able to attend the conference on Saturday at no cost. Hopefully, the conference's strong social justice theme and the refreshingly critical view of the workplace in these "not so new times" will lead to opportunities for partnerships on future projects.

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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