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Literacy makes its mark at CLC Labour Education Conference

"Literacy is an important issue for me now. It began one day when one of my members arrived at the local union office. The high paying, heavy manual job he'd done for 20 years at the Cominco plant in Trail BC was being cut. He didn't want to go to a new job that involved monitoring operations on a computer screen.

He was ready to fight me. Finally, he broke down and told me he was afraid he couldn't read well enough to do the new job. I helped get him into a literacy program. Three months later he was not only doing the new job, but reading stories to his granddaughter."

Ken Georgetti, CLC President, in his opening remarks at the CLC literacy forum that took place in Winnipeg on September 16th, added "Literacy is about making people whole. When the union gets involved, we are more relevant to our members and they are more likely to get involved in the union and in the community."

More than 80 people from Kitimat to St. John's attended the forum that preceded the CLC's *Making a Difference with Union Education* conference. The conference attracted 400 labour educators from across Canada, including 25 rank-and-file literacy activists who were able to attend with subsidies from the CLC through its funding from the National Literacy Secretariat.

A panel on literacy from aboriginal, international and Canadian perspectives included Marjorie Beaucage, a Franco Manitoban Métis film-maker, Roberto Romero, a former Sandinista Deputy Minister of Education in Nicaragua and Jean Connon Unda, an adult educator and psychotherapist formerly with the Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST program. Both challenging and inspirational, each offered participants much to consider as they met regionally and discussed how to bring a literacy perspective to the conference. As Denis Lemelin, Vice-President of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) said, "Now I understand that literacy is a political act."

Two dynamic workshops, *Union-based Literacy for Labour Educators and Union-based Literacy for Practitioners*, left participants inspired and hungry for more. Linda Wentzel, Literacy Co-ordinator for the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour who had been a fish plant worker for 19 years, found the courage to go to the mike at the final plenary. She said, "I got into

literacy to help people. Now I realize how literacy can be so much more than that. It can change the way we see the world."

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.



An affiliate profile: United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

When workers take control over their lives

When a group of members rebelled during the math class at the United Food and Commercial Workers' Winnipeg Training Centre, the union trainers had an unusual reaction. They were happy.



Education program at UFCW Local 832
Training Centre in Winnipeg

"It was the most beautiful news," said Jorge Garcia-Orgales, UFCW National Literacy Coordinatar. "These members were in the middle of a labour adjustment program. They had lost heart because Maple Leaf was closing and they were losing their jobs."

"Suddenly, here they were, taking control of their environment. That's exactly what the union's approach to foundation skills training is all about - helping workers gain control over their lives."

The union started foundation skills training in 1990 as part of its National Training Program. It believes that to function in today's global economy and highly technological world, members need more than the ability to read and write. They need math, computer literacy and verbal communications skills. They need to be able to think critically, problem solve and analyze their social and economic environment to anticipate the changes that might affect them.

"All the training and education that the UFCW provides is designed to empower our members," said Mike Fraser, the union's Canadian Director.

Learning every day

The union's philosophy is that it's never too late to learn, and learning should be a lifelong endeavour.

"Many of us have not had the chance to fully develop foundation skills because of leaving school early, or because there have been too few opportunities to use them in our jobs," said Janet Dassinger, the former Director of Policies and Program for the National Training Program. "We have been busy working, raising our families, and being active in our union and community."

The...National Training Program encourages participation with employers in sector councils and the development of union training centres.

There's no question that the eight UFCW training centres are having an impact. Their programs in union activism, foundation skills, job and workplace skills, employability skills and labour adjustment are in high demand.

In Winnipeg, for example, the centre forged an agreement with the school board to offer credits for Grade 12. Organizers were expecting about 12 people, but 70 signed up.

In British Columbia, Local 2000's training centre opened in 1992 and started out with 40 to 50 participants. "Now we have over 500 a year" said Kelly Sinclair, the centre's director and winner of the 1998 Flight for Freedom Literacy Award.

Overcoming fear

Sinclair spent many years overcoming his own problems with literacy. He says the biggest hurdles for members with poor skills are fear and feelings of failure and unworthiness.

"Some of the most moving moments in my life have been when I've seen a young person who came to us with low self-esteem, poor basic skills and overwhelming anxiety about the future emerge from our program with their trade papers," said Sinclair. "They found their courage and learned to trust themselves. And, for the first time in a long time, they experienced hope."



Increased self-esteem and confidence are two benefits of foundation skills training. But there is another as well: the training is a great union organizing tool.

Most members going into a UFCW training program don't know much about their union. But at the end of a course, 90% often say they now know what their union does.

Currently, the union has a four-fold strategy to build on the growing support for foundation skills and literacy:

1. To revise of what literacy means for the union
2. To research the best ways and means to offer foundation skills to the membership
3. To create an integrated learning approach through four pilot course modules that incorporate foundation skills training, including
 - Food safety and sanitation
 - Food processing for beginners
 - International standards for the food and grocery sector
 - Integrated literacy for the General Educational Development (GED) course and other tests
4. To get training off the ground in Québec.

There are other steps the union is taking to integrate foundation skills training and make it more widely available to its members. These include the development of a "train the trainer" program and different models of distance education and other alternatives to formal learning structures.

At its convention in April, the UFCW passed the following resolution defining foundation skills:

"The UFCW in Canada broadly rather than narrowly defines the term foundation skills to include reading, writing, mathematics, computers, English or French as a second language, verbal communications and conflict resolution, social and economic analysis, critical thinking and problem solving, and employability."

In addition, the convention passed a number of resolutions related to training:

"That the Canadian Council establish a regular standing committee on training to operate at a national level."

"That the UFCW in Canada encourage representation of the UFCW in Canada on community, provincial, and national bodies promoting perspectives on learning and worker training adopted by the UFCW in Canada."

"That the UFCW in Canada adopt a perspective on prior learning assessment and recognition best suited to the learning needs of UFCW members in Canada."

Newfoundland's committee on training speaks out on literacy

Making basic skills training available for workers should be a government priority in Newfoundland with its high unemployment rate and shrinking resources. But that is not the case, according to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour's recently established round table committee on workplace training and education. As a result of devolution of responsibility for training to the provinces and other policy changes, night schools no longer operate, learning centres are closing, and there have been massive layoffs at the community college because of cuts to literacy and Adult Basic Education programs.

The committee of affiliate representatives has its work cut out for it trying to get action on workplace training and education. Since it was established following the CLC's Workplace Training Conference in St. John's in May, 1998, the committee has spent a lot of time dealing with literacy issues. Statistics show that 72% of the province's workforce is between 40-59 years old. Most of these workers need some form of upgrading. Employers often try to get negotiated language on training out of collective agreements because it is too costly for them. The provincial government dissolved the literacy strategy that was in place and has been very slow to come up with a replacement strategy.

The committee is working with the federation and its affiliates to develop a clear definition of literacy and a coordinated step-by-step strategy. "The labour movement of Newfoundland and Labrador will not back down until every citizen of this province has the right and the opportunity to complete their education", said Elaine Price, President of the NLFL.

Clear Language en français

A clear language guide is being developed in French as a parallel to *Making It Clear: Clear Language for Union Communications*, the latest publication of the *Learning in Solidarity* series. The French-language guide is a joint project of the CLC and the Québec Federation of Labour and will be a unique resource - not simply a translation of the English. The plan is to release it around the time of *la semaine du français* (French Language week) in March, 2000 in Montréal. In the meantime, the Québec Labour College plans to incorporate a half day session on Clear Language into its January program. To order copies of *Making It Clear*, see the *Tools for Learning* section of this newsletter.

Grants to value literacy in Canada

The National Literacy Secretariat and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have initiated a \$500,000 per year grant program for research projects on literacy.

The program, *Valuing Literacy in Canada*, is aimed at stimulating research into:

- the policy implications of literacy;
- measuring the effectiveness of literacy programs;
- the learning processes of adults;
- the impact and benefits of literacy learning; and
- the changing nature of literacy skills.

For more information contact: Maynard Collins (SSHRC); (613) 992-5415; e-mail: mzc@sshrc.ca; Margaret Robinson (NLS); (819) 953-5677; e-mail: margaret.robinson@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca. Web-site: www.sshrc.ca.

CLC Ontario Winter School offers new union-based literacy course

What do we mean by literacy in the new millennium? Statistics show that almost half of adult Canadians have some difficulty with reading and writing. Why should the union get involved? How is the union's approach to literacy different from management's? How does literacy link with labour education and workplace training?

Find out how union-based literacy can benefit workers individually and collectively by attending this participatory course at Port Elgin, February 6th to 11th, 2000. Learn about bargaining for basic skills. Practise dear language and design. Discover the essential elements of quality union-based literacy programming. Cost: \$650 for course, shared room and meals. *For more information, contact: Adrienne Smith at (416) 441-3710 or Tamara Levine at (613) 521-3400, ext. 437.*

A history of workers' thirst for knowledge

Labour's role in adult literacy in Canada over the past century is an untold story. But not for long. A research project by the Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (OWAHC), in partnership with the Canadian Labour Congress, is looking at the role workers have played in determining and meeting their own educational needs over the past century.

Funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, the project will produce a bilingual booklet for use by union educators, literacy educators, labour studies programs and government education ministries. It will explore the different ways literacy was important in the past and the different ways literacy learning was achieved. The booklet has been researched by Mary Beth Levan and

Bill Schram in Yellowknife and Monique Ouellette in Montréal, with lots of support and information provided by unions across Canada.

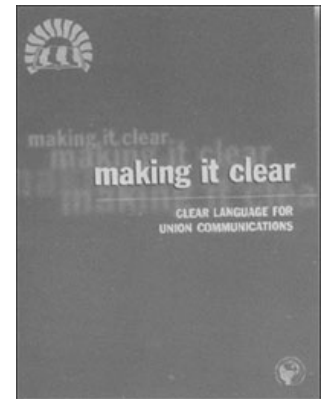
Literacy education in a union context cannot be separated from activism and empowerment. It's about much more than reading and writing. It's about how workers have collectively sought learning and knowledge, helping each other get and communicate the information they need to protect themselves, to fight back, and to enjoy life!

Look for details about the availability of this booklet early in 2000 from the CLC and OWAHC.

Tools for learning

from the CLC Learning in Solidarity Series:

To order publications from the CLC *Learning in Solidarity Series* contact: The CLC Workplace Literacy Project, 2841 Riverside Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1V 8X7; (613) 521-3400; (Fax) 521-5480; e-mail: tlevine@clc-ctc.ca.



Now available:

Making It Clear: Clear Language for Union Communications is a 70 page practical guide that asks: Is our message clear? Is our message reaching our members? What can we do to make our communications more accessible? User-friendly in ring binder format, Making It Clear includes "before and after" examples with suggestions about wording, sentence structure, design and a workshop on clear language. Cost: \$12 or \$10 each for orders of 5 or more.

Literacy Awareness through Labour Councils: a step-by-step guide grew out of a project carried out by the CLC Ontario region with four labour councils to develop literacy advocates. The guide explores how labour councils can raise awareness about the union's role in literacy and build partnerships between local unions, peer instructors and public education providers. This guide will be useful to labour councils across Canada. Available free from the CLC Ontario Regional office, 15 Gervais Drive, Don Mills, ON M3C 1Y8, tel. (416) 441-3710.

Available in January, 2000:

Bargaining Basic Skills: What Unions Should Know About Negotiating Worker-Centred Literacy Programs. This handbook is designed to help unions negotiate basic skills programs for their members. It is intended for unions starting to consider bargaining these programs as well as for those which have existing language on training but want to add a basic skills component.

Learning for Our Lives: A Union Guide to Worker-Centred Literacy. Look for this step-by-step, user-friendly guide on why and how unions should get involved with literacy. Find out why literacy is a union issue and how to assess and respond to the literacy needs of union members while strengthening the union.

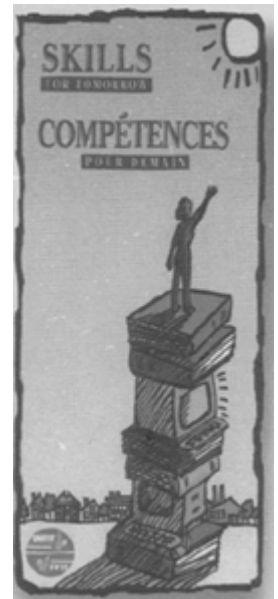
Tools from other sources

Skills and Knowledge Profile. This tool and coach's manual can help people identify the wide range of experiences and skills they have acquired from daily life. Two videos are also available, \$25 per copy for the profile with the Coach's Manual; \$100 with the two videos. Available from: Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women, (416) 599-3590; web site www.actew.web.net.

Skills for Tomorrow. Produced by UNITE, this kit provides union committee members with a road map of how to get essential skills training started in workplaces and local unions. It contains modules on understanding workplace literacy, effective committee structures, mapping the workplace and the local union, how to get started, developing an action plan, bargaining and implementing a program. Available at no charge. Contact: Janice Gairey, Director of Education, (416) 441-1806.

Working Together, Moving Ahead, is a 15-minute video about a joint labour-management basic skills program for hospital workers in BC that combines the strengths of the college and peer instructor models. \$20 per copy.

Contact: Brenda Briscoe, Capilano College, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5, Tel. (604) 986-1911 or the CLC Workplace Literacy Project at (613) 521-3400 ext. 253.



Mark your calendars:

Workplace Learning Conference, Dearborn (Detroit), Michigan May 7th to 9th, 2000.

Designed by employers, unions, educators and government partners, this is the largest forum of its kind in North America. Held for the past four years in Milwaukee, this is a "how to" opportunity to hear the latest on planning, implementing, evaluating and negotiating workplace learning initiatives. A union only pre-conference will be held again this year From May 5th to 7th, 2000. For more information, please contact Tamara Levine, CLC Workplace Literacy project, Tel: (613) 521-3400 ext. 437 or e-mail: clevine@clc-ctc.ca.

Literate Cities 2000: Municipal Excellence through Partnerships and Education Conference, Bathurst, NB, May 14th to 16th, 2000. Sponsored by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), this conference will provide delegates with an opportunity to gain awareness and share experiences about workplace education programs and pilot projects. The workshops will be of interest to municipal managers, unions and learners with current programs in place as well as those looking at the issue or planning a program in their workplace. For further information, please contact Patricia Nutter, Tel: (613) 726-9532; e-mail: pnutter@cyberus.ca.

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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