

**The Ontario  
Literacy Coalition's  
Workplace/Workforce  
Literacy Symposium**

**Reflections  
Paper**

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for the Ontario Literacy Coalition**

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## Acknowledgements

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# **1. Background Information**

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2. Workplace Literacy Approaches  
and Partnership

3. Consultations with Stakeholders in  
Preparation for the Symposium

4. Summary

Appendix

## **1.1 Purpose of this Reflections Paper**

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a common starting point and a forward-looking perspective for stimulating dialogue and future action with respect to workforce and workplace literacy. This paper was written in May 2005 for the *Ontario Literacy Coalition's Workplace/Workforce Symposium*, which brings together delegates from business, labour, literacy organizations, adult learners, training and adult education organizations, and government.

Because this working paper is a starting point for dialogue among symposium delegates, it is not an exhaustive survey of people and organizations across the province. Rather, this paper presents the results of surveying a small number of people from provincial and national organizations that represent large constituencies in Ontario. Every attempt was also made to get input from confirmed symposium delegates.

This paper attempts to begin identifying and clarifying the multiple voices and interests of those concerned with workforce and workplace literacy. Making these interests explicit increases understanding among delegates, and provides a basis for a respectful and fruitful dialogue at the symposium. The ideas presented in this paper can be built upon as more voices and ideas are added through the symposium dialogue.

## **1.2 Organization of this Paper**

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This paper is organized into four major sections:

### **1. Background Information**

Information on this paper and on the factors (including literature, programs, organizations, and events) which led to the desire for this symposium

### **2. Workplace Literacy Approaches and Partnerships**

An overview of existing workplace literacy approaches, models, partnerships, and principles to help inform the symposium dialogue

### **3. Consultations with Stakeholders in Preparation for the Symposium**

Consultations results (from interviews with symposium advisory committee members and the Ontario Literacy Coalition's leadership, and surveys of delegates) which have informed the design and shape of the symposium

### **4. Summary**

A summary of this *Reflections Paper*

## **1.3 Workforce and Workplace Literacy in Ontario**

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This section provides an overview of the work already accomplished in Ontario over the last two decades or more in workforce and workplace literacy – work which provides a foundation for considering the future.

Ontario has a rich history of contemporary workplace education programs that goes back to the early 1970s. In those days, community groups such as St. Christopher’s House and St. Stephens, as well as the Toronto District Labour Council, began to offer workplace education. These early programs focused on health and safety issues, ESL, literacy needs, and working conditions.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.3.1 Multicultural Workplace Program**

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In 1985, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture introduced the Multicultural Workplace Program (MWP). The goal of the MWP was to improve communications in multicultural workplaces. The MWP included literacy and language programs, intercultural communication training for managers, anti-racist education, and employment equity. The MWP approach was influenced by the work of the National Centre for Industrial Language Training (NCILT) in England. The NCILT believed literacy and language programs were not enough, and proposed programs for clear writing and cross-cultural training for managers.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.3.2 Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace**

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In 1988, the Ontario government introduced a funding program, available to both business and labour organizations, for workplace literacy called Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace (OBSW). The program had two streams: business-initiated, and union-initiated. The program assisted business and unions in offering literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills training to employees in the workplace.

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<sup>1</sup> Folinsbee, S. (1998). *An historical overview of practitioner training and development for workplace education in the province of Ontario.*

<sup>2</sup> Folinsbee, S. (1998). *An historical overview of practitioner training and development for workplace education in the province of Ontario.*

The Hamilton District Labour Council, the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region, and the Ontario Federation of Labour delivered union-initiated training. More than 2,100 participants per year attended workplace programs under OBSW funding.<sup>3</sup>

In 1988, the Ontario Federation of Labour began its Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) project under the union-initiated stream of the OBSW. This union-led program was based on a co-worker instructor model. From 1988 on, there were hundreds of BEST programs across Ontario, until the provincial government ended funding for workplace literacy programming in 1998.<sup>4</sup>

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### **1.3.3 Workplace/Workforce Equity and Basic Skills**

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The Workplace/Workforce Equity and Basic Skills<sup>5</sup> (WWEBS) program began in 1995 and brought together various Ontario government programs – the Multicultural Workplace Program, the business-initiated stream of the OBSW program, and the Labour Adjustment Preparation Program. The union-initiated stream of the OBSW continued intact. The WWEBS funded organizational needs assessment, training plans development, and upgrading for workers. Companies and plant-closure committees were eligible to participate. The funding for this initiative, as with the BEST project, also ended in 1998.<sup>6</sup> At that time, the Ontario government adopted a general policy of not supporting public funding aimed at employed workers, on the basis that this would be seen as a “subsidy to business”.

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<sup>3</sup> National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). (1996). *Working in concert: Federal, provincial, and territorial actions in support of literacy in Canada*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/nls/inpub/wic/wictofc.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Worker Arts and Heritage Centre. (2001). *A quest for learning: The Canadian labour movement and worker literacy education*.

<sup>5</sup> The program’s name was later changed to “Workplace/Workforce Employment and Basic Skills” by the Harris Conservative government.

<sup>6</sup> NLS. *Working in concert*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/nls/inpub/wic/wictofc.htm>

### 1.3.4 The Literacy and Basic Skills Program

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The Ontario government's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program was implemented in 1999,<sup>7</sup> and is an amalgamation of seven separate programs: Ontario Basic Skills levels I through III, OBSW, Literacy Field Development and Support, National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) project grants, Ontario Community Literacy for community-based literacy organizations, School Board literacy, and the WWEBS.<sup>8</sup>

As part of the Ontario government's program reform, LBS was streamlined and directed more toward helping learners find work. The program's objectives are a seamless adult education system, quality services, learner needs, accountability, and fostering closer links between literacy and employment. The LBS program focuses on the unemployed, especially those on social assistance. The program is also open to employed workers who need to upgrade their literacy skills, as long as the training is provided outside the workplace. The program is delivered by school boards, community colleges, and community organizations. The province has funded pilot-focused workplace projects under the LBS program, but no funding has been provided for workplace literacy infrastructure or the delivery of workplace programs since 1998.<sup>9</sup>

In 2000, the Ontario government released its Workplace Literacy Strategy.<sup>10</sup> A key objective of the government's LBS program was to develop the literacy and

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<sup>7</sup> Government of Ontario. (2000). *Backgrounder: Ontario support of literacy projects strengthens employment and learning skills*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://mettowas21.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/00.11/support.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff member.

<sup>9</sup> Government of Ontario. (2000). *Backgrounder: Ontario support of literacy projects*. See also, Government of Ontario. (2005). *Literacy in Ontario: The rewards are for life*. Retrieved March, 2005 from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/ontliteracy/ont\\_lit.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/ontliteracy/ont_lit.html)

<sup>10</sup> MTCU, Workplace Preparation Branch, Literacy and Basic Skills Section. (2000, March). Literacy for the workplace: Expanding the skills of Ontario's workforce. In *Literacy and basic skills (LBS) program: Guidelines, (revised October 2000)* (pp. 143-150). Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/basic/basic.pdf>

basic skills of Ontario's workforce. The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) developed the Workplace Literacy Initiative. This initiative included building the capacity of the LBS system to respond to workforce and workplace needs, promoting literacy to workforce stakeholders, encouraging investment in literacy and basic skills development, supporting partnerships, and evaluating the impact of the initiative.<sup>11</sup>

During 2002-2003, five out of sixteen regional literacy networks – Quill Learning Network, Literacy Link Niagara, Literacy Ontario Central South, Mid North Adult Learning Network, and Project Read Literacy Network – were part of a pilot project funded by the MTCU and the NLS to develop a delivery and coordination model for fee-for-service on-site workplace literacy programs. This pilot project included the development of work plans, tools for marketing, and evaluation strategies. The Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) received funding to provide support and training to these five first sites in the areas of planning and delivering workplace programs, marketing, and good practice.<sup>12</sup>

The five participating regional literacy networks did project work in building workplace literacy capacity and concluded that, before focusing on workplace literacy, there was a need to focus on and develop strategies for literacy for employment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2002, March). Ontario's workplace literacy initiative. *Literacy on the move* – The Ontario Literacy Coalition's March 2002 newsletter.

<sup>12</sup> Davidson, C. (2003). Timing right for workplace literacy initiative in Ontario. *Workplace literacy: National and international perspectives*.

<sup>13</sup> Folinsbee, S., & Sauve, L. *First sites report: Collective consultation on workforce/workplace literacy*.

### **1.3.5 Current Workforce and Workplace Literacy in Ontario**

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This section provides an overview of workforce and workplace activities and projects in Ontario over the last three to five years. This section is based on various documents that outline these activities and on input from advisory committee members and symposium delegates' questionnaire responses.

#### ***Literacy Organizations***

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For LBS agencies, the present workforce and workplace literacy focus is on developing literacy skills for employment. For example, the Preparatory Training Program in Toronto focuses on reading, writing, and math tasks that learners are likely to encounter in entry-level employment. Instructors visit local workplaces to learn first-hand how reading, writing, and math are used on the job. In the classroom, learners with varying employment goals are grouped together, and it is a balancing act to ensure that each learner's employment goals are met.<sup>14</sup>

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board offers literacy for employment in three sector-specific classes: Health Care Preparation, Child Care Assistant, and Retail Customer Service. These classes incorporate a variety of activities, such as operating a cash register, leading a circle in the child care centre, and learning about labour rights. Some of the positive impacts of these programs are that people have found work, gained confidence, and become more involved in their communities.<sup>15</sup>

In the New Leaf Literacy Program in Sudbury, learners with employment goals visit work sites and talk to employers. Workplace modules were developed using materials from the work sites. Learners also have the opportunity to get hands-on experience in retail and office situations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Geraci, K. (2002, March). Preparatory training programs. *Literacy on the move* – The Ontario Literacy Coalition's March 2002 newsletter.

<sup>15</sup> The Ontario Literacy Coalition. (2005). *Making it work!*, vol. 2.

<sup>16</sup> The Ontario Literacy Coalition. (2005). *Making it work!*, vol. 2.

Delegates from literacy organizations indicated they have been involved in developing programs and curricula to help people in their communities find employment. Programs in LBS are also being attended by those who are already employed, but who need to upgrade their skills for certification tests or who feel their jobs are threatened. In addition, some organizations said they had developed tools and materials and had offered workplace programs in the 1990s.

Regional literacy networks offer services that include professional development for practitioners. Some networks also undertake the development of workforce and workplace resources and clear language support. Networks also share resources and information with literacy practitioners. A couple of networks are marketing workplace literacy to employers and are pursuing possibilities of jointly offering fee-for-service workplace literacy programs with member organizations.

Over the past two years, five regional literacy networks – Quill Learning Network, Literacy Link Niagara, Literacy Ontario Central South, Mid North Adult Learning Network, and Project Read Literacy Network – have been providing leadership for MTCU’s Train Ontario projects to build the literacy field’s capacity for serving learners with employment goals.<sup>17</sup>

Colleges in Ontario are involved in workforce and workplace literacy through Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)/Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) funded programs and are committed to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) Essential Skills initiative.

The Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) has been involved in workforce and workplace literacy projects funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) for the past five years. The OLC’s work has focused on research, practitioner development, resources development, and on bringing the literacy field and other partners together to share information. This Workplace/Workforce Symposium is one of the most recent of the OLC’s projects.

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<sup>17</sup> Davidson, C. (2004, April). Train Ontario. *Literacy on the move* – The Ontario Literacy Coalition’s April 2004 newsletter.

## ***Labour***

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Labour organizations offer some workforce and workplace programs, and some offer clear language training and resources. Labour organizations noted that funding for their literacy and ESL workplace programs in Ontario ended in 1998. Nevertheless, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) has been rebuilding the Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) program since Ontario government funding ended. With funding from the NLS, the union has put in place a BEST Transformations project which covers the Big Three auto assembly plants, where BEST is entrenched in a collective agreement.<sup>18</sup>

The Labour Education Centre<sup>19</sup> is noted for its expertise in labour adjustment, workplace literacy, and ESL, and now plays a more formal role in helping other labour organizations build the capacity to implement long-term training and education strategies, including literacy in the union hall and the workplace.<sup>20</sup>

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has been actively involved in literacy and clear language since 1996. The CLC coordinates a labour forum for literacy, communicates a vision for worker-centred literacy within and outside the labour movement, and assists CLC affiliates in building the capacity for worker-centred literacy and clear language. The CLC also delivers courses on these activities, and develops tools and resources.<sup>21</sup>

## ***Business***

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Business groups have been involved in offering programs to their employees and in developing resources for their members. The Canadian Manufacturers and

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<sup>18</sup> Ritchie, L. (2002). Transforming BEST. *Working together* – The Canadian Labour Congress newsletter.

<sup>19</sup> The Labour Education Centre (LEC) is a project of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, which represents approximately 180,000 unionized workers. Opened in 1987, the LEC serves the education and training needs of the unionized workforce in Toronto.

<sup>20</sup> The Labour Education Centre. (2002, March). *Literacy on the move* – The Ontario Literacy Coalition's March 2002 newsletter.

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Labour Congress literacy project staff.

Exporters (CME) began a partnership in 2001 with the NLS. The CME collaborated with the business community to develop a literacy guidebook that included case studies, best practices, and tools. The CME subsequently held a number of awareness sessions with manufacturers on the value and benefits of workplace literacy. The CME also delivered a program of site visits, in which manufacturers learned from their peers about companies that have succeeded by adopting their own on-site workplace programs.<sup>22</sup>

One employer indicated it has been involved in offering essential skills programs to employees for the last eight years. These programs focus on literacy, business writing, and computer literacy.

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### ***Training and Adult Education Organizations***

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Training and adult education organizations have offered symposia and conferences that focused on youth and workplace literacy. These organizations have written journal articles as well.

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### ***Government***

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Government noted that over the last two years, efforts in Ontario have focused on practitioner training in literacy for employment goals.

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<sup>22</sup> Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters – Ontario Division staff.

## 1.4 Events Leading to the Desire for a Symposium

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The inspiration for this symposium comes from the 2003-2004 workplace literacy project *Building Support and Developing Partnerships for Workplace Literacy in Ontario*, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). This project was a partnership of the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC), the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), and the Canadian Exporters and Manufacturers (CME) – Ontario Division.

The goal of the project was to determine what kinds of partnerships for workforce and workplace literacy could be developed among business, labour, and the literacy community. Consultations with these three parties were conducted in 2003 to understand how they might work together in the future. Ontario does not have a provincial tripartite partnership as some other provinces do, and these consultations were seen as an opportunity to begin building such a partnership within the province.

Thirty-five people from **business, labour, and the literacy community** participated in the consultations through focus groups and interviews. (In this section, references to **stakeholder groups** are sometimes bolded to facilitate identification of the speaker.) Participants were asked:

- what kinds of literacy initiatives they were involved in
- what partnerships existed already and what were the challenges
- what kinds of support they needed from the other stakeholders to advance literacy

### 1.4.1 Involvement in Workplace Literacy

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**Labour** was the most involved in workplace literacy activities. Labour ran programs on-site and off-site, with and without financial support from business. Half the **business** representatives and only a few **literacy community** representatives had experience in workplace literacy.

### 1.4.2 Partnerships

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**Labour** noted that partnerships with the literacy community, government, and business were a way to revive workplace literacy. **Business** indicated they would welcome links with the literacy field. Employers would work with their unions or within a tripartite partnership of government, labour, and business. The **literacy community** would welcome the development of relationships with business and labour. In school boards and colleges, workplace literacy and ESL are usually run through the institution's ESL department or corporate training department.

### 1.4.3 Challenges

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The biggest challenge for both **labour** and **business** in offering workplace literacy programs was lack of funding for all aspects of programming, including covering lost wages, organizational needs assessment, program design, instruction, resources, support services, and evaluation. The **literacy community** faced similar challenges: lack of funding, lack of resources, and lack of time to get involved.

#### 1.4.4 Follow-Up Action Needed and Recommendations

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**Labour** and **business** wanted to reopen dialogue among government, labour, business, and the literacy community to address the need for funding, infrastructure, and partnership support. Both labour and business cited the importance of support from the literacy community for reviving workplace literacy. The **literacy community** wanted to know more about unions and was interested in partnerships with business and labour.<sup>23</sup>

The project recommendations included the following:

- that the three partners continue to work together to open a dialogue with government
- that a province-wide meeting be held to lay the foundation for future partnerships to improve access to literacy services for both employed and unemployed workers
- that the project partners work together to share and disseminate information province-wide

The Ontario Literacy Coalition Workplace/Workforce Symposium is a direct result of the *Building Support and Developing Partnerships for Workplace Literacy in Ontario* project. Because of the recommendations included in the project's report, the OLC took the lead in putting together this provincial symposium.

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<sup>23</sup> The Ontario Literacy Coalition. (2004). Building support and developing partnerships for workplace literacy in Ontario.

## 1. Background Information

## **2. Workplace Literacy Approaches and Partnerships**

## 3. Consultations with Stakeholders in Preparation for the Symposium

## 4. Summary

## Appendix

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## 2.1 Approaches

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This section provides an overview of some of the literature on workplace literacy. This section also looks at the kinds of workplace literacy activities that have occurred across Canada, and provides perspectives from business, labour, and workplace educators.

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### 2.1.1 Workplace Literacy Across Canada

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The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) has funded literacy projects for business associations and labour groups over the past sixteen years. During that time, one of the key lessons learned is that traditional adult literacy practice does not fit the workplace, because it is not just a practitioner-learner relationship; management and unions are also involved. The practitioner needs to balance these relationships and consider all the different vantage points. Considering one stakeholder's interests over another's will lead to problems in implementation later on. The stakes are higher at the workplace, where jobs can be gained or lost because of literacy. Literacy concerns that come up in the workplace are often beyond the expertise of the literacy practitioner.

The NLS has worked with many business and labour groups to pave the way for workplace literacy activities. This process involves more than just workplace programs; it includes all the work needed to make a culture shift to ensure that literacy is part of learning and communication. The NLS funded the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME) – Ontario Division to develop a manual on the business case for literacy. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has also received funding to coordinate labour literacy activities across the country, including a newsletter, courses on union-based literacy and plain language, support for clear language in union materials, and integration of literacy into labour education programs. Examples of other projects include integrating literacy into food-handling training with the Alberta Food Processors Association, a curriculum for patient-care workers who need to pass certification in Nova Scotia, and a model of inclusive workplace learning with team processes through the CME – British Columbia Division. These are only a few of the projects funded by the NLS.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hayes, B. (2003, September). Workplace literacy: A national update. *Workplace literacy: National and international perspectives on research & practice*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.on.literacy.ca/whatnew/wrkplace/cover.htm>

## 2.1.2 A Business Perspective on Literacy

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*A lot of people used to call in sick on training days for health and safety training, equipment operation, forklift certification... Now people jump at these opportunities. Personal insecurity was holding people back. Also, these courses required answering multiple-choice questions.*

–Allie Craswell, Plant Manager, Avon Foods Inc., Berwick, NS <sup>25</sup>

In its handbook *Business Results Through Literacy*, the CME – Ontario Division acknowledges that people with literacy challenges are good performers. However, the handbook also notes that these people may have difficulty responding to changes that involve reading skills, training, problem solving, and computer skills. Change and innovation are key to staying competitive and viable.

Literacy requirements for jobs are continuing to increase in most workplaces. In CME surveys, members identified “the availability of skilled and expert workers as their most important issue”.<sup>26</sup> Problem solving and interpersonal skills were identified by 47% of companies as the most important skills for improvement. Also, 43% of companies said employee literacy skills would need improvement for future company changes.

In 2002, 60% of CME members responding to a CME literacy survey said they were doing things to improve the literacy levels of their employees. These things included doing screen tests, using literacy assessments, sponsoring literacy programs, and working with community groups.

The CME notes that Canadians think training is very important, and that they think they are not getting enough training to help them deal with workplace change. The CME surveys show that employees are not getting the training they need; 48% of Canadian companies spend 1% or less of their payroll budget on education and training, and 71% spend less than 2%. The Conference Board of Canada suggests

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<sup>25</sup> ABC CANADA. (1997). *The impact of basic skills programs on Canadian workplaces*.

<sup>26</sup> Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters – Ontario Division. (2003). *Business results through literacy* (p. 10). Retrieved March, 2005 from [http://www.cme-mec.ca/on/template2\\_on.asp?p=2](http://www.cme-mec.ca/on/template2_on.asp?p=2)

that most companies do not offer literacy upgrading programs for their employees, because companies do not see the benefits, do not know how to offer programs, or have not engaged unions effectively.

The CME asserts that literacy upgrading improves productivity, quality, safety, flexibility, employee relations, and the ability to keep improving and responding to change. Employees also benefit from increases in areas including self-esteem, positive outlook, ability to participate, advancement opportunities, and job security, as well as an improved family life. These results are confirmed by the Conference Board of Canada.

The CME<sup>27</sup> and the Conference Board of Canada<sup>28</sup> each outline successful case studies and best practices in their reports and handbooks.

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### 2.1.3 A Labour Perspective on Literacy

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*I've seen a greater level of confidence, more co-operation, and more personal opinions being voiced. One of our workers never spoke up at meetings. Now when he has something to say, he says it loud and clear. He says it's directly related to the program... He's learned that he can learn, and that gave him confidence.*

– Sylvian Roy, Union Representative, Bestar, Lac Magantic, PQ<sup>29</sup>

For labour, the issue of literacy has been an important part of a larger struggle to protect and empower working people. Trade unionists first promoted literacy 150 years ago. Today, Canadian unions are at the forefront of developing a democratic and holistic worker-centred approach to literacy. Labour gets involved in literacy to enhance workers' lives, build unions, and improve workplaces.

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<sup>27</sup> Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters – Ontario Division. (2003). *Business results through literacy*. Retrieved March, 2005 from [http://www.cme-mec.ca/on/template2\\_on.asp?p=2](http://www.cme-mec.ca/on/template2_on.asp?p=2)

<sup>28</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. (2003). *Strength from within: Overcoming the barriers to workplace literacy development*.

<sup>29</sup> ABC CANADA. (1997). *The impact of basic skills programs on Canadian workplaces*.

Labour sees literacy as a chance to reach out to those members who had to leave school early, had a negative experience in school, whose skills are rusty, or who are immigrant workers needing to improve their skills. Labour is also looking inside its organizations to see how its programs and materials can be made more accessible to members.

Labour uses a worker-centred approach in the development of their programs.

Worker-centred learning:

- builds on what people know
- addresses the needs of workers as whole persons
- enables workers to have more control over their lives and jobs
- involves workers in decision making
- reflects the diverse learning styles and needs of adult workers
- integrates literacy with other aspects of workplace training
- assures confidentiality
- is developmental
- is accessible
- is open to all

Programs are often held at the workplace with co-workers as instructors. This is convenient and classes can take place at least partly on work time. Program content comes from worker interests related not only to work but also to home, community, and union.

Labour is concerned when it sees literacy framed as the solution to all workplace problems, and when individual workers are blamed for these problems.

Too often, workplace literacy programs only focus on present job competencies rather than being developmental, portable, and a foundation for further education and training.

There are many benefits for workers who participate in worker-centred programs, including improvements in areas such as self-esteem, communication, and comprehension of written instructions and new materials. Workers will also be more likely to participate in further training and education. They will feel more

valued and make more of a contribution to their organization. They will have a better sense of their rights, and will increase their participation in their union, workplace, and community.<sup>30</sup>

#### **2.1.4 A Workplace Educator Perspective on Literacy**

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*There are lots of clients. The learners come in different suits. Sometimes a formal committee is a community of learners. Government funders are clients, or the HR person or union leader is the client. My client is the worker. In large workplaces the joint committee may be a client and behind the committee all the employees have their interests. I feel if any of those levels were unhappy, I would answer to them.*

– Tracy Defoe, Workplace Educator, BC<sup>31</sup>

The multi-faceted role of the workplace educator in literacy includes doing research, planning and implementing programs, facilitating learning, and conducting evaluations. The predominant client is the learner but all stakeholders are clients.

Managing this complex situation can be difficult. There is no single course or experience that can prepare someone to do this work. Experienced workplace educators say that working with mentors and peers was pivotal in their development. Life and work experience as well as formal academic training are also important.

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<sup>30</sup> Levine, T. (2002). Learning in solidarity: A union approach to worker-centred literacy. *Just labour*, vol. 1. Retrieved March, 2005 from [www.justlabour.yorku.ca](http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca) See also, Worker Arts and Heritage Centre. (2001). *A quest for learning: The Canadian labour movement and worker literacy education*.

<sup>31</sup> Folinsbee, S. (2000). *Looking back, looking forward: A conversation with workplace educators*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/lookback/looking.pdf>

Experienced workplace educators identify the knowledge, abilities, and skills needed to do the different kinds of activities their position requires as follows:

**Knowledge** refers to principles of adult education, the belief that everyone can learn, and the ability to look at what people bring to the learning process rather than what they lack.

**Abilities** include respecting all kinds of people and their work, working in different cultural contexts, and recognizing and facing racism in oneself and others. Abilities also include figuring out workplaces and being astute about workplace politics and who one is accountable to. Workplace educators must be comfortable in open-ended situations, as well as being resourceful and creative.

**Skills** needed are instructional skills, planning and analysis skills, and advocacy skills.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Folinsbee, S. (2000). *Looking back, looking forward: A conversation with workplace educators*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/lookback/looking.pdf>

## 2.2 Partnerships

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This section focuses on describing existing partnerships to manage and coordinate workplace education at the provincial level. This section includes descriptions of government, labour, and business partnerships for workplace literacy in three provinces.

### 2.2.1 Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee

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The Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC)<sup>33</sup> is an business-labour-government partnership that promotes Essential Skills and literacy training in the workplace. The WEMSC works with employers to assess the need for Essential Skills training, to develop and deliver custom workplace training, and to train the trainer. The WEMSC has five members: two from business, appointed by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME); two from labour, appointed by the Manitoba Federation of Labour; and the WEMSC coordinator, from government.

In 1989, the Manitoba government established a Skills Training Advisory Committee with many labour market partners. The purpose of the committee was to find out how government could develop a training culture through stakeholder partnerships in the province. The committee identified two important needs: basic education, which would have an impact on any future training activities; and a better-educated and skilled workforce, since workplaces were going through significant changes.

In 1991, the WEMSC was formed to kick-start workplace literacy in Manitoba. The combined economic, business, and labour climate at the time was a catalyst that influenced the creation of the WEMSC. The government invited the CME and the Manitoba Federation of Labour to submit the names of two representatives to the committee. From the business point of view, it was an opportunity to work on labour force development for a more competitive Canada, and working with

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<sup>33</sup> Despins, R., Maruca, G., & Turner, S. (1997). What makes a successful workplace partnership? In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Workplace education: The changing landscape*. See also the Workplace Education Manitoba website at <http://www.wem.mb.ca>

labour was a bonus with little risk on either side. From the labour point of view, it was an opportunity to ensure that workers got real opportunities for upgrading in the face of massive workplace changes, and to work with business and government on an issue of mutual concern.

One of the labour representatives noted that workplace literacy education transcends the politics of the normal union/management positions. Business and labour partners must have respect for each others' principles, even if the partners do not embrace those principles as their own.

The WEMSC works because there is a high level of trust, commitment, interest, and professional expertise from members' jurisdictions, even though there was not initially an in-depth awareness of workplace literacy. The committee's government representative is a full-time government employee who links all the players.

During the early days, the committee came up with informal principles of good practice for the successful implementation of projects. These principles included:

- the need for a house steering committee made up of equal numbers from labour and management
- voluntary participation by employees in any workplace initiative
- avoidance of a deficit-based model; recognition by industry that current employees may have adequate skills but that changes in the workplace may require them to learn additional skills
- the inappropriateness of testing as a methodology to measure literacy levels
- de-emphasis on formal testing and emphasis on other instruments such as surveys and questionnaires

The WEMSC developed a process for workplace literacy initiatives. The first step is having a project team, with equal representation from management and workers, to guide all aspects of the project. Then a consultant for the project is hired by the WEMSC. The next step is conducting a comprehensive organizational needs assessment – a collaborative tool that respects the culture of the workplace.

The input from business and labour representatives into projects allowed exciting new partnerships to develop. Initial sectoral initiatives with grain companies and

construction sectors required completely different approaches to fit with their workplace cultures. As the WEMSC's work grew and became more widely known, it also fostered the development of instructor training and other kinds of workshops for instructors.

The fact that the WEMSC represented all the parties on a project had a large impact on the success of those projects. All committee members believed in a high-quality inclusive approach. Participants in WEMSC-sponsored projects commented that the WEMSC was able to incorporate both labour and management perspectives in a respectful way.

The WEMSC provides project dollars to support the hiring of a practitioner to plan and deliver workplace literacy.

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### **2.2.2 Workplace Education Nova Scotia** <sup>34</sup>

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The government of Nova Scotia sees that it has an important role to play in the development of worker skills. By improving the skills of workers, government invests in the economy, improves the workplace environment, and increases productivity. Government also encourages social development by providing another way for people to be able to participate socially and contribute to family literacy. An overall goal is to develop a lifelong learning culture in Nova Scotia.

Business, labour, and government in Nova Scotia have partnered to form the Workplace Education Initiative (WEI) through Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education. Nova Scotia Partners is a multi-partner advisory committee with representation from government, business, and labour. This committee provides guidance to the WEI, and the WEI provides workplace education that focuses on essential skills for Nova Scotia's workplaces. Government is both the initiator and the coordinator of the WEI. The WEI works to promote workplace education with business and labour and helps to design, implement, and evaluate programs at the workplace using Education Field Officers, who provide adult

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<sup>34</sup> Nova Scotia Department of Education. (n.d.) *Workplace education works: The results of an outcome evaluation study of the Nova Scotia workplace education initiative*. Retrieved March, 2005 from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/worked/contents.htm>

education expertise to projects. Employers provide information on future trends in their businesses and unions represent the interests and needs of their members.

At the site level, each workplace has a project team that includes management, the union, employees, funders, learners, and instructors. The project team promotes the program at the work site. The field officer for the project team conducts an organizational needs assessment. Then the project team determines, implements, administers, and evaluates the program. Courses are built from the workplace's materials and from participants' issues. Workers are able to practise skills and to transfer those skills to home and community.

The WEI conducted an evaluation of its provincial initiative. The research examined end-of-program evaluations from 32 courses at 24 different sites. In-depth interviews were conducted with partners at five sites. The findings confirmed the positive impacts for all partners that both the Conference Board of Canada and ABC CANADA had found previously. These positive impacts included improvements in the areas of performance, communication, morale, self-esteem, health and safety, and labour/management relations. The evaluation also found that the WEI was having a significant impact on people's lives outside of work.

A large majority from all partners saw improvements in essential skills at the workplace.

Interestingly, 73% of workers who took programs at their workplaces said they would not have been able to do so if the program had not been offered through their workplace. A large majority of participants felt more equipped to engage in further training and education and have moved on to do so. A majority feel more loyalty to their employers and unions because of the opportunity to upgrade.

Nova Scotia Partners funds practitioners to deliver workplace education programs and provides money for professional development.

### **2.2.3 Workplace Education PEI<sup>35</sup>**

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Workplace Education PEI is a not-for-profit initiative of business, labour, and government, developed in 1997 to help workplaces keep pace with workplace change. A board representing business, labour, and government directs Workplace Education PEI. Three government field officers are responsible for initiating, monitoring, and evaluating workplace learning across the province. These officers work with business and labour to define learning needs and to develop and deliver appropriate programs.

Under Workplace Education PEI, barriers to learning are removed as much as possible. These barriers include the cost of the program to the participant and having to take at least partial time off work for learning. Participants also find it easier to have programs offered at the work site.

Workplace Education PEI provides money for practitioners to deliver workplace education programs. A field officer conducts an organizational needs assessment at no cost to the workplace to determine learning needs and to make recommendations for programs.

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<sup>35</sup> See the Workplace Education PEI website at <http://www.nald.ca/wepei.htm>

1. Background Information

2. Workplace Literacy Approaches  
and Partnership

**3. Consultations with Stakeholders in  
Preparation for the Symposium**

4. Summary

Appendix

### 3.1 Introduction

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Members of the symposium advisory committee include partners from labour, business, literacy organizations, training and adult education organizations, and adult learners. Advisory committee members represent provincial and national organizations and groups, and speak for large constituencies across Ontario. As such, each advisory committee member has in-depth knowledge of the many voices in their stakeholder group.

Symposium delegates represent the voices and experience behind their organizations.

Input was sought from advisory committee members, symposium delegates, and the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC)'s management to both inform this paper and shape the design of the symposium. Input was received from ten symposium advisory committee members (including project team members), fourteen symposium delegates, and one OLC manager, for a total of twenty-five responses. The opinions expressed in these responses are the views of the respondents and therefore cannot represent all the views of an entire sector. The number of responses per stakeholder group is as follows:

Labour	Business	Literacy Organizations	Training and Adult Education Organizations	Adult Learners	Government
<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

The content of the responses informs this section. An attempt has been made to include all views contained in the responses, and to make explicit the different interests among and within stakeholder groups.

## **3.2 What Does “Workforce and Workplace Literacy” Mean?**

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Advisory committee members and symposium participants were asked to define what the terms “literacy”, “workforce literacy”, and “workplace literacy” meant to them. While people shared some similar ideas, there were a number of striking differences as well. Two common ideas were that workforce literacy can include both the employed and the unemployed, and that workplace literacy is site- or sector-specific.

### **3.2.1 Labour View of Terms**

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Labour might use the terms “basic skills” or “foundation skills”, and give detailed explanations of what is meant by these. Labour uses the term “literacy” as a broad concept. Worker-centred learning is the preferred approach, emphasizing a broader range of skills, not just for employability, but for workers as whole persons.

There is a need for both workforce and workplace literacy. Workplace literacy is not supported by public infrastructure, and varies from workplace to workplace. Workplace literacy focuses on the currently employed and the recently unemployed in terms of adjustment.

Workforce literacy is historically associated with the unemployed. Workforce literacy includes programming for those not currently in a workplace, such as unemployed, laid-off, or injured workers. Workforce literacy also includes apprenticeship programs and employment readiness programs.

Workplace literacy programs reflect the concept of the Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) program originally developed by the Ontario Federation of Labour. This program is designed to facilitate growth individually and collectively, and to enable workers to have more control over their lives at work and in their communities. The program is usually run in workplaces, using co-worker instructors and small group learning. Workplace programs might be offered at the workplace or at a union hall, and might include numeracy classes, computer classes, literacy for Anglophones, and ESL classes.

Clear language and clear communications, in workplaces and within unions, are important aspects of literacy for labour. Effective communications help build a more inclusive labour movement.

Some unions do not use the term “essential skills”, because a focus on the skills for a particular job is too narrow. If literacy is seen through essential skills, this is a problem. Literacy is not an add-on to essential skills; it is a different way of approaching literacy.

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### **3.2.2 Business View of Terms**

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Business said defining literacy is a challenge because there are many different definitions.

Employers might think literacy means someone who cannot read or write. What is the difference between literacy and language learning? There needs to be a more comprehensive definition that people can buy into and use. Business uses the terms “literacy”, and “basic skills” or “essential skills”. These skills are building blocks. “Essential skills” is a broader and more comprehensive term than “literacy”. There is a need for the definition of literacy to grow and evolve.

There is a relation between workforce literacy and workplace literacy. Workforce literacy is a more comprehensive term; it includes those who are working and those who are trying to find work (potential workforce). Workplace literacy refers to a specific company or sector; it is a future investment in a company’s employees. Workplace literacy programs can be company- or industry-specific, or very general. Workplace literacy programs include referrals to community organizations.

Another perspective is that there is no difference between workforce literacy and workplace literacy; they both refer to whatever people in the workplace need, including computer skills, and the ability to understand and respond to written materials.

### **3.2.3 Adult Learner View of Terms**

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For many learners, literacy means people who have great difficulty reading. Other learners see this definition as too narrow. To them, literacy is more than difficulty reading; the term includes what caused the difficulty, and the consequences of the difficulty. Literacy is a label that creates a stigma which prevents people from feeling comfortable asking for help.

Adult learners do not use the terms workforce literacy and workplace literacy. They see it all as literacy. Using so many terms becomes confusing and intimidating.

### **3.2.4 Literacy Organization View of Terms**

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For literacy organizations, literacy has different meanings. One definition is the ability to use and understand material at work, at home, and in the community. Literacy includes media and electronic communication, and refers to children and adults. There is a continuum and there are many literacies.

Another view is that literacy is much more than being able to read and write; it is about reading the world rather than just reading the word.

Another definition focuses on the literacy skills necessary to function in everyday life, using the concepts of Grades 1-9, or Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) levels 1-5.

For the purposes of funding the Ontario government's LBS program, distinctions between workforce literacy and workplace literacy are important. However, workforce literacy and workplace literacy are similar in concept – both are concerned with supporting people in upgrading to find and maintain employment – and the two can be viewed as a single concept within the context of a larger continuum.

Workforce literacy in LBS programs focuses on having learners work on literacy skills in preparation for gaining and maintaining employment. This preparation can include career exploration, job-related training, or strategies for getting a specific job. Workforce programs usually take place at community sites such as

learning centres, adult day schools, or college campuses. These programs focus on the needs of individual learners.

Workplace literacy refers to specific on-site literacy programs or upgrading programs offered at an employee's workplace or union site. These programs help workers maintain skills necessary for employment, and also add to workers' security and quality of life.

One idea was that the term "workplace learning" might be preferable to "workplace literacy" because of the stigma attached to "literacy", especially in the workplace. Workplace literacy should be seen as part of other workplace learning needs and as part of a larger learning strategy. Workplace programs involve many players and should focus on the whole person.

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### **3.2.5 Training and Adult Education Organization View of Terms**

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Training and adult education organizations have different views of the terms.

In one case, "literacy" means lack of reading and writing skills, and "workforce literacy" is not used at all. "Workplace literacy" would be used if it was possible to educate the membership on what it means. The term "essential skills" is used with the membership, and this term includes human rights and conflict resolution.

Another view is that the meaning of workforce and workplace literacy comes down to the inclusion and participation of people, wherever they are on the continuum. People need to be invited to learn, to take the next step. There are two approaches: one is deficit-based (focuses on what workers lack and places the onus on the worker for lacking skills), and the other is participation-based (recognizes that learning needs to be ongoing and provides those opportunities for learning).

Another view is that workforce literacy refers to understanding the labour force and trends, as well as being able to interpret labour market information. Workplace literacy refers to understanding the norms and needs of a specific workplace.

### **3.2.6 Government View of Terms**

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One perspective is to see all the terms as being included in “workforce literacy”, where the focus is on serving literacy goals for employment. This focus could include individuals – employed or unemployed – attending programs at an LBS agency, or it could include fee-for-service programs in workplaces.

Another view is that workforce literacy refers to both employed and unemployed people, while workplace literacy refers only to employed people.

### **3.3 Stakeholder Interests in Workforce and Workplace Literacy**

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This section looks at the interests of labour, business, literacy organizations, adult learners, training and adult education organizations, and government in workforce and workplace literacy.

#### **3.3.1 Labour Interests**

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Labour's interest in workplace literacy is to facilitate the growth of working people in an empowering way.

It is crucial to help working people take more control of their lives, individually and collectively, at work and in their communities, by advocating for greater social justice and equality. There is a belief in the power of learning to transform the lives of trade union members and to build the strength, solidarity, and equity of their unions. Clear and effective communications and programming are also important for building a more inclusive labour movement.

Programs such as BEST were accessible, learner-centred, and based on small group learning, and should be used as models when initiating workplace literacy programs. Many union members need opportunities – especially during times of restructuring and job loss – to improve their basic skills, to upgrade their English, and to address health and safety issues.

#### **3.3.2 Business Interests**

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Business' interests recognize that essential skills such as problem solving, reading, and writing need to be addressed within the workforce. There is a need to raise awareness of the value of workplace literacy, to provide knowledge, and to share opportunities with the business community. One employer said providing essential skills programs for employees enables employees to be the best that they can be at any level.

### **3.3.3 Literacy Organization Interests**

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The interests of literacy organizations focus on helping adult learners to find employment, to keep their employment, or to find better employment. Some organizations have offered workplace literacy programs in the past, and also hope to make workplace connections in the future.

Regional networks and umbrella organizations have an interest in shaping workforce development, and in supporting LBS agencies in assisting adult learners reach their employment goals through professional development, information sharing, and the development of resources. There is an interest in making more connections with business and labour, and an interest in ensuring that all people in Ontario who have literacy challenges are able to participate fully in society.

### **3.3.4 Adult Learner Interests**

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People in the workforce need to get training on the job. Most people cannot afford to take time off work to go back to school. Adults who are working already have many other demands on their time. If the onus is always on the worker to do the upgrading, on their own time, after work, other commitments are going to get in the way.

People also cannot afford to leave work to go back to school, even if the upgrading would give them a substantial increase in salary in the future, because they depend on the salary and on the job-related health and insurance benefits provided by their current employment. If people quit work to go back to school, neither they nor their families will be eligible for the support they would get if they were on Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, or other such government income programs.

### **3.3.5 Training and Adult Education Organization Interests**

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Literacy is a specific barrier to accessing and maintaining employment, and to advancing in a job. One organization's interest is in workplace literacy. The organization wants to raise awareness of the issues and to educate employers on the value of integrating literacy programs into their overall learning strategies. The organization also wants to educate both employers and employees about the value of literacy programming as a partnership.

### **3.3.6 Government Interests**

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Government recognizes that skilled people are needed for the province to be successful. The Ontario government has committed to a number of initiatives such as keeping people in school until age 18, increasing the number of apprentices, and reducing the barriers to internationally trained professionals so they can work here in their chosen occupations.

### **3.4 Priority Issues for Discussion at the Symposium**

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This section provides summaries of the priority issues each stakeholder group would like discussed at the symposium. This section is based on interviews with advisory committee members and surveys of symposium delegates, and all issues presented have been included. These issues have not been weighted. Instead, some of the common issues occurring in different stakeholder groups have been summarized. Those common issues are:

- what are the points of view among stakeholders, and what are the common areas that stakeholders can agree on and work together on
- how to support and fund accessible workforce and workplace programs
- how to implement successful workplace literacy initiatives
- literacy that focuses on the whole person
- the importance of literacy to business
- what are the benefits or impacts of addressing workforce and workplace literacy
- how can partnerships be fostered among the literacy community, business, and unions, for workforce and workplace literacy

#### **3.4.1 Priorities for Adult Learners**

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For adult learners the priority issues for discussion are:

- how to get support for upgrading that is convenient, flexible, and affordable
- how to make upgrading more attainable for workers
- how to remove intimidation and embarrassment from adult education, so learners do not feel stupid

### 3.4.2 Priorities for Literacy Organizations

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*We need to make sure that business know what we do and what we have to offer and that partners know a little more about us.*

– Advisory committee members

For literacy organizations the priorities for discussion are:

#### *Planning and delivering workforce and workplace initiatives*

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- how to get started – defining terms, defeating myths, facts about literacy, which organizations have implemented initiatives, shared responsibilities, organizational readiness, and factors for success
- managing workplace programs – what policies and procedures need to be in place; how to market and evaluate workplace programs
- hearing about and discussing successful models – especially joint union-management models – through workshops, panels, and roundtables
- ways business can support workplace and workforce literacy

#### *Surveys, frameworks, and tools*

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- discussion of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey<sup>36</sup> results, the Test of Workplace Essential Skills<sup>37</sup>, and the Human Resources and Skills Development Essential Skills<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> On May 11, 2005, Statistics Canada released the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS), which is the new version of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The ALLS shows that four in ten Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the increasing demands in our society, and that average scores have not changed significantly since the IALS was conducted nine years ago.

<sup>37</sup> The Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES) is a test of workplace essential skills with a bank of test items which collectively form an assessment tool to measure essential skills in workplace settings. Test content is based on workplace documents and individuals who take the test are required to process information contained in those documents to complete a task.

<sup>38</sup> The federal government has validated nine Essential Skills: Reading Text, Document Use, Numeracy, Writing, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Thinking Skills, Continuous Learning, and Computer Use. Levels of complexity from one to five are used to measure the complexity of these skills in different occupations. Essential Skills Profiles describe how each of the nine Essential Skills are used by workers in

### *Breaking down barriers to employment*

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- how to break down barriers to employment for adults who have literacy challenges but possess extraordinary hands-on skills

### *Partnerships*

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- determining common ground among all stakeholders
- finding out how to cultivate relationships with business and labour, and offer services to them – what are they looking for and what would encourage them to use our services; are they willing to pay?

### *Policies and funding*

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- talking about government policies across departments in terms of supportive changes and policies for workforce and workplace literacy
- a discussion on renewed and ongoing funding for workplace literacy programming by government or by a combination of government and management/employee funding
- how to get funding from government and business for infrastructure supports, including program delivery for workplace literacy

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a particular occupation, including a description of the occupation, the most important Essential Skills, examples of tasks that use the Essential Skills, complexity ratings from one to five, physical aspects and attitudes needed for the job, and future trends.

### 3.4.3 Priorities for Labour

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*We have to have conditions for support and funding. The collective bargaining process is utilized to ensure training is accessible to all workers. If workplace literacy programs are funded, what kinds of conditions apply? We want to make sure that there is a requirement by law that programs are jointly managed. There has to be some kind of standard around equitable access.*

– Advisory committee members

For labour the priorities for discussion are:

#### *Policies and funding*

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- how to get funding from government and business for infrastructure supports for workplace literacy, including program delivery
- to apply for funding and supports for workplace literacy, what kinds of conditions are needed
- sharing notions of what the infrastructure for workplace literacy could look like, to make it concrete for government
- how to work with the free public education system
- the need to include ESL as an integral part of literacy
- how the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) Workplace Skills Strategy will be coordinated with provincial strategies
- paid training and professional development for literacy workers

#### *Partnerships*

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- determining what the common ground is among stakeholders

#### *Approaches*

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- identification of workers' needs, as opposed to the needs of the economy or of productivity, and discussion of worker-centred learning
- how to recruit workers to programs

### 3.4.4 Priorities for Business

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*How can we get the message out to employers about the importance of literacy? What's the message that resonates where people can see the relationship to their own business? Many employers would find it hard to believe that adult Canadians would have literacy difficulties. They would confuse it with a language gap.*

– Advisory committee members

For business the priorities for discussion are:

#### ***Awareness and communication***

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- how to communicate the importance of literacy to business; why should business care in real terms – need more than statistics
- what can business do about literacy in the workplace – mechanisms to engage employers in addressing the issue in their workplaces
- how to process or coordinate success stories and best practices that people can access easily
- expanding the definition of literacy to meet current and future workplace needs
- how to engage small- and medium-sized businesses

#### ***Funding***

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- lack of funding for initial start-up costs such as the workplace needs assessment for programs

#### ***Analysis and action***

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- how to develop a road map for success with literacy
- how does the issue of literacy tie in with other issues facing particular groups, such as the skilled trades

### 3.4.5 Priorities for Training and Adult Education Organizations

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*We should discuss workplace change and the pressures that employers are under. Why would employers be concerned about workplace literacy? People from the literacy community need to have a sense of workplace change and the pressures that workers feel.*

– Advisory committee members

For training and adult education organizations the priorities for discussion are:

#### *Awareness*

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- workplace change – the pressures employers and workers are under and why business would be concerned about workplace literacy

#### *Approaches*

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- making literacy broader – the importance of a literate citizenry
- literacy is about people learning best when they are viewed as a whole person; this approach builds a strong union and people work their best
- management learning discourse which shows that union and management are saying the same thing about how people learn best
- how to create a workplace learning system that includes literacy, apprenticeship, and skills upgrading

#### *Need for and benefits of workplace programs*

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- the need for workplace programs and how business can contribute
- how to pool resources to demonstrate the return on investment of this level of training

#### *Partnerships*

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- how to foster the notion of an employee/business/government partnership

### 3.4.6 Priorities for Government

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*If we want broad support for this issue, we have to understand the impact or return on investment.*

– Advisory committee members

For government the priority issues for discussion are:

#### *Partnerships*

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- employer engagement – who is responsible for what; how can partners work together to broaden support for literacy training

#### *Approaches*

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- how workforce and workplace literacy are defined and framed; what are the cultural values around what we would like to see in the province
- what are the risks of not addressing literacy

#### *Evaluating results*

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- how do we evaluate results in a way that is beyond self-esteem but not cumbersome

### 3.5 Support for Workforce and Workplace Programs

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This section includes a summary of stakeholders' thoughts about funding. (In this section, references to **stakeholder groups** are sometimes bolded to facilitate identification of the speaker.) This section is based on interviews with advisory committee members and surveys with symposium delegates.

**Literacy organizations** said there is financial support for workforce literacy, but more government funding is needed for infrastructure support of workforce literacy. There is no financial support for workplace literacy, and this is needed. There is not enough support for practitioners to have professional development and teachers are burnt out. Most practitioners are paid less than is warranted by their level of expertise. In some work environments, practitioners are paid an hourly wage that only covers facilitation time, not preparation time, staff meetings, or professional development. With respect to workplace literacy, expertise is scattered across the province, and there is no central coordination of information and resources. There is also a gap in business knowledge of and appreciation for investment in workplace literacy.

A broker model is one type of approach which could be considered – a model in which literacy networks are funded to coordinate workplace literacy, do the initial organizational needs assessment, and work with organizations to develop and deliver training.

**Business** said there is not a lot of funding available, as was the case ten years ago. There may be more interest now. The National Literacy Secretariat provides some project funding. There needs to be a national strategy on training, in which partners come to the table to clearly articulate goals and challenges. There also needs to be a provincial strategy on training that ties in with the national strategy. There is a need for common understanding, action plans, and progress. There is also a need to look at what has been done successfully in other provinces, rather than constantly reinventing the wheel.

**Labour** said there are minimal government supports for workforce literacy and none for workplace literacy. Supports are shrinking. For example, adult learning centres have been shut down. There used to be provincial support for programs

like BEST. There were public funds for staff, resources, equipment, and space. Government's role needs to go beyond awareness and tool kits. Business is aware of literacy as an issue, but not as a priority. Areas where there are gaps in funding include promotion, staffing, training of peer instructors, and development of new resources such as learning materials.

One perspective from **training and adult education organizations** was that Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners should not be expected to customize learning to the needs of labour and business for workplace literacy under its present structure.

Companies and unions should be eligible for funding to hire workplace educators for what count as learning needs. The learning must deal with actual workplace scenarios that are problematic, and patterns must be analyzed from organizational needs. Learning should be holistic and not based on testing or blame.

### 3.6 Vision for Action Resulting from the Symposium

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Advisory committee members were asked to imagine it is a year and a half from now, and to describe what their vision was for action that has come about as a result of the symposium. Delegates were also asked what action they would like to see as a result of the symposium.

Several themes emerged for action, and some were common across stakeholder groups. These common themes dealt with needs for:

- support and infrastructure for workforce and workplace literacy
- greater awareness of and commitment to literacy as a business priority
- partnerships
- quality workforce and workplace literacy initiatives.

This section summarizes each of these common themes, presenting the viewpoints of the various stakeholders. (In this section, references to **stakeholder groups** are sometimes bolded to facilitate identification of the speaker.)

### 3.6.1 Support and Infrastructure for Workforce and Workplace Literacy

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An important theme raised by the majority of stakeholders was the topic of government funding and support for both infrastructure and programs for workforce and workplace literacy.

For **literacy organizations**, literacy programs have the information and resources needed to deliver workplace/workforce literacy programs. There is adequate funding from government to support business investment in programming. There is increased funding to better support the ability of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)/Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) funded organizations to deliver workforce and other literacy programming.

For **labour**, there is government funding for a workplace literacy system and infrastructure. There are funds for peer instructor training, marketing, and promotion, matched with leave and funding for workers to attend programs. Direct government funding is for delivery but employers are obligated to pay as well.

For **business**, a sign of success is that government sees workplace literacy as a priority for business.

For **adult learners**, the necessary supports are in place to implement programs that workers can access and attend through their workplaces.

For **training and adult education organizations**, the Ontario government has set up a fund to support voluntary literacy programs in the workplace.

### 3.6.2 Greater Awareness of and Commitment to Literacy as a Business Priority

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A common theme, raised by representatives from **adult learners, business, literacy organizations, and training and adult education organizations** participating in the symposium, was the need for greater awareness of and commitment to the issue of literacy as a business priority.

For **adult learners**, there is an awareness campaign aimed at industries where there are strong educational issues. Employers are aware of the services they could use in their workplaces. There is support for upgrading while people are still working, so that if they are laid off they will have opportunities for other work and will not have to go on welfare.

For **business**, there is greater awareness of how literacy is a priority and a challenge for business. Employers are now aware of the full aspect of literacy and have shared best practices, policies, and procedures. Employers are taking concrete steps to offer programs and related initiatives.

For **literacy organizations**, employers are more aware of available literacy programming and of where they can get support for people with upgrading needs. There is supported investment with government dollars for programming. Literacy has greater exposure in the business media.

For **training and adult education organizations**, members and senior managers are more aware of workplace literacy issues and they know about effective tools that are available. A database of best practices has been developed and is available to all employers. Employers have a better understanding of why learning matters to their organizations. Progressive literacy work is part of an organizational vision taking place. Business understands that literacy cannot be separated from work. There is a broader and more inclusive concept of literacy that is about people's abilities and opportunities to contribute rather than about shame.

### 3.6.3 Partnerships

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Strengthened partnerships were a very important theme for **business, labour, literacy organizations, and training and adult education organizations**. These partnerships took different forms.

For **government**, there is a clearer understanding among the different partners and an appreciation of the constraints on each. Partners have moved beyond original positions.

For **business**, there is a strong follow-up after the symposium, such as meetings including several attainable items that all partners can embrace. Everyone has a stake in working together and there is a new maturity in Ontario to enable that to happen. As a result of the symposium, there is a cohesive strategy to engage the workplace.

For **labour**, there is an informal or formal network of organizations talking to government about the supports that are needed for workplace literacy. The system and infrastructure for workplace literacy are governed by a board made up of business and labour, and possibly community representatives. Importantly, the different vantage points of partners are visible and respected. Just as importantly, these vantage points are not reconciled into a mushy middle.

For **literacy organizations**, relationships with business and labour are strengthened. There is greater awareness of and commitment to literacy on the part of business. There is a common understanding of workforce and workplace literacy. There is an awareness of the necessity of focusing on adults with the greatest needs at the lower levels. Literacy is seen as a positive opportunity, not as a threat. Community programs are working together to deliver services. The means are in place to bring the literacy field together to talk about workforce and workplace literacy. Stakeholders are willing to meet again after the symposium. There is a summary report and an action plan paper for workforce and workplace literacy, with realistic goals and activities.

Workplaces that cannot accommodate full workplace programming because of smaller employee numbers are working with literacy programs to offer alternative options for delivery to these employees. Communication and partnerships exist

among business, labour, and literacy organizations to work toward literacy programming for people seeking employment.

For **training and adult education organizations**, there is a network or partnership of stakeholders working with government on the issues of workplace skills, and workforce and workplace literacy. There is also increased awareness of the need for literate workers.

### 3.6.4 Workplace/Workforce Literacy Initiatives

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The theme of workforce/workplace literacy initiatives was important to **all stakeholders**.

For **adult learners**, people are able to upgrade at home and at the workplace. Upgrading programs find out and address what people are interested in, and what they want. There are more incentives for people to get their Grade 12. People are treated with respect and have more control over their lives.

For some **literacy organizations**, there are twice as many learners receiving programming because organizations are reaching out to learners in their workplaces and serving their needs.

Workplace programs are based on the needs of all partners and on the realities of each workplace. Programs are accessible, worker-centred, and respectful. Programs incorporate workers' needs not only in the workplace but in the home and the community. Programs respect the confidentiality of individuals in assessments and evaluations.

For **business**, there is a "full quilt of coordinated programs, not a patchwork". Business is reaping the full value of available resources. There has been a large step forward and a lot of positive change.

For **labour**, programs are 100% on paid time. Programs are structured on a more broadly-based labour vision.<sup>39</sup>

For **training and adult education organizations**, teaching literacy at work is about the complexities of use. Using and strengthening literacy are not separate. Workplace literacy programs are meaningful to people in their whole lives, and reading and writing are taught in a way that is embedded in the meaning of their lives. People learn to stick up for themselves. Labour is working with business to take a broader approach.

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<sup>39</sup> See Part II. A. iii. of this paper for a labour perspective on literacy.

**1. Background Information**

**2. Workplace Literacy Approaches  
and Partnership**

**3. Consultations with Stakeholders in  
Preparation for the Symposium**

**4. Summary**

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**Appendix**

## 4. Summary

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The findings throughout this paper, from both the literature and consultations, show there is a desire for partnerships among business, labour, literacy organizations, and training and adult education organizations, especially for opening up dialogue with each other and with the provincial government, to address infrastructure needs and funding support for workforce and workplace literacy.

Ontario has a rich history of successful experience with workforce and workplace initiatives over the last twenty-five years or more – experience and expertise to build on for the future.

The consultations with symposium advisory committee members and delegates show there is an overlap in how workforce and workplace literacy are defined. A common concept among stakeholders was that workforce literacy includes both the unemployed and the employed, while workplace literacy is site- or sector-specific.

Stakeholder's ideas for action after the symposium had many common themes. Primary among these common themes was a vision of adequate funding for infrastructure costs and programs for workplace literacy. Another key theme was the need for a business community which had a greater awareness of and commitment to literacy as a priority. People envisioned partnerships being strengthened as a result of the symposium. This strengthening would be manifested by the partners continuing to work together on common concerns after the symposium, as well as the development of partnerships for workforce and workplace literacy among business, labour, government, literacy organizations, and community groups. A future in which programming and resources are available, accessible, and meaningful was envisioned by symposium participants.

Several priority issues were identified for discussion at the symposium. Some of these issues were:

- how to get support for accessible, affordable, and flexible programs
- how to develop partnerships among literacy organizations, business, and labour to serve the needs of learners with employment goals
- how to implement workplace literacy successfully
- how to get funding for infrastructure costs for workforce and workplace literacy and what kinds of conditions are needed to apply for this funding
- how to build awareness of and commitment to workplace literacy

There are a number of provincial models for workplace literacy that can provide a starting point for dialogue about what such a model might look like in Ontario. There are also resources available that outline business and labour approaches to workplace literacy, as well as common principles of good practice that have been identified across the industrialized world.

# Appendix

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## Advisory Committee Members

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**Patricia Ashie**, Adult Learners Network of Ontario

**Cheryl Conway**, Mid North Network for Adult Learning

**Gay Douglas-Broerse**, Literacy Link Niagara

**Janice Gairey**, Ontario Federation of Labour

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## Symposium Delegates at Time of Printing

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**Dave Bleakney**, Canadian Union of Postal Workers

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**Kim Brooks**, Dofasco

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**Tamara Levine**, Canadian Labour Congress Workplace Literacy Project

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**Trudy Lothian**, Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board

**Peggy Anne Moore**, Goal: Ontario Literacy for Deaf People

**Dave Neumann**, Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators

**Ellen Paterson**, Ontario Native Literacy Coalition

**Christine Pinsent-Johnson**, Employment Preparation and Upgrading Program

**Anne Ramsay**, Project Read Literacy Network – Waterloo-Wellington

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**Sylvia Sioufi**, Canadian Union of Public Employees

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**The Ontario Literacy Coalition's Workplace/Workforce Symposium**

**Reflections Paper, May 2005**

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