

## **Why Should *Unions* Care About Workplace Literacy?**

“The BC Federation of Labour believes that literacy is integral to labour’s success, both socially and economically, and is fundamental to labour’s ability to meet the challenges of the new millenium. It recognizes basic skills as the cornerstone of a learning culture and the foundation on which lifelong learning can occur.”

-- *Policy Statement on Literacy*, BC Federation of Labour

“Literacy empowers members to not only understand their rights – be it their collective agreements, employee benefits, health and safety information, labour law, or workers’ compensation guidelines – but to demand these rights be respected. It increases their ability to participate in the union and, collectively, in society as a whole.”

“Unions have long recognized the value of learning opportunities as a tool for organizing new members and in fostering more active member participation. By sponsoring basic skills and other educational opportunities, unions help workers see how organized labour represents their needs and interests – especially among those who have not previously been involved in union activities. Union members gain more knowledge about their union and develop the confidence and skills to get more involved.”

-- *The L Campaign Information Kit*, BC Federation of Labour, 1999

“Members are more likely to feel loyalty and to stay in the union because they appreciate the value they gain from union leadership and support for skills training ... Members with improved skills often take a more active part in union committees and program development.”

-- *Conference Board of Canada*,  
[www.workplacebasicskills.com/non\\_frame/wep/benefits\\_to\\_union.htm](http://www.workplacebasicskills.com/non_frame/wep/benefits_to_union.htm)

“Health and safety issues are also advanced when union members better understand and participate fully in workplace safety training. Greater ability to read workplace safety signs and documents and to critically question unsafe working conditions can promote safer and healthier workplaces for union members.”

-- *The L Campaign Information Kit*, BC Federation of Labour, 1999

“Their awareness of the need to be a part of managing workplace change has prompted unions to financially support and actively encourage literacy and basic skills development in the workplace

... Unions can assist their members to change in order to meet the needs and interests of the membership. By supporting literacy and basic skills development in the workplace, unions focus on increasing the value of employees to the firm. In this way, they safeguard their members' jobs and improve their employment opportunities."

-- *Conference Board of Canada,*

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"For many union members, learning has been a scary thing. Basic skills upgrading gives them greater confidence and interest in learning. Many members say one of the benefits of participating in a workplace program is that they become more involved in their children's learning, even helping them more with their homework. Others say they have the confidence to get more involved in community events and projects."

-- *The L Campaign Information Kit*, BC Federation of Labour, 1999

"Opportunities to upgrade basic skills enrich workers' self-esteem, increase their confidence and interest in learning, and better enable them to carry out their responsibilities outside of the workplace. Upgrading literacy skills enhances workers' employability and is key to assisting those who are adjusting to lay-off and seeking re-employment and retraining. Strong basic skills prepare workers to keep up with emerging technologies, provide the foundation for ongoing training, and increase the likelihood of job security and advancement. Literacy empowers workers to not only understand their rights – be it their collective agreements, employee benefits, health and safety information, labour law, or workers' compensation guidelines – but to demand these rights be respected. It increases their ability to participate in the union and, collectively, in society as a whole."

-- *Policy Statement on Literacy*, BC Federation of Labour

"There are various models of employer support for literacy that unions have wanted at the bargaining table including paid time for training – so many cents per hour worked into a fund – for employees, a percentage of payroll, paid leave programs, tuition advances, etc. Often union-initiated programming can demonstrate models and help raise the standard that will, in turn, have a positive impact on non-unionized workplaces as well."

-- *Kenneth Georgetti*, President, Canadian Labour Congress, April 2003

Upgrading literacy skills enhances workers' employability and increases their likelihood of job security. Not only are strong basic skills necessary for adapting to new workplace systems and technologies – they are also key to assisting those adjusting to lay-off or seeking re-employment and retraining.

-- *The L Campaign Information Kit*, BC Federation of Labour, 1999