

What are the Experts Recommending Be Done About Workplace Literacy?

The following are excerpts of recent recommendations made in support of workforce literacy:

A Pan-Canadian Approach...

- Establish a pan-Canadian literacy development system, supported by federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Establish programs to improve literacy and adults' knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary.
- At the best practices workshop on literacy, participants strongly agreed on the need for a pan-Canadian literacy strategy involving all levels of government, businesses, labour, education, and training providers, as well as literacy groups and non-governmental organizations. Above all, they saw a need to raise awareness and promote understanding of literacy issues, and to develop and share best practices in connection with family and community-based literacy activities.
- Priority actions (include) a national approach to credentials recognition, and national programs for putting skills into curricula.

-- Canadians Speak on Innovation and Learning, Canada's Innovation Strategy, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002

Support for Partnerships...

- Strong and valuable partnerships have been developed over the years with literacy organizations, employers, employee representatives, educators, and a vast number of other stakeholders, all of whom are dedicated to improving the literacy skills of Canadians ... Without additional public and private sector investments in this critical area of human capital, Canada will lose a major opportunity to improve the economic and social welfare of many thousands of willing participants who lack the necessary basic skills to participate more fully in Canadian society.
- That the National Literacy Secretariat continue to promote and develop partnerships that pool resources and utilize best practices for creating opportunities for workplace literacy.

-- Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response, Human Resources Development Canada, June 2003

- HRDC should enhance existing partnerships with organized labour to support delivery of workplace literacy and essential skills training that is worker/learner-centered.

-- Strengthening Our Literacy Foundation is Key to Canada's Future, Movement for Canadian Literacy, April 2003

- Through the NLS, and in partnership with the literacy community, the federal government should continue to identify and fund best practices and develop innovative new initiatives related to workplace literacy. NLS funding for workplace literacy initiatives should be increased to keep up with demand.

-- Strengthening Our Literacy Foundation is Key to Canada's Future, Movement for Canadian Literacy, April 2003

- Business groups should partner with the Conference Board of Canada, Literacy BC, and governments to hold literacy “best practices” forums in BC.

-- Closing the Skills Gap: A Report of the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce Skill Shortages Initiative, April 2002

The Role of Sector Councils...

- At HRDC's ‘Innovations in Workplace Skills and Learning’ workshop, participants discussed two specific workplace training issues: essential skills and recognizing workplace learning. Essential skills training provides the foundation skills that workers need to learn technical and managerial skills. Participants suggested that sector councils were an effective mechanism for delivering essential skills programming, and recommended that support be provided for workplace and career development practitioners who develop and implement this training.
- Sector councils were applauded (by labour organizations) for providing a forum where unions and management can work together to meet their respective and collective needs. They enable unions to identify skill requirements and develop training programs that help union members. This, in turn, leads to skills upgrading in the current work force, which benefits the employer. This type of “win-win” outcome was identified from essential skills development programs at the “Innovations in Workplace Skills and Learning” workshop. A representative from the Canadian Labour Congress explained how essential skills positively affect workers’ lives and, in turn, positively affect organizations and businesses by creating safer, more empowered, and productive workplaces.
- Encourage workplace-based learning and opportunities for workers to “learn while they earn”. Examine with partners possible financial incentives for employers who support essential skills development for their employees.

-- Canadians Speak on Innovation and Learning, Canada's Innovation Strategy, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002

Aboriginal Peoples and Others Facing Barriers...

- Encourage the participation of those facing barriers to labour market participation. Consider, in cooperation with provinces and territories and other partners, targeted skills development initiatives to help persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, individuals with low levels of literacy or foundation skills, and others facing particular barriers to participation in the labour market.
- With respect to skills and learning issues for Aboriginal children and youth, participants at the Aboriginal Skills and Learning Roundtable called for ...More direct investments in literacy and numeracy.
- Many (Aboriginal) participants underscored the need for comprehensive training-to-employment plans to ensure that Aboriginal people can access these opportunities. It was suggested that plans should include the use of innovative methods such as prior learning assessments, workplace literacy programs and e-learning. In a similar vein, improvements in adult basic education systems and investments in Aboriginal post-secondary education were identified as essential to ensuring successful labour market participation for Aboriginal people.
- Business associations ... called for greater attention to literacy and numeracy problems, adult education, better apprenticeship training, and workplace training and measures to improve employability skills for Aboriginal Canadians. Improving labour force mobility through greater portability of credentials across provincial boundaries, along with better recognition of the skills of immigrants, was also seen as a key factor in developing the Canadian talent pool.

-- Canadians Speak on Innovation and Learning, Canada's Innovation Strategy, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002

- That the comprehensive agreement that is currently being negotiated with the provinces and territories to remove barriers to participation in work and learning for persons with disabilities include literacy and numeracy skills development as key components.
- That the federal government allocate \$15 million to supplementary Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements to fund Aboriginal workplace literacy initiatives. In addition, some of the new funding (i.e. \$25 million over the next two years) to be delivered under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership should be earmarked for literacy and numeracy skills development in major projects across the country. Furthermore, all federal programs aimed at increasing labour market participation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada should include basic education upgrading and literacy programs.

-- *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, Human Resources Development Canada, June 2003

- We must work together to address this education gap. Canada's Aboriginal population is growing more quickly than the overall Canadian population. Between 1991 and 1996, the Canadian population grew on average by 1.6% every year. The Aboriginal population increased on average by 3.6% -- more than twice as rapidly. We must work together to address issues of economic and social inequity, to ensure that Canada's Aboriginal peoples have the resources they need to thrive as communities, and as full participants and contributors to Canada's future economic and social prosperity. Investment in Aboriginal literacy development is a crucial step toward this goal.
- The federal government should support and fund a forum where representatives from First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities, as well as relevant Ministers from provincial and territorial governments, and the federal Ministers responsible for HRDC and Indian and Northern Affairs can come together to develop a multi-government Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan. This Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan should build on knowledge and best practices that respect Aboriginal cultures and languages, with the goal of creating healthy, literate communities, integrated programming, meaningful educational experiences, and programs and policies to address learning and educational gaps.
- The federal government should make ongoing support and funding available to contribute to the provision of autonomous, stable Aboriginal Literacy programs.

-- *Strengthening Our Literacy Foundation is Key to Canada's Future*, Movement for Canadian Literacy, April 2003

- Attending community college and school board programs is not always an option for union members. Shift work, family responsibilities, cost, transportation difficulties and fear are all barriers to learning. Programs that are offered at or near the workplace with other members and on company time help to remove these barriers.

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

EI Reform and Incentives to Investment...

- That the federal government increase spending under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act* by \$100 million. Subject to the terms of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, the government should negotiate supplementary Labour Market Development Agreements and enact the necessary changes to the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide literacy and numeracy skills development assistance to all unemployed and employed individuals, irrespective of their historical attachment to Employment Insurance. These supplementary agreements should ensure that a certain proportion of funding is made available to address the literacy needs of members of designated groups. Seventy five percent of the increase in Part II funding should be allocated to supplementary Labour Market

Development Agreements, while the remaining 25% should be allocated to addressing workplace literacy needs as identified by sector councils.

- That the federal government implement a two-year pilot project that offers small and medium-sized businesses an Employment Insurance premium rebate and other incentives such as tax credits to cover the costs of providing workplace literacy and numeracy skills development to employees. Following the completion of this pilot project, an evaluation should be conducted; if the pilot project is deemed successful, it should be extended to all employers, with a continuing emphasis on small and medium-sized businesses.
- All employees with low literacy skills, irrespective of their employment status, be assisted and encouraged to submit a personal learning plan to raise their literacy and numeracy skills ... Learning opportunities should be made available during working hours.

-- *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, Human Resources Development Canada, June 2003

- The federal government should build on current expertise and best practices in workforce literacy through the development of tax incentives; infrastructure development; public awareness campaigns and supportive policies.

-- *Building a Pan-Canadian Strategy on Literacy and Essential Skills*, ABC Canada, FCAF, Frontier College, Laubach Literacy, Movement for Canadian Literacy, and National Adult Literacy Database, 2003

- The federal government should create tax incentives to encourage small- and medium-sized businesses to provide workplace literacy and essential skills training for their employees.
- The federal government should use increased funding for sector councils as leverage to urge councils to develop strategies for essential skills development within the workplace skills development specific to their sector.

-- *Strengthening Our Literacy Foundation is Key to Canada's Future*, Movement for Canadian Literacy, April 2003

- Panel participants demonstrated that there are important and exciting opportunities for employing and leveraging human capital in every sector. In most cases, what is required to take advantage of these opportunities is to help people to change their attitudes, so that they recognize ... the importance of having and using workplace appropriate skills, attitudes, and behavior ... and combining employability skills with technical and business management competencies.

-- *Making the Connections*, Employability Skills Forum, October 2002

The Role of Job Placement Programs...

- Training and employability skills development, by itself, is not particularly effective in helping income assistance recipients make successful, long-term labour market transitions. Training and employability skills development initiatives need to be undertaken in conjunction with job placement programs.

-- *Heather Dickson*, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment, Government of BC, Employability Skills Forum, October 2002

- Opportunities for placement coordinators to make more, and better, matches include ... making Adult Basic Education courses more accessible to clients who want to complete high school.

-- *Sheila Gibb*, JobWavePlacement Coordinator, Fort St. John and *Brigette Ballantyne*, JobWave Placement Coordinator, Kelowna, Employability Skills Forum, October 2002

The Role of the Canadian Learning Institute ...

- Many groups stressed the importance of issues such as literacy and prior learning assessment in the workplace, and they felt these issues should be included in the broad mandate of the Canadian Learning Institute.

-- *Consultations on the Government of Canada's Proposal to Establish a Canadian Learning Institute*. Levin, Benjamin and Seward, Shirley. Canadian Labour and Business Centre, February 2003

- That the federal government includes literacy research in the mandate of the Canadian Learning Institute ... The assignment of literacy research activities to the Canadian Learning Institute should not reduce the National Literacy Secretariat's annual budget for grants and contribution programs.

-- *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, Human Resources Development Canada, June 2003

'Lifelong Learning' in Practice...

- Since half of the people who will make up the workforce in 2015 are already working and have completed their formal education, it will be imperative for everyone to practice lifelong learning as a way of adapting to constant workplace change and continuing to contribute to the labour force.

-- *Heather Dickson*, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment, Government of BC, Employability Skills Forum, October 2002

- What youth need most, if they are to contribute to the economic life of their community, is to be taught how to learn: Teach someone to learn and they will be employed for life.

-- **Laurene Clark**, CEO, Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, Employability Skills Forum, October 2002

- While there was an appreciation of the importance of all aspects of lifelong learning, most business and labour leaders stressed that the focus should be on adult and workplace learning. They talked about the importance of skills upgrading, recognition of credentials of immigrants, inter-provincial mobility and literacy.

-- **Consultations on the Government of Canada's Proposal to Establish a Canadian Learning Institute**. Levin, Benjamin and Seward, Shirley. Canadian Labour and Business Centre, February 2003

- The provincial government should ensure that public post-secondary institutions and school districts continue to make literacy and basic skill development an appropriate priority.

-- **Closing the Skills Gap: A Report of the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce Skill Shortages Initiative**, April 2002

- Unions want to ensure that on-site workplace programs meet their members' needs. Labour's involvement ensures that any learning programs reflect labour's perspective and include union content. As with any joint labour/management issue, unions need an equal voice in worker training and education.

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