Guide to Workforce Literacy

Skills at Work series

Contents

Acknowledgements

Barb McFater asked instructors Sue Fearnley, Linda Armstrong, Anne Marie Williams, Karin Meinser, and Linda Jin-Troendle to work with the materials and try them out with students at Preparatory Training Programs of Toronto. These experienced instructors gave us invaluable feedback about how they would use and modify the workbooks, practitioners' guide, and the on-line activities.

The original review committee was made up of a group of people who met with us and gave feedback on early drafts of the books, which we shared in an AlphaCom discussion.

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Judith Bond – Workplace Training and Services

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Settling on a name for the very broad audience for these materials was not an easy task. The series was written for practitioners/instructors/tutors who are teaching/tutoring in adult literacy programs with learners/students. We hope you feel included as you use *Skills at Work*.

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Introduction

Purpose of Skills at Work: Guide to Workforce Literacy

The *Guide to Workforce Literacy* is a practical guide for literacy programs. It should be useful to coordinators, instructors, assessors, and other program staff who work with learners with employment goals. This guide provides background information on workforce-focused literacy, ideas on program planning, and examples of what some workforce literacy agencies in Ontario have done to support learners towards their employment goals.

Skills at Work takes the reader through the following areas of workforce literacy programming: Getting Started, Assessment, Training Plan Development, Training, and Follow-up, with an eye to how these areas might be addressed in a workforce-focused literacy program. As a practitioner or program administrator, you may wish to examine many elements of your program's current practice to determine an effective workforce literacy model. Through this examination, it is expected that all programs interested in providing workforce literacy services will benefit from the information in this guide – from the type of outreach activities, to classroom materials, to the instructional approaches.

What is workforce literacy?

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funds agencies in Ontario to deliver literacy services to learners. These agencies are funded under the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program.

Employment-focused literacy, or *workforce literacy* as it is called in this guide, centres on improving the employability and essential skills of learners who have employment goals. While considerable research is devoted to emphasizing the need for focused programming, little exists to show instructors models or examples of what workforce literacy might actually look like in their program.

This guide provides some of those examples and explores the various programming supports considered effective in assisting learners with employment goals. This guide also includes an examination of some of the issues and assumptions that underlie this model of literacy programming.

Workplace versus workforce

In Ontario, workplace literacy is funded through an employer, labour union, or both to upgrade the skills of the employer's workers, either at a work site or at an off-site location arranged and approved by the funder. Workforce literacy, which is a fundable LBS activity, is designed for literacy learners whose goal is employment, upon completion of literacy upgrading. Workforce literacy is also appropriate for learners who are employed and wish to increase their skills for the job.

The following table outlines the features of workplace and workforce literacy as they are defined in Ontario.

Workplace literacy	Workforce literacy
• Paid for by the employer, labour union, or their representative, e.g., a sector council	• May be funded through the LBS Program
• Located at the work site or at a location arranged through the employer/union	• Located at an LBS agency site
• Usually targets skills and issues specific to an individual workplace	• Targets skills and issues appropriate across entry-level jobs
• Programming is not usually organized to separate language learners from literacy learners	• Language acquisition programming (ESL) is not an LBS activity

While workplace literacy often zeroes in on the skills required by a specific workplace, workforce literacy addresses the literacy and language skills and tasks used in employment across a range of jobs and sectors. Workforce literacy does not specifically target the requirements and competencies of a particular job, but rather addresses the reading, writing, math, and thinking skills learners are likely to need in a variety of jobs. Workforce literacy can strike a balance between the specific job-related tasks and the essential skills central to many workplace education programs.[1]

Adopting a workforce literacy approach does not mean ignoring decades of best practice documented in learner-centred methodology. While the workplace may become a central organizing feature for program design and curriculum development, we can continue to ensure learners are able to apply their skills in contexts other than work, too. We can also ensure programming encompasses a rich broadly-applicable set of skills, including problem

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[1] Many workplace education programs also seek a balance between job-specific skills and skills required outside work. Workplace educators often view the workplace as a major source of information for curriculum design, but do not limit program content exclusively to the sphere of work. (Folinsbee 2001, 22)

solving, teamwork, decision making, and self-management skills which are highly valued both in adults' roles as workers and as community and family members.[2]

Literacy programming: In context and focused on goals

Research supports the idea that learning should be focused on the context within which skills will ultimately be used outside the program. Consider, for instance, learners who want to enhance life skills or personal independence skills. All evidence suggests such learners will be better suited to a program that reflects these particular skills and needs, in an environment where they can learn alongside others who share their goals. In the same way, learners who are employment-focused will be better served attending programs where staff is able to plan for, program, and assess against the backdrop of employment and employability skills.

In some communities, individual agencies may decide to deliver one type of programming exclusively. In other communities, this may not be realistic and a variety of programming models may need to be established.

The challenges of workforce literacy programming

The complexities of workforce literacy stem from the multiple demands placed on its providers and its learners. The challenge is to negotiate these demands while keeping learners' goals and needs at the heart of the programming model.

Most people who work in adult literacy would say they believe that adults can and should play a central role in determining what they need to learn and the way they wish to learn. Responding to literacy learners' goals and needs in programming content is something literacy practitioners continually strive for, and much of adult education research is aimed at discovering how best to draw on learners' goals, needs, and experiences to maximize learning.

Ontario's LBS program statistics[3] show that approximately one third of literacy learners in LBS agency programs identify employment as a primary goal.[4] Many more learners identify further training as a primary goal, with employment as the end goal. Current research, including emerging data on learning gains across various program models, concludes that the best way for learners with employment goals to develop literacy skills is within an employment-focused context. Yet, there may be few differences between programming for employment-oriented learners and those wishing to upgrade for other purposes.

Systemic barriers and practical constraints exist in gearing program content to learner goals, particularly in classroom-based settings where learners may express a variety of

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[2] Equipped for the Future, a significant undertaking in the US to catalogue the desired skills, competencies, and content knowledge for adults, views adults in their roles as worker, community member, and family member.
[3] While the *Skills at Work: Guide to Workforce Literacy* is written for Ontario practitioners, many of the issues and implications raised in the document extend beyond the province's jurisdiction.
[4] In 2003-2004 LBS Information Management System shows that of the learners who identify a goal, 30 percent identify employment and 50 percent identify further education and training.

goals. Instructors and program staff may even select what they consider to be generic materials and tasks by default, reasoning that by not targeting individual needs, they are in fact addressing the broad needs of the group. By aiming down the middle, practitioners are demonstrating how difficult it often is to address groups' diverse and varied needs.

Background: Ontario's LBS Program and workforce literacy

Over the last six years, Ontario's MTCU LBS Section has initiated several key policy changes. It has developed a goal-centred outcomes-based program model, with assessment expectations geared to support it. Accountability measures within LBS require that literacy agency staff document learners' goals and chart progress against goals during learners' upgrading.

Funding support for literacy learners who receive social assistance benefits has also changed significantly over the past six years. Many literacy learners who receive social assistance benefits now participate in Ontario Works (OW). Since 1995, Ontario's welfare reforms have become increasingly focused on the supports and programming required to help individuals who receive social assistance find jobs. These efforts have made their presence felt in LBS programs, where learners participating in OW must focus their efforts on a goal path that leads to employment. LBS statistics reveal, however, that the employment goal is not limited to OW participants. Many LBS learners, regardless of their income source, wish to upgrade for the purpose of finding or keeping a job.

Many LBS delivery agencies and networks have begun laying the groundwork for workplace education delivery, and are reaping the benefits of stronger connections to local employers, boards of trade, and business associations. In several Ontario regions these connections have resulted in a better understanding of local labour force needs and workers' skill requirements. These connections also open the door to future programming opportunities to assist employed and unemployed workers.

The structures and supports provided through LBS, combined with practitioners' determination to ensure programming is as meaningful as possible, have meant a re-examination of literacy design and delivery. A goal-directed program model has emerged at a time when learners' goals are increasingly employment-oriented, and when practitioners are actively developing relationships with employers. Taken all together, LBS programs are well-positioned to bridge the gaps between literacy and employment.

Setting up your program to address workforce literacy needs

In most communities, programs exist to help learners find jobs. Some learners in your program may wish to attend full-time classes before enrolling in a job search club or other employment preparation service. Others may already be employed, but feel they need better skills to succeed on the job. Still others may view employment as a longer-term goal, with hopes of attending further academic upgrading or post-secondary training between now and the job search. Regardless of whether employment is a short- or long-term goal, the great

majority of LBS learners can benefit from learning more about the world of work, and developing the skills needed to succeed on the job.

Adults attend literacy programs for a variety of reasons, and workforce literacy is not for everyone. LBS statistics support the view that some learners will be better served in programs where the main focus is on developing skills towards personal independence or life skills goals. Another group is in a good position to attain their high school diploma or access post-secondary training with the support of short-term (academic) LBS upgrading. These learners will continue to find their place within the LBS system. Most learners, however, will benefit from some orientation to workforce information and skills.

Research methodology for this guide

The research phase this guide is based on was designed to answer the following questions:

• What is considered good practice in workforce literacy?

• What are the various ways of designing a workforce literacy program?

• What efforts are currently underway in Ontario to help adults make the transition to the workplace?

The first step was to find out what was already happening in Ontario. Literacy networks were asked to provide information on programs (LBS or otherwise) considered effective in helping adult learners meet the demands of the workplace. The search for these programs was not limited to those funded by LBS because innovative practice was the desired feature, regardless of funding sources. In most cases, network staff knew of efforts to assist adults with their employment goals, and either provided detailed information themselves on programs and services, or made referrals to other programs within their region.

In total, eleven telephone interviews were conducted with program staff across Ontario, and further details or documents were often requested to ensure a complete and accurate description. The insights and information provided by community contacts are included in their full version in Part 3 of this guide. Where specific elements of a program support a particular aspect of workforce literacy programming, an abbreviated description accompanies the main text as a sidebar. A complete listing of programs whose experiences are included in this guide can be found in the appendix.

In order to reflect the latest initiatives in the area of workforce literacy, a literature review was conducted which examined practices and programming designed to help unemployed individuals find work. Elements of good practice gathered from the research provided a framework for the discussion and description of workforce literacy. A review of the findings, including program descriptions and design features from other workforce preparation initiatives outside Ontario, are summarized in Part 2.

The research includes American welfare-to-work programs for two reasons: the American federally mandated initiative is in large part responsible for workforce literacy efforts in the US, and the OW program was modeled on several states' welfare-to-work programs. Since American programs have been operating for up to nine years now, longitudinal studies are

furnishing some rich information on the outcomes of particular efforts designed to help individuals find and retain employment.[5]

How the *Guide to Workforce Literacy* works

The *Guide to Workforce Literacy* has been designed as a comprehensive and accessible resource for literacy practitioners and program support staff who are working with employment-focused learners. Along with a practical approach to help you consider the various elements of program design and delivery, this guide provides a combination of research and practice, and includes examples of what colleagues in Ontario are currently doing to help their learners with employment goals.

The following sections in the guide serve to illustrate what you have read, to give you a chance to note down your own ideas, and to apply information to your own circumstances:

Ontario example

Particular aspects of workforce literacy programming captured from Ontario practitioners and their programs

Good question!

Answers to frequently asked questions, designed to clarify common misconceptions about workforce literacy

Checklist of ideas

Practical suggestions to help you incorporate information and ideas contained in the guide to your setting

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[5] While significant lessons can be learned from US welfare-to-work research, some limits must be placed on their applicability to Ontario. Arguably what is most instructive from US research is the range of interventions states have employed and their various outcomes. As longitudinal study results become available from various state initiatives, Ontario can learn from the strengths of various strategies and avoid the pitfalls documented in others.

And finally…

Workforce literacy is a work in progress. We can all contribute towards how it will look and whom it will serve. This guide takes you through the research, the examples, the issues, and the controversies, but does not prescribe how the content should be reflected within any given community. Rather, as literacy administrator, practitioner, or volunteer, you will want to decide for yourself what is potentially effective, given your learners' interests, skills, and goals. You will also want to consider what is realistic given your community's existing resources, your program's access to funding sources, and your potential to partner with other service providers.

Part 1

Elements of workforce literacy

There is no one way to approach workforce literacy. Designed to assist literacy learners towards their goals of employment, it reflects the needs and goals of individual learners. At its most effective, workforce literacy also reflects the community in which it operates: the local labour market; existing literacy programming infrastructures; the community's skills training, education, employment, and job search partners; and employer requirements.

Considering all the elements that contribute to workforce literacy, it is best seen as the product of thoughtful planning and communication among community stakeholders. The elements listed below work together to provide a framework for supporting literacy learners with employment goals.

If you are reading this guide because you are interested in developing a better awareness of workforce literacy or increasing the effectiveness of what you are already doing, read on! You will learn about what others have done to include elements like these in their workforce literacy programming framework:

- Targeted assessment and instruction
- Project-based learning
- Teamwork
- Labour market research
- Integrated services
- Interagency collaboration
- Employability skills
- Essential skills
- Employment context
- Links with employers

Workforce literacy considers:

- Local labour market

and existing:

- Literacy programs
- Skills training programs
- Education, employment, and job search partners
- Employer requirements

- Workplace documents

Building the program

The various elements supporting literacy learners with employment goals come together to create a workforce literacy program. Each element plays a role in supporting the overall structure of the program. Each element is important both for what it offers independently and for the strength it provides to the overall design of a workforce literacy program. In this section of the guide, we will explore the various elements and consider different ways to assist literacy learners on their path to employment.

Getting started with workforce literacy programming

Gathering data

If your agency has not had a lot of experience in program planning for learners with employment goals, a good first step is to find out what kind of work learners in your program are aiming for. Find out what types of jobs learners are getting when they leave your program, then learn as much as you can about these jobs. While you won't need to teach the narrow skill sets of a particular job, the research process will lead you to question how to start making connections between literacy and employment.

Student employment at PTP (Toronto):

- Manufacturing
- Light-duty cleaner
- Cashier
- Retail sales
- Food counter attendant/food preparation
- Personal support worker
- Shipper/receiver
- Caregiver (children)
- Courier
- General office clerk
- Sales representative
- Telemarketing
- Automotive service
- Call centre worker
- Assembler

Ontario example

The Preparatory Training Program (PTP) in Toronto began its shift towards employment-focused literacy training as a result of reviewing program statistics, including goals of learners and proportion of learners becoming employed directly upon program completion. Among the surprising statistics for PTP program staff was the fact that 90 percent of all learners who sought employment ended up in only fifteen different job types.

Using this information, staff analyzed the fifteen job types to determine which skills they required. Programming was then redesigned to address the skills required across the fifteen job types. PTP does not program for specific jobs, but does address the skills these jobs have in common.

Workforce literacy differs from job-specific upgrading or training in that it focuses on the literacy and employability skills required in most jobs. Once your program has a sense of the jobs learners are getting, you can start to plan a program that helps learners acquire the literacy skills they'll need to get and keep a job. Whatever the employment goal, it should inform the way reading, writing, math, and employability skills will be conceptualized, taught, and assessed in a workforce literacy program.

Resources on work

Once you have a sense of which jobs learners in your program are getting, you can begin learning more about what those jobs demand. A variety of resources are available to help you get a clearer picture of what skills different jobs demand, and where the employment opportunities are in your community. You will want to use this information to help yourself and your learners make the connections between literacy and work.

Essential Skills profiles

Essential Skills profiles are a useful place to begin familiarizing yourself with the skills requirements of entry-level jobs. Described as "enabling skills", the Essential Skills are those skills required by individuals to be successful on the job. The Essential Skills profiles are

Essential Skills profiles can be viewed on-line along with related resources at **www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca**.

the result of interviews with thousands of workers across Canada. During the interviews, profilers asked employees what they did on the job. Profilers then systematically documented each job's reading, writing, math, and communications tasks and skills. There are more than 150 Essential Skills profiles of jobs requiring high school education or less.

Each Essential Skills profile describes what is required for a job in these nine skill areas:

- Reading text

- Document use

- Writing

- Numeracy

- Oral communication

- Thinking skills

- Working with others

- Computer use

- Continuous learning

Essential Skills profiles are a good starting point to learn what many entry-level workers are required to do on the job. The skills are presented by level of complexity, using the International Adult Literacy Survey's (IALS) rating scale.[6] The Essential Skills Web site offers a range of other resources related to work and Essential Skills profiles, including a Reader's Guide, a collection of authentic documents, and a glossary of terms to help you in your research.

National Occupations Classification (NOC)

The NOC system categorizes jobs in the Canadian labour market along ten broad skill types and four skill levels. The NOC codes each job to denote skill type category and skill level requirement. Becoming familiar with the coding system allows you to immediately recognize what the educational requirements and skill requirements of a job are likely to be.

NOC skill types:

- Management occupations

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[6] LBS levels 1 to 5 are approximately equivalent to IALS levels 1 and 2. Essential Skills profiles contain comprehensive descriptions of the IALS complexity levels they refer to.

- Business, finance, and administration occupations

- Natural and applied sciences and related occupations

- Health occupations

- Occupations in social science, education, government service, and religion

- Occupations in art, culture, recreation, and sport

- Sales and service occupations

- Trades, transport, and equipment operators and related occupations

- Occupations unique to primary industry

- Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing, and utilities

NOC skill levels:

A. Usually requires post-secondary education

B. Usually requires college or apprenticeship

C. Usually requires secondary education or occupation-specific training

D. Usually offers on-the-job training

Sector councils

National sector councils are another good source of information for educators, particularly if you wish to learn about employment trends within industries. With approximately 29 sector councils currently operating, the councils offer a neutral forum where business, labour, educators, and professional groups can come together to "analyze and address sector-wide human resources issues." (Alliance of Sector Councils Web site, under "About TASC") Here is a partial list of sector councils whose jobs include opportunities for individuals with high school level education or less:

- Trucking

- Construction trades

- Horticulture

- Repair and installation service

- Plastics

- Automotive repair and service

- Apparel

- Tourism

For more information on sector councils and a complete list of member councils, visit the Alliance of Sector Councils Web site at www.councils.org.

Labour market research

While national resources such as Essential Skills profiles, the NOC system, and sector councils provide a baseline of information, you will also want to pinpoint the particular resources, needs, and employment trends within your own community.

Since the numbers and types of jobs available vary widely from community to community, some local research is useful in gaining an appreciation of what learners will face in their job search. In particular, you will want to find out what kind of jobs participants in your literacy program are likely to find when they begin their job search. The research you conduct during this phase also provides excellent sources of information during learner goal setting.

Labour market research brings together information about local employment opportunities and trends, along with skills required by these jobs. For example, if learners are entering your agency with the goal of getting clerical work in an office, it is useful to know whether this is realistic given the number of clerical jobs available in your community and the skill levels required to access those jobs.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), along with their local Employment Resource Centres, are good sources of statistics-based labour market information. On HRSDC's Web site, labour market information is organized by province and city, and offers descriptions of local labour market conditions, including changes to legislation, layoffs and projected layoffs, and employment trends. Employment bulletins for cities are also available, and offer information about job vacancies, changes to full-time and part-time employment rates, and sector-specific employment rates.

Don't forget your own network of colleagues and friends when trying to gather local labour market information. Think of who you know and where they work. Most people are happy to share information about the work they do, the industry or sector they work in, and what the current trends are that affect their business. You can use this information to support what others are telling you, or you may uncover new information. In both large and small communities, these informal networks of friends and colleagues can provide rich details on what is happening with local employers.

Analyzing the data

Once your program has collected information on the kinds of jobs learners get and the skills required by those jobs, it is time to analyze the data in more detail. First, you will want to document any trends you see in job types, skill requirements, and educational and skills

training requirements, as you understand them. This information can help you see who to approach to collaborate with, where you will need to go for more information, and possible next steps for your learners.

Ontario example

Referral Centre for Adult Training (RCAT) in Hawkesbury maintains a database which records clients' information pertinent to the referral process, as well as information on clients' interests. The latter can be used to initiate new programming if the database shows sufficient numbers of people interested in a particular type of program, or it can be used by a training provider to help determine who should be contacted about a program which the provider is planning to start.

The staff at RCAT have done their research and gone one step further by inputting relevant information about learners' goals into a database. The program is set up so programming is driven by learner needs, rather than expecting learners to fit into an existing model.

Literacy task analysis

Once you have a good picture of the jobs your learners go on to do and the kind of tasks they will need to perform on the job, you may wish to investigate job tasks in more detail. Workplace educators use literacy task analysis during needs assessment and curriculum development stages of workplace education programming. Literacy task analysis is the process of obtaining detailed information about the specific parts of a job that require literacy skills. Literacy task analysis can involve interviewing and observing employees as well as analyzing the documents employees need to use on the job.

Here is a snapshot of how job tasks flow from a larger activity, and how each task is made up of a number of skills.

Activity	Tasks	Skills
Attend team meetings	Read agenda	• Read itemized text • Locate information within text pertaining to own job
	Participate during meeting	• Listen carefully, know when to ask questions • Speak on particular topic, answer questions when required
	Make presentation	• Plan and prepare a presentation on a topic
	Write notes	• Write brief notes for personal use (point form)

The skills included in the table are still general. Each skill listed could be broken down into considerably more detail. For example, "plan and prepare a presentation" involves multiple skills including reading, writing, and oral communication domains.

Literacy task analysis helps you think about the particular literacy and numeracy demands of different kinds of job activities. In a workplace education program, this degree of specificity is helpful because practitioners are able to focus on particular jobs and their requirements. In workforce literacy, however, once the practitioner has catalogued the skills required for a range of jobs, he or she tries to determine what is common among those skill requirements.

It is this second step of looking for commonalities that enables you to build a broader-based curriculum which applies to many employment goals. The objective is to gain an understanding of how workers can develop and practise skills as they relate to workplace tasks and to activities outside the workplace. In a workforce program, you may wish to analyze documents you know are used in a variety of workplaces. This can help you to see which skills are needed across job types, and to program according to broader needs.

In *Workplace Education: Making it Work*, authors Marjorie Davison and Paul Temple (1996, 100-101) identify questions practitioners can ask themselves to help gather the necessary information in a literacy task analysis:

- What are the major tasks of the job?

- What are the steps required to perform the task?

- What skills and knowledge are required to perform the task?

- Are there worker problems in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude? If so, what are they?

- How does employee performance differ from what employees are expected to do?

- Why do these gaps exist?

- What are the learning objectives for the job?

- In what sequence should material be learned?

Diane Millar (2002, 54) extends her interpretation of literacy task analysis in *Making Choices; Teaching Writing in the Workplace*. Her analysis includes a further series of questions aimed at strategies:

- Should [the workers] talk to colleagues before completing the task?

- Do they need to refer to other documents and text to complete the task?

- Do they need to carefully plan out what they are going to write?

- Do they need to revise the text several times?

- Do they need to proofread what they have written?

Millar's list reminds us documents demand more than the mechanics of reading, writing, or math operations on the part of readers or writers. Just as in non-work settings, readers and writers must plan, think, strategize, and check their work. Sometimes final written documents represent just the tip of the iceberg, with much of the work invisible beneath the surface.

Checklist of ideas: Doing your research

Read through the checklist below for ideas, and then consider which items are realistic starting places for your agency. Consider who is best suited to doing some of the tasks. Is there an individual within your agency who has a particular interest or background suited to the task? Has another agency undertaken a similar task or project you could learn from? Instructors may want to tackle some of the items on their own, but in many cases a coordinated effort will result in better odds for success.

The challenge is to design a program that is specific enough to develop skills within an employment context, yet general enough that the content applies to many entry-level jobs.

- Start collecting data on the jobs your learners are getting and the qualifications they need in order to get the jobs.

- Catalogue the skills required in the jobs your learners are getting or wish to get. You may wish to do literacy task analyses to identify how job skills translate into literacy skills requirements.

- Document the average length of time learners stay in your program, then organize the data by learner goal. Document how long learners with employment goals stay in your program, compared to those who have further training or education goals, and those who have goals related to personal independence or life skills.

- Conduct some basic research on your local labour market. What jobs are available? What are the rates of pay?

- Use local labour market information to help guide the goal-setting process with learners. How do learner goals compare with local job availability? Are learners able to gain the skills they need to access the jobs they want? Are there steps learners should take between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) upgrading and employment? What other service providers are available in your community to help learners prepare for employment?

Outreach activities

If your program is making the transition to workforce literacy, you will need to decide where it makes sense to build relationships to support this new programming. If you are working to improve the way in which you address the workforce literacy needs of your learners with employment goals, you may want to think about where to build new relationships to improve services.

Research reveals that a critical feature of success in workforce literacy is the ability of program staff to see the education piece of workforce readiness within a larger initiative. (For more on a mixed-strategy approach to literacy upgrading, see page 54 of this guide.) Working closely with employers and other community agencies that offer services in job search and skills training benefits program staff and learners, as well as the collaborating partners. As literacy practitioners, we need to recognize what our role is in assisting learners, and to make links so learners' other needs along the goal path are met.

Employers

Local employers are an excellent resource for current and relevant information on employment within your community. Not only can they provide useful information in the data-gathering stages, but ongoing

relationships with them can also develop into employment opportunities for learners and educational programming opportunities for your own agency down the road. Building relationships with employers can help ensure your program content is relevant and current, and can also provide employers with useful information on your agency's role in assisting learners towards their goals of employment.

<div style="float:right">*For more detailed information on how to make links with employers, see Work-Related Learning Guide for Family Literacy and Adult Education Organizations, listed under Jobs for the Future.*</div>

Ontario example

Elizabeth Debergh, Executive Director of the Wellington County Learning Centre, a community-based agency in Arthur, sees building relationships as key to both identifying needs within the community and then addressing those needs. She is currently working closely with Rural Peer Support and Community Employment Services to start a class which will focus on workforce preparation skills.

Elizabeth has also made contacts with a local manufacturing plant whose workforce includes individuals with literacy and ESL needs. While the employer is not currently able to offer on-site workplace education, Elizabeth hopes that by offering an upgrading program geared to employment at a time when shift workers can attend, the employer will encourage employees to enrol.

Checklist of ideas: Outreach to employers

Earla Smith, Workplace Education Coordinator of the QUILL Network in Walkerton, provides this list of ideas:

- Start with who you know – think of your friends and family. What jobs do they have? Who could provide you with some information about a particular industry or sector?

- Gather information from people you meet – at the hairdresser's, the skating arena, your local businesses, or your neighbour who runs his own business. People are usually happy to talk about what they do and the requirements and opportunities in their line of work.

- If you volunteer, talk to the Executive Director, staff, and other volunteers about an employer they know of or work with whom you could speak with.

- Once you've built a relationship with one potential employer, ask for a tour of their workplace. First-hand experience of workplaces should give you lots to talk about with your learners.

- By working with just one employer at a time, you'll gain confidence and develop a strategy that works best for you. For example, make an appointment with a local nursing home manager. Nursing homes are often looking for staff, including personal support workers, and may welcome working with you to develop future employment candidates.

- Drop in to the local Chamber of Commerce – they display many resources on local businesses.

- Talk to your local government-funded Job Connect office. These offices work with employers who hire entry-level candidates all the time, and they can be a great source of referral. Call their training hotline at 1-800-387-5656.

- Prepare for meetings with employers. Find out about their organization and current issues affecting their business.

- When you meet with employers, tell them what you do and why you would like some information. Ask for some examples of documents their employees need to use on the job.

Service providers

Depending on the size of your community, there may be many other organizations able to support your learners with their employment goals. Examples include job search clubs and skills training programs. These may be offered through community-based agencies or as part of a larger umbrella organization (such as the YMCA). In many communities, school boards and colleges offer a variety of skills training options. You may also wish to consider Native friendship centres, volunteer centres, or community cultural associations.

Start by canvassing the community partners you are already involved with. Ask them for referrals to other agencies they know or work with. Try to get names of individuals so you have a contact to speak with. Some literacy agencies are co-located with service-providing agencies. If you work in such a program, make sure you know what services they offer, and confirm they know what you do. You may even be able to link up your learners with some of their services. Some employment counselling programs, for example, do not have particular funding criteria restrictions for whom they serve.

Assessment

Initial assessment

Initial assessment is largely a process of gathering information. The information you choose to collect is what will be used to assist the learner with goal setting, and to direct programming and future assessment procedures and content. You will want to collect information that helps you determine an appropriate course of upgrading, and then work with the learner to ensure goals are being met.

As the first stage of the programming cycle, the initial assessment process should help learners see where their skills are in relation to their goal. Since learners with employment goals will wish to develop skills for the purpose of using them at work (among other settings), the initial assessment should attempt to document where learner skills are in relation to the employment goal.

Assessment tasks are most appropriate when they are relevant to the tasks and activities learners want to be able to do once they have accomplished their (short-term) goal.[7] In describing a contextualized assessment approach, Marilyn Gillespie (2002, 1) asserts, "instruction and assessment are aimed directly at the skills and knowledge adults need to perform tasks they have identified as important and meaningful to them 'right now' in their everyday lives."

For learners with employment goals, the context in which the literacy and numeracy skills will be applied is the workplace. Keeping this in mind when selecting assessment tasks should help to keep the tasks relevant and meaningful.

Try to find examples of reading, writing, and math tasks that relate to learners' employment goals. The examples need not be specific to the particular job, but should capture the skills entry-level workers are likely to need on the job. This avoids the need for trying to interpret assessment results from one context to another, which can be inaccurate and uninformative.

Demonstrating skills learned in the workforce-oriented literacy program should capture skills and abilities within the context of employment. Through the goal-setting process, the assessor and

The context encompasses not only what is learned but also how the learning is measured. Whatever the assessment tool you use, it should be constructed in such a way that learners demonstrate their skills within a context that is goal-related.

An employment-oriented learning program will include opportunities for the learner to demonstrate his or her skills and knowledge within the same employment-oriented context.

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[7] LBS Demonstrations are in part based on theories of Authentic Assessment, wherein students demonstrate their knowledge and skills for the purpose and within the context that learning occurred.

instructor collaborate[8] to determine what an appropriate demonstration of skills will be and how the demonstration will support the learner's goals.

Goal setting

Working with learner goals that seem vague or unrealistic is a challenge. While workforce literacy can provide a welcome set of parameters within which to discuss goals, learners may enter a literacy program with limited knowledge or understanding of how their literacy and numeracy skills measure up against particular job requirements. Part of the assessor's role, and one which is carried into the classroom, is to help learners complete a clear picture of what trying to reach their goals will entail. Learners need to understand what skills they will need to develop, and what other steps they may need to take after they have completed literacy upgrading.

Goal setting can be an extensive process requiring engaged involvement on the part of both the assessor and the learner. Assessors need to be able to ask questions, provide information, direct learners to sources of information, and provide thoughtful feedback. Learners also need to ask questions and conduct their own investigations in support of their goals. Goal setting involves creating an opportunity for the learner to reflect on goals and articulate the connections between their learning goals and their employment goals. This will not likely be completed in a day or a week. Learners can gather information throughout their program that will help them refine their goals and ensure they are learning what they need in order to successfully move to the next step.

> *"Learners who had clear learning goals upon entering programs made the most change in literacy practice outside of class. Nearly every learner in the high group [learners who made high changes in literacy practices and attitudes outside of class] expressed at least one clear learning goal."*
>
> (Mikulecky 1997, 2)

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[8] In some LBS programs, the role of assessor and instructor are performed by one person. For the purpose of clarity in this document, the roles have been separated. However, the functions described may well be performed by one staff person.

Ontario example

When learners attend the community-based Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre program in Cochrane for the first time, staff spend time assessing their needs and determining the most appropriate referral, whether to literacy or another community resource. Denise Tremblay, who manages the program, says it is not unusual to spend considerable time assessing the client and presenting him or her with options, only to find out literacy isn't the client's preferred next step.

Those learners who do attend the LBS program at Iroquois Falls receive significant support with the goal-setting process, both initially and on an ongoing basis. The staff provides as much information as possible about learners' employment choices, using resources such as the Goals Requirement Handbook to help give an accurate picture of what the learner will need to do to achieve his or her goal. In many cases, the learner will recognize that the initial goal is not attainable in the short- or even mid-term, and staff will then assist in developing a more realistic short-term goal.

In *What Doesn't Get Written Down* (Ewing 2001, *16-17*), Barbara McFater describes the goal-setting process at her LBS agency:

Setting short-term learning goals is one thing, but setting long-term employment goals is another. This is a challenging and time-consuming process and we often have to remind ourselves that we are not employment counsellors.

Learners often need an enormous amount of support if they are going to move towards suitable employment in their chosen field when they leave our program. So I encourage them to do research, or small in-class projects to gather information on their goals.

Program staff will want to ensure that the goals learners come with when they enter the program are based on complete and accurate information. Where this is not the case, both learners and staff will need to collaborate to fill in the missing pieces. Use the information your program has gathered through the workforce research phase to complete learners' understanding of job requirements and possible next steps, such as job search assistance or skills training. No one

expects that this can be done up front, which is why it is described as an ongoing process. Learners and staff can work collaboratively throughout learners' programming to gather information and revisit goals.

Goals should be realistic and attainable. The reality for many adult learners is they have time frames defined for them by their support agencies and/or they have pressing personal responsibilities which limit their ability or desire to stay full-time in an upgrading program for longer than six to eight months, particularly if they view upgrading as just one step towards their goal.

Within the goal-setting process, a workforce literacy program can use time limits in two ways. The time frame can be one factor that informs goal setting and helps you and the learner determine how much can be accomplished during upgrading. Another approach is for you to work with learners to determine how long it will realistically take to achieve their employment goal. You can use the data you have collected through labour market and other research to analyze the employment goal, see how it translates into skills requirements, and estimate how long a program built to achieve that goal might take. If it is necessary to extend a timeline, the extension is easier for learners or income support providers to understand if you are able to provide them with assessment information and workforce data to support your recommendations.

The time assessors and instructors spend with learners exploring goals can help learners decide if the goals they have identified are attainable in the time allotted. Assessors and instructors have a significant role to play in helping learners differentiate between short- and long-term goals. Assessors need to weigh learners' goals against how long it might take learners to reach their goal and the time learners are able and willing to spend in literacy upgrading.

Learners with employment goals need to have a clear idea of their goal path and how literacy connects to their next steps. Learners who require skills training after literacy upgrading need to be able to meet the minimum requirements set by the skills training program. Learners who plan to move directly from literacy to job search need to understand what skills they must acquire to find a job. Either way, curriculum will need to reflect these goals and provide for subsequent opportunities to assess skills as they relate to goals.

Ongoing Assessment

Goal setting is described as a process because it is something learners and program staff can engage in throughout the program. As learners spend time in a workforce-oriented program and learn more about the

jobs available and the skills required, they will need scheduled opportunities to reflect on their goals and make any adjustments they consider appropriate.

Checklist of ideas: Goal setting

- Review your statistics to determine the median length of time learners spend in your program. What do your statistics tell you about how long a learner might reasonably expect to stay in your program?

- During initial goal setting, ask how long learners wish to spend in your literacy program. Compare this to an estimate of the time needed to reach the learners' goal, your own statistics, and information on median program length. Are these timelines comparable, or is the learner's expectation about program length significantly different from what others in your program experience or what you are recommending? Discuss these findings with the learner.

- Ensure learners' finances and personal circumstances are taken into account when discussing the length of time they can devote to literacy upgrading.

- Provide an opportunity for learners to reflect on whether their goal is realistic given the time frame they have stated.

- Be prepared to revise time frames according to learners' goals, or for the learner to revise goals based on time frames. Learners who have only six months to spend in upgrading before moving on to job search will need to have a goal that reflects this defined program length.

- Ensure learners have a clear picture of their goal path, including next steps and how one step connects to the next.

- Review goals periodically, providing any new information your program may have. Allow opportunities for learners to take stock of what they have learned and what they still need to learn in order to attain their original goal.

Employment-related questions:

The following questions can help you and the learner consider options for employment and next steps after literacy. If the learner is unable to answer many of these questions, encourage him or her to seek answers through self-directed or program-supported research, or through group activities with other learners in the program.

- What kind of work do you want to do?

- Why do you want to do this work? Are there related jobs you are interested in?

- Do you know what kinds of skills are required to do this job?

- What kinds of work have you done in the past (paid or unpaid)?

- Do you know someone who has the job you're interested in?

- Will you need to get some further skills training after literacy upgrading? Do you know where that training is offered?

- Do you know where to find more information on this type of job?

High school diploma and workforce literacy

Depending on the nature of your program, its location, and the community it serves, you may find that a sizable number of learners state a high school diploma as their goal when they enter the program. High school completion may be realistic, provided learners' skill levels are adequate, they have sufficient time to dedicate to the endeavour, and the community provides programming to support academic goals.

In the latest evaluations of US welfare-to-work program models, data shows relatively few upgrading program participants are able to attain a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) Certificate within the time they are able to dedicate to upgrading. Completion rates are highest among participants who enter upgrading at or near the high school level. For those who enter with lower-level skills, programming focused on increasing skill levels and content knowledge as they relate to the learner's goal (i.e., employment) is most effective.[9] A separate evaluation shows that learners whose skill levels make them unlikely candidates for high school completion within their current timelines are best served through an upgrading program that closely ties learning to further skills training. (Martinson and Strawn 2002, 13)

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[9] Evaluation results show that seven to seventeen percent of participants achieved a GED or high school diploma, depending on the program model. Enrolment in GED preparation classes for more than six months did not increase GED receipt. (Hamilton 2002, 20, 22)

"The functional context approach to workforce education and lifelong learning aims to ensure that learners are able to apply what they learn in classrooms or learning centers to parenting, citizenship, community, and work tasks outside the classroom.

Instead of this performance orientation, however, many adult basic education programs generally operate under a topic or subject matter orientation in which the goal is to acquire academic credentials, such as a high school diploma, not to perform well in social roles outside of class."

(Sticht 1997, 45)

When learners state high school completion or post-secondary education as their goal, you can use this as an opportunity to explore the goal in more detail. Find out the motivation behind the goal, and why the academic route is the one they are interested in. Sometimes learners frame their goals in academic terms simply because that is what they think upgrading means. Without knowing that there are other options available, and that adult learning doesn't necessarily mean traditional "school", learners may end up in academically-oriented programming by default more than by choice. Assessors can assist adult learners in making an informed decision by providing information and alternative options about the range of adult learning opportunities available in the community.

It is important to explore all the options with learners to determine whether working towards high school credits, preparing to write GED Certificate exams, preparing for college tests as entrance to post-secondary programs, or workforce literacy programming is best suited for them. A Grade 12 diploma may or may not be what they need to reach their goal.

For more information on the GED, contact the Independent Learning Centre, which administers the tests in Ontario, or visit their Web site at http://www.ilc.org.

During initial meetings with learners, take the time to explain what your program offers, and how the skills developed through a workforce literacy orientation can be applied directly to a job and to other pursuits. Continue discussions about academic goals throughout the goal-setting process. Learners who are unable to complete high school or credit courses during their current upgrading time frame may be encouraged to hear about possibilities for working towards the goal in the longer term.

Ontario example

Three years ago, when Barb Duguay became Program Manager at the community-based Valley Adult Learning Association (VALA) in Fort Frances, she began by studying the LBS agency's learner statistics. What she saw was that more than 70 percent of learners identified employment as their goal. With one other literacy agency in town that offered programming towards academic upgrading and credit courses, Barb felt it made sense for VALA to identify its niche as employment-focused programming. Learners with academic goals who wish to pursue high school credits or post-secondary education are referred to the local school board LBS program.

Finally, as assessor or instructor, your role is not to convince a learner of any particular goal path, but rather to help paint a complete picture of the options available. It may be that high school completion – through credit courses, independent study, or GED – is appropriate for some of your learners, but they need to make that decision knowing what the options are.

Good question!

"Employers in my area won't even look at applicants unless they have Grade 12. What is the point of attending literacy upgrading with the goal of getting a job if no jobs are available without a high school diploma?"

The high school diploma requirement varies from community to community, depending largely on local employment levels. The first thing to do is some research to find out if your perceptions are accurate. It may be the case that larger employers require high school diplomas, but many other employment opportunities exist within communities. Find out whether the Grade 12 requirement is in place for the types of jobs your learners are applying for. Check out smaller employers to see what their requirements are.

Checklist of ideas: Further training and education programming versus workforce programming

- Review your own learner statistics. How long do students spend in your program? Is there a difference in the amount of time learners with employment goals spend compared with learners who have further training or education goals? Is one learner group more likely to achieve their goal than the other, according to your statistics?

- Does your program offer different programming to learners with further training and education goals, personal independence goals, and those with employment goals? If not, consider how programming might be adjusted to suit the broad goals of your learners.

- Collaborate with community partners to serve learners based on goal niche.

- Help learners pursue long-term further education and training goals. If employment is the short-term goal, investigate options for learners to continue upgrading while working. If part-time upgrading isn't an option, ensure learners have information about correspondence courses and distance courses available through colleges.

Checklist of ideas: The Grade 12 dilemma

- Communicate with employers. Let local employers know about the programming you offer, how you work with learners to develop skills, and how learners demonstrate what they know and have learned. In Walkerton, QUILL Network's project Hire Value attempted just this with good results. This information resource package has been designed to help employers in Ontario identify suitable employees for entry-level positions. Employers want to know that the people they hire can do the job. If you can convince them your agency helps learners acquire the skills required by the job, both sides benefit.

- Investigate the level of awareness and acceptance for the GED Certificate. The GED is often a good alternative for learners who have the skills (or almost have the skills) but don't have the diploma to prove it. Work in tandem with agencies that provide GED upgrading.

For more information about Hire Value, visit QUILL's Web site at www.quillnet.org

- Keep in mind that job entry requirements change. What employers demand in times of high unemployment is different from what they look for when unemployment rates are low. Ensure you are using current information when goal setting with learners.

- Look at the whole employment picture in your region. Large and small employers may have different ways of recruiting and hiring. They may also have different approaches to considering job requirements. While larger employers tend to attract a lot of attention within communities, most people work for small and medium-sized enterprises. Some employers are able to show more flexibility than others, particularly if you are able to connect with someone within the organization.

Training plan development

Training plans flow directly from the assessment and goal-setting process. They should be helpful to the instructor in program planning and to the learner in understanding their skills gaps. A training plan should help students stay focused on their goals.

The plans are designed to reflect a process and not a defined moment in time. Consider them a work in progress, a place to document decisions and discussions between program staff and learners. These decisions may change over time – learners decide on different goals, or progress at an unexpected rate – and those changes can be reflected in the plan.

Not everything can be captured in the training plan, nor is its purpose to do so. Keep the information authentic and relevant for the learner and for your program.

Training

Including workforce literacy in adult literacy programs

Your literacy program probably works with learners with a wide range of goals, some of whom want to work on the skills that will enable them to enter the workforce. Workforce literacy strives to build on the best features of a variety of program models to address the needs of adult job seekers and learners.

If you are considering how your program can best address workforce literacy, find out first what other kinds of workplace-related services

are offered in your community. You probably won't want to duplicate any of these services, but you probably will want to include information about them and also help learners develop the skills that will help them take advantage of these other services. These are two features of workforce literacy:

1. Workforce literacy seeks a balance between generic "further education and training" programming and job-specific training or job search activities.

2. Although it is considered a unique programming style, workforce literacy may contain elements of "further education and training", job search, basic education, and skills training.

Following are some examples of the skills you might address with learners, who will need these skills to attend job-specific training or to job search successfully. When you incorporate these kinds of elements using authentic workplace documents into your programming, you are also providing some contextual information which helps build students' content knowledge while they are developing these skills:

- Note taking for skills training classes (you don't deliver the skills training)

- Numeracy skills needed for a cashier's job (you don't teach how to work as a cashier)

- Scanning skills to find telephone numbers and addresses of local employers (they don't call the employers in your literacy program)

- Organizing information skills to keep track of job search information (they don't do job search in your literacy program)

- Skimming skills to find information in a training manual using tables of contents or indexes (you don't teach the contents of the manual)

- Computer skills needed to navigate through job training tutorials on-line (you don't teach the tutorials)

Try to anticipate what kind of skills would be needed by the students in your program, based on the kinds of services and jobs available in your region.

Emphasize employment context

As you know, literacy encompasses a wide range of skills and concepts. Since adults often have limited time to attend literacy programs, it is important for them to see the connection between what they are learning in their program and their work goal. One way to do this is to

put literacy programming into context. In the case of learners with employment goals, the context is the workplace.

To maximize learners' workforce preparation experience, try the following:

- Target instruction to the skills learners will need for work.

- Use authentic workplace documents to create reading, writing, and numeracy tasks in your program.

- Make connections from your program to the world of work and find out about other community services including employment and job search supports.

One of the main objectives of contextual learning is to ensure learning enables students to reflect on how and why their learning can be integrated into their lives. Contextual learning has the following characteristics (Ohio State University Section C-3):

- Emphasizes problem solving

- Recognizes that teaching and learning need to occur in multiple contexts

- Assists students in learning how to monitor their learning so they can become self-regulated learners

- Anchors teaching in the diverse life context of students

- Encourages students to learn from each other

- Employs authentic assessment

Learning transfer research challenges the assumption that learning within one topic or for one purpose is made available by the brain, or "transferred", to any number of other topics or purposes.

Rather than assume all learning is transferred from one context to another, literacy practitioners must consider how, or indeed whether, learning is transferred, and develop strategies within the classroom to optimize transfer.

Ontario example

Literacy and Employment Training is an initiative of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board in Hamilton. It combines literacy and employment skills in a six-month twelve hours per week classroom-based program.

Program content includes literacy and numeracy skills developed in a contextualized way. Rose Pye, instructor in the program, describes her approach: "I try to address the broader scope of skills – I'm looking at the skills they need to survive in any workplace. But if an individual has specific needs related to a particular job, I will look at those needs as well."

Contextual learning demands instructors use learners' experiences to ground new learning, and use the experiences of the group to enhance what the instructor brings to the classroom setting. In *Equipped for the Future: Results that Matter*, the authors describe a contextualized approach as one where "students take part in real-world activities during which they build the skills and content knowledge they need to meet their goals." (Bingman and Stein 2001, 18)

Learning isolated skills sets does not enable learners to access what has been learned. Instead, learners must understand how and when to apply skills. (Gillespie 2002, 2) Starting from within a context increases the likelihood learners will make the connections between the individual skill or strategy and its application to a meaningful situation.

Because a contextualized approach considers learners' real needs and situations – for example, the learner will have to navigate through his new employer's Web tutorial during training and take notes – this approach places learners at the centre of the learning process, and encourages them to think about how their new skills will be used in everyday life. A contextualized approach also demands that instructors fully engage in understanding the learners' worlds and use the group as a resource for planning learning. (Imel 2000, 4)

There are many ways to use workplaces as starting points for program design.

Good question!

"The learners I teach need good grammar and spelling skills if they're going to succeed in the workplace. Does programming for workforce literacy mean I don't teach these skills anymore?"

No, you can still teach grammar, spelling, and other embedded skills. The difference may be in the approach you take. If you currently organize your teaching around grammar topics, consider instead organizing your curriculum around real-life tasks and situations and their connections to the world of work. Problems with grammar and spelling will come up naturally as learners work through these tasks, and you can decide how much time learners will spend on isolated grammar activities to address specific challenges. Some teachers advocate spending very little time isolating skills, arguing it is much easier for adults to learn skills as they are applied to real situations. For more on this approach, see the Ontario example of "working backwards" on page 38.

Addressing employability skills

The learning environment can (and should) mirror the environment in which skills will have to be applied. According to the Conference Board of Canada, workplaces look for employees who can think, solve problems, negotiate, make decisions, analyze situations, and communicate effectively. In employment preparation settings, these competencies are referred to as employability skills. Many of the same skills are captured under the LBS program's Self-management Self-direction domain.

What are employability skills?

To get a clearer sense of what employability skills are and how they can be developed in your program, visit the Conference Board of Canada's Web site at http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.htm and download a copy of *Employability Skills 2000+*. Employers consider these the skills necessary to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work. *Employability Skills 2000+* is organized under three categories:

1. Fundamental skills – skills needed as a base for further development

2. Teamwork skills – skills and attributes needed to contribute productively

Literacy learners whose employment history is characterized by long periods of unemployment, or who have no work experience to draw on, may need a significant level of exposure to the type of core skills they'll need to demonstrate on the job.

3. Personal management skills – personal skills, attitudes, and behaviours that drive one's potential for growth

Compare employability skills to the Self-management Self-direction skills contained in Ontario's LBS program's Learning Outcomes, as described in the Ontario Literacy Coalition's *The Level Descriptions Manual* and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' *Working with Learning Outcomes* document. Consider how to infuse your program's content with the skills outlined in both documents.

Time management skills are featured in both documents. Working with calendars, scheduling tasks, and being aware of how long tasks take to complete are all ways to integrate these skills into learning.

Showing up on time

Regular attendance and punctuality on the part of students often present significant challenges for many literacy programs. Yet for learners with employment goals, being able to show up every day and on time is an essential skill to master before going out to find work. Regardless of how skilled an employee is, employers need to have confidence in the employee's ability to manage time and balance the demands of work life with the demands of home life. Literacy programs can play a role in helping learners with employment goals develop strategies and skills that lead to success on the job.

Literacy programs can consider establishing an attendance and lateness policy. If you develop this type of policy, discuss it as part of the initial assessment and goal setting to ensure your program is a good fit for learners. The goal of these policies is to support learners in developing strategies and skills, so their enforcement can be proactive and not punitive. Help learners set their own attendance goals. Meet with learners who are struggling with attendance or punctuality and help them find ways to meet program demands. Organize learning around teams and encourage teams to set their own expectations for accepted behaviours. Fellow team members are often quicker to call a learner on lateness or an unexplained absence if it affects their own ability to get their work done.

Learners who are not ready or able to commit to regular attendance will need to work with program staff to ensure their goals of employment are realistic. Establishing expectations about attendance and punctuality sends a message that program time is valuable.

Checklist of ideas: developing employability skills

- Map out the employability or self-management/self-direction skills learners need to develop at the same time as the reading, writing, and math skills they need. Include these in the training plan.

- Create and display a daily agenda to plan and document learning.

- Use weekly checklists to track what learners have done and need to do for class.

- Encourage teamwork.

- Ensure classes start on time and learners arrive on time.

- Ask learners to phone in to report absences or late arrivals.

Ontario example

The FOCUS program in Owen Sound, Wiarton, and Walkerton offers literacy and employability skills programming. Clients attend FOCUS for approximately four weeks, during which time they develop an action plan. The plan is based on doing a self-assessment and a goal-setting process, and includes next steps.

For many program participants, the challenge lies not in finding a job, but in keeping it. To address job retention, FOCUS encourages participants to better understand themselves, their behaviours, and their attitudes, with a view to developing better communication skills and strategies for getting along with others on and off the job.

Instruction that builds team skills

Many workplaces require workers to be active participants in continuous improvement and other processes which demand a high degree of problem solving and communication skills within teams. Yet often classrooms are still organized around a two-way communication system between instructor and learner, rather than on groups making meaning through interaction and investigation.

Each area of programming should support and reflect an employment focus. This allows students with employment goals to learn what they need and to know how to use new skills and knowledge. The instructional approaches you select can have a significant impact on bridging the gap between your educational setting and the real-life context in which learners are going to further practise and develop their skills.

The following pages describe activity styles that reflect the way workers interact, communicate, and use literacy skills on the job.

Skills needed to carry out authentic tasks

One method for planning lessons within a contextualized approach is to first consider the tasks and activities learners need to perform when they achieve their goals. Once you've outlined these tasks, assess the skills (literacy, math, communication, and self management/self-direction) and knowledge required to perform each task.

This method may or may not be what you are accustomed to. Instead of developing skills sequentially, this method addresses skills development on an as-needed basis.[10] The method does support an outcomes-based approach by looking at the end results and working back to identify the skills, competencies, and knowledge required to achieve outcomes.

For more on the theory behind engaging learners as active participants in their own learning, see the discussion of constructivism on page 59 of this guide.

Diane Millar describes a sophisticated model for breaking down workplace tasks into writing skills in *Making Choices: Teaching Writing in the Workplace*. (2002, 30-31)

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[10] In *Equipped for the Future*, the authors describe the desired approach to basic skills development as "iterative" rather than "sequential". (Stein 2000, 4)

Ontario example

Branne Plitnikas, who developed the pre-apprenticeship curriculum at Niagara College in Welland, started by collecting materials that described the objectives and topics covered by the first year of the existing automotive service technician apprenticeship program. She describes the process as one of working backwards from those objectives, and cataloguing the skills pre-apprenticeship students would need to have in order to eventually meet the objectives laid out in the apprenticeship course of study. The curriculum was organized around four broad areas: math, communications, physics and chemistry, and computers.

Approximately half the materials used in the pre-apprenticeship program are workforce-related and can be taken directly from students' career courses and the workplace. Curriculum strands were then cross-referenced with the LBS program's Levels 4 and 5, and with the college's Ontario Basic Skills Level 4.

Assessing skills through demonstrations

Working from task to skills also lends itself to assessment through demonstrations, which are designed as goal-directed, authentic, and integrated tasks that draw on multiple skills and competencies. Planning this way facilitates learning transfer by putting the spotlight on the purpose for learning, and by providing the immediate work context within which the skills will be used. Learners recognize the connection between their goal and what they are learning. There is no need for literacy instructors to "interpret" the significance of a particular activity because students recognize the connection between their employment goal and what they are learning.

Classroom example

Here is an example of a literacy class in which most learners' employment goals include service and clerical jobs. One task all learners agree they need to work on is writing notes to themselves to document work they have done and work left to do. The literacy instructor has worked on writing in a general way, and has given lessons on spelling, sentence structure, and basic grammatical terminology. Still, when these students jot down notes for themselves, they continue to have difficulty.

The instructor recognizes that her instructional style is not resulting in changes to learner writing. Learners haven't improved their ability to write the notes they will have to write in the jobs they want. The instructor's intent has been to teach a broad set of skills, rather than to have learners master the particular set of skills and body of knowledge they will need to demonstrate to accomplish a particular task or context.

To try to find a solution to this problem, the instructor set up a system of meetings where learners discuss what they will need to learn, and agree on the type and scope of homework and project work. At the meetings, one learner records the group's discussions and decisions. The recorder then meets with a second learner to write out the minutes, which are distributed to the group and the instructor.

Learners are encouraged to think about work situations in which they might need to take notes. The instructor helps learners organize into team-based projects where learners record their work, make decisions, and plan and carry out project tasks. Through these interactions and activities, learners take notes for authentic purposes. Where difficulties with grammar or spelling arise, the instructor works with learners on mini-lessons that target particular skills. Instructor and learners work on recognizing when note taking is necessary and appropriate to various situations.

As a result, the new instructional approach has led to learning activities that have the following qualities:

- They are authentic.
- They are co-operative.
- They are integrated.
- They are contextual.
- They build learning strategies alongside skills.
- They lend themselves to assessment through demonstrations.

Training approaches that support employment-focused learning

The three approaches described in the following paragraphs – project-, team-, and problem-based learning – engage participants in authentic learning experiences and have the advantage of fostering employability skills development alongside literacy and numeracy skills.

Project-, team-, and problem-based approaches tend to give the learner a central role in the assessment process. At the outset, learners can set up the evaluative criteria alongside the practitioner, answering such questions as "What will success look like?", "What steps can I take that will contribute to my success?", and "What will result from the activity?" As part of a demonstrations-based assessment model, the answers to these questions can inform any evaluation checklist or rubric.

Project-based learning

> "No matter how groups are formed, interpersonal challenges exist within them, just as they exist in a workplace team. Managing these conflicts helps build interpersonal skills."
>
> (Marshall 2002, 5)

Projects are usually organized along a work-related theme or topic, with learners working individually or in small groups to answer a larger question. Phases of project-based learning may include planning, research, writing, and presentation.

The strength of the approach is learners become active participants in the learning process. They make key decisions about what they learn and how, and can be responsible for organizing their roles in the various activities which flow from working towards the project objective. Instructors can work with students to set up project guidelines before starting.

Problem solving is usually an essential part of project-based learning, requiring learners to work individually or together to identify issues and barriers and to work towards an effective solution. This process leads learners to establish their own criteria for a quality outcome.

To address workforce literacy skills, you might set up projects to research particular areas of employment or the labour market, or to learn more about a particular aspect of a job. Projects may be a one-time occurrence, lasting several days or weeks, or they may be part of a long-term learning process for as long as learners spend in the program.

Problem-based learning

Considered one of the best examples of constructivist learning techniques, problem-based learning supports collaboration and reflection within a structure that promotes active involvement. (Brown no date, 28) The problem is set out at the start of the activity, but not

all the information necessary to solve the problem is provided. Like project- or team-based learning, no one solution is required. Problem-based learning provides an opportunity wherein "learners are encouraged to work as a collaborative team to identify and solve problems – just as scientists, nurses, musicians, citizen group members and parents do in everyday life. It is through these collaborative experiences that adults come to see that learning is a process of continually transforming and being transformed by social experience." (Gillespie 2002, 4)

Team-based or co-operative learning

Team-based learning shares many of the strengths of project-based learning, with the emphasis on solutions through group interaction. Team-based learning (also known as co-operative learning) occurs when learners each take on particular responsibilities and then work together in order to accomplish a task. Learners may work independently on activities, but can return to group members for support or guidance.

Working in a team mimics an authentic workplace environment that fosters discussion, problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making. It also highlights the need to document work processes. Thus, instead of one-time activities aimed at developing the skills to write a note or memo, learners find themselves in situations where writing a memo is a necessary tool for communicating among group members. (Marshall 2002, 3)

Using authentic workplace documents as learning materials

Authentic workplace documents are an obvious choice to develop workforce literacy competencies. However, they have some inherent drawbacks in a group setting. To ensure authentic documents are useful, you will need to determine the range of employment goals and decide which documents are likely to be encountered by the majority of learners.

When working with a variety of authentic documents, be aware students will need to be able to transfer what they learn in your program to the real documents they will eventually have to use at work. Identify features many documents have in common. Be aware of conventions like rows and columns, titles of documents – or missing titles – and talk about how the documents are intended to be used.

For educators who are committed to placing learners in learning environments that relate to the situations they will find themselves in, David Barton's book *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* is a good resource.

(Belfiore 2002, 19)

Ontario example

Through the assistance of a volunteer retired from a local industry, Sarnia's Organization for Literacy in Lambton has prepared their own workforce preparation materials to address the need for authentic documents. To date they have drafted four manuals, addressing:

- Employment at a donut shop

- Safe storage of foods

- Recipes

- Math with a trades focus

Each of the manuals uses authentic workplace materials as its base, often simplifying language and adding reading comprehension and math activities where appropriate. The manuals will be field tested by learners and tutors in the area before undergoing final revisions.

Numeracy at Work and *Workwrite* are two resources that use authentic workplace documents as a starting point for teaching literacy and numeracy skills. See the Bibliography for details.

The challenge of using authentic documents in an educational setting is they are often specific to a purpose and situation, both of which can be difficult to re-create or understand in a literacy program. From a planning perspective, the authentic document can be used as a springboard from which to establish a situation that demands a number of reactions on the part of learners. Instructors can foster an enriched understanding of workplace documents by discussing their purpose and the circumstances in which documents are likely to be used.

Workplace documents

Look around your own office or program setting for workplace documents. While some of the items listed below are more readily found in a manufacturing setting, some documents such as telephone lists, order forms, memos on various topics, and bulletin board notices are found in most work settings.

Documents vary from workplace to workplace. What learners need to be able to do when they are on the job is recognize the purpose of unfamiliar documents by their features. Spend time discussing both the content of a document and the way it is laid out. How is it similar

to other workplace documents learners have seen or worked with? What is different about it?

Understanding the "stakes" attached to workplace documents and acting accordingly is a key strategy to efficient reading and writing on the job.[11] Begin your discussions of each authentic document by asking learners to reflect on how important they think the document is, along with where and how it might be used. Readers who lack confidence may attribute the same degree of importance to all written text. Employees on the job need to recognize which documents they need to read or use, and what impact the content of documents has on the way their work is done.

Here is a list of common documents and texts compiled in the *Workplace Education Development (WED) Practitioner's Guide* (Whincup 2001, 22):

Documents (usually more than one paragraph)	Text (usually less than one paragraph)
• Employee handbooks	• Lists
• Policy and procedure manuals	• Tables, graphs, charts
• Machinery and operator's manuals	• Blueprints and scale drawings
• Professional/trades journals	• Assembly and schematic diagrams
• Newsletters	• Signs
• Product catalogues	• Time cards and sheets
• Brochures and pamphlets	• Shipping forms
• Collective agreements	• Accident or incident report forms
• Annual reports	• Work schedules
• Contracts	• Work orders
• Regulations	• Purchase orders
• Letters	• Invoices
• Notes	• Receipts
• Memos and emails	• Paycheque slips
• Bulletin board notices	• Maps
	• Floor plans
	• Fire evacuation diagrams
	• Labels
	• Personnel forms (vacation time, sick leave, pension, benefits)

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[11] "Stakes" refer to the degree of criticality attributed to the document. High stakes documents such as accident report forms require a high level of accuracy or the repercussions are serious. For a more detailed discussion of authentic document use in literacy, see the introduction to *Workwrite, Volume 1*.(Geraci 2001)

Coordinating the collection of authentic materials and resources

Before you start to develop collections of authentic materials and resources, decide how you could coordinate this work over time within your literacy network. Other literacy agencies, other community partners, and your local literacy network might all be interested in working together to plan and streamline the resource gathering process. In some communities, much of this work has taken place during earlier labour market development initiatives, so find out what work has already been done in this area. In some cases, it may be a matter of gathering existing resources and reorganizing them so they are accessible and usable for literacy instructors and students.

Checklist of ideas: Coordinating your collection

* Use information gathered during labour market research to help determine which authentic documents are most suitable for your students.

* Fold instruction about authentic documents into integrated tasks, rather than addressing them one by one. For example, you may set up a situation where learners respond to a set of written instructions, develop a checklist, write a memo or note, and read an invoice, all as part of one activity.

* Help learners build awareness of why, how, and when sample authentic documents are used. Discuss similarities and differences in the range of documents they work with.

Program design

In her briefing paper on *Literacy and the Canadian Workforce*, Sue Folinsbee asserts "literacy should be positioned as a key component of lifelong learning or workforce development where everyone has to adjust and keep on learning." (2001, 10) As we acknowledge this, we can help learners plan current learning opportunities that will help meet their immediate needs, as well as consider and plan for future learning opportunities which will help them reach longer-term goals.

Adults often can't afford to spend much more than six months at one time in upgrading programs. They need to develop skills and then use those skills to help them meet an achievable goal, whether it's employment or another personal goal. Effective programming is closely tied to short-term goals, but doesn't lose sight of the long-term goals.

American experience – something to think about

Evaluations of programs serving welfare recipients with employment goals in the US reveal that participants seldom considered taking basic education as part of their back-to-work plan. (Hamilton 2002, 15) While the reasons are not entirely clear, it may be that adults seeking employment did not see the connections between basic education and work. These same job seekers identified numerous barriers to employment, but usually related the barriers to a lack of hard skills or resources. Basic education, or literacy, may be perceived as too vague, or perhaps as too much directed at very low-functioning adults, to be of much benefit in a back-to-work plan.

These same evaluations point to programs that offer a combination of services – including basic education – as the most effective way to prepare adult learners for employment. One of the success stories described in the evaluations is the Steps to Success program in Portland, Oregon, which consistently surpassed all other programs in its employment rate for participants. The characteristics considered strong in the Portland model were an employment focus, use of both job search and short-term education or training, and an emphasis on holding out for a good job. (Hamilton 2002, 35)

Six elements of strong American workforce education programs

Julie Strawn, a US researcher with the welfare-to-work evaluations, identifies six key elements to building a strong workforce education program (Martinson and Strawn 2002, 3):

- Provide an employment contract

- Offer intensive services

- Monitor participation closely

- Make strong linkages to job search

- Emphasize job quality

- Emphasize training options

Following are more detailed descriptions of these six key elements, along with some possible ideas for their implementation in LBS programs. Take some time to consider whether any of these ideas might fit well with your program's approach to workforce literacy.

Features 1	Provide an "employment" contract
Description	Used widely in job search and job training programs, contracts contain many of the same features of a real employment contract. Like any signed document, contracts can be a good way to reinforce program expectations and convey a sense of worth about the program. Contracts outline participants' responsibilities while in the program and usually include program expectations such as attendance policies. Contracts may also detail whatever penalties participants can expect if expectations aren't met. Contracts may also state what participants can expect from the program, and any recourse participants have if they aren't satisfied with some aspect of the programming.
Ideas for implementing	Training plans may contain some of the information included in employment contracts, such as goals, reasons for attending the program, responsibilities while in program, and what participants can expect to achieve and do during the program. Ideas for implementing include: • Use information from training plans, including learner goals. • Outline hours and days of program. • Include attendance and punctuality expectations. (Remember, what you expect of learners you must also expect of staff!) • Use contracts as a basis for conversations and clarification of program expectations. • Outline any expectations for work that must be completed outside class hours.

Features 2	Offer intensive services
Description	Services in this case are those that support participants and assist them in reaching their goal. In workforce settings, such services might include employment counselling, job search assistance, and job preparation (for example, writing resumés and cover letters). Most LBS agencies are in a better position to partner with existing service providers than to seek separate funding for additional service delivery. There are examples in Ontario, however, of programs that offer support services on-site to LBS students (with non-LBS funding).
Ideas for implementing	The first step is to document barriers, consistently raised by learners and staff, which prevent or impede learners in reaching their goals. Next, think creatively of ways to address these barriers. Some examples: • Is there an agency within the community you could partner with? • Are there guest speakers or experts on a specific topic who might agree to speak with learners? • Are there ways of learners supporting each other? • Do any members of staff have areas of interest or expertise (for example, particular work experience) that could be shared?

Features 3	Monitor participation closely
Description	Learners attending literacy programs with the goal of becoming employed as a next step need to ensure they are able to meet basic requirements of regular attendance and punctuality. If these expectations are not met, students will be back into unemployment in short order. Equally important is an individual's ability to monitor how they are doing in the classroom (or on the job) and to seek help when needed.
Ideas for implementing	• Intervene early and often. Monitor students' participation in class, particularly within the first two weeks, and provide feedback and support where issues arise. This monitoring may be outlined in an employment contract if you decide to use one in your program. • Designate one staff person to assist learners with problems related to attendance or participation. (This role may rotate among staff.) • Communicate as a staff. An issue concerning one learner may well affect others. Use communication sessions to identify broader or repeating issues and brainstorm strategies to resolve problems. • Foster personal independence skills in learners. While it is important learners feel they have a place to discuss issues that affect learning, the learner should be at the centre of the problem-solving and decision-making processes.

Features 4	Make strong linkages to job search
Description	Learners should be able to see connections between what they are doing in their literacy program and the next steps. Program staff can play an important role in describing options and assisting learners to make connections with employment services such as job search.
Ideas for implementing	• Seek out community partners providing job search programs and classes. Ensure your students know about these options. • Investigate the possibility of co-locating with service providers offering complementary services. • Recognize your own strengths as an LBS provider and draw the lines clearly between literacy and employment services. • Depending on the size of your organization, you may wish to consider applying for funding to hire an employment counsellor on-site, either to work exclusively with your learners, or in combination with another agency (or your literacy network).

Features 5	Emphasize job quality
Description	Job seekers should look for job quality, and not necessarily take the first job they are offered.[12] Among the factors for consideration are pay, possibility of promotion, job security, availability of job training, and paid benefits. While job search activities are not conducted during LBS programming, learners can benefit from discussions that raise awareness of these issues and provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on their life circumstances and needs as they relate to employment.
Ideas for implementing	• Find out the employment goals of your learners • Use the Internet, HRSDC employment resource centres, and other labour market information sources to gather basic information on pay, job availability, etc., across sectors. • Use students as a resource. Students may have experience working in sectors or jobs that others in the class are interested in.

[12] US welfare-to-work program evaluations conclude job quality is a significant factor in job retention. Program participants under pressure to accept the first job offered had a much higher rate of returning to social assistance. (Hamilton 2002, 8)

Features 6	Emphasize training options, especially for those with low skills
Description	Although training programs are not offered in significant numbers across many Ontario communities, some do exist, often funded through Community, Family and Children's Services and HRSDC. Other programs may be offered through local school boards or service agencies. Learners should know which training opportunities exist in their area, and understand entry requirements and how to achieve those requirements (if not through your LBS agency, then they should know where to go next).
Ideas for implementing	• Research training programs and providers in your community. Compile a detailed list of programs offered (if one does not already exist) and be sure to include a section for eligibility criteria, which is often restrictive. • Contact the training provider and request information about training requirements and program content. • Consider a learner path that begins with literacy and continues to training. Does your literacy program content prepare learners for the kind of reading, writing, math, and employability skills required for the training programs?

Supporting Volunteer Work

Learners can gain valuable skills and work experience through volunteer work. Volunteering provides an opportunity to practise skills learned in the literacy program, and gives learners a taste of exactly how they will need to use skills on the job. It may even help learners to identify areas where they could benefit from further upgrading. Volunteer opportunities can be established through your LBS agency or community partners, or you may consider other unpaid learning opportunities such as job placements or job shadowing with local employers.

Through volunteering, learners can see immediately just how large a role employability skills play in being successful on the job. No longer working from the singular perspective of literacy skills development,

volunteers must organize their work, prioritize and plan, communicate with others, make decisions, and carry out tasks, all within a real work setting.

Ontario example

In December 2001, Heartwood House in Ottawa entered into a partnership with the municipal transit authority, OC-Transpo, to become managers of their Lost & Found program. The program provides substantial training opportunities for clients of the various member group programs at Heartwood House, including People, Words & Change (PWC), and Alternate Learning Styles and Outlooks, two LBS-funded literacy agencies.

Approximately twenty volunteers, including some literacy learners, work each day to help OC-Transpo customers find their belongings. As part of the development work to start the program, PWC staff worked with volunteers to develop plain language forms for use in the Lost & Found service. By working alongside volunteers, staff were also able to identify many of the skills needed to work in the Lost & Found. Among those skills are:

- Answering phones
- Managing inventory
- Sorting and tagging items
- Keeping careful records
- Keeping items organized
- Searching for items by description and date
- Reception duties – greeting people who come to collect items
- Organizing the twice-yearly sale of unclaimed items

Volunteer work benefits the learner by providing work experience within a supportive learning environment. Paid staff can support volunteers to the degree necessary, often beginning with job shadowing and proceeding through mentoring. As volunteers become more confident about their abilities to perform the work, they can work independently, with staff available to call on as a resource.

Staff also benefit from supporting a volunteer initiative. To ensure volunteers are adequately trained to perform their activities, staff need to analyze tasks and necessary skills, and decide how best to train volunteers to do the work.

Your agency may be able to provide volunteer placements directly through Ontario Works (OW) if you have learners who are attending through this program. Participants can volunteer up to 70 hours per month through the Community Participation program. Volunteers cannot perform the work of paid staff, but can help LBS agencies accomplish tasks that would not get done without these extra efforts. Details of the OW Community Participation program vary from community to community, so it is worthwhile contacting your local OW office to determine your agency's capacity to offer a program.

If OW is not an option for your agency, you may be able to partner with another agency that places their participants as volunteers in your program, or with an agency who can assist you in setting up a volunteer program with your own participants. Most agencies that place participants in volunteer positions as part of their programming are motivated to see the placement work out. The agencies often provide ongoing support and troubleshooting assistance when things aren't working out as well as they should.

Operating volunteer placements within your agency presents challenges, and it will certainly require a review of how your agency will supervise and support volunteers. The process builds familiarity with how employees must learn on the job and with various training options used to orient new employees. Do some research in your community before deciding whether a volunteer component is possible and how it might work.[13]

Checklist of ideas: Volunteer opportunities for learners in LBS programs

- Identify an area within your own program that could use the assistance of volunteers.

- Create a project or micro-business within your agency that can run with volunteers (for example, a snack canteen, catering company, delivery business, cleaning business).

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[13] Joanne Kaatari and Leila Downie's *Volunteer Management Resource Guide for Adult Literacy Programs*, August 1997, presents a listing of volunteer bureaus and centres in each region of Ontario. Full document text is available at www.nald.ca.

Common elements of program success:

- Training for jobs that pay well, present career ladders, and are in sustained demand in the local labour market

- Providing access to training

- Integrating basic and soft skills

- Offering support services and activities (for example, hands-on training) that facilitate participation and retention

- Fostering employer involvement

- Recognizing and responding to program contexts (government funding, guidelines, economic development initiatives, local employment, etc.)

(Research Triangle Institute 2000, 7-4)

Mixed-strategy approaches[14]

Contextualized workforce literacy is just one way to prepare learners for the workforce. Five-year reviews of welfare-to-work programs in the US provide ample evidence that a mixed-strategy approach is most effective in preparing adult learners for employment. Closer to home, Norm Rowen, in his report *People Over Programs*, found that programs are often unable to address the range of client needs because programs are bound by the scope of their funding bodies. There is hope, however. Around Ontario, LBS programs have found creative ways to partner with community agencies, co-locate their services with agencies, or work closely with OW to build a stronger program which is better able to address the needs of learners with employment goals.

Ontario example

Fanshawe College in London offers two integrated LBS/employment skills training programs (call centre training and personal support worker training). Sandra Hennessey, who coordinates the programs, finds the approach to workforce literacy that works best is one where employment skills are integrated into the programming. By designing programs in this way, Sandra feels participants have a context within which to build skills. She also feels the relatively short program length (between six and eight weeks) keeps participants focused.

The Fanshawe College profile is an example of a balanced approach to workforce preparation. Basic education is folded into the program, which also includes job search skills, employability skills, and job-specific skills. In US welfare-to-work evaluations, programs employing mixed strategies show consistently higher rates of employment and job retention than single-strategy programs, such as basic skills or job search alone. (Martinson and Strawn 2002, 16)

In mixed-strategy approaches, sharp divisions between basic skills and employment preparation fade, with good results. Researcher Susan Imel concludes "programs that combine job search assistance with some education and training tend to be more successful over a five-year period than programs focusing on either job placement or basic

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[14] Julie Strawn coins the term "mixed-strategy" in *Beyond Job Search or Basic Education: Rethinking the Role of Skills in Welfare Reform*, 1998.

skills training." (Imel 2000c, 1) Using an integrated approach, participants learn literacy skills while researching job options, or refine employability skills through contact with community employers.

Follow-up

Once students have completed their literacy upgrading, it is time to find out how their learning has prepared them for their next steps. Whether learners move on to skills training, job search, or employment, you will want to understand how your program served them, and what else it can do to better serve learners in the future. Use the data you compile through follow-up phone calls to feed back into your program design. Listen for trends in the information learners provide, and see if there is something you can do to work with the trend. Learners are a rich resource after they have left your program. They can provide your programming with an ongoing source of up-to-date information on job search, work requirements, and work-related training.

When conducting follow-up interviews, ask participants for feedback on their job search, employment, or other next steps. Get information that is as specific as possible. Questions that require yes or no answers won't give you a good picture of how your program is serving your clients.

Checklist of ideas: Questions to ask in follow-up interviews

(Note: the following questions are suggested to help you glean information for your program, and are not required by the LBS program.)

For learners who go on to employment:

• What type of job did you find?

• How did you find your job?

• What was the hiring process like? (entry test, resumé required, job interview, etc.)

• What skills are you using on the job that you learned or practised in the program?

• What did you not learn or practise in the program that would have helped you on the job?

- Are there other job opportunities with the same employer?

For learners who go on to skills training:

- Describe the training program a little bit.

- What skills are you using in the training that you learned or practised in the program?

- What did you not learn or practise here that would have helped you in the training?

- Would you recommend the training program to others?

Summary of good practice in workforce education

Getting started:

- Research the local labour market. Encourage all staff to familiarize themselves with contemporary workplace demands and options.

- Use your agency's statistics to identify trends in learner populations. Make changes to your program based on analysis of statistics.

- Consider learning paths, such as academic upgrading, etc. (Don't keep learners in the same program beyond what is necessary). Refer learners to others in the community, based on immediate needs.

- Collaborate with other service providers or offer comprehensive services on-site to assist learners who have employment goals.

Goal setting:

- View goal setting as a long-term process. Encourage learners, instructors, and other program staff to continue to inform the process for as long as learners remain in the program.

- Review goals periodically throughout learners' time spent in literacy. Refine goals as learners collect information, participate in ongoing assessment, and consider other life circumstances.

- Help learners gather as much information as possible about their next steps. Knowing the entry requirements of various programs and the skill requirements of particular jobs will increase the likelihood learners move on to next steps sufficiently prepared.

Assessment:

- Build on learners' experiences. Find out about learners' work experiences – paid or unpaid – and use the information to identify their strengths and gaps.

- Use assessment tools that clearly reflect the learner's goal and the instructional context. Learners with employment goals should have their learning measured using employment-focused tasks.

Training plan development:

- View the training plan as a work in progress. As students learn more about the demands of the workplace and how their skills stack up against job requirements, review the training plan and make any adjustments required.

Training:

- Make explicit connections between what is learned in your literacy program and its application to real-life activities and contexts, including work. Make learning experiences authentic and meaningful.

- Use teamwork and project-based learning to simulate work environments and foster interpersonal skill development.

- Literacy instruction is a balancing act. Learners need skills and they need knowledge of the areas in which they will use those skills. Learners in short duration programs (less than one year) must either have enough content knowledge to able to focus on skills development, or they should work within a defined context to build the necessary content knowledge and skills simultaneously.

Follow-up:

- Use information gathered after learners leave the program – especially as it relates to job skills – to inform future programming.

Part 2

An overview of the research

Workforce literacy is rooted in learning theory research and practice. This section begins with an overview of the research which workforce education draws on, and presents, in brief, implications of the research to the Ontario context.

Learning theory: Constructivism

Based on the work of developmental psychologists, including Piaget and Vyogtsky, constructivism views the learning process as one based on social interactions, whereby the learner is involved actively in creating meaning through learning. (Brown no date, 8) Situated cognition, one strand of constructivist-based learning theory, sees learning as "an activity that is situated with regard to an individual's position in the world." (Martin, Larry G 1999, 4:49) Its focus is on process more than outcome, and on the learner's ability to develop not only skills, but also cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Situated cognition views the learning process as starting with the familiar and moving out to the abstract. It contends that traditional academic learning approaches do not benefit learners – particularly low-literate adult learners – because those approaches focus on skills and ignore the authentic ways in which skills are used in life. In contrast to an academic approach, situated cognition has the learner take the central role in creating meaning through the learning process, and upholds the connectedness between what is learned and how it is learned.

"Constructivist learning environments offer the potential for locating learning in the context of real-life situations and problems. They offer a rationale for curriculum integration that connects learning with the workplace."

(Brown no date, 9)

Contextual Learning

Contextual learning arises out of constructivist models of learning theory, in which the learner creates (constructs) meaning through his or her social interactions and through experience. Where learners attend programs with employment goals, the context becomes

employment with skills, strategies, and content knowledge developed mainly through the world of work.

Contextual learning has the following characteristics: (Clifford and Wilson 2000 in Imel 2000, 2)

- Emphasizes problem solving
- Recognizes that teaching and learning need to occur in multiple contexts
- Assists students in learning how to monitor their learning so they can become self-regulated learners
- Anchors teaching in the diverse life context of students
- Encourages students to learn from each other
- Employs authentic assessment

One of contextual learning's main objectives is to ensure learning is a tool to help learners reflect on how and why their learning can be integrated into their lives. (Imel 2000, 3) Instructors use learners' experiences as the foundation and context for learning. Contextual learning is predicated on the belief that learning isolated skills sets will not enable learners to access what has been learned. Rather, learners must understand how and when to apply skills. Starting from within a context increases the likelihood learners will make the connections between the individual skill or strategy and its application to a meaningful situation.

The context envelops not only what is learned, but also how the learning is measured. The assessment tool must be constructed in such a way that learners demonstrate their skills within a context that is goal-related.

The beginnings of workforce literacy: Tom Sticht and Functional Context Education

In the 1970s, researcher Tom Sticht began designing training programs for US army recruits whose functional literacy level was lower than had previously been allowable in the Armed Forces.

Through his analysis of existing training programs, which provided general education classes modeled along a high school curriculum, followed by job-specific training, he recognized timelines would need to be extended considerably if the same model were to be used with the low-literate recruits. Instead, he set about designing a program that would push the two previously separate content areas together. Recruits would develop reading and writing skills while they learned the job-specific content areas.

Known as Functional Context Education (FCE), Sticht and others went on to document the considerable gain these recruits made across skill and knowledge domains when compared to their colleagues enrolled in traditional upgrading.

Sticht's research revealed several key findings. When compared to recruits enrolled in general upgrading courses, the low-literate recruits enrolled in job-specific upgrading courses showed significantly higher reading gains after a 180-hour training course. Even more surprising, however, was that low-literate recruits did as well on general reading scores as those enrolled in general upgrading. The findings led to a large body of research developed over 30 years, much of which supports the position that adults learn more and learn faster when they are able to develop skills within a context they recognize as beneficial, interesting, and relevant to their daily lives and goals. (Sticht 1997)

FCE is predicated on a number of assumptions:

- Adult learners bring previous knowledge and interests to learning.

- Adult learners have a reason for returning to the learning environment.

- Adult learning is often pursued under time constraints.

- Adults learn best when learning is tied to goals.

Literacy transfer

The question of how and when learning is transferred from one situation to another is at the heart of many investigations into learning. Learning transfer research challenges the assumption that learning within one topic or for one purpose is made available by the brain, or "transferred" to any number of other topics or purposes. Taylor defines the occurrence of learning transfer as "when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials." (Taylor 1997, 1) Rather than assume all learning is transferred from one context to another, literacy practitioners must consider how, or indeed whether, learning is transferred, and develop strategies within the classroom to optimize transfer.

Transfer focuses on how skills are applied rather than on their simple possession. FCE stemmed in large part from the wish to improve learners' abilities to transfer new learning from one context to another. Sticht found that transfer strategies were not well-developed in low-literate adults. In trying to raise skills levels over a short period of time, Sticht depended on a limited context to increase the likelihood

Functional Context Education (FCE):

- Attempts to reduce barriers between what is learned in the classroom and what is practised outside the classroom

- Limits the scope of programming but increases the depth of knowledge and skills within the defined scope

learners could demonstrate the learning that had occurred. Supporters of FCE argue literacy transfer is more successful using this approach for two reasons. First, the literacy skills developed in the classroom are precisely those the learner will need beyond the classroom. Second, through their literacy program, learners will have built content knowledge through exposure to documentation and scenarios they are likely to encounter beyond the classroom.

Content knowledge and skills development

"...all human intellectual activities, such as thinking, communicating, problem solving, and learning, require both processes and content (knowledge). This implies that attempting to raise people's cognitive abilities to high levels simply by improving processes such as "reading," "writing," "critical thinking" is nearly futile.

To perform these processes well requires high levels of content knowledge on which the processes can operate."

(Sticht 1997, 2)

Contemporary learning theories support the notion learning is more than the accumulation of sequential skills. Learning involves complex processes whereby learners increase content knowledge alongside skills at the same time as they develop cognitive and metacognitive strategies. (Gillespie 2002, 1.) And as we have seen above, much of learning is knowing how and when to apply skills. We begin with a context, but as we grow and develop as learners, we learn to apply our skills outside the original context.

Literate practices play a significant role in how we learn about our world. On a mechanical level, reading allows us to decode printed information, but it also serves as a gateway to further knowledge. The relationship between reading and knowledge is both sophisticated and subtle. We build meaning, make connections, and gain a broader understanding of the world as we learn, and we learn as we read.

Reading comprehension is based on two abilities: the ability to decode text, and the ability to derive meaning from the text. This latter ability stems in part from connections readers are able to make between what they are reading about and what they already know. If one of the two elements (decoding or background knowledge) is weak, readers rely on the other to compensate. Expressed in a positive light, readers are able to read well beyond their skills level when the text is something they know about. Conversely, readers are at a significant disadvantage when they must contend with both weak decoding and lack of background knowledge.

General or academic programming is predicated on the assumption that learning is neutral and transferable – that the act of acquiring skills will enable the learner to use the skills for a variety of purposes and within a variety of contexts. Research conducted over the last decades has revealed the faultiness of these assumptions and has instead looked to methods of developing skills while acknowledging that content knowledge and strategy development must occur concurrently.

The relationship between content knowledge and skills development cannot be overemphasized, and has significant implications for the

way adult literacy is practised. Sticht and others contend adult literacy should aggressively seek to increase both knowledge and skills if learners are to come away from literacy programs able to use their skills with the greatest efficacy.

Building reading skills through content knowledge

As an example of the interplay between content knowledge and skills acquisition, consider how children learn. Children's reading and writing activities are heavily infused with instructional content. They learn about historical events as they read history texts. Their knowledge of geography is enhanced by using atlases and maps. Children's skills continue to develop as their content knowledge base broadens across a wide variety of topic areas. In fact, we generally acknowledge it takes more than ten years of schooling for the average child to demonstrate functional literacy skills.

Now consider the situation of adult literacy learners. The average adult literacy learner may be able to devote six to twelve months towards upgrading their skills. And while those may be the initial plans, life circumstances and changing priorities often result in considerably less time dedicated to literacy. Given these short timelines, practitioners must consider how they can provide a meaningful educational experience, given the broad skills gap that often exists between learners' skills at program start and those required for functional literacy.

Building workforce education programs

In *Built To Last*, author Julie Strawn (Martinson and Strawn 2002, 3) identifies six key elements to building a strong workforce education program. She recommends program staff:

- Provide an employment context
- Offer intensive services
- Closely monitor participation
- Make strong linkages to job search
- Emphasize job quality
- Emphasize training options, especially for those with low skills

Strawn's research, based on tracking of participants over time, concludes that basic education programs alone are not effective in assisting welfare-to-work participants attain and retain jobs. She and others in the US argue for the value of offering both vocational training and post-secondary education to improve job quality for welfare recipients. For those learners unlikely to achieve post-secondary diplomas in the timelines given, success is tied to learners'

By embedding literacy learning within the context of job training, adults will more rapidly progress from literacy to job training to work. But to become broadly literate, adults will have to engage in wide-ranging reading for some years.

(Sticht 1997)

"The disappointing results of past skill-building programs may be due to an over-reliance on basic education as an end in itself, rather than to ineffectiveness of skill-building in general as a strategy."

(Strawn 1999, 5)

exposure to basic education only when the learning is closely tied to further skills training. (Martinson and Strawn 2002, 13)

Several success stories from US workforce preparation programs bear examination for common design elements. In particular, programs in Portland, San Diego, Brooklyn, and Ohio demonstrated significant success in assisting (often long-term) welfare recipients find employment with sustainable wages and some level of job security. The Portland Steps to Success Program showed high rates of success with its participants. The program placed strong emphasis on finding "good" jobs, included in-depth assessment for all participants, and offered basic skills and General Education Development (GED) preparation, vocational training, volunteer work experience, and on-the-job training programs. (Strawn 1999, 7)

"Learning is facilitated through the design of classroom activities that guide students to work collaboratively with others, set their own sequences and pace of work, actively engage in problem-solving, critical thinking and negotiation."

(Brown no date, 9)

Overall, shorter-term interventions demonstrated more success than longer-term programming, and programs that tailored themselves to participants' skill levels were more effective than those that offered the same programming to all participants. Strawn (1999, 16) concludes, "the welfare-to-work programs that have been most successful in helping participants work more and earn more over the long run included substantial access to education and training, together with employment services."

Although it may not be practical or possible in some regions, researchers do stress that participants not stay in programs for long periods (often less than eight months), but rather that students benefit from a variety of programs that meet their needs. Linkages should be forged between individual programs to foster a sense of progression and success for participants. Thus, rather than a scenario where one program attempts to address participants' needs from low-level literacy to post-secondary preparation or GED, the community strives to develop connections across programs which develop expertise in a particular area.

In cases where an individual is unlikely to attain post-secondary or high school certification, the goal path should include job search or job development programs, rather than links to further academic upgrading. (Strawn 1999, 18) Exceptions to this model are programs such as Portland's Steps to Success, where many different programs are housed under the same roof. Because it offers such a range of programming, learners don't need to fit into any predetermined goal niche.

Using a contextualized workforce education approach can mean transforming the classroom into an environment that has some of the features of the workplace. Integration of academic content and employment skills allows learners to acquire skills as they are used in

goal-related contexts. Beane (1998 [cited in Brown no date, 34.]) catalogues the following as features of integrated curriculum:

- Problems and issues of personal and social significance guide curriculum

- Learning experiences are designed to integrate knowledge in the context of its use

- Knowledge is developed and used to address relevant issues

- Learning activities involve the application of knowledge in real-life settings where students can experience problem solving and the intricacies of social interaction.

The learning environment can (and should) mirror the environment in which skills will have to be applied. Workplaces demand employees who can think, solve problems, negotiate, make decisions, analyze situations, and communicate effectively. For literacy practitioners, the question becomes how to construct an environment where the same demands are made of learners.

Part 3

Workforce initiatives from the field

The **Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre** in Cochrane, Ontario has been providing employment-focused Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programming for a number of years. To Denise Tremblay and her staff, it seems common sense to focus on the skills and language learners are going to be confronted with, whether on the job or in the training that will lead to the job. Staff members link with local employers to source authentic materials, and maintain contacts throughout the region with other support agencies, educational institutions, and intermediaries to ensure learners receive current and practical assistance towards their employment goals.

> Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre
> Cochrane, Ontario
>
> LBS activity:
> ☑ Assessment
> ☑ Training
>
> Program features:
>
> - Focus on short-term employment goals, linking literacy skills to job requirements
> - Relationship building in community with employers, and education and service providers
> - Emphasis on goal setting as a longer-term process

Over the last few years, Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre has seen some significant shifts in its client base. The average age of learners is younger, and most have little recent work experience. Upwards of 40 percent of clients enrolled in the last year are already employed, but recognize the need to upgrade specific skills in order to perform on the job. Almost all learners attend the program with the goal of applying their skills to the workplace.

When a learner attends the program for the first time, staff spends a considerable amount of time assessing the learner's needs and determining the most appropriate referral, whether to literacy or to another community resource. Denise Tremblay, who manages the program, says it is not unusual, after assessing the client and

presenting him or her with options, to find out literacy isn't the client's preferred next step.

Goal setting

Those learners who do attend the LBS program at Iroquois Falls receive considerable support with the goal-setting process, both initially and on an ongoing basis. Staff provides as much information as possible about learners' employment choices, using resources such as the *Goals Requirement Handbook* to help give an accurate picture of what the learner will need to do to achieve his or her goal. In many cases, the learner will recognize that the initial goal is not attainable in the short- or even mid-term, and staff will then assist in developing a more realistic short-term goal. For example, learners who begin the program at Level 1 or 2 but whose goal requires a high school diploma are often ready to reassess their goal once they realize how long the original goal will take to achieve. Staff then work with the learner to develop a training plan that includes specific literacy, numeracy, and computer skills that will be required on the job.

The purpose of spending all this time up front with learners is to ensure their literacy skills development is part of a larger strategy to become employed or trained. Denise describes the program design approach: "We found it was hard for learners to stay motivated when goals were too far in the future. Now we don't give learners anything they don't need, which keeps them focused." Most learners leave with a clear sense of their next steps towards employment.

Denise is clear that there are challenges in this type of programming, the most significant of which is the time required to create materials appropriate for individual learners' goals. Time spent talking to employers, collecting materials, and maintaining relationships with other service providers is time that doesn't fall under "instruction". Nevertheless, this LBS agency sees it as an indispensable part of providing meaningful literacy programming to learners with employment goals.

Fanshawe College in London, Ontario offers two integrated LBS/employment skills training programs: one for those seeking customer service positions in call centres, the other for individuals interested in preparing for entry-level employment in community health care or for certification as personal support workers.

> Fanshawe College
> London, Ontario
>
> LBS activity:
> ☑ Training
>
> Program features:
>
> • Integrated program models include literacy, employability, and employment skills
> • Program design based on local labour market analysis

Sandra Hennessey, who coordinates the programs, finds the approach to workforce literacy that works best is one where employment skills are integrated into the programming. By designing programs this way, Sandra feels participants have a context within which to build skills. She also feels the relatively short program length (between six and eight weeks) keeps people focused. Sandra explains, "The finite program length holds participants' interest. Everything is geared to the job they are interested in, and they know why they're learning what they're learning."

> **Program length**

While there are many indications within the city of London that there is a healthy supply of positions in call centres and in personal support work, college staff wanted first to determine the feasibility of a training program aimed at those two job markets. Interviewing employers ensured both the relevance of program content and employers' interest in individuals completing the program. Staff conducted labour market research to determine salary ranges, availability of employment, and job requirements, as well as opportunities for advancement and further training. One of the primary considerations before setting up the programs was whether the pay range was suitable for long-term sustainable employment.

Although a substantial number of participants are referred through Ontario Works (OW), there is no requirement that participants be in receipt of welfare, Employment Insurance, or any other form of income assistance. To be accepted into either program, participants' assessment results must indicate their skills fall between LBS Level 3 and Level 5, using a screening assessment developed through Fanshawe. Program content contains communication, math, and computer skills (call centre program only), with the culminating demonstrations for each program created to mirror authentic work tasks at a Level 5. Program content also includes modules on employability skills as they relate to the two kinds of employment.

> **Authentic assessment**

Both programs are the result of community partnerships. The Personal Support Worker Preparation program is an initiative of both Fanshawe and WIL Counselling for Training and Employment, while the possibility of a call centre program was initially identified through the London and Middlesex Market Planning Council.

In 2000, **St. Clair College** in Windsor, Ontario entered into a partnership with OW because both recognized a need to better serve clients who were caught in a cycle of short-term low-paid employment. As a result of this partnership, St. Clair College was designated the LBS provider of orientation sessions to potential LBS learners in the Windsor-Essex area of Ontario. Individuals within OW are scheduled to attend the session if results of their literacy testing indicate a need for upgrading. While upgrading is not mandatory, caseworkers often strongly encourage their clients to attend the one-hour workshop to learn more about upgrading, education, and training options in the region.

St. Clair College
Windsor, Ontario

LBS activity:
☑ Information and referral

Program features:

• Single point of entry for learner
• Emphasis on links between educational requirements and employment
• Orientation workshop includes goal setting with a focus on short- and long-term educational goals

Debbie Crew, one of the sessions' facilitators, describes "typical" participants as having been out of school between three and five years, and having left without obtaining a high school diploma. Work history is often comprised of short periods of employment (often through temporary agencies) followed by periods of unemployment. Upgrading and skills development are seen as key interventions to assist individuals in achieving stable higher wage employment.

Initially, the orientation was designed primarily to provide information on the range of education and training opportunities within the region. However, facilitators also recognized the need to address participants' very real anxieties as they confronted the possibility of returning to the classroom. The facilitators are aware that, for many participants, education wasn't a positive experience the first time, and they are reluctant to return. Debbie describes the process: "We deal with the fear issue by giving participants lots of options. We want to empower them, and have people walk away from the session with options and good information."

Information and referral

During the session, the facilitator describes the wide range of educational opportunities offered in the region, stressing the flexibility of scheduling and the adult approach to learning taken by LBS, credit, and training institutions. Facilitators spend time both in the larger group and one-on-one asking about participants' backgrounds in education and work, and about goals for the future, to help participants explore next steps. From there, the process is one of trying to encourage those who are interested to make that next crucial step – to show up and register for a course of study, and to do it as quickly as possible.

St. Clair College staff use the same person who facilitates the session to register new clients who decide to attend college as a result of the orientation. They find that a single contact person reduces participants' fears and streamlines the registration process for everyone involved.

The **Wellington County Learning Centre (WCLC)** in Arthur, Ontario has paired up with a local agency that assists individuals within the community who have mental health issues. Agency staff identified re-employment as a very high priority for clients, and recognized the benefit of working with a local literacy agency to develop workforce skills.

> Wellington County Learning Centre
> Arthur, Ontario
>
> LBS activity:
> ☑ Information and referral
> ☑ Training
>
> Program features:
>
> - Relationship building with community agencies and employers
> - Integrated workforce literacy program based on local needs

The Workforce Literacy Project, which began in early 2003:

- Prepares adults who are entering or re-entering the workforce

- Improves reading, writing, numeracy, and problem-solving skills that entry-level workers are expected to use at their place of employment

- Builds awareness of the importance of interpersonal skills in getting and maintaining a job

Elizabeth Debergh, Executive Director of the WCLC, sees relationship building as key to both identifying needs within the community and then addressing those needs. She is currently working closely with Rural Peer Support (RPS) and Community Employment Services to

Information and referral

start a class that will focus on workforce preparation skills. The literacy class will operate a half day per week, while RPS will offer a separate class to address personal development issues to the same learner group. RPS will help with learner recruitment to get the class up and running.

Elizabeth has also made contacts with a local manufacturing plant whose workforce includes individuals with literacy and ESL needs. While the employer is not currently able to offer on-site workplace education, Elizabeth hopes that by having WCLC offer an upgrading program geared to employment at a time when shift workers can attend, the employer will encourage employees to enrol.

The **Referral Centre for Adult Training (RCAT)** in Hawkesbury, Ontario has been set up to assist adults with upgrading and retraining, and to reduce the drop out rate of clients once they are enrolled in programs.

The Centre grew out of a response in the mid-1990s to the dwindling numbers of literacy learners attending programs and the perception that inadequate or inappropriate referrals were being made within the community to literacy, credit, and skills training providers. To reduce competition among agencies and to increase the quality of referrals, RCAT was opened in 1997 as a one-stop assessment and referral centre.[15]

Referral Centre for Adult Training Hawkesbury, Ontario
LBS activity: ☑ Information and referral
Program features:
• One-stop assessment and referral model
• Able to customize literacy and credit or job skills training depending on learner needs

In addition, RCAT determined that literacy skills could be offered as part of an integrated training plan. Sylvain Lapointe, a consultant to RCAT, explains, "The strength of the model is that we can build an integrated program. If a client wants a high school diploma, but has low-level literacy skills, we can build a program that has a literacy course in the morning, and credit courses in the afternoon. We have

Integrated training

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[15] The one-stop model found across the US, although substantially larger in scope than RCAT, is predicated on the same idea – that using a neutral third party to conduct assessment and referral increases the likelihood clients will be referred to programs based on their expressed needs. Once assessed, client's needs are matched to an education or training provider. This systematic approach is in contrast to current practice in most Ontario communities, where participants enter programs because it is the first provider they approached.

built partnerships with all the education providers, including the colleges, that make this possible."

Both OW and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) send clients who wish to upgrade their education or attend a training program through RCAT. However, anyone within the community can take advantage of RCAT's services. Besides the literacy assessment, RCAT assists in the development of an individual training plan, which then follows the client when he or she is referred out of the centre.

RCAT maintains a database that records clients' information pertinent to the referral process, as well as information on clients' interests. The latter can be used either to initiate new programming if the database shows sufficient numbers of people interested in a particular type of program, or it can be used by a training provider to help determine who should be contacted about a program which they are planning to start.

Information and referral

As a way to combat the decreasing numbers of literacy students attending programs in the area, RCAT helped to create several job training courses geared to individuals with lower-level literacy skills, including landscaping, food preparation, and retail sales.

Organization for Literacy in Lambton, in Sarnia, Ontario is a community-based one-to-one tutoring program using volunteer tutors. It provides literacy services to all of Lambton County in Southwestern Ontario.

Jean Doull, Executive Director of the organization, explains her reason for developing materials: "I am always looking for relevant Canadian literacy materials, and I find there isn't much available in the way of workforce literacy resources to meet our learners' needs."

> Organization for Literacy in Lambton
> Sarnia, Ontario
>
> LBS activity:
> ☑ Training
>
> Program features:
>
> • Workforce materials developed with the assistance of local employers
> • Programming needs based on labour market information

Through the assistance of a volunteer retired from a local industry, Organization for Literacy in Lambton has prepared their own workforce preparation materials to fill this gap. To date they have drafted four manuals, addressing:

Material and resources

- Employment at a donut shop

- Safe storage of foods

- Recipes

- Math with a trades focus

Each of the manuals uses authentic workplace materials as its base, often simplifying language and adding reading comprehension and math activities where appropriate. The manuals will be field tested by learners and tutors in the area before undergoing final revisions.

The **Welland, Ontario Campus of Niagara College** offers a pre-apprenticeship program for individuals interested in apprenticing as automotive service technicians (AST). While the existing college apprenticeship program requires a Grade 12 diploma, there is an effort underway to make some apprenticeship programs available for individuals who can demonstrate a Grade 12 equivalency of skills. This course is based on a learning outcomes approach that assists learners to achieve equivalency in the concepts and skills needed for entrance into the AST Apprenticeship Program and to further demonstrate, apply, and transfer learning relevant to their goals.

> Niagara College, Welland Campus
> Welland, Ontario
>
> LBS activity:
> ☑ Training
>
> Program features:
>
> - Pre-apprenticeship program links job skills with academic requirements for learners with less than Grade 12

Curriculum development

Branne Plitnikas, who developed the pre-apprenticeship curriculum, started by collecting materials that described the objectives and topics covered in the first year of the existing AST apprenticeship program. She describes the process as one of working backwards from those objectives and cataloguing the skills pre-apprenticeship students would need to learn in order to eventually meet the objectives laid out in the apprenticeship course of study. The curriculum was organized around four broad areas: math, communications, physics and chemistry, and computers. About half the materials used in the pre-apprenticeship program are workforce-related and were pulled both from students' career courses and the workplace. Curriculum strands were then cross-referenced with the LBS Levels 4 and 5, and with the college's Ontario Basic Skills Level 4.

Students interested in the program were assessed using a standardized test to ensure they began the program with sufficient skills to be successful, given its focused nature and relatively short duration (22 weeks). The AST pre-apprenticeship upgrading course is one part of the 40-week pre-apprenticeship program students must complete. Prior to the upgrading portion, students attend several job-specific certificate training courses, then take the 22-week upgrading course, followed by eight weeks in the regular apprenticeship stream first-year program, and finish with a co-op placement. Niagara College staff are very pleased with the results of the course, which was offered once in 2002 with 22 students completing the full program.

Three years ago when Barb Duguay became Program Manager at **Valley Adult Learning Association (VALA)**, she began by studying the LBS agency's learner statistics. What she saw was that more than 70 percent of learners identified employment as their goal. With one other literacy agency in town that offered programming towards academic upgrading and credit courses, Barb felt it made sense for VALA to identify its niche as employment-focused programming.

Valley Adult Learning Centre Fort Frances, Ontario LBS activity: ☑ Training Program features: • Literacy agency focuses exclusively on learners with employment goals • Program design includes job, literacy, and employability skills

Learner referrals to VALA come from OW, the Ontario Disabilities Support Program, and the HRSDC Employment Resource Centre located in the same building as VALA. Learners with academic goals who want to pursue high school credits or post-secondary training are referred to the local school board program.

VALA has recently initiated a workforce readiness program which, when fully operational, will include community placements for learners, as well as employment-specific skills for receptionists and customer service workers. VALA provides two opportunities for learners to practise employment-related skills. Students may work within a mock store to practise using a cash register, making change, and to develop customer service skills. Learners in the receptionist training program practise their skills two hours a week within the agency's office, where they photocopy, fax, answer the telephone, and perform other duties appropriate to their level. The program model also includes a weekly class on employability skills, which most learners are encouraged to attend.

Integrated training

Goal setting

The goal-setting process begins during initial assessment, followed by a lengthier goal-setting process (approximately three hours) that is carried into the classroom. VALA staff find learner employment goals change with time, often becoming more realistic given the individual's skill levels. As a result, staff revisit goals with clients periodically.

The focus on receptionist and customer service work was determined through speaking with learners and finding out the types of work they were interested in. Program length is based on individual needs, with successful completion of employment-specific demonstrations at LBS Levels 1, 2, and 3 required.

The **Owen Sound/North Grey Union Public Library LBS program** offers literacy and employability skills programming through the FOCUS program. A joint venture of OW, Job Connect, and MTCU LBS, FOCUS is offered through adult learning centres in Walkerton and Wiarton, Ontario and is targeted to OW clients with significant barriers to employment.

FOCUS Program
Owen Sound, Walkerton,
and Wiarton, Ontario

LBS activity:
☑ Training

Program features:

- Collaborative programming model
- Range of employment and employability skills addressed, with particular emphasis on job retention
- Based on best practice research and local labour market needs

In 2001, OW approached both Job Connect and the Adult Learning Centres (Wiarton, Port Elgin, and Walkerton), asking them to assist in the delivery of programming for clients considered hard to serve. Tim Nicholls, along with other LBS staff, researched best practices in reaching hard-to-serve clients, and decided upon a small group programming model. Program content addresses self-management and self-direction skills as much as it does the reading and writing skills typically associated with literacy programming. Two facilitators work interchangeably with the group, with one facilitator acting as support to learners and the other presenting information.

Employability skills

Clients attend the program for approximately four weeks, during which time they develop an action plan that includes self-assessment, goal setting, and next steps. For many participants, the challenge lies not in finding a job, but in keeping it. To address job retention, FOCUS encourages participants to better understand themselves, and their behaviours and attitudes, with a view to developing better communication skills and strategies for getting along with others on and off the job.

Staff from across the agencies stay in contact to discuss and determine the content and skills that need to be addressed in the group. Depending on the needs identified by staff and participants, staff from LBS, the local Job Connect, or the OW office will facilitate sessions. One strength of this model is it allows for customized interventions to address individual participant's needs. For example, if OW determines the individual would benefit from a community placement, it can be arranged while the participant is still in FOCUS. Another strength is that participants work with the same staff people across agencies, building familiarity and trust.

> Co-operative service delivery

Since the program's inception, FOCUS has served over 100 clients. Approximately 60 percent of clients found work upon program completion, and most of those clients were in the same job three months later. Program staff collect follow-up statistics on employment and job retention and use the data to inform program planning.

Literacy and Employment Training (LET) is an initiative of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board to combine literacy and employment skills in a six-month twelve hours per week classroom-based program. During the program, participants upgrade their literacy and employability skills and prepare a resumé and cover letter, which are sent out to prospective employers with the goal of securing a four-week job placement leading to employment.

Literacy and Employment Training
Hamilton, Ontario

LBS activity:
☑ Training

Program features:

- Integrated literacy and employment skills program
- Job placement component
- Job search skills

Participants are referred through the St. Charles Adult Learning Centre, where they are first assessed by a central assessor. Eligibility includes a minimum LBS Level 3 and a strong commitment to upgrading for the purposes of getting a job. Most participants to date have come to the program with little work experience, but with employment goals within their reach, given their background and literacy skills.

Program content includes literacy and numeracy skills developed in a contextualized way. Rose Pye, instructor of the program, describes her approach: "I try to address the broader scope of skills – I'm looking at the skills they need to survive in any workplace. But if an individual

has specific needs related to a particular job, I will look at those needs as well." The program operates on continuous intake, which Rose acknowledges is an additional (though necessary) challenge when trying to balance individual participants' needs.

Co-operative service delivery

In addition to reading, writing, and math skills, participants learn how to research the local labour market, health and safety training (including WHMIS – Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System), job search, resumé writing, and interview skills, and are provided with some basic computer orientation. Rose is able to tap into a sister program, offered through the school board, which provides interested LET participants with the opportunity to develop customer service skills or attain a CPR certificate.

When it comes time for participants to begin applying for jobs, Rose sends a letter to accompany their resumé and cover letter. The purpose of her letter is to describe the LET program and to seek the co-operation of the employer in providing both a volunteer job placement and feedback on the individual's skills as they relate to job requirements once in the placement. Rose then uses this feedback to assist in future planning in general, and, if necessary, to further develop the skills of the individual in question.

Rose supports learners as they begin the job search process, phoning local employers to see who is hiring. While no particular employer is targeted, Rose attempts to build relationships with employers whose job requirements match her learners' skills. For example, if the learner's goal is to be a cashier, she will contact supermarket chains and department stores. If an employer is interested in using the LET program to fill vacancies, Rose is open to their suggestions.

The LET program has experienced significant success. St. Charles is exploring the possibility of establishing a relationship with OW and Employment Insurance to secure job placements for learners receiving benefits from either funding source.

Learners at **People, Words & Change (PWC)** and Alternate Learning Styles and Outlooks, two LBS agencies in Ottawa, participate in a large volunteer service which operates the Lost & Found services for OC-Transpo, Ottawa's municipal transit authority. The two agencies are located in Heartwood House, a self-governing nonprofit organization currently comprised of fifteen member agencies who have come together to serve people in need of educational, emotional, and physical support.

People, Words & Change
Ottawa, Ontario

LBS activity:
☑ Training

Program features:

- Integrated literacy and employment skills program
- On-site volunteer placement component
- Co-located with other service-providing agencies
- Partnerships with local employers

In December 2001, Heartwood House entered into a partnership with OC-Transpo to become managers of OC-Transpo's Lost & Found program. The program provides substantial training opportunities for the clients of the various member group programs at Heartwood House.

Approximately twenty volunteers work each day to help OC-Transpo customers find their belongings. During the first year of operation, the department received 28,000 lost items and was able to return more than one third of the items to their owners.

As part of the development work to start the program, PWC staff worked with volunteers to develop plain language forms for use in the Lost & Found service. By working alongside volunteers, staff were also able to identify many of the skills needed to work in the Lost & Found. Among those skills are:

> Volunteer placements

- Answering phones (approximately 200 calls a day in English or French)

- Managing inventory

- Sorting and tagging items that come in each morning from dispatch

- Keeping careful records

- Keeping items neatly organized

- Searching for items by description and date

- Reception duties – greeting people who come to collect items

- Organizing twice-yearly sales of unclaimed items

Regular volunteers receive a free monthly bus pass. Kae McColl, LBS Coordinator at PWC, sees learners taking great pride in their work, with everyone feeling they are an important part of a team. She explains, "Participants use their literacy skills on a daily basis in a real situation. They greet the public, some of who are cranky and difficult, but most of who are very grateful to have their lost item back. It's a great learning opportunity, and they tell us they love it!"

Appendix

Name	Position/Agency	Network	Email/Phone	Program Type/Features
Sandra Hennessy	Fanshawe College LONDON, ON	Literacy Link South Central	519-659-9393 shennessy@fanshawec.on.ca	Call Centre/Personal Support Worker & Home Care Programs • Integrated program models include literacy, employability and employment skills • Program design based on local labour market analysis
Rose Pye	Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board HAMILTON, ON	Adult Basic Education Association Hamilton Wentworth	905-575-5202 rose_pye@hotmail.com	Literacy and Employment Training (LET) • Integrated literacy and employment skills program • Job placement component • Job search skills
Diane Dugas	RCAT/CAFA HAWKESBURY, ON	Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario	613-632-9664 cap@hawk.igs.net	Referral Centre for Adult Training (RCAT) • One-stop assessment and referral model • Able to customize literacy and credit or job skills training programming depending on learner needs
Tim Nicholls Harrison	Owen Sound Adult Literacy Centre WALKERTON & WIARTON, ON	QUILL	519-376-6628	FOCUS • Collaborative programming model • Range of employment and employability skills addressed, with particular emphasis on job retention • Based on best practice research and local labour market needs
Debbie Crew	St. Clair College WINDSOR, ON	Tri-County Literacy Network	dcrew@stclairc.on.ca	Orientation & Referral Workshops for Ontario Works clients • Single point of entry for learner • Emphasis on links between educational requirements and employment • Orientation workshop includes goal setting with a focus on short- and long-term educational goals

Name	Position/Agency	Network	Email/Phone	Program Type/Features
Elizabeth Debergh	Wellington County Learning Centre ARTHUR, ON	Project Read Literacy Network	519-848-3463	Workforce Literacy Initiatives • Relationship-building with community agencies and employers • Integrated workforce literacy program based on local needs
Jean Doull	Organization for Literacy in Lambton SARNIA, ON	Tri-County Literacy	519-332-4876 litstar@ebtech.net	Authentic Workforce Materials Development • Workforce materials developed with assistance of local employers • Programming needs based on labour market information
Denise Tremblay	Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre COCHRANE, ON	Literacy Network Northeast	705-272-4860 dtremb@puc.net	Community-Based Workforce Literacy • Focus on short-term employment goals, linking Literacy skills to job requirements • Relationship-building within community to employers, educational and service providers • Emphasis on goal-setting as longer-term process
Barb Duguay	Valley Adult Learning Association (VALA) FORT FRANCES, ON	Literacy Northwest	807-274-2000 vala@ff.lakeheadu.ca	Community-Based Workforce Literacy • Literacy agency focuses exclusively on learners with employment goals • Program design includes job, literacy and employability skills
Branne Plitnikas	Niagara College WELLAND, ON	Literacy Link Niagara	905-641-2252 x4173 bfplitnikas@niagarac.on.ca	Pre-Apprenticeship Program • Pre-apprenticehip program links job skills with academic requirements for learners with less than grade 12
Kae McColl	People Words & Change OTTAWA, ON	Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy	613-234-2494 pwc@bellnet.ca	Integrated literacy and employment skills program • On-site volunteer placement component • Co-located with other service-providing agencies • Partnerships with local employers

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