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Research in Progress

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

Essential Skills through Safety and Health

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) undertook a two-year national project to identify and promote innovative workplace initiatives that “embed” Literacy and Essential Skills training within companies’ occupational safety and health training programs. It developed a curriculum (*Learning a Culture of Safety*) for a ten-week program of one hour a week, with two workers from each of the 35 companies as pilot sites. The program included a qualitative research study in which twenty-nine recent immigrant workers whose first language was Mandarin, Punjabi or Tagalog (the three largest linguistic groups of immigrants to Canada) were interviewed in their mother tongue about health and safety in their home countries and in Canada. Most had been in Canada for fewer than three years and were in temporary employment. All were working in manufacturing or warehousing workplaces in the Greater Toronto area. Most had been professionals in their country of origin and had worked in offices rather than on the factory floor. An unpublished draft report, *Improving Health and Safety Training for Newcomers in Manufacturing Workplaces*, notes that workers often felt like outsiders in their workplaces due to their precarious work status and cultural differences. However, the effects of isolation could be mitigated by a strong workplace safety culture created through effective health and safety training that outlined workers’ rights to health and safety, and by prioritizing health and safety on a daily basis. Workers who felt they had received good training felt more confident and valued and ready to speak out on health and safety issues. The project also involved investigating the state of

Occupational Health and Safety training for First Nations and whether there were practices and materials that could be incorporated into the *Learning a Culture of Safety* curriculum.

An article on this project in the *Canadian HR Reporter* can be found at <http://www.essh.ca/download.php?id=162>. Further information on the project, and links to course materials, can be found at <http://www.essh.ca/en/>.

Keywords: Aboriginal peoples; Canada; Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME); Embedding; English as an Additional language (EAL); Immigrants; Occupational health and safety training; Qualitative research

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Conference Board of Canada Conducts Aboriginal Workers Survey

Aboriginal Workers: Integral to Canada's Ongoing Competitiveness and Performance (Feb. 1, 2012 press release) [http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/commentaries/12-02-01/Aboriginal Workers Integral to Canada s Ongoing Competitiveness and Performance.aspx](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/commentaries/12-02-01/Aboriginal%20Workers%20Integral%20to%20Canada's%20Ongoing%20Competitiveness%20and%20Performance.aspx)

The Conference Board of Canada is conducting a study to find out why Aboriginal workers have lower employment rates than the rest of the population. They are surveying employers to identify challenges they face to recruit and retain Métis, Inuit and First Nations workers. Employers from across Canada were invited to take part in an Internet survey in February 2012. Results will be available in May through the Conference Board of Canada website.

Keywords: Aboriginal peoples; Canada; Conference Board of Canada; Employers; Labour market outcomes; Surveys

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Reports and Articles

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. (2012). *Public Services for Ontarians: A Path to Sustainability and Excellence*. Retrieved March 23, 2012, from <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/reformcommission/>.

This report, also known as the “Drummond Report”, focuses on how to improve the cost effectiveness of Ontario public services to achieve significant cuts in public spending from now to 2018. The report addresses employment and training services in Chapter 7. Like the [Ontario Chamber of Commerce \(OCC\)](#) (see p. 5), the Commission calls for streamlining employment and training services and criticizes current program evaluation as too focused on “service indicators” (e.g., clients served, satisfaction) rather than outcomes. Unlike the OCC, the Commission does not call for an overall increase in funding for employment and training services. The report does not address adult education programs besides those related to employment. It calls for Ontario to take over federal responsibility for settlement and training programs to allow for a more effective integration of immigrants into the Ontario workforce.

Keywords: Funding; Immigrants; Labour market outcomes; Ontario; Policy

Conference Board of Canada. (2011). *Investing in Skills: Effective Work-Related Learning in SME's*. Retrieved March 2012 from <http://www.workplaceskills.ca/en/employers/effective-work-related-learning-in-smes.html>

This report gathers insights from studying work-related programs in 45 Canadian and international small and medium enterprises (SME's) identified as “effective” based on their having been awarded prizes or otherwise recognized by organizations such as The Canadian Awards for Training Excellence; Canada's Top 100 Employers and associated provincial/regional competitions; Best Employers for New Canadians; Council of the Federation Literacy Award; UK Skills' National Training Awards and associated regional competitions; The Australian Training Awards and associated state competitions; Training Magazine's “Training Top 125”; and Investors in People New Zealand Case Studies, among others. It is unclear what proportion of these programs is focused on literacy and essential skills. The report identifies common elements that facilitate effective sustained learning programs. These include: aligning learner needs with organizational goals, building flexibility into programs, and forging partnerships with organizations to support learning.

NOTE: A “companion report” of case studies from these 45 programs has been integrated into the Centre for Workplace Skills' Best Practice database, at <http://bestpractices.workplaceskills.ca/>. Click “Browse” and search by “Project” to read the case studies.

Keywords: Best practices; Canada; Case studies; Centre for Workplace Skills; Employers; Small and medium enterprises (SMEs); Workplace learning programs

Malcolm, Jaime (2012). *Essential Edge: Integrating Essential Skills into a Rural Labour Market – Pilot Project Evaluation Report*. Retrieved March 20, 2012, from http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/essential_edge/essential_edge.pdf

This study evaluated a two-year pilot project (February 2010 - January 2012) in British Columbia's rural southern interior which aimed to create a common understanding of the concept and resources of Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) among employed and unemployed workers, employers, employment service providers and adult educators. The project also set out to identify the skills gap faced by some workers and to increase their skill levels through individual training plans using LES materials. The project provided LES training to 43 individuals in employment and education services. Surveyed at the end of the project, 76% of the educators and 64% of the employment service providers reported either regular integration into their work or occasional use of LES tools and resources with learners, job seekers and workers.

Keywords: British Columbia; Literacy and Essential Skills; Pilot projects; Program evaluation; Project outcomes; Rural areas

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Murray, T. Scott, & Shillington, Richard (2011). *Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: A segmentation analysis*. Bow Valley College. Retrieved March 15, 2012, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/tsmurray/aboriginal_oles/aboriginal_oles.pdf

This report analyzes literacy data from recent surveys and Canada's labour markets to make the case for investing in upgrading the literacy and essential skills (LES) of Canada's aboriginal peoples. It provides estimates of literacy skill shortages in various occupations and the extent to which providing adult LES instruction to aboriginal peoples could improve their labour market performance and contribute to eliminating literacy skills shortages in the Canadian economy.

Keywords: Aboriginal peoples; Canada; Labour market outcomes; LES Skill shortages

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2011). *Building the Foundations: Outcomes from the Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Search Conference*. Retrieved March 2012 from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/2345.pdf>

A report on a conference hosted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on behalf of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in September 2010. The forum focused on three topics: Why are language, literacy and numeracy important? Who should be targeted by public programs? What is the best means of building language, literacy and numeracy skills? Attendees included representatives from government, research organizations, training organizations and LLN practitioners, and one representative from industry.

The report includes background papers (Chapters 1-6), and the main points of discussion (Chapter 7). The main points include a need to update policy and strategies and undertake research to inform these policy developments. Suggested areas of research include: longitudinal studies of learners from the start of programs through subsequent periods of employment; and investigation of why some workers do not take up training. The report emphasized that this research should be at least partly qualitative. It also suggested that publicly funded programs should target those with the lowest skill levels, that policy should promote intergenerational and family literacy programs, that current language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) activity in Australia should be “mapped”, and that longer-term outcomes of LLN programs should be measured using both pre- and post-assessment.

Keywords: Australia; Conferences; Policy

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Ontario Chamber of Commerce (2011). *Protecting Our Most Valuable Resource: The Business Case for Lifelong Learning and Job-based Training*. Retrieved March 15, 2012, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/ont_commerce/protecting_resource/protecting_resource.pdf

From a 2010 survey of Ontario employers, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) identifies gaps in the current workforce training system and argues for reforms: consolidating workforce training streams into one central fund for training services, and standardizing eligibility criteria for funding. The OCC finds that the current system focuses too much on workers with low skill levels. Standardized criteria would involve providing equal access to funding for training for high skill/high wage jobs. These criteria would be based on demand for skills improvements from employers and would use improved productivity as the key performance measure. The survey results show that while most Ontario employers invest in workplace training to some extent and see the value, constraints of time and money limit their support for such training. These constraints are particularly onerous on small businesses – due to weaker economies of scale, training costs are much higher. The OCC suggests that this example of “market failure” is a good case for government intervention. The report calls for transferring responsibility for program administration and delivery to regional, multi-stakeholder training hubs. It also recommends developing a growth and innovation fund to encourage companies (particularly SMEs) to adopt new information and communication technologies as a means to enhance skills and boost business performance.

Keywords: Employers; Funding; Ontario; Policy; Small and medium enterprises (SMEs); Workplace learning programs

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Labour Education Centre. (2011). *Union Learning Representatives and Workplace Learning*. Centre for Workplace Skills. Retrieved March 2012 from <http://www.workplaceskills.ca/en/workers/union-learning-representatives-and-workplace-learning.html>

This report looks at how union learning representatives could help to develop cultures of continuous learning, drawing on profiles of their use in England, Scotland and New Zealand and on a profile of union education in Quebec. These examples show both the possible benefits of union learning representatives and the factors required for them to be effective, such as government support and employer cooperation.

Keywords: Canada; England; Quebec; Scotland; United Kingdom; Union education; Union learning representatives

Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) (2011). *Menial No More: A Discussion Paper on Advancing our Workforce through Digital Skills*. Retrieved March 15, 2012, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/olc/menial_no_more/menial_no_more.pdf

This report explores the implications of one major finding from the OLC's recent workplace literacy and essential skills (WLES) demonstration projects implemented in fifteen workplaces across Ontario. They found that due to emerging technology, pressures to increase productivity, and legislative changes to health and safety standards, low-status, low-paying jobs which were assumed to be low-skilled now require increasing levels of literacy and other essential skills, particularly digital skills. The report presents a number of case studies that demonstrate this trend, looks at how jurisdictions in the US and UK are trying to ensure that workers will have the required skills, and makes some recommendations for Ontario.

Keywords: Digital skills; Low-paid work; Ontario; Pilot projects; United Kingdom; United States;

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Adult Literacy

Zacharakis, Jeff; Steichen, Marie; Diaz de Sabates, Gabriela; Glass, Dianne. (2011). Understanding the Experiences of Adult Learners: Content Analysis of Focus Group Data. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, v5 n2 p84-95 Sum 2011.

This American qualitative research study examines the experiences of adult learners in adult education centers in the United States. The researchers wanted to discover why learners attended classes, what elements of the program learners believed promoted success, barriers to learner participation and success, and possible program improvements. The researchers conducted eight focus groups with 104 adult education students from 25 adult learning centers. Five groups were made up of English-speaking ABE students; learners in the three ESL groups spoke Spanish. They used an iterative content analysis method, Strategic Analysis of Representations Approach (SARA), to identify common themes in the responses of participants. These themes include: participants' desire for more power/agency in their lives, the factors that get in the way of personal empowerment, the barriers to returning to school, the strengths and problems of the program and the self-perception of the learners. The research showed that learners have aspirations but often have fragile self-confidence and have had their education disrupted by life events. ABE and ESL programs can help learners reinforce their tenacity and overcome obstacles with passionate, inspiring teachers, friendships and support networks. Student – teacher relationships are particularly crucial. Students felt empowered by their successes. The researchers note that their research was limited by the fact that learners were invited by teachers or center directors to participate in the study, so the study only included more persistent learners.

Keywords: Adult education; Adult basic education (ABE); Content analysis; English as an additional language (EAL); Focus groups; Learner participation; Qualitative research; Strategic Analysis of Representations Approach (SARA); United States

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English as an additional language (EAL)

Hammond, Karen, & Holmes, Tara (2011). *Comparative Analysis of CLB Benchmarking Methods*. Retrieved March 15, 2012, from <http://www.hammondassociatesinc.com/pdfs/Benchmarking-Methods.pdf>

This report does a comparative analysis of Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) referenced occupational benchmarking* methods used to benchmark occupations and occupational training programs in Canada. The researchers conducted an environmental scan of Canadian benchmarking projects, reviewing 17 initiatives between 1999 and 2010 that resulted in benchmarking 76 occupations, trades and professions and 92 college programs. Since the interviewees expressed the feeling that they work in isolation with little opportunity to talk to and learn from others, the report recommends that a practitioner's forum be held to break their isolation and allow them to learn from others, that means be created for sharing information, and that efforts be made to identify "best practices" in benchmarking. Practitioners identified a core set of skills or expertise that anyone doing benchmarking research should

have; the report therefore recommends ongoing, widely accessible training programs that provide an overview of different approaches. Recommendations are also made for further research.

*Language benchmarking is a form of research to identify language requirements in a given occupation.

Keywords: Benchmarking; Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB); English as an additional language (EAL); Environmental scans

Family Literacy

Larrotta, Clarena; Yamamura, Erica K. (2011). A Community Cultural Wealth Approach to Latina/Latino Parent Involvement: The Promise of Family Literacy. *Adult Basic Education & Literacy Journal*, Vol. 5 Issue 2, p.74.

This article examines parents' participation in a family literacy project, focusing on ten Latina mothers in Texas. The project was intended to involve parents in their children's literacy learning, and took place for two hours each week over twelve weeks in the spring of 2007. The mothers were among 32 parents enrolled in the program, in which parents attended classes where they read culturally relevant texts while practicing reading comprehension strategies and working with their children and other children doing their own reading program. The researchers wanted to find out what types of community cultural wealth (CCW) participants develop as a result of their interactions and family literacy practices. Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is a concept that denotes the cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts of socially marginalized groups (Yosso, 2005, <http://www.cgu.edu/pdf/files/ses/teip/tara%20j.%20yosso%20culturalwealth.pdf>). Types of CCW tracked in the study include: aspirational capital (to aspire to success, to stay focused on one's goals and remain resilient in the face of obstacles); and familial and social capital (the knowledge and understanding that resides in relationships with family and friends). Data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, field notes, and parents' reflective journals. The researchers found that parents' aspirational, familial and social capital were strengthened by their experience of the program.

Keywords: Community cultural wealth (CCW); Elementary education; Social capital; Texas; United States

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Keywords

Adult education
Benchmarking
Best practices
Case studies
Community cultural wealth (CCW);
Conferences
Content analysis
Digital skills
Elementary education
Employers
English as an additional language (EAL)
Environmental scans
Focus groups
Funding
Immigrants
Labour market outcomes
Learner participation
Low-paid work
Pilot projects
Policy
Project outcomes
Qualitative research
Rural areas
Skill shortages
Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
Social capital
Union education
Union learning representatives
Workplace learning programs

British Columbia
Centre for Workplace Skills
Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)
England
Ontario
Quebec
Scotland
Strategic Analysis of Representations Approach (SARA)
Texas

Name keywords:

Australia