

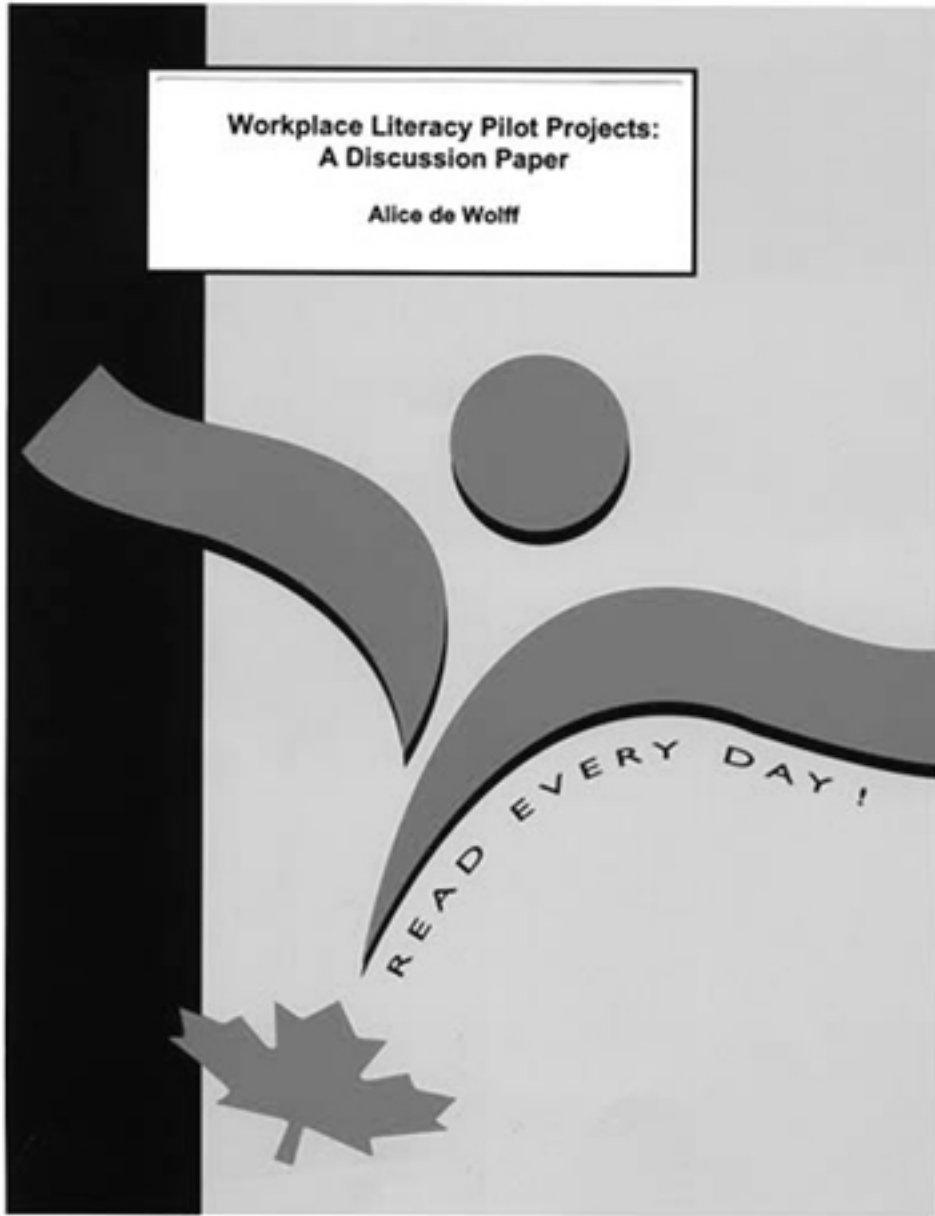


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## Workplace Literacy Pilot Projects: A Discussion Paper

Alice de Wolff



National  
Literacy  
Secretariat



Le Secrétariat  
national de  
l'alphabétisation

Canada



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## SUMMARY

This paper is based on a review of the National Literacy Secretariat's (NLS)'s experience with workplace pilot projects. It examines the Secretariat's experience with innovations in workplace learning activities and organizational change strategies, and with the changes required which might better enable workplaces to become "learning organizations". It is intended to contribute to on-going efforts to ensure that workplace literacy activities make important contributions to transformations in the lives of individuals, their communities and their workplaces.

The broad observations of the review are that:

- ◇ Pilot projects have been of considerable value, particularly to umbrella organizations, particularly in the early stages of program development, and in situations where there is no other immediately available source of funding for new learning activities
- ◇ Pilots have introduced literacy into a range of new industries and workplaces. Umbrella organizations have recognized the need for literacy education in their industry or sector and developed programs which encourage and support member workplaces to do the same. However, to date these efforts have created the foundation for on-going programs only in a small number of workplaces.
- ◇ Pilot projects tend to have three fields of activity:
  - learning activities
  - short term organizational change strategies
  - long term structural workplace change
- ◇ The learning activities in most pilots have tended to be predictable rather than innovative, particularly in circumstances where the pilot needs to demonstrate that workplace literacy creates an advantage for the employer.
- ◇ Short-term organizational change strategies have generally not been recognized as a discrete or important component of pilots, and need further development.
- ◇ The kinds of organizational changes needed to support on-going programs tend not to be anticipated in sufficient detail during most pilots. The scope of workplace organizational change actually accomplished tends to be modest.

The review's observations lead to recommendations about changes in the kind of support the Secretariat might provide to organizations which want to develop strengthened and innovative programs. These recommendations are detailed in Section F; they are, in summary:

- i) NLS should fund more innovative workplace learning activities.
- ii) Time and financial resources for pilots should be extended to support more effective organizational change activities.
- iii) NLS grants should include some agreement with all parties that indicates their commitment to literacy related organizational changes.
- iv) Professional development resources should be made available to those involved in pilots in order to familiarize themselves with the concerns and expertise of other parties, and to assist with further research and writing about the work.
- v) The NLS should support a country-wide discussion about workplace organizational change strategies and the capacity of Canadian workplaces to learn.
- vi) Federal and provincial governments need to review policies for funding adult literacy, particularly those that assume employers will fund programs.
- vii) The NLS needs to clarify its objectives for supporting pilot projects, confirming whether or not through its support the Secretariat intends to encourage innovations, open up new or hard to reach sectors or regions, and/or reach new or excluded groups of workers.
- viii) The NLS and the workplace literacy community should explore the question of whether it or some other organization should house the overview of what we know and don't know about Canadian workplace literacy.

# National Literacy Secretariat

## Workplace Literacy Pilot Projects: A Discussion Paper

### A. Introduction

The purpose of this discussion paper is to examine the effectiveness of pilot projects as a strategy to increase the number and quality of workplace literacy programs in Canada. It is addressed to policy makers in the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), and to practitioners, administrators and organizers who are planning, or are in the midst of a pilot project. It is intended to contribute to on-going efforts to ensure that workplace literacy activities make important contributions to transformations in the lives of individuals, their communities and their workplaces.

The paper was researched by reviewing NLS materials which describe the Secretariat's policies, procedures and pilot projects, and through interviews with key organizations and individuals. (See Appendix A). Those interviewed contributed both to the initial observations and commented on a first draft of the paper. The analysis and observations here are not reflections on individual programs. The paper is, rather, an attempt to think through the broad implications of current practices and to provide the basis for strengthening those practices.

### Current practice

The NLS supports the development of high quality workplace programs and the introduction of programs in new workplaces and sectors. Pilot projects are recognized by the program as one of several possible strategies to accomplish these goals. Between 1995-96 and 1997-98 the NLS business/labour stream funded a total of 79 organizations, 12 of which conducted approximately 40 pilot projects across the country. The organizations that have conducted NLS funded pilots are mostly umbrella organizations such as industrial sector training councils, regional training and economic development organizations, employer associations and unions.

The NLS does not have a specific definition of, or category for funding for pilot projects. The use of pilots has developed in response to project holders who have said that they need to demonstrate the effectiveness of an actual program in order to introduce or strengthen workplace literacy in their sector, region or organization. When this has happened, the

Secretariat has requested that the project holders present a certain amount of research to back claims that pilots are an appropriate strategy.

Because the NLS does not directly fund workplace training, the only occasion where the Secretariat provides resources specifically for teaching and learning activities in a workplace is when a project is considered a “pilot”. The NLS tends to use the term “pilot” only for those projects which are organized around a learning activity.<sup>1</sup> Consequently this paper focuses on a very specific kind of activity: i.e. projects which include teaching and learning activities in a workplace which are used as a strategy to develop further programs.

The broad picture that emerged during the review is that pilot project holders have operated successful workplace learning activities, but only a small number of pilots have opened up a path for further programs in the way that the project holders had anticipated.

## Different Contexts, Different Pilots

Workplace pilot projects have taken place in significantly different contexts across the country. Government policy and legislation, as well as industry standards and ratings significantly influence the goals of pilot activities, the ease with which they are followed up and the strategies needed to secure support beyond the pilot phase.

### Funding and Government Policies

Provincial governments have developed a range of different policies on the funding of ongoing literacy programs. These affect the focus and goals of developmental “pilots”. On one end of the spectrum, Nova Scotia funds workplace literacy as part of the province’s responsibility for public education, where the workplace is one among many delivery sites. Other provinces like Ontario and Alberta take the position that government funding for workplace literacy would be an inappropriate subsidy to employers. Quebec takes the position that training is in part the responsibility of employers, and has introduced a training tax which is administered by the province.

Each of these policies embodies two assumptions: i) that workplace literacy programs create an advantage, or benefit for both workers and employers; and ii) that employers (and occasionally unions) should pay for the benefits to them by funding programs in their own workplaces. Provincial policy varies about how long employers have to understand their funding responsibilities. In some provinces employers are expected to provide most of the funding for any program, regardless of whether a pilot has been run in their sector

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<sup>1</sup> The term “learning activities” captures a broad range of activities that take place in a classroom, one on one tutoring, individual study and/or distance learning. Learning activities take place in the context of a “learning relationship” between participants and instructors, tutors and/or mentors.



or workplace (in Ontario and Alberta for example). In other provinces (such as Nova Scotia) employers have two or three years to make this decision. Consequently those involved in pilot projects must engage, sooner in most cases than later, with demonstrating that there is sufficient workplace value in their program so that employers are prepared to provide funding.

Employers have not been easy to convince of the assumption that underlines most current government policy – that they should pay for the workplace advantage that results from successful workplace literacy programs. Employers tend to be prepared to try a program or pilot if there is outside funding to do it, and if they have sufficient control over the use of the funding. The next phase, of transferring to even partial employer funding, is often difficult. Other workplace partners, like unions, tend not to pick up full responsibility for funding in part because they recognize that while their members receive an advantage, employers also benefit and should be responsible for costs. NLS pilot projects are directly engaged with this set of issues. **In most pilots, demonstrating benefits to the employer becomes the primary purpose, at least towards the end of the exercise.**

Demonstrating the benefits of literacy programs to workers and to the workplace can be a controversial and complex undertaking. In situations where there are no other external sources of funding for the permanent phase of the program, the focus on this work takes over earlier.

This tends to mean that in jurisdictions where there are no sources of government funding for on-going programs, pilots need to demonstrate benefits quickly. Consequently the learning activities themselves are likely to be as predictable as possible, and not experimental. In other jurisdictions where there is some funding for on-going programs, pilots do not need to invest as many resources in demonstrating workplace benefit and can focus more attention on innovations which could improve the quality of the learning activity itself.

### **Legislation and Standards Can Change the Focus of Pilots**

On-going commitment to a program by all parties involved appears to be more likely in situations where there is some additional, external rationale for the training. This is the case, for instance, for some workplaces in industries (e.g. tourism) which have developed and adopted occupational standards and company rating systems. These systems lay out the connections between foundation skills and an external recognition of company performance, and remove the necessity to demonstrate those components in pilots, or in on-going projects.

Some companies or industries operate with specific (legislated) agreements with a province about the composition of their workforce. Several northern mines, for instance, are required to hire a proportion of local or aboriginal people and to ensure their representation throughout the company operations. In situations where these groups do not speak English or French as their first language and where they have not had access to a quality education, foundation skills are a necessary part of workplace training and any internal company process of career development.

These agreements and standards systems can elicit a range of workplace reactions, from willing action that represents the spirit of the agreement to barely minimal compliance. They can, however, provide a context for pilots where the focus on demonstrating workplace benefit does not need to completely dominate, and where projects have more ability to experiment with and find the right mix of workplace support structures, providers and courses.

## B. Pilots and Transformation - Individual Learning and Organizational Change

Let us step back a moment from NLS projects and to look more generically at the kinds of pilots that are possible. Two broad definitions of “pilot” projects appear to be common in the literacy community as well as in other sectors. They represent two different (and at times complementary) ideas about how change takes place.

One way of thinking about pilot projects is as a “method of gaining additional information”. That is, they are a research strategy to add information about a particular question to a body of knowledge. They can be considered an opportunity “to develop and test procedures or components”, or to test a “new use of information or data” or to “integrate new technologies”. The experience in pilots can be used to “more precisely understand the impact” of a program, tool or technology. These activities affect change by testing or validating new “truths” and documenting them so they can be used by others.

A second, slightly different way of thinking about pilots is as a way of ‘leading’, as in “pilot boat”, where the object is not as much adding to a body of knowledge but actually implementing a new activity. These kinds of pilots are understood as “showcases” or “demonstrations”, or as ways of “introducing new ideas”. They are often conducted as part of a strategy to broaden support when there is tension, disagreement, skepticism or discomfort around a new program area. A staff member of a community college, for instance, reported that in her organization the term “pilot” was usually used for a project that did not have the support of the administration, and which was a long standing passion of a staff member who had mobilized just enough support so that they could no longer be ignored. She says that her heart always sinks when an initiative is called a pilot, because they rarely have a life after the

“pilot” phase. In more ideal situations, however, where there is general organization-wide support for the project, pilots can be seen as a necessary step in the development of a full, on-going program. These activities affect change by creating a space to “get the bugs out” of a program, and to “bring people on-side”.

Workplace literacy pilots tend to be seen and used in this second way, as demonstration projects, although there is a strong potential for and interest in using them as research and innovation strategies.

## NLS Pilots Have Two Sets Of Goals

As noted earlier, the kinds of pilot projects that the NLS funds are those which involve participants in learning activities. Because they are understood to be pilots, that is, because they are intended to test or demonstrate something, these projects necessarily have two sets of goals:

- i) to operate a successful, innovative learning activity, where the learning of participants is the primary measure of success, and
- ii) to effectively demonstrate the usefulness of this learning activity to a broader audience. In many cases this audience is expected to be sufficiently convinced of the usefulness that it will commit the resources to sustain or further develop the program. In order to do this, most organizations need to make changes in their internal structure and funding.

The second set of goals is as important as the first. Generally speaking, when something new is being tested, the implication is that the project initiator wants to demonstrate how it works to an audience. Even if the project initiator simply wants to “see what happens” with a good or a new idea, they usually want someone else to see the results, particularly if the outcome is positive. Usually they want the right people to see the results, and for the right people to make changes based on the results. In workplace literacy the kinds of changes hoped for are often described as organizational attitudes (“creating a learning culture”, “developing support for literacy”). Attitudes, however, are important only as they translate into the hoped for programs. This process is not mysterious, it comes about as the result of a series of organizational strategies and actions.

This understanding brings three fields of activity into view:

- ◇ the learning activity
- ◇ short term bridging, or organizational change strategies
- ◇ long term organizational changes

Several general observations about these fields of activity have emerged during the review. At the risk of oversimplifying, the following sketch presents a broad picture:

- ◇ Pilot projects have been of considerable value, particularly to umbrella organizations<sup>2</sup>, particularly in the early stages of program development, and in situations where there is no other immediately available source of funding for new learning activities
- ◇ The learning activities in most pilots have been based on commonly accepted adult learning practices, and have produced a body of anecdotal material which shows the value of the activity for individual participants. The learning activities have not been particularly innovative however, in large part because the projects have needed to demonstrate successes to the employer. Innovations tend to be primarily those which develop specific workplace or union related content.
- ◇ Bridging or organizational change activities have generally not been recognized as a discrete and important part of pilots, and consequently tend not to be well articulated, funded or tested.
- ◇ Pilots have introduced literacy into a range of new industries and workplaces. Umbrella organizations have recognized the need for literacy education in their industry or sector and developed programs which encourage and support member workplaces to do the same. But there is little certainty that these efforts have created the foundation for on-going programs in individual workplaces. The kinds of workplace changes needed to support on-going programs tend not to be stated in particular detail, and the organizational changes actually accomplished tend to be modest.

The following sections discuss in more detail the ways in which innovations are currently limited in each of the three fields of activity, and how these efforts might be strengthened.

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<sup>2</sup> These NLS funded “umbrella” organizations include industrial sector training councils, regional training and economic development organizations, employer associations and unions.

## C. Innovations in Workplace Learning Activities

Pilot learning activities have generally been based in accepted adult learning practices, and their evaluations consistently document their usefulness to participants. But when they are seen as a whole effort, they do not appear to be addressing some of the particular difficulties and potential related to learning in a workplace environment.

There are limitations to how innovative the activities themselves can be. The most significant of these is the requirement that most pilot projects demonstrate that a literacy learning activity is a benefit to the employer (or project holder). Consequently pilot learning activities have tended to be predictable rather than innovative.<sup>3</sup> Further, the people who have been involved have tended not to formally discuss, document or analyse components of the learning activity that may not have worked as well as expected. So, whatever lessons are learned about the activity itself tend to remain informal among the participants, their co-workers, local instructors, workplace committee or the workplace human resource managers.

It has been possible to create more space for learning activity innovations in situations where the project does not have a major focus on producing the rationale for on-going support. Projects where legislation or an industry agreement ensure that training will take place, or where the training is union-sponsored, or where stable funding is available are most likely to be able to push the boundaries around workplace learning.

The NLS could direct a portion of its resources to support those projects which have the most potential to contribute to the expansion and further development of the theory and practice of how literacy learning takes place in the context of a workplace. Workplaces can be particularly difficult environments for workers to develop new learning practices – it may in fact be the most challenging learning situation for some who need the opportunity to reverse previous, negative education experiences. Another obvious feature of workplace literacy is that the learning agenda is shared between learners and employers, in situations where learners have less organizational power. Pilots need to be actively exploring the implications of these and other features of workplace learning.

The review indicated that the following kinds of learning activities have been developed or tested in pilots. This summary also notes where innovations could be developed or strengthened.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, during the interviews most project holders were asked whether they would be prepared to try a new approach to working with adults that recognizes that many literacy learners have a history of trauma which is directly connected to their capacity to learn (Jenny Horsman, “But I’m Not A Therapist”, forthcoming). All indicated that they felt that it would be risky to do this in a workplace pilot, and that employers would not likely support it.

## Pilot Workplace Learning Activities

- Needs Assessment* What has been developed or tested:
- Practices And Materials*
- ◇ “fair” or “joint” approaches that involve workers and managers in the design, implementation and analysis of the needs assessment
  - ◇ needs analysis tools & guides, including individual and group interview questions and techniques and survey questions
  - ◇ tools & guides for individual literacy assessments
  - ◇ methods of analysing data

What could be further developed or tested:

- ◇ more precise tools for developing skills and knowledge inventories which more accurately describe workers’ knowledge assets (beyond literacy skills) and their relation to work processes<sup>4</sup>
- ◇ more precise tools for accurately assessing and distinguishing literacy and second language capabilities and needs
- ◇ assessing conditions that need to be in place for workers that create an optimal and safe learning environment.

*Delivery Models* What has been developed or tested:

- ◇ finding the mix of classroom, individual tutoring, mentoring, distance learning, learning center facilities and/or schedule best suited for workplace (e.g. northern fly-in mine)

What could be further developed or tested:

- ◇ tools which assist workplaces in choosing the best mix
- ◇ tools and practices which encourage the use of more than one approach at the same time.

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<sup>4</sup> A range of workplace issues can be inappropriately diagnosed as low skill levels, or “deficiencies” among workers. Most employed workers have sophisticated knowledge, coping and work skills. Isolating the actual learning needs of a workforce requires a thorough understanding of work processes, workplace relations and communications.

*Teaching Approaches, Methods And Tools* What has been developed or tested:

- ◇ workplace specific curriculum modules
- ◇ new certification programs
- ◇ materials adapted to a specific cultural or linguistic group of participants
- ◇ materials adapted to a specific workplace or industry
- ◇ materials adapted to a region
- ◇ audio-visual materials specific to a sector, occupation or workplace.
- ◇ Individual learning portfolios

What could be further developed or tested:

- ◇ new approaches to adult learning and their application to workplace learning
- ◇ curriculum that blends foundation and other workplace skills, team teaching in blended programs
- ◇ training workplace trainers/tutors/mentors
- ◇ greater collaboration between providers and union, shop stewards.

*Evaluation Practices And Materials* What has been developed or tested:

- ◇ tools and guides for conducting evaluations of individual learners' progress
- ◇ tools and guides for assessing the quality of the learning activity itself
- ◇ tools and guides for assessing the impact of the learning on the workplace

What could be further developed or tested:

- ◇ workplace human resource surveys which regularly monitor training related impact
- ◇ better translation between descriptive, qualitative evaluations and employer needs for “returns” on investments of time and resources.

## D. Organizational Change Strategies

The overall objective of most pilots is to establish the groundwork for a longer-term project, or for a similar project in a different location<sup>5</sup>. This means that the success of the activity is dependent on decisions taken about future programs or other actions in the workplace that build on the experience of the pilot. These decisions are usually made by people who are not immediately involved in the learning activity. Consequently, an essential part of the work involves what is referred to here as organizational change strategy – communicating, mobilizing and lobbying in preparation for key decisions, before, during and after the completion of the learning activity.

Project holders have used a range of organizational change strategies associated with pilots, but they are not particularly well articulated, documented or analysed for their effectiveness. There are a number of possible reasons for this. First, efforts to prepare the workplace and other organizations to make the necessary decisions tend to be understood as “follow-up”, and not as part of the project itself. Detailing these strategies in advance may overwhelm, or “spook” the parties involved. Further, organizational change efforts are often excluded from projects because they don’t easily fit a “project” format. Very often the time frame of pilots coincides with that of the learning activity, and project reports are written immediately after the learning activity is evaluated. This is usually far too early to assess whether the organizational strategies are working.

There are few funding sources for the work that needs to go on after a learning activity is complete. The groups that have a greater ability to maintain their efforts after a pilot learning activity is complete are the umbrella bodies – industry associations, sector training councils and federations of labour. They often have dedicated an adult education facilitator or consultant to do exactly this kind of work, although many of these people also work on project specific grants.

Everyone involved in this field acknowledges that that it is not simple to introduce literacy programs into workplaces. Workplaces are not educational institutions, and do not tend to make changes based solely on arguments about good learning experiences for workers. Change does not take place in what some of us imagine to be the straightforward model of the physical sciences. In that model, we imagine, if the project holder has correctly isolated the innovation, conducted the test, verified the results and published them in a reputable journal, then the job is finished and the rest of the field will act on the results as “truth”. Nor is there a parallel between the testing of learning activities and market research, where consumer reaction to a product or service can create swift changes in all aspects of a company. In

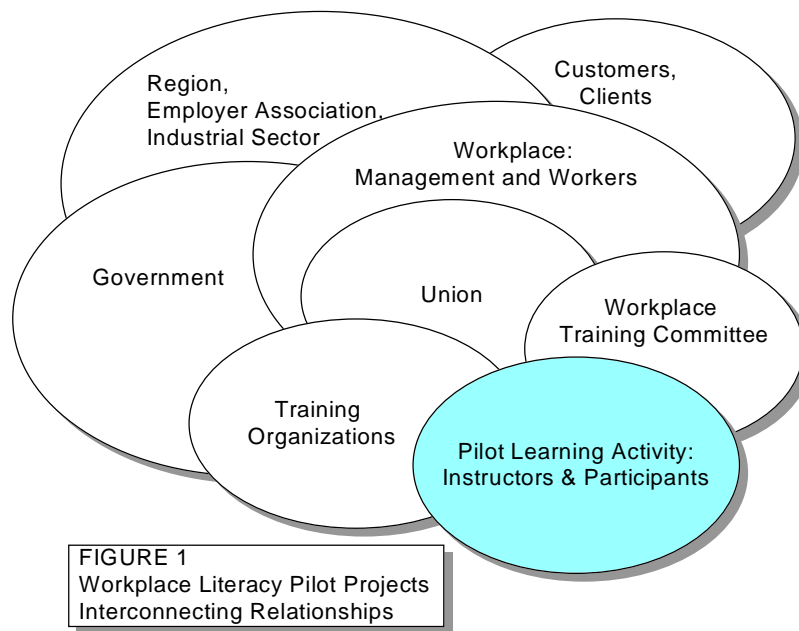
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<sup>5</sup> Sustainability is not necessarily the goal for all workplace literacy projects, but when a project is set up as a pilot, there is a very strong assumption that there will be some more permanent program or activity that follows.



workplace literacy the processes of individual learning, not to mention organizational learning, are human in ways that continue to evade standard scientific understanding. The processes of incorporating new ideas and consequent changes are not the same from organization to organization, and require specific organizational knowledge and strategies.

Pilot project holders must identify the groups which are going to be encouraged to change, how they are expected to change, and their interest in change. This needs to be done during the planning stage and refined throughout the implementation. *Figure 1* represents a possible set of relationships among these groups in a “traditional” workplace literacy situation: i.e. a unionized workplace where the employer is expected to make some form of on-going commitment to the program. It suggests that strategies need to be developed which prepare for changes or actions in each of the associated organizations.



Recognizing that both individuals and the organizations involved are going to be affected by the project means confronting one of the bigger stumbling blocks encountered by pilot projects – how to recognize and measure successes. Workers, employers, umbrella organizations and providers can all have very different interests in workplace literacy. They may all start into the project wanting to see very different outcomes. The process of finding commonality among parties who have different goals needs to be carefully strategized, because it is central to the change process – parties will not make the necessary changes unless they see that their interests are likely to be met. Workplaces which have dealt most effectively with this question have begun to develop the capacity to recognize a broad

spectrum of learning and its impact.<sup>6</sup> They are designing evaluation tools which include appropriate measures for adult literacy learning (standardized testing is not always appropriate), and appropriate measures of the impact of increased literacy on issues like community participation and workplace communication, supervisory practices, labour management relations, union participation, health and safety practices, human resource costs, as well as on production quality and efficiency.

The term “appropriate” can not be over-emphasized here. It points to a particular tension that pilots need to work with and strategize around. The impact of a short term, pilot, literacy program for a small number of workers is not likely to show up in immediate, measurable changes in productivity – and it is important that the goals of literacy pilots do not establish this kind of unrealistic expectation. Employers, however, are often not willing make significant change, particularly allocating funds, unless they can see how the project will contribute to efficiency and productivity. Literacy pilots are more likely to have an impact on workplace issues like communication, supervision, health and safety and labour relations. Those involved may need to establish connections between changes in these areas and company responsiveness, product or service quality and costs. If the employer is not prepared to make changes without being able to anticipate “bottom line” gains, those involved may need to make links between the impact of the pilot and the establishment of a longer term training plan, where participants are able to participate in increasingly more complex production related training. The development of a long term training plan, particularly if it is developed and managed by a joint worker/management committee, would itself be a significant organizational change in most workplaces.

There are a wide range of possible organizational change strategies, that is activities that create a bridge between the pilot learning activities and some form of take up, or further programming. NLS pilots have had positive experience with those that follow.

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<sup>6</sup> Examples include “An Impact Profile for Assessing Outcomes of Joint Workplace Change Initiatives”, Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Center, May 1997; and “Training Plan Guide”, Canadian Grocery Producers Council, 1999.

## Pilot Organizational Change Strategies

- Workplace Strategies*
- ◇ Strong advisory group for the project planning, including a representative from all participating groups, followed by formation of employer/employee literacy or training committees
  - ◇ careful identification of different interests of participating groups, followed by a process of finding commonality among those interests - at all project stages, including during planning
  - ◇ establish an understanding that learning will take place among all participating groups during the project
  - ◇ identify expectations of the roles and responsibilities of all parties at the beginning of the project
  - ◇ agree during the planning process on evaluation procedures. Evaluation process looks at a broad range of impact including: individual learning, classroom experience, and changes related to the workplace, union, community and family
  - ◇ establish a decision making time line for implementation and follow up accompanied by outline of reports and documents needed throughout the process
  - ◇ identify literacy “champions” in umbrella group, on board, in management, in union, among employees.
  - ◇ post program information in the workplace
  - ◇ create or attend events where participants and others who have become excited by the project have the opportunity to share their experience with appropriate groups.
  - ◇ write plain language reports that speak to the interests of all parties. including clear financial implications
  - ◇ distribute reports thoroughly, and make in-person presentations
  - ◇ hold regular meetings with government funders
  - ◇ form a consortium or other groups to lobby for funding and/or legislative changes

- Union Strategies*
- ◇ Strong union support for employee representatives on project joint committees, including separate training and preparation.
  - ◇ Strengthen or create union or local training and education committee

<i>Umbrella Organization Strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Develop an industry-specific (involving workers and employers) rationale for the need for a literate workforce</li> <li>◇ hire experienced literacy developer or consultant to support individual workplaces as they develop and run programs. In sector training councils both a management and a labour developer/consultant are involved.</li> <li>◇ establish strong link to literacy providers</li> <li>◇ write and circulate a newsletter</li> <li>◇ form a consortium or other group to lobby for funding and/or legislative changes</li> </ul>
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<i>Provider Strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Collaborate with employer and union to publicize the project</li> <li>◇ assign experienced workplace adult education consultant(s) to a region or sector</li> <li>◇ hold regular meetings between instructors and workplace committee, or with managers and employee representatives</li> <li>◇ write and circulate a newsletter</li> </ul>
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Observations developed during the review and in conversation with interviewees suggest that organizational change strategies might be strengthened through more attention to the following kinds of issues.

<b>Organizational Change Strategies – Potential</b>
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<i>Observations About Developing Stronger Strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ The term of pilots should be lengthened to include organizational change activities which take the organizations involved to the point of making decisions about future programs.</li> <li>◇ The contract between all parties involved in pilots and government funders could include some agreement to take all possible steps towards establishing subsequent programs and making the required organizational changes that would support them.</li> <li>◇ Pilot strategies could include establishing agreement to use clear language throughout the workplace. They also could provide a forum for examining how people throughout the workplace learn</li> </ul>
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most effectively (verbal vs. text); and the use of text in the workplace, including the pros and cons of using print vs. verbal instructions, and personal vs. print or electronic supervision, etc.

- ◇ During the planning stages of each pilot, project holders should carefully question themselves and others about whether the groups involved really need a demonstration project, or a test of some aspect of the program. If the project is neither of these and is actually the first stage in the development of a program, and if everyone involved assumes it will be on-going, then a stronger strategy is to design a phased in program. This is because a significant effect of calling something a pilot is to put off the decision to establish a longer-term project. This would involve challenging possible funders (government, employers, unions) to deal with a problem in some provinces where government funds for on-going programs are not available.
- ◇ The NLS should continue to regularly connect project holders with people responsible for other funding sources. The NLS should assist with problem solving when there are gaps in funding for on-going or regular programs.
- ◇ Finding commonalties and matches in the interests, motivations and expertise of employers, industries and unions are what makes workplace learning unique. Literacy practitioners need the opportunity to develop specific understandings of these interests in each workplace. Union representatives and practitioners often see themselves as advocates for employee learners, but often need to more fully understand their differences as well as similarities. Employees and managers in most workplaces need to expand their understanding of adult learning, and develop the skills needed to manage a training program. This kind of professional development should be included in the pilot process.
- ◇ Some human resource managers have the experience of conducting workplace change projects, including training projects. If this is the case in a pilot workplace, they should be consulted about this experience during the development of a literacy program. HR “best” workplace change practices involve working closely with all affected departments and decision makers, setting clear,

demonstrable objectives, planning the activity, estimating costs, measuring qualitative and quantitative impact and projecting a return on the financial and human resource investments.

- ◇ All parties involved in pilots could be encouraged to contribute to a country-wide discussion about organizational change strategies. The discussion could include local, regional and country wide gatherings and electronic conferencing.

In particular, comparisons should be encouraged about organizational change strategies which are effective in small, medium and large workplaces. A number of practitioners are looking for information about how to establish and support programs in small workplaces. Others would like to collect strategies appropriate for workplaces where there has been no previous literacy program or any other training. Others would like to know more about the most effective strategies used by umbrella groups.

## E. Transformed Organizations

NLS funded pilots have introduced literacy into a range of industries, regions and workplaces. A number of umbrella organizations have recognized the need for literacy education in their industry or sector, and developed programs which encourage and support member workplaces to do the same. On the whole however, there is little certainty that these activities have created the foundation for on-going programs in individual workplaces.

Pilot project holders often hope to create a “sustainable learning culture”, or to foster a “learning organization”. But these objectives tend not to be accompanied by a clear vision of what a “learning culture” or “learning organization” actually might look like. There are significant differences, for example, between the structures and activities of organizations that conduct learning activities, and organizations that expect their employees’ learning to contribute to the organization’s ability to learn and change.<sup>7</sup> Pilot efforts have tended to look for and accept more modest organizational changes that support learning activities, although many people involved hope for more fundamental change. This is in large part because of the need to establish relatively quick “success” in the form of follow up programs.

The following charts sketch the two ends of a range of possible organizational changes. They draw on observations made during this review, and on materials developed by groups that have conducted pilots. Each sketch attempts to capture key features of the interests of the principle workplace parties, the main structural changes involved in the change and the impact that those changes could have on both the training program and the workplace. **Sketch 1** pictures an organization at the beginning of a continuum of change where intermittent literacy courses are added to the responsibility of a human resource department. **Sketch 2** pictures an organization which values the knowledge and literacy of its workforce and develops the capacity to learn from it.

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<sup>7</sup> The contemporary notion of a learning organization has been developed by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline*, (1990). This book has been followed by a number of studies, including Michael Marquardt’s *Building the Learning Organization* (1996) and Ken Starkey’s collection *How Organizations Learn* (1996). These authors promote a particular approach to the question of how workplace organizations learn and change which has some currency among HR managers and some adult educators. Pilot project holders who use these terms should make themselves familiar with these studies.

## Sketch 1 - Modest Changes

Organizations where intermittent learning activities are conducted

Participating Group Interest	Workplace Structural Changes	Possible Impact of Structural Changes
<p>Employer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ good corporate citizenship, i.e. the employer is willing to contribute to a benefit to employees but does not see it as a contribution to their operation</li><li>◇ negotiated benefit to employees, where the union has brought training to the bargaining table</li></ul> <p>Union</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ service to members</li><li>◇ membership development</li></ul> <p>Worker Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ increased employability</li><li>◇ better ability to participate in community organizations</li><li>◇ improved interactions with</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ Courses are held intermittently, where curriculum may or may not be related to the workplace</li><li>◇ Some joint planning of needs assessment and courses</li><li>◇ Work schedule is changed accordingly</li><li>◇ Basic skills education is added to Human Resource (HR) responsibilities</li><li>◇ Participants' time and course costs are added to HR budget</li><li>◇ Facilities are used for courses</li></ul>	<p>Impact on Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ Learning activities have some workplace support</li><li>◇ learning activities are vulnerable to production priorities, workplace down-turns and cost cutting</li><li>◇ learning activities tend to be reliant on stability / availability of public funding</li></ul> <p>Workplace Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◇ Broadened workplace discussion and interest in learning</li><li>◇ perception that process and therefore the training will balance needs of participants and employers</li><li>◇ improved morale</li><li>◇ improved employer — employee relations</li><li>◇ increased employability of participants</li></ul>



family

## SKETCH 2 - Substantial Change

Organizations where employees' learning is expected to contribute to the organization's ability to learn and change

Participating Group Interest	Workplace Structural Changes	Possible Impact of Structural Changes
<p>Employer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ workplace based interest – recognition that learning activities contribute to the future of the enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Literacy is part of a 3 - 5 year workplace education and training plan</li> <li>◇ Employer – employee training committee established that is responsible for needs assessment, implementing training plan and evaluation</li> </ul>	<p>Impact on Learning Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Stable education and training plan - i.e. learning is essential to organization's understanding of its goals</li> <li>◇ sustainability of learning activities is less dependent on public funding</li> <li>◇ literacy is connected to progressive training, and workers gain the background needed for further training</li> <li>◇ accountability for learning activity - to and for all parties involved</li> <li>◇ program evaluations which create the fewest barriers to adult literacy learning</li> <li>◇ continually improved learning activities.</li> </ul>
<p>Union</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ service to members</li> <li>◇ membership development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ plain language is used in all workplace communication</li> <li>◇ any added job responsibilities that result from learning activities are negotiated and recognized</li> <li>◇ education and training plan is included in the business plan</li> </ul>	<p>Workplace Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ better strategic anticipation of workplace education and training requirements and more accurately targeted learning activities; learning is specific to goals identified by all parties in the workplace</li> <li>◇ perception that process and therefore the learning activity will balance needs of participants and employers</li> <li>◇ employee and management committee members develop new skills</li> <li>◇ increased employability of participants</li> <li>◇ improved morale</li> <li>◇ improved employer – employee relations</li> <li>◇ improved health and safety records</li> <li>◇ improved production quality or customer service</li> <li>◇ decreased HR costs due to employee turn-over</li> <li>◇ learning activities more thoroughly integrated into operations, decreased likelihood of schedule disruption</li> <li>◇ recognition of workplace as an innovator, changed industry ratings (in sectors where ratings exist)</li> </ul>
<p>Worker Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ increased employability</li> <li>◇ better ability to participate in community organizations</li> <li>◇ improved interactions with family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ education and training plan is a separate item in budget, and includes projected returns</li> <li>◇ in unionized workplace, education and training is included in the collective agreement</li> <li>◇ whole systems approach is developed to projecting and measuring components of productivity and efficiency</li> <li>◇ HR workplace surveys include literacy related questions</li> <li>◇ management and supervisory practices become more consultative</li> <li>◇ facilities are designed for courses, possibly including development of learning center</li> <li>◇ work schedule consistently accommodates training</li> <li>◇ informal learning, tutoring or mentoring is recognized in job descriptions</li> </ul>	

## F. Recommendations

The review's observations open up a discussion of possible changes in the kind of support the Secretariat might provide to organizations who want to develop new internal possibilities and/or strengthen learning relationships.

### 1. Learning Activities

The NLS should support projects which further the development of strong workplace learning activities in areas such as the following:

#### Needs Assessments

- i) skills and knowledge inventories which more accurately describe workers' knowledge assets (beyond literacy skills) and their relation to work processes
- ii) tools for more accurately assessing and distinguishing literacy and second language capabilities and needs
- iii) tools for assessing workplace conditions which can create an optimal and safe learning environment for workers

#### Delivery Models

- iv) tools which assist workplaces in choosing the best mix of learning approaches and methods
- v) tools which encourage the use of more than one approach at the same time.

#### Teaching Methods

- vi) new approaches to adult learning and their application to workplace learning
- vii) curriculum that blends foundation and other workplace skills, team teaching in blended programs
- viii) programs which train workplace trainers/tutors/mentors

## Evaluation

- ix) workplace human resource surveys which regularly monitor broad literacy and training related impact
- x) broad descriptive, qualitative evaluations which have the capacity to look further than narrowly defined outcomes, which develop connections with employer needs for “returns” on investments of time and resources

## Support needed from the NLS

- xi) Pilots need sufficient resources to conduct a long term, rather than a one-time needs assessment, in order to develop some vision of and commitment to an on-going project. The danger of a short-term needs assessment is that it may involve everyone in a workplace in an activity that has not yet found the right focus, or the right balance of interests to sustain an on-going effort.
- xii) More room needs to be created in the NLS reporting process to honestly assess and learn from unexpected events and outcomes that take place in pilots, so that future programs are based in actual workplace experience.
- xiii) Professional development resources are needed for practitioners, committee members, consultants, etc. who are involved in pilots so that they can further research and write about their work.

## 2. Organizational Change Strategies

The NLS should further the development of strong organizational change strategies during pilot projects.

- i) The term of pilots should be lengthened to include organizational change activities which take the organizations involved to the point of making decisions about future programs.
- ii) Organizational strategies should be explicitly including in the planning, implementation and assessment phase of all pilots. This will include clarifying the learning activity and organizational goals for all parties. Develop a process for keeping the goals of each party balanced through policy changes or staff turn over in any one of the organizations involved, including those of the funder(s).

- iii) The contract between the parties involved in pilots and government funders could include some agreement that indicates their commitment to establishing subsequent programs and making the required organizational changes that would support them. This could include agreements about the use of plain language throughout the workplace and discussions about the use of text in the workplace.
- iv) If project holders need support for the first phase of a longer-term project, rather than a pilot, engage with the problem in some provinces where government funds for on-going programs are not available.
- v) The NLS should continue to regularly connect project holders with people responsible for other funding sources. The NLS should assist with problem solving when there are gaps in funding for on-going or regular programs.
- vi) Professional development should be included in the pilot process which familiarizes those involved in a pilot with the concerns and expertise of other parties.

### 3. Strengthen vision and goal setting for organizational change

- i) The NLS should support a country-wide discussion about workplace organizational change strategies, and the capacity of Canadian workplaces to learn. The discussion could include local, regional and country wide gatherings and electronic conferencing.

### 4. Government Workplace Training Policy

- i) A large obstacle to sustained workplace programs, and to innovation in existing programs is the lack of consistent private or public funding for workplace literacy learning activities. All levels of government need to examine the experience with workplace literacy with the following basic questions in mind:
  - ◇ Is workplace literacy a demonstrable benefit to employers?
  - ◇ If it is a demonstrable, is it a benefit that employers are prepared to fund?
  - ◇ Regardless of whether it is a benefit to employers, is adult literacy a public education responsibility?

- ii) The review suggests that pilot project holders are often in the position of attempting to “prove” current federal and provincial policy assumptions to employers, particularly the assumption that workplace literacy programs are a benefit to employers. It also suggests that this places restrictions on the ability of pilots to actually develop innovations. If these policies are not about to change, then both levels of government should be pro-active in the employer community, so that the burden of proof does not land so heavily on those conducting workplace pilots.

## 5. Role of the NLS

- i) The NLS should clarify or re-affirm its own objectives for supporting pilot projects. These could include:
  - ◇ testing innovations that might fill in knowledge gaps in the field of workplace literacy
  - ◇ opening up new or hard to crack sectors or regions
  - ◇ reaching new or excluded groups of workers.
- ii) If the NLS sees itself as assisting the workplace literacy field in filling in knowledge gaps and developing innovations, it opens up a further question. Should the Secretariat, or some other organization, house the overview of the “big picture” – what we know and what we don’t – related to Canadian workplace literacy?
  - ◇ Does the Secretariat have the capacity to become a knowledge center? Is there another organization that does? Are there regional or sectoral organizations that could contribute?
  - ◇ If the NLS were to take on this project, how would it identify priorities for filling the gaps? How might this be developed? How might it communicate the accumulated knowledge?

# APPENDIX

## How The Review Was Conducted

In preparing this paper, I reviewed material available through the NLS which described the Secretariat's policy, procedures and pilot projects. With the advice of the workplace program consultant, four organizations were selected for interviews. They were chosen because they had substantial experience to share about the process of planning, conducting and following up pilots. These organizations are representative of the groups that have received NLS funding to conduct pilots. They included a union federation, a sector council, an employer association, and a regional economic development association. One was a national body, and the others were located in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In addition, five people were interviewed who had experience with NLS pilots in their roles as provincial government program staff and as workplace literacy instructors or facilitators. Most interviews were conducted by telephone, although it was possible to conduct some in person.

The discussion paper is a systematic look at the issues raised by a review of the materials and the interviews. It is not an assessment of individual projects.

### i) Employer Association

The project holder is a country-wide employer association which is operating pilot projects in 5 separate locations – Bathurst, St. John's, Moncton, Edmonton and Port Moody. Two of these five are still in planning or needs assessment stages. Each workplace is unionized, and the union has been actively involved. Literacy programs are not completely new among this group of workplaces – these pilots have been selected and developed as a more concerted strategy to establish sustainable programs. They have had access to the resources of a consultant hired by the association who has provided support to the local managers and union members during the planning and implementation of each pilot. They have also contributed to, and had access to manuals and newsletters prepared by the consultant and distributed to all association members who conduct literacy programs.

### ii) Federation of Labour

The project holder is a provincial federation of labour located on the prairies. In the past several years it has conducted a basic skills needs assessment survey among its member unions, and identified six clusters of learning needs and unions to pilot the courses. They included an introduction to labour council issues, communication for shop stewards, health and safety combined with language upgrading, and high school equivalence courses.

Another four projects are in the planning stages. The intent of the pilots is to encourage affiliates to see basic skills training as a resource that they can offer their membership as needs are identified (i.e. not necessarily as long term projects). The projects are supported by the Federation with two part time staff who assist during the project development process and with curriculum selection or design. The Center has traditionally handled health and safety and labour education in the school system, and is now developing a focus on adult learning. It is in a period of transition, with the expectation that it will soon become fully funded by service agreements with the affiliates

### iii) Prairie Regional Training Consortium

This Consortium sponsored two pilots in the northern part of the province in order to develop and demonstrate delivery models that worked in northern and remote workplaces whose workforce is primarily aboriginal. The pilot at a fly-in mine was completed in 1997 and continues to operate as a permanent program. The pilot at a Band operated hotel is mid-implementation stage. The project has been coordinated by a program developer at a community college, who has used her experience to develop a new strategy for outreach. The consortium dissolved and has been replaced by a provincial labour force development board, which was in the process of hiring a staff person (fall 1998) who is expected, among other things, to develop a network of trainers and distribute information about these and other basic skills projects.

### iv) Industrial Sector Training Council

This country wide sector training council operated 5 pilot projects in 1996 - 97. They were located in the Fraser Valley, B.C, Toronto and Sherbrooke. Four of the pilots were intended to be models of on-going programs for the industry, as well as the beginning of long term programs in those particular workplaces. The fifth was a pilot of an adjustment program that took place after a plant closure. There is on-going training taking place in at least three of the four workplaces, but these programs are not necessarily based on the needs assessment or the approach taken during the pilot. The council, however, has documented each pilot, isolated the lessons from each, and used that information to shape its program (launched in June 1998) and a series of guidebooks. The approach is one that emphasizes the joint participation of employers and employees, and provides a management and union education consultant to companies who become members.



It should be noted that the writer's most comprehensive knowledge of this field comes from her involvement with this council.

v) Other Sources

I also spoke with two practitioners who have been involved as facilitators and instructors in workplace pilots and programs for many years, and with provincial government representatives from Nova Scotia and Ontario.