

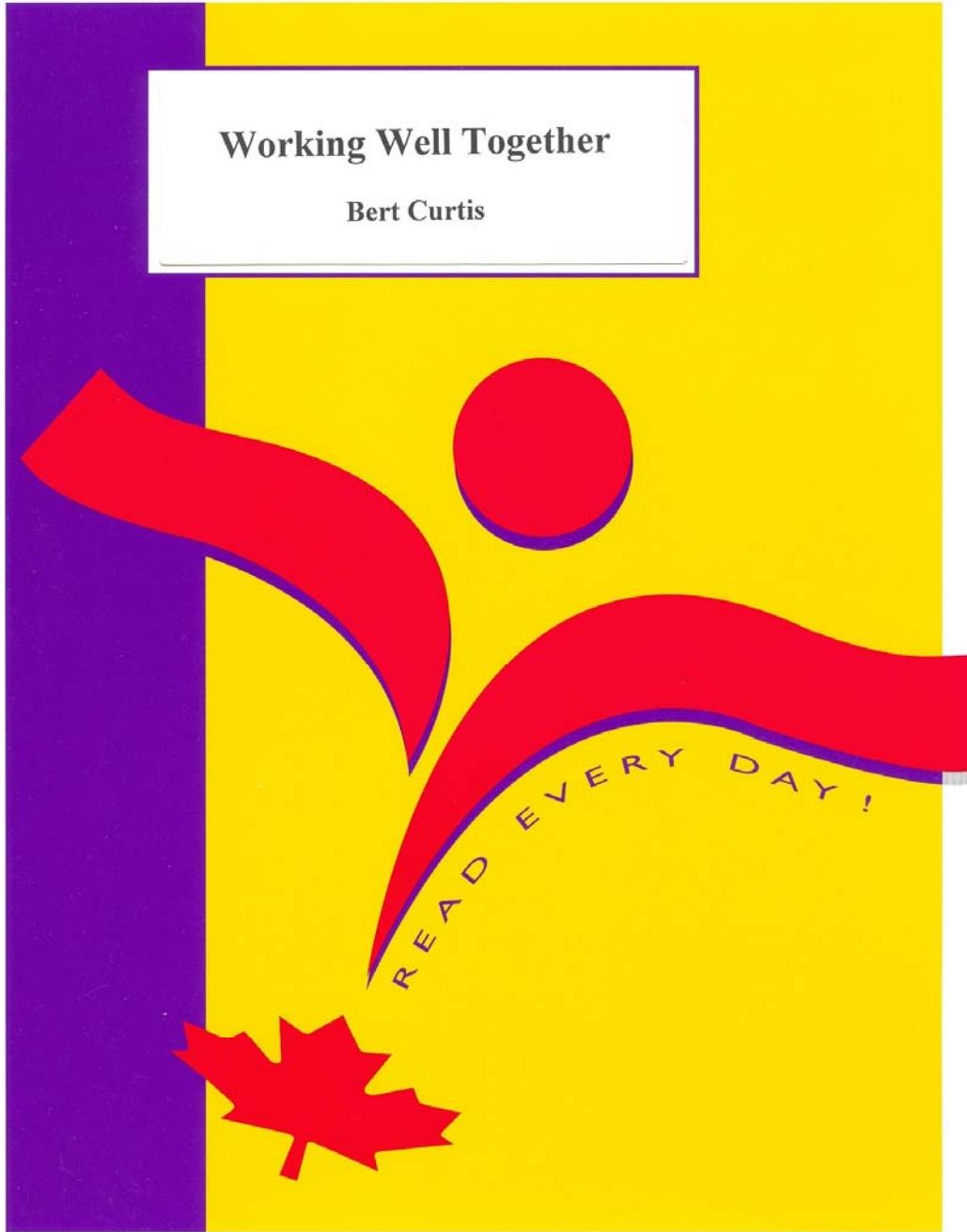


Human Resources  
Development Canada

Développement des  
ressources humaines Canada

# Working Well Together

Bert Curtis



*National  
Literacy  
Secretariat*



*Le Secrétariat  
national à  
l'alphabetisation*

Canada

# **Working Well Together**

Bert Curtis

Community Colleges in Literacy Partnerships that Work

July 20, 1992

## **Working Well Together**

### **Community Colleges in Literacy Partnerships that Work**

Many organizations teach adults to read and write. They develop teaching methods to meet the particular needs of students in their communities and are able to provide complete, effective training programs. Some organizations have found, however, that they need skills that can best be provided by another institution. So community colleges call on organizations of persons with disabilities to find out how to meet the needs of adults with particular disabilities; and businesses call on educational institutions to help them design literacy courses for their employees. These partnerships allow each organization to benefit from the expertise of the other. But, for any partnership to work, the organizations involved must develop an effective relationship that builds on their individual and collective strengths.

#### **Partnerships that work**

In some cases, the organizations whose stories are told in this collection initiated partnerships with community colleges to reach their common goals. In other cases, the National Literacy Secretariat, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, approached the organizations and invited them to create literacy partnerships. In both instances, by working together, each organization was able to benefit from the other's skills while their joint efforts met the literacy training needs of people in their community. The six partnership stories in this publication take the best elements of each of the partnerships to illustrate to other organizations - community colleges, community agencies, businesses and others - how they can build good working relationships. Of course, none of these efforts are perfect. All of the partners have had to respond to challenges and adjust their way of working as their relationships developed. But all have succeeded in providing unique literacy training programs that have endured through partnerships that work.

#### **Six partnership stories**

*Mutual Respect* tells the story of New Brunswick Community College's long-lasting partnership with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to provide literacy training to inmates of Dorchester and Westmorland institutions. The college had to design a program that would meet inmates' diverse needs while working in an environment that has to focus more on security than openness to learning. The two partners learned to respect each others' needs and abilities to the benefit of inmates who need and want to learn.

It isn't always easy to admit that you need to learn new skills, especially when those skills are as basic as reading and writing. But George Brown College and the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region developed a program that lets union members from the area take literacy courses through the college. *Getting Credit* tells how the workers' privacy is respected while they earn college credits for their efforts.

People who are deaf need, more than others, to rely on the written word. But they often lack the literacy skills they need because their early education didn't help them relate written English or French to the sign language they had learned as young children. *The Deaf Literacy Project* brought together Red River Community College, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, and the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf to teach English as a second language to adults who use American Sign Language to communicate. The program curriculum is really designed by the students themselves, and the program as a whole is built on respect for the deaf community and its culture.

*ERIC - Effective Reading in Context* is a workplace literacy program that was developed by Keyano College for Syncrude Canada Limited. Like other companies, Syncrude found that many of its employees had difficulty with the material they had to read and write on the job. Instead of relying on employees to follow courses on their own, Syncrude and Keyano College used their work materials as a basis for a literacy program. The program has benefited supervisors and other employees both on and off the job. Many of them now want to take more advanced training courses.

Adults with severe disabilities may not be able to use speech to communicate, but they are able to learn with the right support from instructors and computers. *SARAW, The Student's Voice* tells the story of Capilano College and the Neil Squire Foundation and how they worked together to build a literacy program that would give adults with severe disabilities a chance to learn independently. Their high tech program is adaptable. It can be integrated into Adult Basic Education programs and it can be set up in community colleges anywhere.

The whole community of New Westminster and the surrounding area got involved in *I-CARE - The Individual Community Adult Reading Education Program*. Douglas College started the program of one-on-one literacy training for adults by teaching volunteer tutors the techniques of adult education. But the community - (the source of the volunteers and the students), - local libraries, and community agencies became active and supportive partners. Their story shows how partnerships can work among many groups to the benefit of entire communities.

## 1 - Mutual Respect: New Brunswick Community College and the Correctional Service of Canada

Studies of inmates' educational backgrounds have indicated that there is some relationship between low literacy skills and criminal activity. And an inmate's lack of literacy is a major barrier to his or her rehabilitation into society. The Correctional Service of Canada and provincial correctional services have responded to this need with programs of Adult Basic Education (ABE), which offer inmates education from grade 1 through grade 8 and literacy upgrading programs.

Canadian colleges provide many of the literacy programs in federal and provincial institutions. The partnerships between the colleges and the institutions vary in size, scope, and in the way the partners define their roles. The partnership between the Moncton campus of New Brunswick Community College and the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has several outstanding characteristics:

- **Continuity**
  - Teachers remain with the program over a number of years
  - Inmates can continue their programs after they are released from the institutions
- **Accountability; and**
- **Clearly-defined responsibilities.**

### **The literacy program**

New Brunswick Community College offers a literacy program in the CSC's Dorchester and Westmorland institutions. The literacy courses in each institution are limited to 10-12 students and are part of the ABE program. The college tests their reading skills before inmates begin the ABE program. Those whose reading scores are at the level of grades 1 to 6 first enrol in the literacy program.

### **Dorchester and Westmorland Institutions**

Dorchester is a maximum security institution that treats many inmates with psychological problems. Inmates tend to be serving longer sentences and most are in "protective custody" because they have been incarcerated for crimes such as rape, or child molestation, or because they are considered informers. Westmorland is a minimum security institution where inmates are generally serving shorter prison terms for less violent offences.

## **The student inmates**

Teachers need a special type of dedication and skills to deal with inmates of correctional institutions. The "typical" federal inmate was described by Blinn and Hody as follows: "He is in his early twenties, emotionally bankrupt, with a life history of failure. He usually comes from a broken home. He was not supervised as a child, tended to be overactive or hyperactive, and was disliked at school. He is poor and lacks career direction because he has had only occasional, short-term jobs. He is pessimistic about the future. By the time he is admitted to a federal correctional institution, he has had five criminal convictions. "

## **The teaching challenge**

These characteristics make it difficult to improve inmates' low literacy skills. Low literacy is not the only problem these individuals have to cope with in their lives. Each student inmate represents a challenge for the teacher. And the task is complicated by the fact that, in all correctional institutions, custody takes preference over training. Despite these difficulties, many correctional institutions are doing good literacy work.

## **Continuity**

New Brunswick Community College has been providing literacy courses for inmates at Dorchester and Westmorland institutions for the past 11 years. The college and the CSC have managed to attract and retain five teachers over a considerable time. Both institutions consider this continuity and the quality of the teachers as key factors in the program's success.

Where possible, inmates are recommended for placement in community college programs when they are released and paroled. This helps them to keep their new skills and to build on the knowledge they gained in the institution.

## **Accountability**

The Correctional Service of Canada has a mandate to reduce the number of inmates whose literacy skills are below the grade 8 level by 5 percent per year. The Atlantic Region of the CSC has provided yearly enrolment and completion targets that it encourages each institution to reach.

### **Clearly-defined responsibilities**

The institutions and the college share responsibility for planning the literacy training, but the Correctional Service of Canada pays for all the program expenses. The college tests new inmates and identifies those who would benefit from literacy upgrading. It also assesses inmates' progress through the program.

### **Benefits for the inmates**

The inmates seem to benefit from the program and appreciate its importance to their lives. Inmates aged 19 to 60 when asked "What would you tell other adults who have reading and writing problems?" responded:

"Keep going to school if you have the chance. "

"Learn the best they can - to the best of their ability. "

"That they should try for upgrading. "

### **Mutual respect**

The attitudes of staff in the two organizations are fundamental to the success of this literacy partnership. The CSC and New Brunswick Community College demonstrate an attitude of mutual respect. William Snowdon, the Department Head responsible for the program at the college, reflected on the effectiveness of the partnership:

"I think that competent teachers providing good service to the Correctional Service and their clients is a major contributing factor. I know there are some correctional operations where contract teachers rotate between the institution, school districts and other contracts every 6 months or so. Our teachers are hired specifically for our Correctional Service contracts and we usually ask Corrections for a commitment of 3 to 5 years. We try to maintain a good working relationship with Correctional staff, from the guards to the Warden, and remember that we are "guests in their house." To that end we obey their regulations, uphold their mission statement and assist or support them where possible in times of trouble with inmates.

"The Correctional Service has been reciprocal in respect to our service. "

## 2 - Getting Credit: George Brown College and the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region

Employers and unions who want to help workers improve their literacy skills face a challenge. Workers may fear losing their jobs if they admit to their employer that reading and writing tasks give them trouble, or that they are uncomfortable working with numbers. And workers may not want to tell other union members that they need literacy training. In 1988, the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region found a way to offer union members the literacy training they might need through a partnership with George Brown College.

The labour council and the college joined with other funders to create the Metro Labour Education Centre (MLEC), which offers training programs for union members, at the college. The MLEC literacy courses are taught by workers who are trained in adult education techniques. The literacy students are considered bona fide college students and receive college certificates when they complete their training program.

The working relationship between George Brown College and the labour council includes a number of characteristics that can lead to a successful partnership:

- **Union-employer cooperation**
  - employer contribution to training time;
  - workplace learning;
  - peer instruction;
- **Clearly-defined responsibilities;** and
- **College certification.**

### **Union-Employer cooperation**

The literacy courses are accessible to workers because they are offered in the workplace through agreements between local unions and individual employers. The employers usually give workers two hours a week of work time to attend classes; the students add another two hours of their own time each week.

The MLEC recruits and trains instructors for its programs "from the shop floor." So students are taught by other trade union members, who are familiar with the issues they



face in their working and family lives. For this reason, the relationship between instructors and students is generally trusting.

MLEC staff represent neither the employer nor the union. And workers who register in MLEC courses do not have to tell their employer or their union what course they are taking. This gives the literacy students privacy. One staff member highlighted this point:

"We stress that our work is confidential. When you sign up for a workplace course with us - and we always call it "upgrading," not literacy - it doesn't go back to either the company, or the union, that you're actually working on literacy. That's important, especially if you've put on your application form that you've got Grade Twelve - and you actually can't read or write nearly at that level. Literacy skills are a very delicate, personal matter, because you're judged on them in everything you do."

MLEC trainers are paid instructors, not volunteers. Some literacy students, who have taken literacy training from volunteers, have been discouraged when the volunteer loses interest; the students are likely to say, "My tutor gave up on me. I guess I was too slow for him. " The MLEC literacy courses offer a stronger guarantee that the instructor will remain with the program.

### **The Literacy Program**

The centre offers four programs for workers:

- Labour Studies;
- English in the Workplace;
- Adult Basic Education; and
- Skills Training for the Unemployed.

The literacy courses last 100 hours and are part of the Adult Basic Education program. Literacy instruction is also integrated into courses in numeracy, computer awareness, and blueprint reading. In this way, students who need literacy instruction, and who are interested in computers or another subject, can combine their interests and make progress in two subjects.

The ABE Unit has served approximately 1,200 learners in workplace literacy programs since its beginning in 1988. Each year, the program typically involves about 200 workers taking literacy and math upgrading courses in 20 workplaces. There are approximately 100 instructors, one-half of whom teach literacy, math or English in the Workplace, which is a program for teaching workers to speak English as a second language.

The literacy instructors have learned that immigrant workers who learn to speak English, but who cannot read and write in their first language need that training before they can learn these skills in English. Many workers become stronger in speaking English, but still have great difficulty learning to read and write in English.

### **Clearly-defined responsibilities**

Through a formal partnership agreement, the labour council and the college agreed on their responsibilities in support of the MLEC. The college must approve the training programs and the overall curriculum; it has representation on the MLEC's Advisory Committee, it monitors the training programs, and it takes part in program evaluations.

The agreement also sets out how the programs are publicized, how the centre's finances are administered, and the process for handling students' tuition fees and the enrolment grant from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

The literacy instructors have access to training and ongoing support from the Adult Basic Education Unit. They can draw on full-time administrative and professional support when they have a teaching problem and they can take part in college staff development activities.

### **People who have lost the ability to read and write**

It is important for the peer instructors to be able to relate to the students' learning needs. Good teaching techniques are essential, but so is an understanding of the students' previous learning experiences. Most of them learned to read and write in school. They want an upgrading course that brings their rusty skills to the level they need for their work and leisure.

"We've found the needs for literacy instruction in workplaces surprisingly high. When we're talking about Canadian-born workers, people who've been through the school system here, we haven't found hundreds of people whom the school system has failed. "

"But what we do find, and find in the hundreds, is functional illiteracy. We see that people have lost their literacy skills. These are people working in plants and factories and offices, people whose math and reading and writing skills have deteriorated from whatever level they had when they left school. All of a sudden they have a disability. When they left school, they could write essays and reports; but now, they have huge problems with spelling and paragraphs and putting in capitals and periods. "

"What we can do is get them back to their previous levels, even get them writing poems and producing publications, but is the process going to happen all over again when they go back to the same job? That's why we think we have a responsibility - we've opened the door for them, and we need to help them bridge somewhere. That's why we need something in place to help them bridge to the college. "

### **College Certificates**

As students of George Brown College, the literacy students can use all of the student services. The program's college affiliation also means that they receive a college certificate when they complete their training program.

For the MLEC, the students, and the college, this college-level accreditation is important. The MLEC expands the college's access to workers who might otherwise never pass through their doors. The workers see their college certificates as tangible proof of their accomplishments and an open door to further learning.

### 3 - The Deaf Literacy Project: Red River Community College, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, and the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf

Until recently, deaf children were at a disadvantage when they entered traditional schools and schools for the deaf. Some would have learned American Sign Language (ASL) from their peers, their families, or others, before starting school. In many cases, however, the children's families did not become proficient in ASL, so the children were not able to practice their language skills at home. As a result, their overall language skills would be much more limited than those of hearing children.

American Sign Language uses hand movements to symbolize objects, actions, and the relationships between people and things. So its structure and grammar are different from English or French, which use the alphabet to assign names to these same objects, actions, and relationships. An individual who communicates in ASL needs to relate English or French words and phrases to the appropriate ASL symbols and learn the alphabet, grammar and structure of the new language.

Many deaf adults graduated from schools where the use of American Sign Language was very limited. So they received only part of the information that was communicated to the other students through speech. This made it difficult for them to learn English or French. As a result, many deaf adults who have graduated from high school are able to read and write at only a basic level. Studies in the United States have shown an average literacy level among deaf high school graduates of about grade 5.

The Deaf Literacy Project (DLP) was established to teach literacy skills to deaf adults in Winnipeg. Its success illustrates four aspects of an innovative partnership that can be applied to other projects:

- **Multiple partners;**
- **Learner-driven;**
- **Bilingual and bicultural;**
  - American Sign Language and English;
- **Clearly-defined responsibilities.**

## **Multiple Partners**

Red River Community College, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, and the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf have known that members of the Deaf community need training to improve their abilities to read and write English. People who are deaf rely on the printed word in their work and home environments even more than hearing adults. A low-skill level severely limits their potential. The three organizations established the Deaf literacy Project (DLP) and made sure that its design would give deaf persons control.

The DLP has three main objectives:

1. To use a second-language-learning approach to teach deaf adults, who are competent and proficient in American Sign Language, to read and write in English;
2. To develop students' appreciation of the value of sharing information and being able to communicate effectively in their work and home environments; and
3. To foster students' appreciation of the printed word, communication, and interaction.

## **Learner-driven**

Before they begin the DLP, prospective students are interviewed informally to assess their English reading and writing skills and their comprehension of American Sign Language. Students enter the program with varied literacy skills. They determine their own short- and long-term goals and evaluate their progress on these goals throughout the six months of classes.

The program is learner-driven. The project's Steering Committee and its instructors believe that the students are the curriculum, so there is no preset, formal curriculum. Students learn through experiences and materials that they select and that relate to their own lives. The instructors use interactive learning methods that allow students, individually and as a group, to direct the way the program develops. The strategies include one-on-one or small and large group discussions, peer teaching, closed-captioned programs, role playing, translation exercises, individual and interactive reading, and writing and computer exercises.

## **Bilingual and bicultural**

The DLP is bilingual and bicultural, with instruction in American Sign Language. It recognizes that American Sign Language is the native language of the deaf and that the deaf have a unique culture of their own. The assimilation of the deaf into the "hearing" culture is not an objective of the program or part of the process. The steering committee

and staff realize that "The idea of assimilation is always more congenial when you are the one being imitated."

This bilingual and bicultural approach enhances students' self esteem and pride in their culture while enabling them to apply their newly-learned skills to their community and their work and home environments.

The students can attend one of four project groups, each of which is limited to 12 participants. Three-hour classes are offered three evenings and one afternoon a week, with schedules arranged according to the students' needs. Because students set their own learning goals, some leave when their goals are achieved. Some have indicated that they would like to stay longer but they want to give access to individuals on the waiting list.

The project also offers students a chance to join a "Deaf Poets' Society." The society explores language and cultural issues that are pertinent to the deaf community, as well as students' personal issues. The group discussions help students learn the value of sharing information and of developing their communication and language skills in both ASL and English.

### **Clearly-defined responsibilities**

DLP program staff - one deaf and one hearing person - are located at Red River Community College and are members of the its teaching staff. The college provides technical expertise, project facilities, and ongoing day-to-day program supervision and support.

The community-based project Steering Committee directs the instructors' activities and offers them support. The deaf members of that committee set the project's philosophical direction and policies. They ensure that the project follows the values and norms of the deaf community, and meets the community's goals and needs.

The Society for Manitobans with Disabilities coordinates the administration of the project. It manages the funding grants from the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and the province of Manitoba. A grant from the Manitoba Community Services Council is managed by the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf.

The program is currently being evaluated by Dr. Michael Rodda of the University of Alberta and Rita Netzel of the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities.

## 4 - ERIC - Effective Reading in Context: Keyano College, Fort McMurray, and Syncrude Canada Limited

More than one in three Canadian adults has some difficulty reading and using written materials that we are likely to encounter in everyday life. Most of these Canadians - people who may be able to deal with basic written information but who have difficulty with forms and complicated materials - avoid tasks that involve reading and writing. Many of these adults, however, have to read and write more complicated information on the job. Businesses and industry need to develop programs to improve these employees' literacy skills. Literacy is essential for workers to do their jobs effectively and to deal with the changing technologies and other demands that are an everyday part of the workplace of the '90s.

Keyano College and Syncrude Canada Ltd., of Fort McMurray, designed a literacy program that would help Syncrude's workers to improve their reading and writing skills. The program uses work-related materials to build these skills in classroom exercises. The way in which the partners developed ERIC - Effective Reading in Context - and the way they adapt the program to the workers' needs, is a good example of a partnership with the following outstanding characteristics:

- **Worker-centred instruction;**
- **Employer-funded;** and
- **Prepares participants for more advanced learning.**

Syncrude Canada Ltd. is the largest producer of synthetic crude oil in the world, currently supplying 13 percent of Canada's crude oil requirements. Located about 45 kilometres north of Fort McMurray, Syncrude is Alberta's largest private sector employer, employing approximately 4,500 people and providing work for about 1,000 contractors.

Like any large employer, Syncrude has found that its employees have a wide range of basic literacy skills. The company's Supervisory Development Centre administered an industrial reading test to mine supervisors and found that 30 percent of the supervisors tested had some difficulty understanding written materials.

In early 1988, Syncrude contracted with Keyano College to provide a literacy program for the mining supervisors. The reading comprehension program would be designed to

meet supervisors' specific needs on the job while improving their overall effectiveness and potential as managers.

Keyano College is a comprehensive community college serving northeastern Alberta. The name 'Keyano' is a Cree word that means "sharing" or "yours, mine, ours." The challenge for Keyano College was to design a program, using work-related materials, that would meet the needs of any number of employees, at different reading skill levels. The new program also offered the college an opportunity to build a partnership that would have education and industry working together for the benefit of the community.

### **Designing a literacy program**

Keyano College developed the program over a period of nine months. Syncrude provided working facilities and consultative support for the program and set up contacts with the supervisors. Syncrude also paid for all of the program's costs. Keyano College engaged a consultant to help design the program, provided clerical support, and managed the program's accounts.

The consultant interviewed some supervisors to assess the scope and type of reading materials they encountered on the job. The work-related reading materials gathered during this process were used later as a bank of instructional resources for the program.

Supervisors became a vital part of the development process, involved in all stages as consultants and partners. They were asked to participate as volunteers in a pilot instruction period. They helped ensure that the instruction strategies were helpful and that the lesson materials were relevant to their needs.

### **Introducing ERIC**

Employees entering the ERIC program are interviewed for two hours by an instructor who assesses how much improvement the individuals need in reading comprehension. Instructors then recommend participants for either a 28-hour or a 40-hour workshop program. Both programs contain the same information, but the longer program provides more opportunity for practice. Each workshop group is limited to six participants.

Both workshop programs are offered for three four-hour sessions each week. The time between class instruction allows participants to apply the learning on the job: after attending a morning class, participants go to work in the afternoon; they can quickly become confident in using their newly-acquired skills.



The ERIC program includes instruction in four areas:

- Analysis - students learn how to separate out essential information in a text;
- Synthesis - students relate ideas within a text or between texts;
- Generalization - students abstract a focus or theme from a text; and
- Study Habits - students learn techniques to help them understand new information and retain that knowledge.

Participants attend the program partly on their own time and partly on company time: if employees are on shift for the days their workshop is offered, they are given the half-days to attend; but if the classes fall on any of their days off, they are still expected to attend class.

In 1989 the program offered to supervisors was expanded for technicians and other, occupational, employees. All have found the program beneficial and easy to apply to their work situations.

### **A gateway to greater learning**

Syncrude has gained much from the success of its literacy program. As an immediate benefit, the program has increased the abilities of mining supervisors, technicians, and occupational workers to deal with complex work instructions and such things as safety information and accounting data. But the benefits extend to employees' potential for further learning. They are now ready to follow additional teaching modules on oral communication and numeracy. And Syncrude's experience has shown other employers how the program can meet their needs.

### **An employer-funded program**

Working with Syncrude allowed Keyano College to fulfill its mandate of offering relevant and dynamic education programs to the community of Fort McMurray. With funding from the company, the college was able to develop an innovative reading comprehension program. The ERIC program is comprehensive and includes means to assess participants' reading, writing and oral communications skills. Without Syncrude's financial sponsorship of the program's development and its instructional costs, the college could not have offered such an effective program to its community members. The program is unique in its use of work-related materials and in its flexibility, accommodating employees' varying abilities.

The experience also enabled the college to promote workplace literacy through the educational network. And Keyano College is now developing a marketing program to promote workplace literacy, encouraging corporations and institutions to set up literacy programs through partnerships. Many large companies and educational institutions have expressed interest in the program.

### **Worker-centred instruction**

Participants report that, by using their work materials to improve their reading skills, they are performing better on the job. They say that ERIC has helped them deal with internal and external communications, decision-making, and health and safety. It also has enabled them to get more value from other training. Many say that they deal more confidently and efficiently with the increasing paperwork that they encounter daily. More importantly, perhaps, they have been able to transfer this learning to their personal lives.

## 5 - SARAW, The Student's Voice: Capilano College and the Neil Squire Foundation

This partnership illustrates a very special type of teamwork bringing advanced technology to literacy work. It is directed to adults with severe disabilities but may have the potential for broader applications.

SARAW is a talking computer program designed to teach basic reading and writing skills to adults. The software was developed by Capilano College, North Vancouver, and the Neil Squire Foundation. The foundation is a world leader in the development of technology for people with physical disabilities. Capilano College is a pioneer in the literacy field, with many years of experience creating literacy programs and putting them into practice.

SARAW is designed for adult students who have severe disabilities and who are non-verbal. It can meet the needs of people whose reading and writing skills are at the levels of grades 2-6. Even though many of these individuals are not able to turn pages in a book or hold a pencil, SARAW enables them to participate in a literacy classroom.

### **Program adaptable to ABE courses**

At Capilano College the SARAW program is housed in a special lab set up for 12 students. SARAW study stations can also be placed within an existing ABE classroom. In this way, SARAW students can be "mainstreamed" with other literacy students.

In the summer of 1990, SARAW was tested by adults with physical disabilities in Vancouver, Regina, Ottawa and Fredericton. These students provided valuable feedback in making refinements to the SARAW software.

The partnership between Capilano College and the Neil Squire Foundation that led to the development of SARAW has a number of outstanding aspects:

- **Learner-controlled program;**
- **Independent learning for adults with severe disabilities;**
- **Program adaptable to ABE courses;**
- **High-tech focus; and**
- **Government and Business sponsorship.**

## **Learner-controlled program**

SARAW provides students with a set of activities from which they can choose. They select topics that interest them and decide what skills they want to develop further from a wide range of options. SARAW uses stories about the life experiences of other literacy students, other adults with physical disabilities, and other writers, as well as the students, work, as the basis for literacy lessons. By using the students' experiences as learning tools, the program encourages them to work independently and gives them a sense of control over the learning process and their own lives.

## **Independent learning for adults with severe disabilities**

Literacy is a tool of empowerment. Many students with severe physical disabilities cannot write. SARAW enables them to write down their frustrations or aspirations and to control their environment instead of being controlled by it. And for students who are non-verbal, SARAW can be their voice.

## **High tech**

Students' lesson and activity choices are listed on the computer screen and voiced by the computer. The program includes four major components: Reading, Activities, Writing, and Options.

The **Reading** component comprises a collection of stories written by adult literacy students and people with physical disabilities, as well as other stories that the instructor may add. The students also have the option of reading stories they have written. The computer reads the selected story aloud, a word at a time, a sentence at a time, or as a complete story. The students can ask the computer to repeat the last word or sentence it has voiced.

The **Activities** component contains two word games and a "sounding board" that is used to teach phonics. The Sounding Board uses coloured pictures that students can associate with letter sounds. The word games have varying levels of difficulty so students at different levels can choose games that they find challenging but not frustrating.

The **Writing** component of the program works like a "talking" word processor. Students can have the computer speak each letter, word or sentence as they type. In this way they receive immediate feedback and can judge whether the word they have just typed sounds correct. The program's "word prediction" feature uses the first letter or letters that the student types to suggest appropriate common words starting with those letters. The student presses one key to instruct the computer to finish typing the word automatically. With this feature students whose physical disabilities slow them down in using the keyboard can be more productive. It also helps students who know the word they want

but are unsure of the spelling. An "ideas" section of the writing component suggests writing topics and hints to help the student get ready to write. The computer program cannot help the student with complex grammar, however, so a teacher or a tutor helps students edit their writing.

The **Options** component lets the student choose the computer's voice, the speed at which it speaks, and other miscellaneous functions.

Using SARAW requires particular hardware and software expertise, especially when being set up. College staff are generally able to provide this support. For example, students with severe disabilities who have difficulties using a standard keyboard can use "adaptive access methods" to emulate the computer's keys. Help in using such devices can be obtained from college Disabled Student Services, Adult Special Education departments, local hospitals, and organizations that work with people with physical disabilities.

SARAW works best when each student has a SARAW computer station in the college classroom and another at his or her residence. The cost of a complete SARAW station varies greatly depending on the computer used.

### **A pilot project**

In 1990-91 Capilano College tested the SARAW program with 12 adult students from throughout British Columbia. All the students were non-verbal and had severe physical disabilities. Each student spent about 10 hours a week working with a tutor and met weekly with a Capilano College instructor - either in person or electronically, using a computer with a modem. Special software used during the pilot project allowed the instructor to call the student and see what he or she was doing and let the students converse among themselves.

A SARAW program needs faculty members who are familiar and comfortable with computers and who have the skills necessary to work with people who have severe physical disabilities but who are able to learn. Faculty members who are interested in taking part in a SARAW program may be apprehensive about the demands that it may make on them. The SARAW training video and manual may help allay their concerns, as might instruction from faculty members who have used SARAW at Capilano College and from experts at the Neil Squire Foundation.

## **Government and Business Sponsorship**

The Neil Squire Foundation received financial assistance for the design and development of SARAW from the Secretary of State of Canada and the National Literacy Secretariat, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. Capilano College received funding to test SARAW as a pilot project from the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and the National Literacy Secretariat, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada.

Digital Equipment of Canada Ltd. donated computers for a SARAW lab at Capilano College and provided computers that students can use in their homes while they are enrolled in the program. Other contributions were used to purchase special adaptive equipment for computers.

SARAW is now an ongoing program at Capilano College.

## 6 - I-CARE - The Individualized Community Adult Reading Education Program - Douglas College, communities, libraries and community agencies

The I-CARE (Individualized Community Adult Reading Education) program illustrates an approach to literacy improvement that can be offered by any college. Douglas College trains and supports volunteer literacy tutors, placing them in partnerships with adult students and carefully monitoring their work. The program began as a college program for the community, but it has evolved into an effective college-community partnership.

I-CARE is directed at adults who wish to learn how to read and write but who are unable or unwilling to enter a classroom. Along with a one-on-one relationship with a tutor, the program gives students access to all the resources of a community college. The 50 or more students who learn literacy skills from I-CARE tutors each year can take their sessions on one of the college campuses, at their homes, or at locations provided by libraries and community centres.

The partnership that has evolved among Douglas College, communities around New Westminster, libraries, and community agencies illustrates how a partnership can be effective with:

- **Multiple partners;**
- **Training of volunteer tutors.**

### **Multiple partners**

The I-CARE program has operated since 1978, when the B.C. Ministry of Education funded the first pilot project. Since then Douglas College has borne all of the program's costs, including the salaries of the program coordinator and a part-time literacy instructor who trains and helps the tutors.

The program's biggest supporter is the community, which is the source of the volunteer tutors. Libraries in Coquitlam and Maple Ridge provide space for the tutor training program and the one-on-one literacy training sessions. Community agencies refer to the program individuals who want to improve their reading and writing skills. All of these partners also provide feedback on the program to help evaluate its effectiveness.

## **Training volunteer tutors**

The I-CARE program provides tutors with a 10-week training session, including 20 hours of workshops and a 12-hour practicum in one of the college's literacy classes. The program also offers tutors ongoing support, other workshops to improve their skills, and an opportunity to share experiences and learn from other volunteer tutors.

The classroom practicums give the new instructors experience in working with adults who have difficulty reading and writing. The sessions also show them how to build lessons around a student's particular interests. The tutors can attend follow-up sessions and have resource materials available. Their access to the college literacy classes gives them additional opportunities for practicums and introduces them to alternate teaching formats for adult literacy students.

## **Individual learning programs**

The program coordinator assesses each student, prepares an individual learning program, and matches the student with a tutor. The tutor-student relationship will endure throughout the program.

The program has served students aged 19 to 82, with different life experiences and interests, some of whom have special needs because they have a learning disability. The learning program fits the individual needs and interests of students. It also allows them to choose the times and location of their tutoring sessions and provides all of the learning materials they need. The program allows them to learn at their own speed and helps them with practical knowledge, such as how to complete an application form or get a driver's license.

Students are able to contribute to the periodic evaluations that help decide the program's future directions. They complete monthly report forms with their tutors and join with the tutors as members of a committee that advises the program's administrators.

## **Evaluation**

In a 1989 program evaluation, the researcher concluded that:

" ... this carefully thought out program of the late 1970s has stood the test of time. Crucial to the success has been the commitment of the College Administration and Board... There is a continuing need for the kind of help offered by I-CARE. "



**Institutional support**

Douglas College has supported and recognized the I-CARE program. Its faculty and other staff associated with the program have provided advice and assistance to other colleges wishing to start similar programs. It provides adequate funding for the program's activities and the use of its resources for such things as a newsletter published 10 times each year and mail outs. The college's board members have taken a personal interest in the program by attending events sponsored for the tutors and students.

## **Making Partnerships Work: The Elements of Success**

These six case studies illustrate a variety of characteristics that can help to make a literacy partnership work. These include:

### **Program characteristics**

Continuity  
College certification  
Learner-driven  
Bilingual and bicultural  
Prepares students for other learning  
Trains volunteer tutors  
Independent learning  
Adaptable to ABE courses  
Uses high technology

### **Partners' characteristics**

Government and business sponsorship  
Union-employer cooperation  
Multiple partners  
Accountability  
Clearly-defined responsibilities

The stories themselves are the best explanation of why a particular characteristic is important. Some elements of success, however, merit some further explanation.

### **Planning**

The best partnerships take time for planning. The planning for a literacy partnership should start with the prospective students. Adult students volunteer for literacy training programs. They should be asked if they want such a program and whether they would help in planning it. The partners must demonstrate their commitment to the students by including them at all levels of planning and by giving them an opportunity to advise on how the program should operate.

### **Clearly-defined responsibilities**

The partners should discuss the project's goals, funding arrangements, working methods, and each organization's level of commitment. They have to be sure that each understands and accepts these terms before a partnership agreement is drawn up. Then the responsibilities of each partner need to be carefully set out.

## **Continuity**

The partners must be committed to the program for the time needed to accomplish the agreed-upon goals. This may be a long-term commitment. And an institution's commitment must come from the highest level. If the President and the Board of Governors of a college commit the institution to a literacy partnership, the program can get built into the college's base budget. This gives the program a permanent home and a better chance of enduring. The same is true of the level of commitment needed from businesses and other institutions.

Douglas College and Red River College are good examples of how a program's staffing, space, and other necessary operational costs have been built into the core budgets of the colleges because the programs have support at the highest levels. Programs that have top level commitments from corporations, foundations, or other associations can also have bright futures. Syncrude Canada, The Neil Squire Foundation, and the Metro Toronto Labour Council may be expected to continue to fund their partnership activities.

The duration of funding is important to longer term success. In recent years the National Literacy Secretariat has "seeded" funds to partnerships and other literacy ventures. While all government grants are annual, literacy partners have now come to expect that funding for a new project can continue for the first several years. But literacy partners in projects that need outside funding to ensure that they can endure are careful to develop plans for alternate funding support when the scheduled grants end.

The downside of the grant process is that the people responsible for the program must spend so much time applying for funding that the program may suffer. And, where "next-year funding" is in doubt, the insecurity felt by staff and volunteers can be a detriment to the program's operation.

## **Accountability**

It is important to have realistic expectations of students and teachers or tutors. Organizations must take care not to make or imply promises they cannot keep.

## **Teachers and Tutors**

The most important single factor in any literacy partnership or project is the person who is in direct contact with the student. Teachers in adult literacy programs need special attributes that vary with the particular teaching situation. In specialized teaching situations, such as SARAW at Capilano College, penitentiary programs, and the Deaf Literacy Program at Red River, teachers need special skills and patience. Even in more usual situations, however, teachers and tutors must be carefully screened and selected.

Many qualified teachers of children and youth, who may be used to standard classrooms and a formal curriculum, have difficulty adjusting to the self-directed nature of adult education methods.

Extra time and special care are needed in hiring and placing qualified teachers in literacy activities with adults. They must receive training in the methods of adult education and their skills should be reinforced regularly through workshops and other means.

Tutors, who are often volunteers, are equally crucial to the success of many programs. Effective work with volunteer tutors requires special skill and insight from program supervisors. Tutoring adults with low literacy skills is a rewarding volunteer activity, but volunteers must be trained to be skilled tutors; they must also be able to create an effective working relationship with the student. Tutors need constant monitoring and support to use student-centered approaches instead of falling back on teacher- or curriculum-centered techniques.

Mia Gordon, who supervises the I-CARE program at Douglas College, comments on a potential difficulty with all literacy programs that are dependent on volunteer tutors: "The biggest hazard is that the program will be under-valued and under-funded. A good volunteer program should not be seen as a cheap way to provide services. "

## **If you want to create a literacy partnership...**

Many of the organizations whose work is chronicled in these stories are willing to offer advice and assistance to colleges and other institutions that are planning on setting up a literacy partnership. The National Literacy Secretariat and the author wish to thank each of these organizations for allowing their stories to be told so that future literacy partners - teachers, students, tutors, businesses, communities and others - can benefit from their experience.

### **Mutual Respect**

William Snowdon  
Department Head, Institutional Services  
**New Brunswick Community College**  
P.O. Box 2100, Station A  
1234 Mountain Road  
Moncton, New Brunswick  
E1C 8H9

Telephone: (506) 379-2471, Loc. 2510

### **Deaf Literacy Project**

Josie Karpa  
Supervisor  
Deaf Literacy Program  
Educational Support Centre  
**Red River Community College**  
D102A-2055 Notre Dame Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3H 0J9

Telephone: (204) 632-2381 (Voice)  
(204) 633-6329 (TTY)

### **Getting Credit**

Maureen Hynes  
School of Labour Coordinator  
**George Brown College**  
P.O. Box 1015, Station B  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5T 2T9

Tel: (416) 944-4508  
Fax: (416) 944-4594

Sandy Lysachok  
Coordinator  
Deaf Literacy Steering Committee  
Deaf Program, Regional Services  
**Society for Manitobans with  
Disabilities**  
825 Sherbrook Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3A 1M5

Telephone: (204) 786-5601 (Voice)  
(204) 774-2861 (TTY)

## **ERIC**

Lloyd Campbell  
**Syncrude Canada Limited**  
P.O. Bag 4023, M.D. 7085  
Fort McMurray, Alberta  
T9K 1S3

Tel: (403) 790-6579

Nancy Steel  
**Keyano College**  
Clearwater Campus  
8115 Franklin Avenue  
Fort McMurray, Alberta  
T9H 2H7

Tel: (403) 791-8943

## **SARAW, The Student's Voice**

Don Bentley  
Software Development Manager  
**Neil Squire Foundation**  
4381 Gallant Avenue  
North Vancouver, B.C.  
V7G 1L1

Tel: (604) 924-2453  
Fax: (604) 929-3316

Dileep Athaide  
Adult Basic Education/SARAW  
Coordinator  
**Capilano College**  
2055 Purcell Way  
North Vancouver, B.C.  
V7J 3H5

Tel: (604) 984-4971

## **I-CARE**

Mia Gordon  
Director of Student Services  
**Douglas College**  
700 Royal Avenue  
Box 2503  
New Westminster, B.C.  
V3L 5B2

Tel: (604) 527-5321  
Fax: (604) 527-5095